



Development and the role of the church: Exploring public pastoral care positioning within congregational ministry

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Discussions on development have been ongoing for many decades. Within these discussions, approaches such as human and community-focused development have gained prominence in recent years. Churches are acknowledged as critical actors and vehicles that foster human development. However, locating development within church discussions raises the question of theological and praxeological relevance. This challenges theology and the church to both develop theological and ecclesiological justification. Within that justification is embedded the challenge of discerning and developing church ministry frameworks that interfaces with people in communities to ensure authentic human and community-focused development approaches. To that end, church public pastoral care is suggested, and its positioning needs to be clearly established, while emerging issues requiring research unveiled for investigation. This article describes the developments on the subject of development and the church, as well as position church public pastoral care as an approach that drives church development while highlighting questions for research on the subject.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This study employs an interdisciplinary approach whereby international development discussion and public role of churches within congregations are integrated to propose the role of church pastoral care as a ministry nexus. It contributes to public pastoral care and congregational ministry designs that respond to poverty and community-social challenges. It employs a critical literature analysis to make recommendations.

Keywords: development; church and development; church and community; role of the church; pastoral care; public pastoral care.

Introduction

It is a well-established fact that until recently, the gross domestic product (GDP) for the vast majority of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has seen little change since the independence from colonial rules (Augustine 2018:3; Louis 2015:1; Sachs 2000:579–600). According to the World Bank (2018:3), poverty in SSA countries has increased despite the progress made in reducing extreme poverty over the past quarter century (Handley et al. 2009:1; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] 2007:265). The World Bank (2018:1) states that by the year 2015, fewer people were living in extreme poverty than in 1990. However, the situation is different in the case of SSA. It was estimated that the number of people living in extreme poverty in the region increased from about 278 million in 1990 to 413 million in 2015 (UNDP 2007:265; World Bank 2016:4, 2018:3). While the average poverty rate for the other regions improved to below 13% in 2015, it was increased to 41% in the case of SSA (World Bank 2018:3). Twenty-seven out of the world's 28 poorest countries are in SSA, with poverty rates above 30% (UNDP 2007:269; World Bank 2018:3).

The SSA is described by the World Bank (2018:3; Myers 2017:149) as a region that is affected by fragility, conflict and weak institutions, as well as a lack of success in channelling growth into poverty reduction. Augustine (2018:6) presents some indices of underdevelopment as manifestly evident in SSA which includes low per capita income/GDP, the preponderance of inferior technology, weak economic and political institution, underdeveloped political culture, the prevalence of a ruling class that stresses and rationalises values that are incompatible with socio-economic and political development as well as fragile statehood (Augustine 2018:2, 6).

What is the hope of the situation described by Augustine (2018) for SSA? The answer to this question is linked closely to the value and importance of development. Studying development is

very critical to understanding and addressing the issues and challenges that the nations on the planet earth are facing. Those issues include problems related to poverty, climate and environmental change, health, technology, war and conflict, migration, rapid urbanisation and democratic disorder, among other things. It is on embarking on development that these issues are not just understood but are also changed for the better of human lives. Hence, the value and importance of development.

To guide the discussion, the question that may be posed is: how should development be understood and performed by diverse actors such as churches, which are community structures? At stake is the question: what is development and how are churches, as community-embedded institutions and structures, located within the understanding of development? How can frontline congregational ministry such as pastoral care perform a public pastoral role that could be deemed developmental?

The concept of development and churches' positioning

Perspectives on the meaning of development

The concept of development is a fluid term to define; people and organisations conceive it differently (Magezi 2017:8; Power 2003:4; Todaro & Smith 2012:14). Magezi (2017:8) pointed out that it is difficult to define the term development because what one accepts as development might be interpreted by another as not development at all. Magezi (2017:8) and Woolnough (2014) agree with Calderisi (2013:70) who admits that like any other soft jargon, development can mean a range of things. It may mean modernisation, economic diversification, improvements in human well-being, creation of equal opportunities, and poverty reduction (Potter et al. 2018:6). Furthermore, Calderisi (2013:70) clarifies that despite frequent confusion on the subject, development is not the same thing as economic growth. Growth is generally considered necessary for development, but how much is enough and what kind of growth it should be remain unclear. In some places, the two do not seem connected at all. For example, the most populous country in Africa, Nigeria, is still struggling to share the benefits of its oil wealth with the majority of its population, while Cuba has had one of the best education and health systems in Latin America, despite decades of stagnation (Calderisi 2013:70). Woolnough (2014) stated this about development:

(Ask) what is development for? (and) you get very different answers in different cultures. Many in Western countries see it as being about places like Africa 'catching up' with the development world. In Africa, by contrast, you are more likely to be told to do with well-being, happiness and membership of community. (pp. 2-3)

The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English defines development as follows:

[G]radual unfolding, fuller working out; evolution ...; well-grown state, stage of advancement; product; more elaborate form ... It is

from this concept where myriads of qualifiers like 'economical', 'human', 'social', 'community', sustainable. (n.p.)

have been added to the word development (Klaasen 2017:30; Potter et al. 2018:5).

In economic terms, as Todaro and Smith (2012:14) put it, the word development has been associated with 'achieving sustainable rates of growth of income per capita to enable a nation to expand its output at a rate faster than the growth of its population'. Organisations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund largely employ the above economic understanding of development (Asheim 1994:7; Bowers du Toit 2010:262; World Bank 2015:1). The understanding of development as economic growth emerged out of the climate of Cold War and post-colonialism in order to bring structural changes whereby the traditional and backward non-developed countries would develop towards greater similarity to the Western or the Northern countries (Bowers du Toit 2010:262; Sen 1988:12; Todaro & Smith 2012:14). According to the World Bank (2015:1), this growth must be both inclusive and environmentally sound to reduce poverty and build shared prosperity for today's population and to continue to meet the needs of future generations, hence sustainable development.

Collier (2007:12) provides a definition of development which goes beyond the economic growth when he said, 'to my mind, development is about giving hope to ordinary people that their children will live in a society that has caught up with the rest of the world'. In Collier's definition (2007:12), one can observe two things. Firstly, development is associated with hope which is given to people who are stuck in life. They need to know that their situation is not unfixable. Secondly, development should help people to grow out of their situations. There should be a change in people's lives because of development.

The concept sustainable development originated from the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987 through its report also called the Brundtland Report (Asheim 1994:7). Even though the report does not precisely give the definition of sustainable development, the quotation that is used as a point of departure is that 'sustainable development is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (Asheim 1994:7; WCED 1987:43). The South African government (2008:1) narrows this definition to enhancing human well-being and quality of life for all time, in particular those most affected by poverty and inequality. It is from this understanding where the World Bank (2015:1) renders that development must therefore be perceived in three aspects of economic growth, environmental stewardship and social inclusion which are carried across all sectors of development both in the present and in the future (World Bank 2015:1). This led to the establishment of Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 by the United Nations (UN) where among other goals, the ending of

poverty, hunger and improvement of economic growth by 2030 has been prioritised (UN 2015).

The African Union (AU) adopted the third document of Agenda 2063 in 2015, which focuses on enhancing the sustainable development for African countries in a number of areas. These include the following: (1) a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development; (2) an integrated continent, politically united on the ideals of Pan Africanism and the vision of African Renaissance; (3) an Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law; (4) a peaceful and secure Africa; (5) an Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics; (6) an Africa of which its development is people driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children; and (7) Africa as a strong, united, resilient and influential global player and partner.

The UNDP (2010) definition of development places an emphasis on people, hence human development. The UNDP (1990) stated that 'people are the real wealth of a nation'. It is from these words that the 1990 Human Development Report (HDR) began by the UNDP (2010:1, 2014:27). The 1990 HDR specified that the objective of development should be to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives, which is evident today. Therefore, a central objective of the HDR has been to emphasise that development is primarily and fundamentally about people (UNDP 2010:1).

Human development is defined by the UNDP (2010:2) as the expansion of people's freedoms to live long, healthy and creative lives, to advance other goals they have reason to value, and to engage actively in shaping development equitably and sustainably on a shared planet. This notion of human development has affinities with Amartya Sen's (1999) understanding of development in his book entitled: *Development as Freedom*. He defined development as the process of expanding real freedom that people enjoy (Sen 1999:3). Sen (1999:3) came to this definition after concluding that poverty is better understood as being the result of deprivation of human freedom. When freedom is absent, things like low income, lack of education, ill health, and lack of access to credit and social services will hinder human development (Myers 2017:154; Sen 1999:4).

Chambers (1997), World Vision International (2017), and Myers (2011) use the lens of human development, which focuses on improving people's lives. Chambers (1997:10) succinctly put that the objective of development is responsible well-being for all. The World Vision International (2017:7) agrees with Chambers (1997) and adds that development is a transformational process and actions through which children, families, and communities move towards fullness of life with dignity, justice, peace, and hope.

Although development is viewed as a debatable and multidimensional concept by numerous scholars, they also

agree that it is always seen in conjunction with other terms such as change, growth, progress, reformation, transformation, and even revolution (Bate 2016:60; Magezi 2017:8; Potter et al. 2018:5–6; Ward 2000:272). To overcome the divergences in understanding development, it is important to position it within theoretical frameworks. In this article, development is described as any process that brings positive change in the sense of improving the quality of human life in a society (Garkovich 2011:13; Munyua & Mutukaa 2016:71). Departing from this understanding of development, Magezi (2007) rightfully pointed out its dimension thus:

Since development takes root in people and amongst people, it should have something in common with the community or the society in question. Development must make sense to the people and be in line with their values and their capacity. It must be appropriate – culturally, socially, economically, technologically, and environmentally. Development is achieved by people and is for people. It is more than economics; it is about human development – the quality of human life as people themselves define it. (pp. 8–9)

Development and the church

Churches and other faith-based organisations (FBOs) play a critical role in community development (Hiagbe 2015:165; James 2001:109; Magezi 2017:1; Myers 2000:65, 2017:175; Woolnough 2014:4). Myers (2017:175) affirms that the time between the ascension of Jesus Christ and his second coming should be characterised by encouraging and contributing to improving living conditions of people. Similar to Stackhouse (2007:243), Myers (2017:175) posits that the historical evidence suggests that the classic Roman Catholic, Reformation, and now the newer Evangelical and Pentecostal traditions tend to generate an ethos that stimulates modernisation. This observation by Myers (2017) is traceable to a basic attitude towards the duty to convert souls, societies, and gain stewardly dominion over the ecosphere in a fallen world. Pillay (2017:1) contends that the church has normally construed the transformation of society to be an important part of its mission. He demonstrates that throughout the ages, the church has been involved in 'the life of humankind, in making of nationhood, building of culture, structuring of society with its functions and institutions and in shaping the form and quality of political system' (Pillay 2017:1).

According to Woolnough (2014:2), one of the most encouraging developments within the Christian church has been the growth of the concept of holistic, or integral mission, where God's command to his church has been to tackle all aspects of life: the material, the emotional, the environmental as well as the spiritual aspects (Magezi & Mutowa 2018:124; Myers 2017:93). Magezi and Mutowa (2018:124), in agreement with other integral mission scholars such as Padilla (2004), in their recent article rightly observed that there is agreement among Christians on the notion of integral mission.

The terms such as 'integral mission', 'holistic mission' or 'ministry', 'Christian development', 'compassionate ministry',

'transformation', or 'church-driven development' denote the role of churches in helping people and communities with material resources, as opposed to solely evangelism. These terms denote a Christian ministry that is concerned with the whole person (Magezi & Mutowa 2018:124).

Woolnough (2014), Magezi and Mutowa (2018:124) as well as Beukes and Plaatjies van Huffel (2016:226) clarify that the involvement of church in a society implies the restoration that God brings in this world, which brings about both spiritual and physical transformation and change in the lives of individuals and communities.

Klaasen (2013:182, 2014:72) mentioned how development has been an integral part of the ecumenical church and specifically the World Council of Churches, which has made development as a theological discourse to be an integral part of missiology. Klaasen (2014:73) posited that within the ecumenical movement, development was a natural flow from the church's quest to play a relevant role in societies after the Second World War (Beukes & Plaatjies van Huffel 2016:226).

Ajulu (2010:160) understands development as the very first great commission given to human beings. Ajulu (2010) specified that:

The church, as the body of Christ (all believers both men and women), is sent into the world through the New Testament's great commission, which provides the mandate for it to execute its stewardship role under God's authority and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Holism in development must be viewed as part of the church's overall holistic mission in the world to which it is sent through this commission. (p. 160)

Ajulu's statement is concurred by Padilla (2016:42) who elucidates that the followers of Jesus Christ (the church) are sent into the world as he was to embody and proclaim the good news of God's reconciling presence and purpose for the entire creation.

Nevertheless, the assertion that the church should incorporate a holistic approach in its ministry in people's lives is not without some counter arguments. Deyoung and Gilbert (2011:62–63) sternly pointed out that from the early church in Acts and the life of the apostle Paul, the primary mission of the church is to win people to Christ and build them up in Christ. The primary task of the church has been making disciples as seen in the Synoptic Gospels (Mt 28:18–20, Lk 24:46–48, Mk 16:16–20). Hildreth (2018:55–63) agrees with the assertion above by maintaining that the church should corporately endeavour to accomplish the tasks of preaching, witnessing and making disciples of all nations.

However, Stearns (2009:181–189) firmly argued that a gospel that excludes social involvement is a Great Omission rather than Great Commission. Furthermore, he indicated that:

If we in the church are truly dedicated to the Great Commission, then we will first have to do something about the 'Great Commission'. We will never effectively demonstrate Christ's love

to the world if we cannot first demonstrate it to the Church – the whole Church that includes those struggling just to survive. (Stearns 2009:189)

Tsele (2001:214) strongly advised to stand against the concept that church's involvement in development is dangerous as it deviates the church from the real thing which is saving people for the kingdom. This attitude needs to be firmly countered against by affirming that human, social, and economic development is not strange to Christian concept of mission. According to Tsele (2001:214), 'development is therefore not something the churches are busy with apologetically, or by default. It is the work of God, part of God's own mission to the world'. Alawode (2016:6) concluded the same regarding the mission of the church mentioning that church-based development or faith-based development can be regarded as a mission because it is based on Christ's great commission to the church. 'It is done for the glory of God and anticipation of his kingdom' (Alawode 2016:6). Forster and Oostenbrink (2015:2) contended that the notion of being called a Christian is not solely to make disciples but also to be an agent of change as Matthew 5:13, 14 puts it that they are 'salt and light' in the world. It is through church (believers) that the principles of God's kingdom such as justice, equity, human dignity and prosperity are to be established in a society (Costa 2007:17–27; Driesenga 2015:40; Forster & Oostenbrink 2015:2; Forster & Power 2011:47–62).

Beukes and Plaatjies van Huffel (2016) defined a theology of development as referring to:

A theological sub-field which came into existence in the sphere of the World Council of Churches and the ecumenical movement, motivated by a Christian desire to creatively and wholeheartedly be involved in seeking solutions to human, social and political problems in the contemporary world. (p. 226)

Pillay (2017:1–12) argues that the church has always been involved in the transformation of societies. However, Kaiser (2015:40) notes that the church's role in addressing social concerns dwindled in 1926. Myers (2010:119) stated that during the 1920s, American evangelicals took a break in social action. This was because of wounds that were caused by the modernist–fundamentalist controversy (Myers 2010:119). Kaiser (2015) added that this decline was probably due to the:

[E]mphasis on the 'Social Gospel' in liberal theology which evangelicals began to view with deep suspicion as evidence of attempts to procure salvation by works rather than evidence of social concern in the church. (p. 40)

As a response to this, the evangelicals 'retreated behind the fundamentals of the faith and the singular importance of evangelism and stayed in a defensive stance for almost 50 years' (Myers 2010:119).

According to Beukes and Plaatjies van Huffel (2016:226), a theology of development focuses on a holistic people-centred development from a practical theological perspective. This is to say that churches and Christians involved in development

understood well theologically that both spiritual and material needs of people are to be met equally as demonstrated by Jesus Christ in his ministry (Acts 10:38). Clarifying on this aspect, Beukes and Plaatjies van Huffel (2016:226) stated that a theology of development is to be established in the declaration that God and humanity are linked because of the cross. The involvement in development with a motivation that God cares for humanity and all creation is what is understood as theology of development (Myers 2011:47). This is when the Christian message is applied to the conditions of human beings (Myers 2011:47; Swart 2010:11).

It is also in the scope of theology of development that it involves 'a theological, ecclesiastical, Christian, biblical and confessional basis and perspective' (Beukes & Plaatjies van Huffel 2016:226). This scope should serve as a motivation for Christian active involvement of churches, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), FBOs and Christians as an instrument in the transformation in the socio-economic challenges of society. This is performed with the implication that God's restoration in this world involves both spiritual and physical transformation in the lives of individuals and communities (Beukes & Plaatjies van Huffel 2016:226). Swart (2010:211) and Paeth (2008:62) postulated that a theology of development could be best formulated when there is interaction between the traditional context of theology and the secular context of development, which involves the various social science disciplines feeding into the subject matter of development, the various themes arising from the secular development debate and the secular actors engaged in development.

How then are churches vehicles of development within communities?

Churches as community development structures within a congregational setting

As observed in the above discussion of what development means, it has been concluded that development, among other things, is about improving the quality of human life. These humans are not buildings or economy but are a community of people who face common problems with untapped capacities for self-improvement (Phillips & Pittman 2009:3). It was upon the recognition that people live in the communities that the concept of community development was realised. Community development can be properly defined by providing definition of each of the two concepts: community and development (Garkovich 2011:13; Phillips & Pittman 2009:4). Garkovich (2011:13) as well as Phillips and Pittman (2009:4) acknowledge the multi-faceted definition of community by stating that community has a multitude of meaning – from a geographically bounded physical place with people living together and meeting their livelihood and social needs to groups of people whose interaction is based not on physical proximity but on common interests (Mattessich & Monsey 2004:56). There are two things that are outstanding in the first definition of

community. Firstly, there are people who have ties that bind them together, and secondly, these people are in a specific geographical location. It is in this context of a community where community development is understood as a process of teaching people how to work together to solve the problems that they are facing in their societies (Phillips & Pittman 2009:4). According to Sail and Abu-Samah (2010:63), community development is a process that leads to change in many aspects of community living, which include social, economic, cultural as well as environmental aspects. Looking at the above two definitions of community development by different scholars, this article defines community development as a continuous process aimed at improving the quality of life of the community (which are people and their situations). This process usually has three basic elements: firstly, the community members' well-being or welfare involving both material sufficiency and non-economic aspects of living such as health and education; secondly, resource development, involving increased production and efficiency; thirdly, organisational development, involving the maintenance and creation of social and economic structures through which members of the community may participate effortfully for the betterment of their community living (Baker 1989:48; Sail & Abu-Samah 2010:62).

The concept of church has been multifaceted and refers to several theological concepts as it finds expression in different ways in a society (Beukes 2019:2; Forster & Oostenbrink 2015:5). It is a well-known fact that most people have the definition of the church as referring to the building, or the structures that are used by Christians for the purpose of worship. Sometimes, the church is defined in a conventional management perspective as an organisation or institute (Erickson 2007:1037; Forster & Oostenbrink 2015:5; Munyua & Mutukaa 2016:68). Erickson (2007:1037) observed how the confusion of misunderstanding the term church comes in the failure to understand the nature of the church. Magezi (2007:68) cautioned against the understanding of the church as a building when he says that 'it is important to underline that ekklesia does not refer to a building but to an assembly of people'. Grudem (2007:853) simply defines the church as the community of all true believers for all time. Shedding light to what the church is, McGrath (2001:491–494) explains what the Vatican Council II (Ecumenical Council of the Roman Catholic Church) discussed about the nature of the church. Three expressions were given related to the nature of the church. Firstly, the church as the communion (Koinonia) which has the connotation of sharing the common life of the believers within the church (Erickson 2007:1047; McGrath 2001:493). Secondly, the church as the people of God, which calls for involvement of all nations to be called people of God rather than only Jewish nation. Thirdly, the church as a charismatic community which is a reference to gifts or abilities that God has bestowed to the individuals within the church to fulfil some specific services.

Smit (2007:61–67) has suggested three forms that are generally perceived of being the church. Firstly, the church is considered as a local congregation of Christian members. This understanding is in the form as described above,

where the church is seen as a localised community of Christians organised around regular common worship (Munyua & Mutukaa 2016:68; Smit 2007:61). Secondly, the church is viewed as an institution, denomination, and ecumenical body. This is when people primarily refer the church as an organisation or institution that they are part of (e.g., the Catholic, Orthodox or Methodist Church). Finally, the church as believers, salt and light in the world (Grudem 2007:867–868; Smit 2007:61–67). According to Smit (2007:68), this understanding of the church is very important in the church's engagement in community development as it encourages believers' participation in being an agent and bearer of hope in the society. Tsele (2001:213) and Magezi (2019a:1) rightly put it that the churches are involved in development work because they are primarily involved in the lives of poor people. Church is one of the social groups that lives, understands, and identifies with the poor in Africa. Tsele (2001:213) mentions that in South Africa, other than the post office, no institution has as many branches as the church. It is found in the remotest parts of the country. According to Tsele (2001:213), when the church talks with the poor, it is talking of its own members. 'It is the Church with the poor and of the poor' (Tsele 2001:213). The church in Africa is trusted by the poor people, and they understand its language, motives, and leadership; hence it is a well-attested vehicle for development endeavours (Magezi 2019a:1; Tsele 2001:213).

Beukes (2019:1–10) writes about how members of the community have contributed to the development of their community, even though they did not do that in the sense of a congregation or a denomination; nevertheless, they are the same people who attend church in the same community. This means Christians demonstrate that they are the body of Christ as they get involved with their communities in their daily lives. They do so as followers of Christ and as people who confess faith both in word and through their lives and actions (Smit 2007:68). Magezi (2007:69), commenting on Smit (2003) and Louw's argument (1998) on understanding the church in relationship to practical theology, contended that Christianity must not be portrayed as a 'sterile objectivism, a transcendent dimension that excludes the realities of being human' (Magezi 2007:69). It is the role of a Christian church to interpret and understand the Christian truths in terms of human experience in the world, thus understanding of the church within a practical theological ecclesiology (Magezi 2007:69).

The above discussion indicates that community development entails change that is intended to lead to the betterment of people and places around the globe and to enhance the common good. To that end, churches are critical community development agents (Magezi 2017:1).

Then, the following question arises: How can church-driven development be understood within **Practical Theology, Public Pastoral Care and community development**?

Public practical theology, public pastoral care and community development nexus

There is considerable evidence that in recent years, practical theology has evolved from being seen as primarily concerned with the practice of the church and clergy to include public issues that people are facing in their societies (Chester 2013:39–41; De Wet 2017:259; Magezi 2019b:133, 2020:62). In this view, when practical theology takes a clear public dimension, it becomes public practical theology. Kim (2017:40) defines public theology as 'critical, reflective and reasoned engagement of the theology in society to bring the kingdom of God, which is for the sake of the poor and the marginalised'. This understanding of public theology entails that practical theology include equipping individuals to serve in their communities. Thus, theology in its nature negates the notion of individualism (Magezi 2020:62). Osmer and Schweitzer (2003:215) emphasised the need for practical theology to not neglect the public dimension in its work. Juma (2015:1) asserted that the goal of one's theological training should not be solely the church but to be equipped for service in the world (Dreyer 2004:919; Juma 2015:1).

The emphasis of practical theology as public practical theology is a major development that is acknowledged by many practical theologians (Dreyer 2004, 2011; Dreyer & Pieterse 2010; Magezi 2018; Osmer & Schweitzer 2003). Osmer and Schweitzer (2003:218) usefully explain that the task of public practical theology is discerned in three ways. Firstly, it is about ensuring that the public is one of the audiences of practical theology. Secondly, it is to ensure that practical theology includes everyday concerns and issues in its reflection. Thirdly, practical theology should facilitate a dialogue between theology and contemporary culture.

Magezi (2019b:133) rightly observed that 'practical theology in Africa is faced with a challenge of developing a holistic practical theological framework that includes practical spirituality, social, physical, political and economic issues' (Magezi 2019b:133b; Nanthambwe 2020:8). It is in the context of enormous challenges which Africans are facing that calls for the need for a public practical theology enquiry. Magezi (2019a:1) pointed out that African communities are facing various challenges that require the intervention of different sectors to address such challenges. In response to the challenges in Africa, Magezi (2019a:1) recommended that churches need to re-examine their role in communities to develop relevant responses that are deeply rooted in Christian approaches and heritage. The church needs to engage a public practical theology that strives to uncover the theological issues that underlie human culture, society, and experience (Paeth 2008:3). Agang (2020:1) stated the need for the shifting of practical theology to public theology when he observed that while living in Africa one will quickly sense that there are many problems that need to be addressed. Issues like bad governance, corruption, socio-economic injustice, religious competition, tribal and ethnic conflicts, and political domination are some of the challenges that have hampered

African development (Agang 2020:1). Agang (2020:2), against the background of African context, calls for a practical theology, which will ensure that firstly the word of God is being proclaimed. Secondly, the way of Christ's life is being demonstrated by his followers. And, finally, that different sectors in the community are working hard in Africa for the healing of the nations. This includes the church. Agang (2020:4) insightfully pointed out that the problems which Africans are facing should move the church to contemplate stepping up as politicians seem to have no answers to the problems. He further clarifies that for the church to impactfully contribute to addressing African problems, there is a need for the church to have a solid theology that goes beyond promising future deliverance and the salvation of our souls, to a public theology that proclaims that God cares about people and hears their groaning.

Having explained how practical theology is connected with public theology, there is still a question to ask. How do practical theology, public theology and pastoral care converge? Magezi (2019a:4, 2020:67) helps to explain their convergence by first pointing out that pastoral care is a subdiscipline of practical theology. According to McClure (2012:269), the term pastoral in pastoral care is a Latin translation of the word *pastorem*, which means shepherd and in its deep etymology, it includes the notion of tending to the needs of vulnerable. The focal point of pastoral care is tending the needs of the people. When this tending of the people is not solely 'church' orientated, but takes an explicit public dimension, the pastoral care becomes public pastoral care just as public practical theology (Magezi 2020:67). There is an unequivocal agreement among many pastoral care scholars about shifting of pastoral care from being 'individual intrapsychic' oriented to addressing public issues (Leslie 2008:80–89; Louw 2014; McClure 2012; Miller-McLemore 2005). McClure (2010:20, 2012:276) highlighted that pastoral care as public practice entails developing practices from the ground that enhances engaging with the real issues that people struggle with on a daily basis in society. Pastoral care is grounded in theological conviction about human being and divine intent (McClure 2010:8, 2012; Louw 2014). Magezi (2019c:1) commented that the notion of care viewed from the African perspective implies an attentive concern for the other person. Thus, public theology and pastoral care are linked as a practical theological discipline. Magezi (2020:68) finds the resonance between public practical theology and pastoral care in the public theological task of giving people a voice to enable them to express themselves on what things ought to be, providing an opportunity for correction of things that are going wrong, and giving people hope in the midst of degenerating state systems.

While there is an agreement among pastoral care theologians concerning its public dimension, there are two things that are worthy to discuss about public pastoral care. First is what Leslie (2008:83–84) noted. She talks of a dilemma that pastoral theologians have concerning their work in society (Leslie 2008:83–84). Most theologians view themselves as not well equipped to offer care in public arena (Leslie 2008:83). This

makes pastoral care to be deemed as 'private, unassuming and circumspect' (Leslie 2008:83). She staunchly lamented the behaviour of pastoral care givers in this way:

We regularly reflect on the sufferings of the world, but we do it with Christian audiences in mind. It remains an in-house conversation. How can our professional skills of supporting (healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling) as well as listening, praying, absolving, organising, and theorising effectively equip us to engage in the public discourse when we are out in that public? (Leslie 2008:83)

Here, Leslie (2008:83–84) laments the vacuum that is there between the theoretical aspect of public pastoral care and how not much has been done in the ground. While she speaks from the context of United States, the truth of the matter is that it is even worse here in Africa. Second is the gap noted by Magezi (2019b:115–118) in the context of practical theology where there is not much intellectual reflection of practical theology (which pastoral care is a part of) in African universities. While the African society is faced with challenges of various kinds, there have been few intellectual reflected materials written by African practical theologians.

Another aspect that Magezi (2020:63) observed is that there is a lack of clarity pertaining to defining the boundaries of public pastoral care, and this leads to being unclear of what it is. He alludes to the fact that public pastoral care is a new phenomenon that people do not commit to define but is a lens that is very critical (Magezi 2020:63). He further offers the following definition in order to help in clarifying the boundaries of public pastoral care:

Public pastoral care is (1) caring for people from a Christian spiritual perspective whereby (2) the care is provided to people in different public spaces and contexts (3) to address holistic issues affecting people such as spiritual, social, emotional, cultural, economic, political and others (4) to enable them to meaningfully cope with life. (Magezi 2020:69)

To summarise Magezi's (2020:69) definition of pastoral care, four things are observable. Firstly, the spiritual perspective of pastoral care where its focus is on caring the souls of people. Secondly, the difference in context and the environment of the people receiving the care. It is not just the church but people from different walks of life. Thirdly, the diversity of the issues being addressed. The issues are not inflexible but multifaceted. This includes spiritual, social physical, political economical or any other issues affecting people in society. Fourthly, the care is geared to help people to cope with life. This coping with life entails transformation. This is where people are empowered to change their situations. It is in the fourth objective that all the first three objectives are geared to achieve. Therefore, public pastoral care could be understood as helping people to transform their lives.

Magezi (2019a) observed thus:

There is a need for transformation of people's lives. People and community transformation entails facilitating people's progress and development. Church care, therefore, means human (i.e., soul – nephesh) care, which in Christian ministry is called holistic ministry. (p. 3)

Magezi's observation (2019a:3) is very insightful in connecting the link between pastoral care and development. Both pastoral care and community development focus on the betterment of people's lives. He stated that the link between public theology and pastoral care is easily discernible (Magezi 2019a:3). It is in the context of different challenges, in particular, that the African communities are facing, which Maathai (2010:9) describes them as real and vast, that call for intervention of pastoral care (Magezi 2019a:3; McClure 2012:276; Louw 2014; Paeth 2008:3). Pastoral care is called to intervene in addressing community challenges such as poverty, underdevelopment, gender-based violence and all kinds of injustices in a society (Magezi 2019a:3). The communities in the SSA are faced with enormous challenges that impede their development.

Agbiji and Agbiji (2016:1–2) lamented that even though there have been many discussions about the importance of pastoral care as a professional discipline in Europe, the USA and Australia, pastoral care as a professional discipline and practice has not received sufficient attention in development discourse, or for its role in healthcare institutions particularly in Africa. Why is it like this in Africa? While there might be a number of reasons, Agbiji and Agbiji (2016:2) postulated that the scant attention could be related to the narrow conception of pastoral care, which only focuses its practices to the ecclesial context (Dreyer 2004:919–920; Magezi 2019b:133). Magezi (2019a:5) agrees with Agbiji and Agbiji (2016:2) when he said that pastoral care should be shifted to public pastoral care, which includes developing practical ways of healing aimed at the public space (Magezi 2019a:5; Leslie 2008:21). According to Magezi (2019a:5), currently the church and academic pastoral discussion is happening; however, the focus on the society is very little. This 'very little' needs to be understood in the context of the impact that these discussions are having on the society. It is one thing to have discussion on the church and the role it has on the society, and another thing to really practise what the role of the church is in a society.

It is against such backdrop that Louw (2008:76) argues that pastoral care should not only focus on the ecclesial context but to equip people to be imaginative, creative and anticipatory towards life and its related challenges. Therefore, the concept of pastoral care as both practice and discipline should encompass a reflective practice of faith in everyday life under all circumstances (Agbiji 2013:11; Miller-McLemore 2012:6).

Conclusion

The tragic reality of underdevelopment particularly in the SSA calls for intervention from various sectors to effectively address the challenge. The church is one of the players that are called to participate in the development of people's lives as attested by Jesus in the gospel (Mt 5:13–16). To that end, a church public pastoral care is one of the approaches suggested to address the challenge of underdevelopment. The church is encouraged to engage in a public pastoral care that goes beyond the clerical paradigm to the concerns of societies. It is through understanding the role of church in communities

that relevant responses to the challenges faced by the people will be formulated.

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