

Why is pastoral care crucial to Africa? Towards an African pastoral care perspective

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Without a doubt, pastoral care as the frontline ministry of the church has been crucial in Africa. Numerous obstacles confronting the African continent as a whole make pastoral care indispensable. Despite the fact that many scholars have acknowledged this, the distinctiveness of pastoral care in Africa has not been extensively investigated. What is it about pastoral care that makes it such an essential ministry in Africa? Other questions that must be addressed to clarify the primary question include: If pastoral care is essential, what is the church doing to expand pastoral care in Africa? What contributions are pastoral care theologians making to the academic impact of pastoral care discourse? This article examines why pastoral care is essential and how the church and pastoral care theologians can increase its impact in Africa. The article's thesis is supported by extant research within the field of pastoral care.

Contribution: The article presents a discussion on the importance of pastoral care in Africa. The article helps elaborate on the need to have pastoral care in Africa that will effectively serve its people. Churches and pastoral care scholars in Africa will benefit from the discussion of this article as it helps in mapping the direction of pastoral care in Africa.

Keywords: pastoral care; Africa; pastoral care theologians; importance of pastoral care; African pastoral care perspective.

Introduction

The recognition of the necessity to utilise appropriate pastoral care models that would produce outcomes in the African setting has been acknowledged by several researchers in the field of pastoral care (Acolatse 2014; Klaasen 2018, 2023; Louw 1997; Magezi 2016a, 2019a, 2022; Nanthambwe & Magezi 2022; Ndlovu & Naidoo 2023). Foskett and Lyall (1988) state that pastoral care has been at the heart of the church since its inception. The present scholarly discourse around the significance of pastoral care in Africa is considerable; nonetheless, there exists a dearth of literature addressing the specific factors that contribute to the relevance of pastoral care ministry within the setting of African churches. Moreover, the discussions held by the church and theologians specialising in pastoral care in Africa have shown limited progress in addressing the substantial demand for pastoral care on the continent. Magezi (2016a) expresses concern over the insufficient level of reflection exhibited by theologians focussing on pastoral care, which hinders the potential for transformative impact on individuals residing in Africa. According to Berinyuu (1988:4), the notion of pastoral care in Africa predates the arrival of Western Christianity on the continent. Despite this legacy, in contrast to its Western counterparts, pastoral care in Africa has seen a very sluggish rate of development, as noted by Magezi (2019a). Magezi (2019a) observes:

There is a clear gap that exists in pastoral care in Africa. In many respects, pastoral care seems to be stuck and preoccupied with the elements that Ma Mpolo (2013) called the *Homo africanus* elements. These elements are important for pastoral care, as they form the foundation for African people. However, they are deficient in addressing emerging challenges in the modern and technologically advanced Africa. (p. 10)

Magezi's (2019a) concern was earlier pointed out by Lartey (2013), who commented that the slow catching up of pastoral care in Africa is a result of African-led churches even in the diaspora that exhibit backward African thinking and much less progressive African thinking. What is this backward African thinking that Lartey (2013) refers to? While it may refer to different things, the explanation that Gifford (2008) gives highlights some of the backward thinking that Lartey (2013) may allude to. For instance, according to Gifford (2008), it is good to promote traditional practices of African pastoral care; nonetheless, it is important to approach this task with a critical mindset. The promotion of African traditional standards should be approached with caution to avoid regressive tendencies that may advocate for a return to former practices. The question is: how should Gifford's (2008) advice be understood in the recent quest for decolonising pastoral care in Africa?

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The matter of decolonising pastoral care is of utmost importance, but several scholars (Fanon 1990; Mbembe 2015; Prinsloo 2016) recommend exercising prudence in implementing this undertaking. Although there may be a temptation to eradicate Western influence and return to conventional practices, it is crucial to contemplate the potential ramifications. According to Katongole (2017:6), it is important to note that decolonisation, if approached solely as a negative or reactionary endeavour, may inadvertently result in discarding valuable aspects along with undesirable ones. For example, the narrative therapy approach, which helps individuals reframe their experiences and derive meaning from their stories, is something that is highly valued in African culture (White & Epston 1990).

While pastoral care is important in Africa, there is an imminent need to investigate its importance if it is to be impactful. What are the key factors that contribute to the indispensability of pastoral care as a ministry in Africa? Additional queries that want attention to elucidate the central query include the following: If pastoral care is deemed vital, what measures are being undertaken by the church to augment the provision of pastoral care within the African context? What are the scholarly contributions of theologians specialising in pastoral care to the academic conversation around pastoral care?

Therefore, this article explores the significance of pastoral care within the African context, as well as strategies that might be employed by the church and pastoral care theologians to enhance its effectiveness in Africa. The thesis of the article is substantiated by existing research in the domain of pastoral care.

What is pastoral care anyway? On the conceptualisation of pastoral care

What is the rationale for the necessity to conceptualise pastoral care? According to Buffel (2004:38), it is crucial to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the concept of pastoral care before engaging in any discussion on the subject. What are the justifications provided by Buffel (2004)? Buffel (2004) presents the initial rationale, which aligns with the viewpoints of Campbell (ed. 1987) and Pattison (2000). Campbell (ed. 1987) and Pattison (2000) have expressed their concern with the tendency of several authors to overlook the significance of providing a clear definition for the concept of pastoral care. It is commonly assumed that a definition of pastoral care is unnecessary, as individuals are presumed to possess prior knowledge of its meaning (Pattison 2000:5, 6). One additional factor is that in certain cases, researchers may refrain from providing a definitive definition when dealing with a very intricate issue such as pastoral care (Buffel 2004:38). Although the task of defining pastoral care is indeed challenging, it is important to acknowledge that the difficulty in describing a profession should not discourage us from making an effort to formulate a definition (Buffel 2004:38).

Pattison (2000:5, 6) argues that the difficulty of defining pastoral comes because 'pastoral care is a matter of doing rather than thinking'. Pattison (2000) observed that attempting to define pastoral care can be limiting, as it tends to encompass a wide range of practices. He argued that because of the complex and multifaceted nature of pastoral care, it is challenging to propose a comprehensive definition that can encompass all its activities. Pattison (2000) further suggests that the true essence of pastoral care is resistant to analysis and definition, making it difficult to capture its entirety in a single definition. Another argument highlighted by Buffel (2004) for the need to conceptualise pastoral care is its relative obscurity as a theological field when compared to disciplines like New Testament and Old Testament studies and Systematic theology. Despite this, Christians often engage in pastoral care practices without explicitly labelling them as such. Therefore, the importance of conceptualising pastoral care cannot be overstated, since it enables a comprehensive knowledge of its nature and components (Adams 2018:51).

The inclusion of a definition of pastoral care in this study is crucial for two reasons. The first reason emanates from Magezi's (2016b) findings. According to Magezi (2016b:1), the concept of pastoral care is widely recognised as a discipline worldwide; however, the interpretation of the term 'pastoral' varies. Patton (2013) poses a substantial issue about conceptual delineating the term 'pastoral'. Patton (2013) raises a specific inquiry on the extent to which the phrase covers both compassionate attitudes and acts, as opposed to simply referring to the administrative oversight conducted by a clergy member who has a position of responsibility. Given the existence of many meanings of the term 'pastoral', it logically follows that the idea of pastoral care might likewise be susceptible to diverse formulations. The understanding and use of pastoral care might exhibit variability among persons. A comparison between a school atmosphere and a military one reveals the possible variability in pastoral care approaches.

Additionally, there is a need to construct a precise and unambiguous definition of pastoral care. This need arises from the assertion made by Barbara McClure (2012:269) that the practice of care transcends the boundaries of Christianity, as highlighted by Lartey (2003:22). McNeill (1951) elucidates the historical significance of pastoral care by emphasising the existence of intelligent religious mentors who offered support within secular frameworks, particularly in the Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim spheres. Magezi (2019a:1) has recognised that in an international setting, individuals engage in pastoral care with diverse religious perspectives. Therefore, it is crucial to define pastoral care as it will serve as a framework to clarify the intended scope and exclude any potential misconceptions. This article does not address pastoral care in a broad or generic sense. According to McClure (2012:269), while the practice of care transcends Christianity, the concept of pastoral care is exclusive to the Christian tradition and originated from the practical needs of

congregational life. It is important to acknowledge that McClure's (2012) remark does not negate the legitimacy of alternative forms of pastoral care that are conducted beyond the scope of Christian tradition. Nevertheless, I interpret her assertion as a demarcation for discussions about pastoral care within the context of the Christian faith.

How then is pastoral care understood within the Christian context? According to Clebsch and Jaekle (1964), pastoral care is referred to as:

The ministry of the cure of souls, or pastoral care, consists of helping acts, done by representative Christian persons, directed toward the healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling of troubled persons whose troubles arise in the context of ultimate meanings and concerns. (p. 4)

Clebsch and Jaekle (1964) outline four primary components of pastoral care, namely healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling. These practices can also be referred to as the objectives or functions of pastoral care (Adams 2018:67–80). Clebsch and Jaekle's (1964) definition also designates a recipient of pastoral care as an individual who is grappling with difficulties that are fundamentally connected to issues of 'ultimate meanings and concerns'. The question to ask is what are these 'ultimate meanings and concerns'? According to Goodliff (1999:8), the phrase 'ultimate meanings and concerns' can potentially be construed as matters of a religious or spiritual nature. Hence, as stated by Mills (2005:837), matters of ultimate concern must possess significance within the context of the Christian religion, as they contribute to the cultivation of a more profound faith and a closer connection with God. Thus, pastoral care, according to Clebsch and Jaekle (1964), focusses on assisting individuals who have been troubled by various life challenges to avoid situations that could harm their faith or spiritual well-being.

Nevertheless, it is important to establish a clear definition of the term 'spirituality' in the context of pastoral care. According to Magezi (2019a:1) and Nauer (2010:55–57), there is a cautionary note regarding the portrayal of pastoral care as spiritual care within the realms of helping and healing professions. They argue that this portrayal diminishes the distinctiveness of pastoral care and its inherent link to *cura animarum*, which pertains to the healing and nurturing of souls. How did Magezi (2019a) and Nauer (2010) arrive at this particular conclusion? It is because of the limited focus of pastoral care ministry when it is performed to deal with the internal or intrinsic aspects of human beings. Klaasen (2020:1) noted that despite the presence of diverse religious and cultural societies and the promotion of a sense of cosmic unity and cohesiveness, pastoral care has predominantly remained a personal phenomenon. Louw (2012) provides a comprehensive analysis that challenges the notion of the soul being exclusively associated with an individual's internal essence. Louw (2012) argues that the biblical usage of the term 'soul' differs from the Hellenistic understanding, as it does not denote a separate and distinct substance. Louw (2012) refutes the Platonic notion of the soul, which posits

that the soul can exist independently from the body, attaining complete independence only upon separation, and possessing immortality. Hence, the physical form serves as a mere vessel for the essence of the individual, akin to a confinement that needs liberation and emancipation. However, according to Louw (2012), the concept of the soul extends beyond its characterisation as a basic internal entity. It might be argued that the soul is a measure of one's overall well-being (Louw 2012). While the understanding of the soul in African culture is complex and diverse, in various African traditions, it is often associated with life force and energy. This life force is considered essential for health, prosperity and overall well-being (Mbiti 1991).

What are the potential dangers associated with approaching the comprehension of the concept of the soul from a metaphysical perspective? The obvious danger is the subject of caution raised by Doris Nauer (2010) and Daniel Louw (2014). According to Nauer (2010:55–57), the act of translating pastoral care (*cura animarum*, which refers to the care or treatment of human souls) into spiritual care, as is frequently done in the realm of helping and healing professions, diminishes the unique identity of pastoral care, and its connection to *cura animarum*. Hence, Louw (2014:61) aptly warned that exclusively considering spiritual healing in the context of professionalisation runs the risk of making the pastoral care ministry obsolete. The redundancy in question has been elucidated by various researchers in the field of pastoral care, who argue that pastoral care transforms into a form of 'individual intrapsychic' practice (Leslie 2008:80–89; Louw 2014; McClure 2012; Miller-McLemore 2005).

Anderson (2003) provides a concise summary of the correct understanding of spirituality when he argues:

Spirituality lies deeper in the human soul than religious edification. At the same time, spirituality goes further toward human wholeness and well-being than merely the removal of sickness, pain, and distress. Spirituality thus grows out of an integrative matrix which includes both the physical and mental aspects of personal being, grounded in social, personal, sexual, and psychical integration as a praxis of life. (p. 11)

The aforementioned interpretation of spirituality is sometimes denoted as 'spiritual care' within the context of pastoral care (Louw 2014; Magezi 2016b; McClure 2012). According to Magezi (2020:2), a valid argument can be made that when spirituality is defined as the origin of meaning and guidance in life, it becomes understandable why Louw (2014:66) argued that acknowledging the value of spirituality in therapy and counselling led to a shift away from the predominance of psychotherapy in pastoral care. Spirituality plays a crucial role in fostering the harmonious amalgamation of life and faith, resulting in a unified and coherent existence where our belief system is tangibly expressed through practical means. The integration of spirituality in the provision of pastoral care presents a critical examination of the humanistic paradigm in caregiving, since it establishes a religious framework, particularly within the confines of a church, as exemplified in my personal experience (Magezi 2020:2).

The definition of pastoral care, as outlined by Clebsch and Jaekle (1964), emphasises the importance of helping individuals overcome obstacles and experience the fullness of life as mentioned in John 10:10. This involves caring for others so that they can flourish in their relationship with God, themselves and others (McClure 2012:269). Magezi (2020) further explains that care is felt and experienced when it is given. Thomas (1993) supports this understanding by stating that care is a complex and multifaceted concept that can only be fully understood through practical application.

Hurding (1995:85) uses the word 'concern' to refer to 'care' in his definition of pastoral care. Hurding (1995) defines pastoral care as 'the practical outworking of the church's concern for the everyday and ultimate needs of its members and the wider community'. McClure (2012:269) concurred with Hurding (1995) explicating that pastoral care is about caring for other people so that they can flourish in their relationships with God, themselves and others.

The concept of care is challenging to provide a simple definition for, but Magezi (2020:1) succinctly captures it as the notion that care is perceived and encountered when it is bestowed onto individuals. Magezi (2020) developed this interpretation of care as a result of the intricate nature of the notion. Understanding God's love for people and the world is the mainstream of this care (Hurding 1995:85). Thomas (1993:651) proposes a particular conceptualisation of care, wherein she establishes a unique distinction between 'theoretical categories' and 'empirical categories'. According to Thomas (1993), care can be classified under the latter group because of the varied and complex nature of care provision. Thomas (1993) further argues that a thorough understanding of the notion of care can only be achieved by actual application.

The description of Christian care as presented by Redding (2012:14) warrants considerable attention. Redding (2012) establishes a clear differentiation between the concepts of kindness and caring. Redding (2012) pointed out that Ellen DeGeneres, a prominent American celebrity television programme presenter, consistently concludes her show by urging viewers to exhibit kindness towards one another. However, Redding (2012) asserts that exhibiting kindness towards others does not hold the same degree of importance as actively expressing care and concern for one another. Redding (2012) clarified:

Caring implies a relationship and an ongoing commitment in which lives become inextricably linked. Whereas pity and beneficence tend to be the primary motivators for acts of kindness and charity, it is compassion that sparks our motivation to care. We can be kind to one another yet still live autonomous lives, largely isolated from, and even indifferent towards the suffering that is evident all around us. (p. 14)

The comprehension of care mentioned above is of utmost importance. Firstly, it demonstrates that care is inherently relational. While the attribute of kindness may be perceived as distant or detached, the act of caring necessitates a sense of

being actively present and engaged. Secondly, the concept of care invariably results in subsequent actions. According to Magezi (2020), the essence of care is challenging to encapsulate in a concise definition. Nevertheless, Magezi asserts that care is a tangible and perceptible phenomenon that is discernible through its provision and reception. Deifelt and Hoffman (2021:55) concur with Magezi (2020) in their assertion that the manifestation of love is characterised by a genuine concern for the well-being of others, which compels individuals to actively engage with the practical challenges and emotional distress experienced by those in their immediate vicinity.

The advancement of technology has presented us with scenarios where the giving of care has not been limited to personal agents but also to Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems (Stoddart 2023). Stoddart (2023) has proposed the importance of including human representatives in the field of pastoral care, with a specific focus on the growing presence of AI as a potential substitute for care provision. Stoddart (2023) posits a scholarly perspective on the incorporation of human presence within the realm of pastoral care, substantiated by a set of four fundamental arguments. First and foremost, the concept of contingency about mortality. As individuals of the human species, our cognitive faculties are inherently designed to engage in decision-making processes that are influenced by the existential awareness of mortality and the finite nature of our lifespan. Secondly, the significance of knowledge as opposed to mere acquisition of facts. The necessity of human agents arises from the requirement for wisdom in the act of caring. Thirdly, the oppressive and/or liberatory potential of AI, and lastly, the value of presence. According to Stoddart (2023:13), there is a compelling argument emphasising the significance of presence, particularly when it is provided by another individual, as it incurs a certain level of expense. However, it is important to note that Clebsch and Jaekle (1964) argue against the mistaken belief that individuals responsible for providing pastoral care in Christian communities are limited solely to ordained clergy. Therefore, as McClure (2011:20) aptly asserts, anyone engaged in Christian pastoral care may belong to either the ordained clergy or the laity. These persons can be characterised as exemplars of the Christian faith since they employ the discernment and cognitive structure of the Christian tradition to tackle diverse concerns.

In the African context, pastoral care has mostly been conceptualised dependent on the Western perspective. This observation is noticeable in most of the conceptualisations of pastoral care by African scholars. For example, Brundson (2017) describes pastoral care as the following:

Pastoral care is used here, in the generic sense of the word, as an umbrella term denoting all pastoral actions within a Christian framework on both a formal and an informal level. Heeding the classic Latin terms *Pastorem* [shepherd] and *cura animarum* [care of souls], pastoral care inevitably points to care within the faith community towards one another. (pp. 109–110)

Why Latin terms are used to describe the concept of pastoral care to Africans is the question at hand. Could there not be African terminologies that more accurately define and replace the Latin concept of pastoral care? Magezi (2019a, 2016b) and Klaasen (2018:2) exhibit comparable patterns in their writings, wherein pastoral care is delineated utilising Western terminologies. According to Louw (1997), it is unwise to approach pastoral care in Africa through a Western lens. For pastoral care to be acknowledged as authentically African, Louw (1997) argues that a paradigm shift is necessary. Without delving into the conceptualisation of pastoral care, Louw (1997) identified two areas of emphasis for pastoral care in Africa. Pastoral care in Africa should initially adopt an alternative framework that incorporates, interprets and comprehends the African worldview. Furthermore, an imperative exists to improve pastoral care through the implementation of a community-oriented and contextual strategy that centres on existential elements.

Putting together Louw's (1997) proposal, the conceptualisation of pastoral care in Africa in this article refers to any undertaking by Christian individuals where the focus is more inclusive of mutual healing and growth geared to the congregation and its community where moral degeneration; severe poverty and high unemployment; high crime rate and violence; gender-based violence (GBV); illegal drug trafficking; drug abuse and gangsterism; effects of COVID-19; corruption and abuse of power, racism and xenophobia; hopelessness and despair and many other churnings exist. Close to this understanding of pastoral care in Africa is Lartey's (2003) definition. Lartey (2003) defines pastoral care as follows:

Pastoral care consists of helping activities, participated in by people who recognize a transcendent dimension to human life, which, by the use of verbal and non-verbal, direct or indirect, literal or symbolic modes of communication, aimed at preventing, relieving or facilitating persons coping with anxieties. Pastoral care seeks to foster people's growth as full human beings together with the development of ecologically and socio-politically holistic communities in which all persons may live as humanely as possible. (pp. 30, 31)

Thus, the primary objective of pastoral care in Africa is to promote the well-being and spiritual development of individuals while facilitating transformative processes (Klaasen 2018). Using its diverse array of interventions and practices, pastoral care significantly contributes to the promotion of societal healing. The therapeutic procedure incorporates a comprehensive approach to foster overall development. The comprehensive resolution of the 'suffering' experienced by African communities, according to Magezi (2016a:1), is successfully achieved by offering various forms of pastoral care.

The need for pastoral care from an African perspective

Why is it important to consider pastoral care from an African perspective? While several factors have contributed to the quest for an African pastoral care perspective, this article discusses four major ones.

Firstly, the rise of contextual theology. According to Bergmann and Vähäkangas (2021:1), contextual theology is characterised by an intense awareness of how Christian faith must be expressed in ways intelligible to specific contexts. This prompts the questioning of the Christian practices in Africa that are Western-oriented. What is the status quo and whether it is relevant to people?

Yusufu Turaki's 1999 publication, *'Christianity and African gods: A method in theology'*, delves into the paradigm shifts that have transpired in the Christian faith's implementation in Africa after the advent of missionaries. Turaki (1999:15) asserts, among other things, that early African intellectuals endeavoured to dispel Western misunderstandings regarding Africa and advanced the following cultural agenda. Firstly, Africans have an enduring history; secondly, Africans have dignity, worth, honour and identity; thirdly, Africans have civilised cultures, religions, traditions and societies; and fourthly, an African can be a scholar, a scientist, an administrator, a politician and a theologian.

The above-mentioned agenda resulted in the pursuit of three objectives: the indigenisation of African Christianity, the contextualisation of Christianity and the Africanisation of Christianity (Turaki 1999). These factors contributed to the emergence of 'contextual theology', which examines the relevance of the Christian faith to the African people and the current state of affairs (Brundson 2017; Pears 2010; Turaki 1999). According to Pears (2010), 'contextual theology' is a 'theology which explicitly places the recognition of the contextual nature of theology at the forefront of the theological process'. While Pears (2010) does not provide an explicit definition of the term 'theological process', it is evident from her book that the term denotes a conventional methodology that does not subject theological assertions to critical examination. In contrast, the contextual theological perspective asserts that the circumstances of those engaged in the theological endeavour influence and even dictate all forms of Christian theology.

Secondly, the questioning of white theology. To understand what white theology is, it is important first to understand what 'whiteness' does imply. The temptation is to understand white theology as the theology of white people, even though it has some affinity with racial connotations (Munyao & Tanui 2021). Jennings (2020:9) rightly uses the term 'whiteness' to refer not just to people of European descent, but rather to a way of being in and perceiving the world that creates cognitive and social structures capable of luring individuals into its habitation and meaning making. Munyao and Tanui (2021) elucidate the meaning of 'whiteness' in the following way:

Whiteness is a way of life that finds wings to thrive in the world through politics, economics, and Christianity. For every Christian in the world to find their Christian story is to find themselves in Whiteness. Whiteness, as a way of life, positions itself as superior to other ways of life and is domineering over other cultures. (p. 2)

Hill (2018) pointed out that 'whiteness' almost invariably exhibits dominance over other cultures when it comes into contact with them. According to Sanneh (2003), in the realm of religion, for instance, the influence of 'whiteness' has permeated Christian culture for numerous centuries; Christian theology, ecclesiastical practice and culture have all been Eurocentric. White theology is therefore the product of 'whiteness', whereas in theology what is normative is considered a standard for everyone. For example, the way theological truths are applied in Europe and America should be the same in Africa and Asia. However, this trend has been seriously questioned which has resulted in the rise of African theology. According to Magezi (2023:5), 'African theology aims to ensure that Christianity and the Bible constructively dialogue with African culture to develop authentic African Christianity'. Magezi and Igba (2018:1) explained that the primary objective of African theology is to facilitate a healthy conversation between Christianity, the Bible and African culture, with the ultimate goal of cultivating an authentic form of Christianity that is rooted in African traditions and values (Lartey 2017:viii). This theological paradigm is rooted in the dynamic interaction between Scripture, Christian tradition and African cosmology.

Thirdly, the rise of questioning colonial theologies. In the field of practical theology, which spans several themes such as pastoral care, Lartey (2013:129) suggests the adoption of assertive postcolonial practices. The objective of these practices is to cultivate a perception of God in Africa that is detached from the influence of colonisation, thereby facilitating a genuine and locally rooted comprehension. Lartey (2022:664) asserts that post-colonial approaches aim to undertake a critical analysis and interrogation of the persistent hegemonic vestiges of colonialism, alongside other purposes. Lartey (2013) highlighted that the process of 'post colonialising' activities requires a comprehensive approach that includes critical analysis, validation, recovery and creativity. The main aim of this undertaking is to facilitate the meaningful and active participation of those who have experienced colonialism in intellectual and practical discussions. Consequently, there has been a rise in the examination of colonial theologies. Colonial theologies arose from a passionate and hopeful enthusiasm, motivated by the aspiration to convert non-Western Christian nations into Christian civilisations through the impact of Christian civilisation. However, the spread of the gospel during the Western European imperialistic era led to the missionary movement becoming closely connected to the colonial aspirations of the Western world (Akron 1998:58, 2011:63). As a result, Western cultural norms got entwined with Christianity, deviating from a rigorous devotion to the unadulterated teachings of Jesus Christ as presented in the gospels. Given the circumstances, researchers have developed postcolonial theologies as a method of tackling the previously described concerns (Lartey 2013, 2018; Turaki 1999:17).

Fourthly, the uniqueness of the perspective of life by Africans. The difference between African and Western views of life has

been emphasised by several scholars like Louw (1997), Masango (2005, 2017), and Mbiti (1991). Ma Mpolo (2013) delineates certain discernible and general elements that are prevalent across African cultures. These include the sanctity of life, the connection between misfortune and sin, the spirit and ancestors in communal life, and the experience of life in its entirety. Unlike the Western view of life where there is a difference between the physical and the spiritual, in Africa life is experienced as a whole (holistically) (Magezi 2016a). Life in Africa is viewed as integrated into which who a person is and what he does are intimately related (Masango 2017:1). Since life in Africa is viewed holistically, the Western approach of pastoral care where the emphasis is on the individual has been ineffective, and irrelevant in serving African populace.

The factors mentioned above have prompted a re-evaluation of theological approaches that are presently being implemented in Africa. There has been a growing demand to embrace theological methodologies that are in harmony with the spirituality and culture of Africa (Lartey 2003; Mucherera 2017:23). A comparable appeal to reorient theological approaches in Africa about pastoral care was made by Ma Mpolo and Nwachuku (1991). Ma Mpolo and Nwachuku (1991:27) have advocated for pastoral care approaches that integrate African beliefs and practices that are significant to African culture and spirituality. Mucherera (2005:167) agreed with Ma Mpolo and Nwachuku (1991) that the effectiveness of pastoral care in Africa is contingent upon the alignment of approaches with the cultures of the people. In light of this, Mucherera (2005:17) cautions that it is inappropriate and harmful to directly transmit Western theories to non-Western people without first considering their culture and religion. Based on the arguments of African theologians including John Mbiti, Kwame Bediako, Jesse Mugambi, and Mercy Oduyoye, Sakupapa (2018:406) has therefore argued for a reorientation of pastoral care in Africa to imbue it with an authentically African essence. All this has led to a call for decolonising pastoral care in Africa. Decolonisation of pastoral care calls for the abandonment of pastoral care approaches that are entirely Western in their perspectives (Dreyer 2017; Yong 2021).

What makes pastoral care critical in Africa?

When examining the distinctive characteristics of pastoral care in Africa, it is essential to revisit the definition of pastoral care as it is defined in this article within the African context. The definition demonstrates that the principal objective of pastoral care is to assist individuals in escaping the circumstances that bring misery into their lives. There are a multitude of challenges that the African populace must confront and resolve. Pastoral care, being a frontline ministry, is strategically positioned to assume a prominent role in carrying out this responsibility within African church environments; therefore, it is considered indispensable (Nanthambwe & Magezi 2022).

The continent of Africa is confronted with a multitude of issues that hinder the progress and improvement of individuals' livelihoods. According to the World Bank (2018:3) and Myers (2017:149), the continent of Africa, namely sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), has faced persistent challenges such as fragility, violence, inadequate institutions, difficulties in translating economic progress into poverty reduction, warfare and famine.

Augustine (2018:6) identifies several indicators of underdevelopment that are prominently observed in SSA. These indicators include a low gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, a prevalence of inadequate technology, feeble economic and political institutions, an absence of political culture, the predominance of a ruling class that prioritises and rationalises values that hinder socioeconomic and political progress, and a fragile statehood. Several pressing issues that societies face, including poverty, are climate and environmental changes, health concerns, technological advancements, war and conflict, migration patterns, rapid urbanisation, democratic instability, GBV, unemployment rates, the impact of the COVID-19, and pervasive corruption within governmental systems.

The above issues have made the African continent and its people vulnerable to suffering and deterred their enjoyment of life. The economic, political, social and other things in Africa call for interventions from all social organisations to tackle the problems that people are facing. The ministry of pastoral care has in its functions some remedies that can help make Africa a better place. The following pastoral care functions as presented by Lartey (2003), make this ministry critical in Africa.

The healing function of pastoral care

The issues of wars, poverty, the effects of COVID-19 and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), and many other things have made people in Africa susceptible to suffering and in need of healing. Lartey (2003) states:

As human persons, we find ourselves broken and bruised in many ways. From time to time, we find ourselves in need of physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual restoration. Healing presupposes that we have lost something we once enjoyed and that it is possible to regain what we have lost. Often it is hoped that such restoration will take us further or place us in a better position than we were before. The art of healing entails those activities that facilitate the restoration sought for. (p. 62)

Lartey (2003) underscores the imperative of providing healing to individuals experiencing diverse forms of suffering. However, what is the precise definition of healing? According to Parsons (2002:147), healing can be defined as the process of returning an individual who is experiencing distress to a state of complete bodily, emotional and mental well-being, hence restoring their overall wholeness. Clinebell (2011:55) and De Gruchy (1989:39) assert that there exists a

correlation between the concepts of healing and salvation. In Africa, people are entangled with so many things that have brought suffering in their lives. Just proclaiming that people are saved without being liberated from their bondages is a fallacy (Mbiti 1986). According to De Gruchy (1989), the restoration of the social and political order is an integral aspect of the healing process, alongside the physical and psychological dimensions. Magezi (2006:3) proposed that healing in the African setting involves addressing the ailments experienced by individuals within the community, with the ultimate goal of enabling them to lead meaningful and satisfying lives.

This manifestation of flourishing extends beyond the mere provision of fundamental necessities, such as sustenance and housing. According to McFague (2001:107) in her publication titled *'Life abundant: Rethinking theology and economy for a planet peril'*, she argues that the concept of thriving encompasses more than mere ecological sustainability and the fulfilment of basic needs. Additionally, it encompasses the establishment of democratic and equitable political and governmental systems, as well as the provision of chances for cultural, technological, educational, social and spiritual advancement. It also encompasses the promotion of social, emotional and creative development for both present and future generations. Pastoral care is the vehicle through which the necessary healing needed by African nations can be achieved, hence making it crucial (South African Council of Churches [SACC] n.d.). For instance, with the issue of the effects of COVID-19 in South Africa, people are left with the economic knocks of job losses, the collapse of businesses, domestic tension is on the rise, abuse and violence have promoted various manifestations of societal disquiet and mental health conditions (SACC n.d.). There is an urgent need for a public reassurance and healing campaign that holds the people of Africa in hope even if their situations seem to be hopeless. The pastoral care goal is to bring healing to such communities and the lives of individuals.

The sustaining function of pastoral care

The sustaining function of pastoral care in Africa lies in its capacity to support individuals in navigating the diverse obstacles they encounter within their circumstances. According to Lartey (2003:63), there are some circumstances in which the process of healing may be prolonged or fail to occur as anticipated. In what ways does pastoral care contribute to addressing such circumstances? Pastoral care facilitates individuals in accessing internal and external sources of strength and support, enabling them to effectively navigate and cope with circumstances that are beyond their control. In the context of Malawi, the issue of poverty has been widely prevalent, posing significant challenges for individuals to overcome (Magezi & Nanthambwe 2022). In circumstances of this nature, pastoral care assists not through the assurance of a positive outcome or improved circumstances, but rather by empowering and facilitating

the development of coping mechanisms inside individuals. Alternatively, individuals can be assisted in accessing external sources of support that exist beyond their capacities, such as those found within their immediate social or cultural contexts (Lartey 2003:64). African culture through the philosophy of *ubuntu* encourages people to support one another. The concept of *ubuntu* emphasises the interdependence and interconnectedness of all life, and fosters solidarity and mutual support among people in Africa (Magezi 2019a). While pastoral care in Western contexts places a strong emphasis on personalised support provided by clergy, trained lay members, psychologists, and other professionals, the literature widely recognises the presence of an additional support mechanism within African communities, particularly through the extended family system. According to MaMpolo (2005:12), the church acknowledges the dynamic nature of the extended family structure as it assists individuals and families in comprehending the consequences of societal transformations.

One of the ways by which pastoral care can perform its sustaining function in Africa is through the implementation of church-led development strategies. These approaches empower communities to independently identify their needs and resources, mobilise their assets, devise their plans, execute their initiatives, monitor their progress and evaluate their outcomes. Magezi (2019b:1) presents an illustrative instance of this methodology in Lesotho, where he implemented the church and community mobilisation approach (CCMP) that facilitated collaborative partnerships between churches and various stakeholders within their communities, thus enabling them to collectively tackle prevalent social challenges.

The guiding function of pastoral care

Pastoral care's guiding function is to assist individuals in discerning the will and purpose of God for their lives, and in harmonising their decisions and deeds with that of God. The African populace is profoundly impacted by the obstacles they encounter, to the extent that it becomes difficult for them to make the best life decisions (Magezi 2016b). Furthermore, individuals in the 21st century are confronted with a variety of decisions concerning worldviews, philosophies of life, ideologies and perceptions (Lartey 2003:64). Upon contemplation of various potential options, three inquiries arise at the crossover: How ought one to decide? How should the relative benefits and drawbacks of an option be evaluated? How is it possible to evaluate and make a decision among various alternatives? Pastoral care facilitates responses to such inquiries (Lartey 2003). How do pastoral caregivers in Africa help with guidance? According to Magezi (2016b), pastoral care providers offer guidance through listening, questioning, advising and praying with people who seek spiritual direction.

Mwaura (2017) argues that pastoral care in Africa serves a vital function in offering guidance. As a result of the myriad obstacles that communities and individuals on the continent encounter, such as disease, poverty, and conflict, a significant number of individuals look to their religious leaders for counsel and assistance. In a secure and encouraging environment, pastoral care enables people to discuss their struggles and receive counsel and direction. Additionally, it fosters a deeper connection between people and their spirituality and faith, which can be a source of solace and resilience in times of difficulty. Pastoral care practitioners collaborate closely with communities to assist them in devising strategies to surmount their unique challenges and requirements. Pastoral care assists communities and individuals in navigating the complexities of life's challenges and in developing fortitude and optimism by offering direction and stability (Magezi 2016b). A study published in 2002 in the *African Journal of Primary Health Care & Family Medicine* established the notable function of pastoral care in Africa, which is to furnish communities and individuals with direction and assistance (Mwaura 2017). Pastoral care practitioners, according to the study, collaborate closely with communities to address their particular challenges and needs, guiding and supporting them as they navigate the complexities of life (Mwaura 2017). Furthermore, according to a report published by the World Council of Churches (2014), pastoral care offers individuals a secure and encouraging environment in which to confide in their challenges and obtain counsel and direction. This support enables them to strengthen their connection with their spiritual and religious beliefs, and provides solace and resilience amid challenging circumstances. Additionally, pastoral care assists communities and individuals in coping with the grief and trauma brought on by violence and conflict. Pastoral care practitioners, according to a report by the World Council of Churches (2014), offer emotional support and counselling to communities and individuals impacted by violence, assisting them in the process of healing and reconstructing their lives. In summary, pastoral care plays a crucial role in Africa by offering direction and assistance to communities and individuals. It establishes a connection between individuals and their faith, assists them in navigating complex issues, and fosters fortitude and optimism.

The reconciling function of pastoral care

The reconciling function of pastoral care in Africa helps people to restore their broken relationships with God, themselves, others and creation. It involves helping people to experience God's forgiveness and reconciliation, and to practice forgiveness and reconciliation with others (Kellmen & Edwards 2007:52, 82). Lartey (2003:65) simply stated that 'reconciling involves bringing together again parties that have become estranged or alienated from each other'.

The effects of colonisation in Africa have led to conflicts and division among many African tribes. Nyikuri (2020) and Tuduks (2020) pointed out how colonialism was at the hub of

driving severe conflicts among ethnic groups in Burundi and Nigeria respectively. As a result, Africa is widely regarded as one of the most conflict-ridden continents globally, with numerous conflicts arising from political, social and economic factors. The conflicts in Africa have often caused the displacement of people, loss of lives and destruction of properties, leading to deep-seated wounds and animosity between different groups of people. Therefore, the need for peace and healing is paramount to building sustainable peace and development in Africa.

According to Magezi (2022), the understanding of humanhood denoted by *ubuntu* is central to facilitating reconciliation in Africa. The African concept of *ubuntu*, emphasises the interconnectedness of humanity and the importance of relationships. This concept of *ubuntu* underpins the reconciling function of pastoral care in Africa, as it seeks to restore broken relationships and promote harmony between individuals and communities. Several examples show how pastoral care has been used to promote reconciliation in different African countries. In Rwanda, for instance, the church played a critical role in promoting reconciliation after the 1994 genocide. The church used pastoral care to facilitate healing and forgiveness between victims and perpetrators of the genocide (Nyikuri 2020). Similarly, in Nigeria, pastoral care has been used to promote reconciliation between different religious groups, such as Muslims and Christians, who have been in conflict for decades (Tuduks 2020). In South Africa, pastoral care has been used to promote reconciliation between different racial groups, particularly between black people and white people, who have a history of apartheid. The example of Tutu's leadership in the attempts at reconciliation in South Africa is a significant illustration of how the pastoral care function of reconciling has worked in Africa. These examples illustrate how pastoral care has been used as a reconciling function in different African contexts to promote healing and reconciliation.

The other pastoral care functions of nurturing, liberating and empowering, as mentioned by Lartey (2003) have all their focus on ensuring that people are living free from oppression and are helped to overcome their struggles so that they can enjoy life. Africans, with a history of slavery and colonialism, need to completely unshackle themselves from their effects and be empowered to live as Africans. Pastoral care in Africa can make this happen when it is practised through an African lens which enables the Africans to instil a sense of citizen responsibility and innovativeness to resolve the challenges that people are facing (Du Plessis 2021; Magezi 2019a).

Africa's current state of pastoral care

Vhumani Magezi (2016b) explains how pastoral care in Africa has fared. In his reflection, he observed that there is a lack of a concise and defining approach or at least an organising centre for pastoral work in Africa. Magezi (2016b) gives a comparison of the Western countries where

psychotherapy is identified as an organising centre for pastoral care, whereas it is not easy to find such an organised centre for pastoral care work in Africa. Agreeing with Magezi (2016b), Klaasen (2018) asserted:

Compared to Britain and the United States of America, pastoral care as an academic enterprise in Africa has a brief history. Pastoral care is less developed in so far as it lacks a clear unified framework and a specific school of thought, even if it is situated within practical theology. (p. 3)

The question is why is it obscure to find an organised centre for pastoral care in Africa? Magezi (2016b:6) identifies at least five causes for pastoral care fragmentation in Africa which are the illusion of Africa's homogeneity; the gap between academic reflection and congregational ministry; the excessively diverse approaches among missionary churches and African Pentecostal and Charismatic churches; different theological approaches; and a lack of a narrow focus on pastoral care. On the homogeneity of Africa, Ma Mpolo (2013) pointed out that Africa is heterogeneous with diverse groups of people despite it known as a whole. The heterogeneity of Africa makes it a challenge for pastoral care to have a distinct approach as observed by Brundson (2017):

Even in the same country, Africans themselves do not represent a homogenous group in terms of ethnicity and expression of cultural practices and beliefs. Current factors like globalisation and urbanisation are instrumental in further diversifying the value systems of Africans, contributing to the fluidity of the notion of a uniform African context. In light of this, the quest for a pastoral care model for Africa inevitably needs to be careful of a generic approach to the African context and always attempt to be specific about which context is at stake. (p. 111)

Despite the challenge of Africa being heterogeneous, Ma Mpolo (2013) identifies some elements that are discernible and common among African cultures. These are the sanctity of life, the relation between illness, misfortune and sin, spirit and ancestors in the life of the community, and life experienced as a whole. Ma Mpolo (2013) argues that pastoral care in Africa should be concerned with dealing with the mentioned elements, if it is to be effective. However, Magezi (2019a) has pointed out that most approaches in pastoral care that have been the product of African theological intellectualism which resist the imposition of Western culture and values have been eclectic and lack definitiveness.

While Magezi (2016b) lamented pastoral care in Africa lacking a definitive organising centre, he (Magezi 2018:7) later changed his argument by noting that there exists a central point of organisation in Africa concerning pastoral care besides the *Homo africanus* of Ma Mpolo (2013), which emphasises the process of reconstruction.

How does the notion of 'reconstruction' tie pastoral care approaches in Africa together? According to Magezi (2016b), the African experience is viewed and understood as a whole. This suggests that a person must be free of illness or adversity in life. The presence of robust physical and mental well-being

in children, a harmonious and satisfying marital relationship, a secure and consistent occupational position, and a sense of tranquillity and contentment in interactions with parents and extended family members all contribute to the state of being whole and fulfilled. In the African context, wholeness is achieving freedom and peace in both spiritual and bodily worlds. These elements help to provide a complete picture of African life and spirituality. Pastoral care is built on the African viewpoint on life and spirituality. As a result, numerous African theologians and religious scholars have written about these elements, as evidenced by a document published in 2013 by the Society for Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling (SIPCC) titled *Voices from Africa on Pastoral Care: Contributions in International Seminars 1988–2008* (Magezi 2016a:136). The psychotherapy-oriented approach that was the centre of Western religion in the 19th and 20th centuries has always been included in the African pastoral care model. To ensure its relevance and efficacy, it also includes the way Africans understand life and spirituality.

Another important topic of discussion in the field of African pastoral care approaches is the disparity in methodologies used by academic institutions and renowned practitioners. Academic institutions, according to Magezi (2016a), prioritise the cultural contextualisation discussion by looking out for categories that are significant in African culture. Church leaders, on the other hand, focus their efforts on meeting the pastoral and catechetical needs of the African Christian community.

Concerning the academic side of pastoral care in Africa, Magezi (2016a:137) bemoans the wide range of pastoral care reflections by African researchers, claiming that it makes discussion 'superficial'. The book edited by Waruta and Kinoti (1994), for example, contains subjects similar to the document edited by Federschmidt, Temme and Weiss (2013), which is 'diverse and deals with fragmented topics with no in-depth discussion or reflection on the discipline, at least at the theoretical level' (Federschmidt et al. 2013). While Magezi (2016a) does not elaborate on what he means by 'in-depth discussion', we have recently seen several pastoral care scholars writing on a variety of pressing issues such as the effects of COVID-19, poverty and GBV, particularly in South Africa and Zimbabwe. However, Magezi's (2016a) observation remains accurate in light of the continent's failure to address difficulties as a whole, rather than individual countries. This could explain why, although Africa is perceived as a whole, there is no uniformity in the viewpoint on life and challenges impacting individuals on the continent. What does this indicate about African pastoral care? While African pastoral care scholars are writing, there are still many topics that need to be covered, and additional voices from different parts of Africa on diverse pastoral care challenges are required.

The current state of pastoral care in Africa shows that more needs to be done on the ground so that pastoral care can effectively serve the people in Africa (Magezi 2019a). While

pastoral care is very crucial as discussed above, there is a need to embrace and enhance this ministry in Africa (Brundson 2017; Nanthambwe & Magezi 2022). The following discussion dwells on how the church and pastoral care theologians can contribute to making pastoral care serve its purpose in Africa.

Pathways for the church and theologians to enhance pastoral care in Africa

At the 12th conference of the International Council on Pastoral Care and Counselling (ICPCC) held at North-West Potchefstroom Campus on 3rd–6th July 2023, African pastoral care theologians and practitioners that attended admitted that pastoral care in Africa has been slow. Reading different articles on pastoral care in Africa, one will find that a lot has been suggested as to how the church can help enhance pastoral care (Brundson 2017; Magezi 2016a, 2016b; Nanthambwe & Magezi 2022). The question is why is the progress of pastoral care so slow in Africa despite good suggestions that are there to make it move forward? The answer is that there is a lack of implementation in executing plans that can transform pastoral care in Africa. Therefore, the church and pastoral care theologians in Africa need to be intentional about executing strategies to transform pastoral care in Africa.

Furthermore, the church and pastoral care theologians need to ensure that pastoral care in Africa is a public one. Pastoral care cannot be limited to the private sector; it must reach out to the public sphere to successfully address the multiple difficulties that African communities face (Magezi 2019b). By taking a public stance, churches and pastoral care practitioners can actively ensure that engagement with broader societal concerns affecting the well-being of individuals and communities is prioritised. Magezi (2019a) has emphasised the need for pastoral care in occupying public space in his work. Magezi (2019a) elaborated that pastoral care should extend beyond the private and religious spheres and into the public sphere. This viewpoint questions the commonly held belief that pastoral care is limited to individual counselling or spiritual advice within religious organisations. Magezi's (2019a) thesis resonates with the changing character of society, as the lines between the public and private spheres are increasingly blurred. Magezi (2019a) categorically stated that pastoral care has the potential to address a wide range of needs and difficulties. Magezi (2020) pointed out that Africa is currently dealing with a slew of issues that considerably impair the quality of life for its people. This problem is further elaborated by Nanthambwe (2023) whose research on the churches in South Africa shows that African people are being tormented by various challenges that are making their lives difficult.

According to the World Bank (2018:3) and Myers (2017:149), Africa, particularly SSA, has faced a slew of challenges, including instability, war, poor institutions, and a failure to successfully transform economic expansion into poverty reduction. There is a high occurrence of warfare, starvation, and other problems that plague the region. The current

situation in Africa gives a once-in-a-lifetime chance to expand pastoral care services to a broader audience. Pastoral care has long been connected with religious institutions and their efforts to provide emotional and spiritual support to their parishioners, as researchers have remarked (Hoffman 2015). However, there has been a rising acknowledgment of the need for pastoral care in broader contexts, such as healthcare settings, educational institutions, and even in response to social difficulties such as those confronting Africa today. As illustrated by the works of McClure (2012), Louw (2014), and Magezi (2020), scholars have highlighted the critical role of pastoral care in resolving societal challenges. Yet, establishing a detailed framework outlining how pastoral care can effectively engage with and address societal issues is critical. Pastoral care is critical in facilitating individual and community transformation in Africa. Magezi (2016a) stated that the major goal of pastoral care is to support holistic growth and development, which includes the spiritual, emotional and social components of people's lives. Therefore, pastoral care can make a significant difference in African communities in enriching their living experiences.

Additionally, the church and pastoral theologians in Africa should ensure that publishing on issues that can help transform people's lives is promoted. The question is how can this be done? At the ICPCC conference mentioned above, African pastoral care theologians and practitioners delegates, which I was one of, discussed the need to publish issues concerning Africa. It was agreed upon that journals that were established for the advancement of publishing issues for pastoral care which have not been effective enough should be reorganised and made functional. This is because there is not much-organised effort put in by African pastoral care scholars to ensure quality publishing across the continent. While the need to publish is urgent, Magezi (2018) issues a warning on how this can be achieved. Magezi (2018) writing in the context of practical theology in Africa, which pastoral care is part of quoted Gifford (2008) who noted that some unpolished papers are getting published by exploding publishers that put at stake the quality of the published work. As a result, crucial issues requiring in-depth and theoretical reflection are not being addressed or academically considered systematically. The church and pastoral care theologians in Africa can help in regulating the published work on pastoral care in Africa. This can be achieved by establishing more journals on African pastoral care with quality standards. In doing so, the published issues in journals can be impactful to the African population.

Lastly, there is a need for a collaboration effort by the church and pastoral care theologians to ensure that they are united in addressing issues affecting people in Africa. From what I observe, there is a need for unity between the church and various institutions tackling pastoral care issues in Africa. This involves the governments as well. Scattered efforts by the church, different institutions and governments in Africa dealing with care issues will not yield much. Nanthambwe and Magezi (2022) observed that there is a need for cross-sector partnerships to address issues that people are facing in

Africa. What does this look like? According to Eric Swanson and Rick Rusaw (2020), churches must become less self-focussed and more community-focussed to be effective in offering pastoral care for the people in Africa. Swanson and Rusaw (2020) suggest that churches should partner with non-church organisations to address issues affecting people in communities.

Conclusion

The article presents the cruciality of pastoral care in Africa. It discusses the importance of conceptualising pastoral care so that the African populace can understand it. The understanding of pastoral care in Africa has been presented. The article further delves into a debate on the need for pastoral care from an African perspective. It has been found that pastoral care as it is practised in Africa now is more Eurocentric and this makes Africans to be foreigners in its practice. Therefore, there is a need to change the pastoral care perspective to an African one to serve Africans better. The distinctiveness of pastoral care has also been presented in this article. Furthermore, the article has presented a brief discussion on how pastoral care is faring in Africa today. It shows that there is a need to work towards making pastoral care to be organised so that it can be relevant and effective. Lastly, pathways for promoting pastoral care in Africa have been presented.

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