



**Interplay of prophetic voice and pastoral
care within a complex socio-political
context: The case of the Church in
Zimbabwe**

P Tafirei



orcid.org/0009-0009-4292-5064

Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree *Master of Theology with Pastoral Studies*
at the North-West University

Supervisor: Prof V Magezi

Examination: November 2025

DECLARATION

I, Priviledge Tafirei, declare that **Interplay of prophetic voice and pastoral care within a complex socio-political context: The case of the Church in Zimbabwe**, is my own work and that all sources I have used or quoted have been acknowledged by means of complete references. I further declare that the thesis has been text-edited in accordance with the requirements and has not been submitted previously to any university.

Signature

Date

Priviledge Tafirei

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I give all glory, honour, and thanks to God. Without His grace, wisdom, and sustaining hand, this work would not have been possible. He has been my strength in moments of weakness, my light in moments of confusion, and my anchor throughout this journey.

I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, Prof. Vhumani Magezi, for his guidance, encouragement, and patient support. His insights and wisdom shaped my thinking and helped me stay the course, even when the path felt unclear.

To my dear wife, thank you for your love and sacrifice. You carried me through the late nights, the grumpy days, and the many moments when I doubted myself. Your constant belief in me gave me the courage to keep going, and for that, I will always be thankful. Thank you for editing, removing unnecessary adjectives, and ensuring the correct use of en and em dashes.

To my parents and family, thank you for your patience and understanding as I poured myself into this research. Thank you for being patient with me and understanding when my focus was elsewhere.

Your support and prayers gave me the space and strength I needed to finish this work.

To all of you, I owe more than words can express.

ABSTRACT

The Church in Zimbabwe has historically served as both a moral compass and an agent of societal change. However, its role in the public sphere has become increasingly contested within a complex socio-political environment characterised by authoritarian governance, economic decline, and social division. Although the Church is biblically and theologically called to embody both prophetic witness and pastoral care, its contemporary engagement has become fragmented. Some leaders have aligned themselves with political power, thereby damaging their credibility, while others have endeavoured to resist oppressive systems at great personal sacrifice. This has led to a lack of clarity and consistency in how the Church upholds its dual mandate of prophetic boldness and pastoral care.

This study aims to critically examine the relationship between these two roles and to develop a framework for public pastoral care that faithfully integrates prophetic and pastoral responsibilities to enable effective church engagement in Zimbabwe. Using a literature-based approach, the research employs thematic analysis of published work, peer-reviewed, theological texts, and historical case studies on Church-State relations. It is situated within the field of public practical theology, employing Osmer's four tasks approach to describe the current situation, interpret its underlying causes, provide biblical-theological insights, and suggest practical responses.

The research contends that prophetic witness and pastoral care are not opposing forces but complementary and mutually enriching roles that collectively form the Church's public pastoral mandate. By reclaiming this integrated approach, the Church can restore credibility, promote holistic well-being, and make a meaningful contribution to community healing and national transformation. The proposed framework offers both theological and practical insights by equipping church leaders to navigate Zimbabwe's socio-political challenges with courage, compassion, and contextual awareness. Ultimately, the study underscores the urgent need for the Church to embody its dual mission in ways that mediate God's shalom and promote justice, peace, and restoration within society.

Keywords: Public pastoral care; Prophetic witness; Pastoral caregiving; Church-State relations; Zimbabwe; Practical theology; Socio-political context; Community healing.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-----------|--|
| AICs | African Initiated Churches |
| BSAC | British South African Company |
| CCC | Citizens Coalition for Change |
| CCJP | Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace |
| EFZ | Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe |
| ESAP | Economic Structural Adjustment Programme |
| NCA | National Constitutional Assembly |
| NWU | Northwest University |
| LMS | London Missionary Society |
| RCZ | Reformed Church in Zimbabwe |
| UCCSA | United Congregational Church of Southern Africa |
| WCC | World Council of Churches |
| ZAOGA FIF | Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa Forward in Faith |
| ZCC | Zimbabwe Council of Churches |
| ZANU-PF | Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front |
| ZCA | Zimbabwe Christian Alliance |
| ZCC | Zimbabwe Council of Churches |
| ZCBC | Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference |
| ZHOCD | Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations |
| ZIICC | Zimbabwe Indigenous Inter-Denominational Council of Churches |

BIBLE BOOKS ABBREVIATIONS

| | | | |
|--------------------|-------|--------------------|-------|
| Genesis | Gen. | Matthew | Matt. |
| Exodus | Ex. | Hebrews | Heb. |
| Numbers | Num. | Luke | Luk. |
| Deuteronomy | Deut. | Mark | Mk. |
| Joshua | Josh. | John | Jn. |
| Judges | Judg. | Acts | Ac. |
| Ruth | Rut | Romans | Rom. |
| Samuel | Sam. | Corinthians | Cor. |
| Kings | Kgs. | Galatians | Gal. |
| Chronicles | Chr. | Colossians | Col. |
| Psalms | Ps. | Hebrews | Heb. |
| Isaiah | Isa. | Peter | Pet. |
| Jeremiah | Jer. | Timothy | Tim. |
| Ezekiel | Ezek. | Revelation | Rev. |
| Daniel | Dan. | | |
| Amos | Am. | | |
| Jonah | Jon. | | |
| Micah | Mic. | | |
| Zechariah | Zech. | | |

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1 CHAPTER 1: Orientation and Background

1.1 Introduction

“Every man carries a wound. I have never met a man without one. No matter how good your life may have seemed to you, you live in a broken world full of broken people.” — John Eldredge (2011:72)

The world is undeniably broken, filled with wounds that shape the lives of individuals and communities alike. From systemic injustice to personal suffering, the human condition is characterised by pain, conflict, and division. In the face of this profound brokenness, the Church, even though not always consistent, has long played a role in addressing public issues and promoting healing (Field, 2015:180-1; Bokenkotter, 2004; Katongole, 2011: xiv, 15–20). It has made significant contributions during some of the most challenging eras in human history. For instance, during the slave trade, the civil rights movement in the United States, the apartheid period in South Africa, the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe, and many other instances across the world, the Church has contributed to the confrontation of injustice, guiding societies towards healing and restoration (Abraham, 1989; Boesak, 2009; Bentley, 2013:6; Davis, 1988; Gilkes, 2001; Glaude Jr, 2016; Kgatle, 2018:1; King Jr, 1958; Maenzanise, 2008:79,88; Thomas, 1985; Mujinga, 2018:244; Paradza, 2019:3).

Throughout these periods, Church leaders have emerged not only as spiritual shepherds but also as agents of social transformation. Figures such as John Wesley, Granville Sharp, Desmond Tutu, Allan Boesak, Martin Luther King Jr., Ralph David Abernathy, Abel Muzorewa, and Ndabaningi Sithole, in their different contexts, embodied a ministry that addressed public suffering while challenging systems of injustice (Heitzenrater, 1995; Hochschild, 2006:42–52; Allen, 2006; De Gruchy, 2005; Branch, 1988; Abernathy, 1989; Maenzanise, 2008; Thomas, 1985). Their work revealed the inherently public nature of Christian ministry, a nature not born out of crisis alone, but rooted in the incarnational and redemptive mission of Christ, who publicly embodied God’s justice and compassion (Nyirawung, 2010:2; Bosch, 1991:391–393). Their example demonstrated that the Church’s ministry is most credible and faithful when both its private and public witness embody compassion and confronts injustice, for it is in holding these together that the Church reflects the heart of Christ.

Thus, the Church’s ministry has two inseparable dimensions:

- i. **Prophetic mandate** — speaking truth to power, confronting injustice, and calling communities to align with God’s vision for justice and human flourishing (Brueggemann, 2018:13; Nyiawung, 2010:2).
- ii. **Pastoral care mandate** — offering compassionate support, spiritual guidance, and practical help to individuals and communities in times of crisis (Magezi, 2024:3; Miller-McLemore, 2018:313; Leslie, 2008).

Theologically, these roles are complementary: the prophetic confronts brokenness, while the pastoral offers comfort to the broken. Ideally, the Church should embody both roles simultaneously as two expressions of the same gospel mission. However, in practice, the contemporary Church has often struggled to perform these two roles as complementary roles. In many contexts, the prophetic and pastoral dimensions of the Church’s calling are increasingly perceived and practised as separate, even competing, roles. Where past leaders saw them as inseparable, contemporary ministry often divides along two tracks: some within the Church lean heavily into prophetic activism, while others retreat into pastoral care stripped of public engagement.

1.1.1 Why the mandates are often separated

The division between the prophetic and pastoral roles in modern church practice can be linked to a convergence of theological, social, and political pressures. The growth of secularism and the privatisation of faith have increasingly moved the Church away from the public sphere, redefining its mission as one of private spirituality or charitable work, rather than a comprehensive engagement with justice and compassion (Taylor, 2007). In many contexts such as Zimbabwe, prophetic engagement has become costly due to political polarisation and authoritarian repression. This has, in turn, given rise to a consumer-oriented religion that sees pastoral care as a therapeutic service, divorced from confronting systemic injustice (Dombo, 2014:144–145; Gunda, 2018:46). This change has been reinforced by a perception of role specialisation, where ministers regard prophetic engagement and pastoral care as separate specialisations rather than parts of a unified calling (Magezi & Manzanga, 2020:4; Miller-McLemore, 2018:314). Fears of political repercussions, especially in volatile environments, have further led leaders to choose the “safer” option of pastoral care (Chamburuka, 2023:4). Differences in skills and temperaments also influence this division: prophetic ministry demands rhetorical boldness, political insight, and public advocacy, while pastoral care emphasises deep listening, empathy, and ongoing relational presence, causing leaders to gravitate towards one role over another (Hendriks, 2004:22; Osmer, 2008:4–6). Theological reductionism compounds this issue – some traditions prioritise personal salvation, leading to pastoral care without prophetic engagement, whereas others focus on social justice as the

gospel's primary call, resulting in activism without sustained pastoral nurturing (Bosch, 1991:400–402; Brueggemann, 2018:3–4; Magezi, 2024:8). Institutional pressures such as denominational politics, reliance on donors, and congregational expectations dissuade risky prophetic involvement, especially in fragile political and economic settings (Forster, 2022:85; Alexander & McGregor, 2013:752). Consequently, a predictable fragmentation occurs, with some within the Church becoming prophetic activists without caring for the wounded, while others focus solely on pastoral care without addressing systemic injustice. This disjunction damages theological integrity, weakens public witness, and limits the Church's ability to foster lasting societal transformation.

This fragmentation raises important questions: How can the Church faithfully embody both its prophetic and pastoral care roles in the face of complex public challenges? What theological and practical framework can help hold both together?

1.2 The Zimbabwean socio-political context

1.2.1 Defining the socio-political context

It is against this backdrop that the Zimbabwean context offers a critical case study. Here, the interplay between prophetic boldness and pastoral care is continually tested and reshaped by a complex socio-political reality marked by colonial legacies, liberation struggle memories, authoritarian governance, economic instability, and deep social fragmentation (Heywood, 2019:72; Louw, 2016:7,161). The term 'socio-political' in this context refers to the dynamic and often tense relationship between power, governance, economy, and the everyday lives of citizens (Heywood, 2019:72). 'Church' in this study refers to the collective body of Christians, regardless of denominational affiliation, who are united in faith and mission. This includes formal denominations, parachurch organisations, and individual believers actively living out their faith. The Church is understood as a diverse, yet unified community committed to worship, service, and the advancement of Christian principles (Fitch, 2021; McGrath, 2017:357; Erickson, 2013:1032–1035).

1.2.2 Zimbabwe's complex landscape

In Zimbabwe, the socio-political landscape is complex, deeply influenced by a series of interconnected and often contradictory events. This situation highlights both the urgency and challenge of balancing the prophetic and pastoral roles in a way that remains biblically faithful, theologically consistent, and practically viable. The following explores this socio-political landscape and its implications for the Church's public ministry.

The difference between complicated and complex is essential for understanding Zimbabwe's current issues. A complicated problem, as Nilson (2007:238) notes, can be broken down into manageable or "solvable parts" and approached with technical or structured solutions. In contrast, a complex problem cannot be easily separated because its elements are non-linear and interconnected. Louw (2016:7) observes that "in complexity, paradoxes are rendered as intrinsic parts of reality." In such cases, solutions do not involve simplifying but instead involve exploring the layered and interconnected systems, which Louw terms "the density of systemic networking" or thick descriptions, enabling the development of multiple, contextually appropriate responses.

Zimbabwe's socio-political landscape is best understood as complex rather than merely complicated. The interaction of political repression, economic instability, historical injustices, and spiritual longing creates a situation that defies quick or linear solutions (Louw, 2016:161). While describing it as complex may seem pessimistic, it opens space for deeper, more creative engagement. By acknowledging this complexity, the Church can respond with solutions that are both contextually relevant and theologically grounded

1.2.3 The Church's historical moral role

This complex interplay extends into the Church itself. Historically, the Church was a vital moral compass in Zimbabwe's public life, offering both spiritual direction and social critique. Over time, however, some prominent Church leaders, once celebrated as faithful shepherds and courageous advocates for societal healing, have gradually shifted away from this prophetic mandate. Instead of resisting injustice, many aligned themselves with a regime under which society steadily disintegrated.

Dombo (2014:144–145) notes how these religious figures moved from being agents of critical reflection to becoming instruments of political validation, turning pulpits into platforms of propaganda. As a result, voices that once called for justice now echo the rhetoric of power. Leaders such as Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa, Prophet Eubert Angel, Bishop Mutendi, and Andrew Wutaun Ashe have been publicly accused of acting as "regime enablers" (Magezi & Tagwirei, 2022:1; Dube, 2020:1; Masengwe, 2024:2).

1.2.4 Regime co-option and Church polarisation

This alignment was not accidental but often the result of strategic co-option by those in power. Many Church leaders moved from prophetic resistance to political endorsement, losing moral clarity and theological integrity.

Not all leaders followed this path, however. Figures such as Bishop Levee Kadenge and Sifiso Mpfu of the Christian Alliance, Bishop Anselm Magaya of the Zimbabwe National Pastors' Conference, Pastor Evan Mawarire, and Apostle Talent Chiwenga resisted regime co-option, but at great personal cost. They faced harassment, threats, and persecution, leaving the Church fragmented in its public witness (Mujinga, 2024:2; Magezi & Tagwirei, 2022:4). Some, especially from the Catholic tradition and mainline denominations, have continued to confront state power and call out injustice. They argue that Zimbabwe's crisis stems from systemic failure and misrule, not from a lack of faith. They urge the Church to not only provide spiritual comfort but also to confront oppression and work for renewal.

1.2.5 From Mugabe to Mnangagwa: continuity of repression

When Robert Mugabe was ousted in 2017, there was renewed national hope. Emmerson Mnangagwa's rise promised reform and a break from authoritarian rule. However, this optimism quickly faded. His administration soon mirrored the same repressive patterns: silencing political opposition, meeting protests with violence, and serving the interests of the ruling elite (Marumahoko & Chigwata, 2020:304–307; Chigwedere, 2021; Mkodzongi & Lawrence, 2019).

Mnangagwa deepened the Church's polarisation, co-opting leaders with land, money, and recognition in exchange for loyalty. This gave rise to openly partisan groups like Pastors4ED and Vapostori4ED which campaigned for the ruling party and portrayed Mnangagwa as divinely appointed (Chitando, 2020; Gunda & Kügler, 2021).

1.2.6 The growth of Christianity amid crisis

Despite this, Christianity in Zimbabwe continues to grow. The 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom notes that 85.3% of the population identifies as Christian, up from 84% in 2017 (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, 2017; U.S. Department of State, 2023). This suggests that in times of national distress, Zimbabweans turn to faith for hope and survival (Forster, 2022:85).

However, many question whether this growth reflects genuine transformation or is merely a coping mechanism. Prosperity preaching and regime-aligned churches often shift blame for poverty from government policy to individual believers' faith, absolving the state and weakening the Church's prophetic witness (Gunda, 2018:81).

1.2.7 The urgent call for a reimagined Church

The Church's influence is undeniable. Politicians court it, citizens trust it, and its reach is growing. But without courage, clarity, and theological depth, this influence will be wasted. Gunda (2018:49) provocatively argues: "...everything that has gone wrong in Zimbabwe has been under the watch of Christians mostly. In a way, we are what is wrong with Zimbabwe today!" This erosion of the Church's prophetic voice is not just a theological concern; it has real consequences for Zimbabwe's future. In a society gripped by systemic injustice and fragile hope, the weakening of the Church's moral authority leaves a dangerous vacuum.

This is both a challenge and an opportunity. The Church must move beyond survival and shallow comfort to become a credible, transformative presence, boldly confronting injustice and tending to the nation's wounds.

1.2.8 Ongoing barriers to engagement

The repressive political environment fosters fear, discouraging engagement. Economic instability and social unrest further divert attention from advocacy to survival. Many pastoral caregivers, uncertain of their public role, conform to government expectations, weakening their prophetic witness (Chamburuka, 2023:4; Magezi & Tagwirei, 2022). As Chamburuka (2023:4) puts it: "Most Christian leaders have opted to go into a mute mode or hiding in matters to do with politics. As shepherds, they watch helplessly when the sheep are being devoured by political and economic predators." Scholars have further reinforced this call, arguing that the Church's failure to fulfil its prophetic and pastoral responsibilities has exacerbated Zimbabwe's socio-political crisis. Some have even gone as far as to claim that Zimbabwe's core problem is not merely its politics but the Church itself. This assertion suggests that the Church's failure to fulfil its God-given mandate has significantly contributed to the country's state of disorder.

This critique presents both a challenge and an opportunity. On one hand, it calls the Church to self-reflection, urging it to rise above complacency and engage actively and courageously in the fight against societal degradation. On the other hand, with its growing influence and the trust it holds among the people, the Church is uniquely positioned to drive meaningful change, offering not only spiritual hope but also tangible leadership in the pursuit of justice, peace, and national restoration.

Despite these growing calls for the Church to reclaim its role in the healing and transformation of Zimbabwe's socio-political context, it continues to find itself in a state of limbo. The repressive nature of Zimbabwe's political environment has created a climate of fear, where the threat of persecution and violence discourages and disempowers the Church from

engaging actively with the adversaries of human social flourishing (Gunda, 2018:46; Tagwirei, 2023:116; Chivasa, 2017:3; Dombo, 2014:142). Additionally, economic instability and social unrest have placed further burdens on Church leaders and congregations, diverting attention and resources away from prophetic advocacy toward immediate survival and pastoral care needs (Sibanda *et al.*, 2024; Alexander & McGregor, 2013:752).

1.3 Problem Statement

This fragmentation has weakened the Church's theological integrity, undermined its credibility, and reduced its ability to offer a holistic witness in Zimbabwe's complex socio-political environment. Despite widespread calls for the Church to embrace both mandates, there is still no clear and practical framework for how these roles can be effectively integrated in a way that is faithful to Scripture, theologically sound, and contextually relevant.

Without such a framework, Church leaders risk either remaining silent in the face of injustice or engaging in activism without ongoing pastoral nurture. This study, therefore, aims to explore the relationship between the prophetic and pastoral mandates, drawing on theological, historical, and contemporary perspectives, to develop a contextually grounded model for combining these roles in the Zimbabwean Church's public ministry. Such a model seeks to enable the Church to speak truth to power while guiding its people with wisdom, courage, and compassion, thereby mediating God's shalom and fostering holistic well-being within the community (Magezi, 2024:11).

1.4 Research question(s)

Given the above problem statement, the research questions below are posed to guide the study.

1.4.1 Main research question

How can the Church in Zimbabwe effectively integrate its prophetic and pastoral care roles to fulfil its public pastoral mandate, fostering community healing and promoting holistic well-being in Zimbabwe's complex socio-political context?

1.4.2 Secondary research questions

Emerging from the above main research question are the following elucidating questions:

- i. How have historical Church-State relations in Zimbabwe shaped the Church's role in socio-political engagement?

- ii. How has the Church in Zimbabwe prophetically and pastorally addressed socio-political issues, and what theological principles motivated these interventions?
- iii. What biblical foundation that can guide the integration of prophetic and pastoral care roles in socio-political contexts?
- iv. How can a public pastoral care approach be developed to integrate prophetic and pastoral roles for effective Church engagement in Zimbabwe?

1.5 Study objective(s)

In addressing the research questions outlined above, the study aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To analyse the historical relationship between the Church and the state in Zimbabwe concerning socio-political engagement.
- ii. To evaluate the prophetic and pastoral interventions undertaken by Zimbabwean churches in addressing socio-political challenges.
- iii. To identify and analyse biblical foundations that inform the integration of prophetic and pastoral care roles.
- iv. To develop a public pastoral care framework that integrates prophetic and pastoral care for effective Church engagement in Zimbabwe.

1.6 Research Aim

To examine the integration of the Church's prophetic and pastoral care roles in Zimbabwe and to develop strategies that strengthen its public pastoral mandate for fostering community healing and holistic well-being in the nation's complex socio-political context.

1.7 Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative, literature-based methodology to critically examine the relationship between the Church's prophetic and pastoral roles within Zimbabwe's socio-political context. Data was systematically collected through a review of peer-reviewed academic journals, theological texts, and historical case studies focusing on Church-State relations and the Church's public pastoral care roles. Inclusion criteria were applied to ensure that selected sources were credible, relevant, and contributed meaningfully to the research objectives.

The Inclusion Criteria: Sources were required to be peer-reviewed, published within the last 20 years (unless historically significant), and to directly address themes of prophetic witness, pastoral care, and Church-State relations in socio-political contexts. This method ensured a balanced and comprehensive literature review that accurately reflected the multifaceted nature of the Church's public engagement (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005:547).

The study was grounded in a public practical theological framework, particularly through the concept of a public pastoral care nexus. Public pastoral care, in this context, referred to ministry conducted at the intersection of religious faith, community life, and public social issues, particularly politics (Magezi, 2024:3; Magezi, 2019:1; Louw, 2014:67; McClure, 2011:7; Hendriks, 2007:1002).

By situating the study within this framework, it was positioned as an inquiry into practical theology (Magezi, 2019:4; Koppel, 2015:15; Cahalan & Mikoski, 2014:12). This approach allowed the research to transcend concerns internal to the Church and instead place the Church's actions within a broader social and political context, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of its impact. The study thus contributed to both theoretical and practical insights into how the Church navigates its prophetic and pastoral roles in a politically charged environment.

1.7.1 Data Collection Method

The primary data collection method was a comprehensive review of the literature. This literature included:

- i. **Academic literature:** Peer-reviewed journals, books, and dissertations focusing on public pastoral care, practical theology, and the relationship between church and state.
- ii. **Theological texts:** Key writings in pastoral theology, with an emphasis on the prophetic and pastoral roles of the Church, particularly in politically charged contexts.
- iii. **Church/Denominational/Church bodies' publications (Historical case studies):** Documented historical accounts of church involvement in political and social issues, specifically those from Zimbabwe or similar contexts.

1.7.2 Data Analysis Method

The study utilised thematic analysis to identify and analyse recurring themes and key concepts across the collected texts (Kiger & Varpio, 2020:846–85; Guest, *et al*, 2012; Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method was particularly suitable for this study, as it facilitated the exploration of

how the Church engaged with its prophetic and pastoral roles in relation to politics, with a specific focus on balancing these roles within a complex political landscape.

Furthermore, thematic analysis helped pinpoint gaps in the current literature, aiding in the creation of a comprehensive, integrative framework for public pastoral care. This framework addressed the Church's dual mandate—prophetic and pastoral—and provided insights into how these roles could be effectively managed within a socio-political context. Through this approach, the study offered a detailed understanding of the Church's public pastoral role and its implications for ministry in politically sensitive environments.

1.8 Framework Development

As previously mentioned, the thematic analysis informed the development of a theoretical framework for public pastoral care, offering practical recommendations for balancing prophetic witness and pastoral care within church ministry, particularly in Zimbabwe's socio-political context.

To thoroughly develop this integrative framework, the study drew on Osmer's four tasks approach. This approach enabled a deeper, more nuanced understanding of complex issues, promoting well-informed and effective ministry (Grenz & Olson, 1992:59). It allowed practitioners to address practical theological concerns in a structured, reflective, and contextually sensitive way, resulting in more meaningful and impactful ministry outcomes. Osmer's four tasks approach guided the research in the following steps:

- i. **Describing the current situation (What is happening?):** The study provided a comprehensive historical description of the Church-State relations within the complex socio-political landscape of Zimbabwe.
- ii. **Critically assessing why the Church's roles are configured as they are (Why is it happening?):** This task involved a critical analysis of the factors that have shaped the Church's current engagement with politics, including historical, theological, and socio-political influences.
- iii. **Providing biblical and theological insight into what should happen (What should be happening?):** Drawing from scripture and theological texts, the study offered a normative theological assessment which lays the basis for an integrated approach for the Church's prophetic and pastoral responsibilities, particularly in relation to political engagement.

- iv. **Suggesting practical responses (How can we respond?):** Finally, the study proposed an integrated public pastoral care approach with actionable recommendations for the Church's practical and meaningful engagement in the socio-political sphere while maintaining faithfulness to biblical principles.

1.9 Ethics clearance

This research was reviewed and approved by the North-West University Scientific/Research Proposal Review Committee, ensuring compliance with ethical standards and safeguarding the integrity of the study. The ethics clearance number is 0 0 8 7 4 - 2 4 - A 6.

1.10 Delimitation of the Study

This study focused on the public pastoral care role of the Church in Zimbabwe within its complex socio-political landscape. It explored how Church leaders integrate prophetic and pastoral care functions to foster community healing and holistic well-being. The study is confined to Zimbabwe. This geographic and contextual focus allows for an in-depth examination of the Church's unique challenges and strategies in a specific setting marked by economic instability, political corruption, human rights abuses, and social unrest. The study does not aim to provide a comparative analysis with other countries or religious contexts; it focuses instead on the intricate dynamics within Zimbabwe.

1.11 The study flow

In this first chapter, we laid the background of the study and explored the research topic by introducing it and elucidating its importance. As part of the background and introduction, the chapter provided a concise overview of Zimbabwe's socio-political landscape and presented the central research question, its associated sub-research inquiries and the method that the study employs. Lastly, the rest of the study will flow as follows:

Chapter 2: Church-State relations and socio-political context in Zimbabwe

Chapter 2 delves into the historical interplay between the church and the state within Zimbabwe, specifically emphasising their respective roles and interactions within the realm of socio-political issues. Furthermore, this section will conduct a comprehensive review of pertinent literature, shedding light on the churches' engagement with and contribution to the resolution of socio-political challenges.

Chapter 3: Prophetic and pastoral interventions by the Church in Zimbabwe

In chapter 3, our investigation shifts towards an examination of the multifaceted interventions and initiatives initiated by churches to confront socio-political issues in Zimbabwe. Drawing upon the data gathered, this section undergoes a meticulous analysis, ultimately yielding case studies and exemplars that showcase the efforts made by churches in addressing these challenges. The chapter also explores the tensions, limitations, and lessons arising from this engagement, underscoring the need for greater integration between pastoral and prophetic roles. These insights provide a crucial foundation for envisioning a public pastoral care model that is both compassionate and courageous in Zimbabwe's contested public sphere.

Chapter 4: Biblical foundations for the interplay between the prophetic and pastoral mandates

This chapter examines the biblical foundations of the prophetic–pastoral interplay, showing how Scripture consistently portrays these roles as integrated expressions of God's character: just and compassionate, confrontational and caring. Key narratives provide clear examples of this interplay, demonstrating how confrontation and care operate together within God's redemptive purposes. These examples offer practical insight for the Church in Zimbabwe, showing how prophetic challenge and pastoral care can be faithfully combined to respond to the nation's socio-political realities.

Chapter 5: Developing a public-pastoral care approach for the Church in Zimbabwe

Chapter 5 develops a public pastoral care approach for the Church in Zimbabwe, proposing a model that integrates prophetic and pastoral care to address the nation's complex socio-political challenges. It outlines the core strategies for implementing this approach and provides a practical framework to guide the Church in embodying an integrated, contextually grounded ministry. Building on this model, the chapter also considers the roles of key stakeholders, identifies potential challenges to implementation, and suggests mitigation strategies to support effective adoption, adaptability, and long-term impact.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In the concluding chapter, we will embark on a reflective journey, providing a poignant culmination to our research expedition. This section will again underscore the paramount significance of integrated ministries as catalysts for community cohesion and healing within the context of Zimbabwe.

1.12 Conclusion

In this chapter, we established the background of the study and introduced the research topic, highlighting its significance. We presented a concise overview of Zimbabwe's socio-political landscape, outlined the central research question along with its sub-questions, and described the method adopted for the study. This foundation prepares the way for the next chapter, which will examine the historical interplay between the church and the state in Zimbabwe, with particular attention to their respective roles and interactions in addressing socio-political issues. Chapter 2 will also provide a comprehensive review of relevant literature, offering insight into how the church has engaged with and contributed to the resolution of these challenges.

2 CHAPTER 2: Church-State relations and socio-political context in Zimbabwe

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how historical Church–State relations in Zimbabwe have shaped the Church’s socio-political engagement, with particular attention to issues affecting ordinary people, such as social justice, political rights, and national identity. The chapter is located primarily within Osmer’s descriptive, empirical, and interpretive tasks of practical theological inquiry, attending to what has happened and why these patterns have emerged within Zimbabwe’s socio-political history. Drawing on a comprehensive review of relevant literature, the chapter examines key moments of interaction between the Church and the State in order to identify historically embedded patterns of engagement, resistance, accommodation, and silence.

Within this framework, Church–State relations are understood as historically shaped patterns of interaction between ecclesial and political institutions, influenced by shifting political power, theological orientation, and social conditions. This chapter demonstrates how past Church–State relations continue to shape the Church’s present capacity for socio-political engagement. This historical and conceptual grounding provides a foundation for the empirical analysis in Chapter Three and the constructive proposals developed in later chapters.

2.2 A historical exploration of Church-State relations in Zimbabwe

Several scholars, approaching from both a broad historical and ecclesiastical perspective, have explored the complex historical interaction between the Church and State in Zimbabwe. The consensus among these researchers, if not unanimous, acknowledges the distinct power dynamics and examples of collaboration that characterise Church-State relations throughout Zimbabwe’s history (Gundani, 2019; Harold-Barry, 2022; Linden, 1980; Maenzanise, 2008; Ruzivo, 2017; Thomas, 1985; Zvobgo, 1991).

2.2.1 Colonial Era: Collaboration

A review of scholarly literature shows that the origins of Church-State relations in Zimbabwe mainly involved collaboration (Dachs and Rea, 1979; Gundani, 2019; Harold-Barry, 2022; Linden, 1980; Thomas, 1985; Zvobgo, 1991). Christian missionaries significantly contributed to advancing the colonial agenda before and during colonisation. Many scholars argue that faith was carefully employed to establish colonial dominance, while political authority

supported the proselytization of the indigenous population (Maenzanise, 2008:68–70; Zakeyo, 2012:5; Ruzivo, 2017:2).

Thomas (1985:115) and Maenzanise (2008:70) illustrate this dynamic, noting that in the late 19th century, the London Missionary Society (LMS) and the Jesuits faced challenges in evangelising Southern Rhodesia. According to Maenzanise (2008:70), the Ndebele King Lobengula did not allow his people to convert to Christianity, fearing it posed a threat to their traditional way of life and his authority (Dachs and Rea, 1979: 20). To address this challenge, LMS missionaries enlisted the British South Africa Company (BSAC) to dismantle the Ndebele State, believing that only through firm intervention could the people be liberated to embrace Christianity (Dachs & Rea, 1979:20; Gundani, 2019:78; Harold-Barry, 2022; Maenzanise, 2008:70). The LMS, via their missionary Charles Helmore, obtained a mining concession from King Lobengula, which granted the BSAC extensive powers and served as a pretext for Cecil Rhodes' colonisation project (Thomas, 1985:115). Rhodes' northward expansion in 1890 paved the way for increased missionary efforts in the region. Within seven years, the single LMS mission in emerging Rhodesia was augmented by eight distinct mission societies. Harold-Barry (2022) notes:

“A gradual process developed where the missionaries became inextricably linked with the Rhodesian project. They relied on the administration – railways, grants to schools and clinics and the ‘law and order’ – which the whites initiated. And the administration appreciated the efforts of the missionaries to accustom the people to settled, in contrast to nomadic, living, and to work.”

This demonstrates that the foundation of Church-State relations in Zimbabwe was collaborative. However, Mills & Grafton (2003:1) note that in the years that followed, the colonial government strategically utilised missionaries to achieve its goals. In fact, as Linden (1980:8) states, “the missionaries supported the imperial expansion.” Colonial rulers like Rhodes actively fostered alliances with certain missions (Anglican, Methodist, American Board) to consolidate control and legitimise their occupation. Rhodes was acutely aware of the potent and influential role that religion could play in advancing his overarching agenda of “sucking Africa into the web of global capitalism” (Gundani, 2019:79).

2.2.1.1 Collaboration for convenience

Although the initial phase involved collaboration, it is important to understand that the alliance between the Church and the State did not share a common goal. Instead, it was mostly opportunistic, with each side exploiting the other to promote their own interests. It is clear that

both groups pursued different objectives: missionaries aimed to spread Christianity among the locals, while the British South African Company (BSAC), which later became the Rhodesian government, sought territorial and mineral wealth. Nonetheless, it is vital to acknowledge that these pursuits came at the expense of indigenous communities.

By capitalising on the Church's close ties with indigenous populations, the colonial government entrusted the Church with the responsibility of acting as its social welfare branch, delivering essential services like education and healthcare to the native population (Gundani, 2019:79; Thomas, 1985:116-17). Although many Church leaders initially welcomed this partnership, it was not without its complications. Scholars such as Baloyi (2022), Maenzanise (2008), and Linden (1980) emphasise that education, for example, served as a means for both missionary indoctrination and the suppression of potential challenges to missionary authority. Similarly, under the BSAC, education was employed to create a compliant workforce for mines, industries, and farms (Ruzivo, 2017). Indeed, the use of education by both the Church and State to subjugate and shape the local population highlights that this collaboration functioned as a mechanism to advance the agendas of both entities, often at the expense of the well-being of indigenous communities.

Another example of this convenient collaboration was the land issue. The expansion of the BSAC led to an influx of white settlers who were then granted rights to land for farming (Zvobgo, 1991:139). This growing population of white settlers caused the natives to lose their land to these settlers and be pushed to less fertile land reserves. This quickly led to a policy of segregation concerning land ownership – a policy driven by strong hostility from settlers towards the idea of natives owning land in their midst (Zvobgo, 1991:143). The unfortunate part is that the missionaries, probably because they also stood to benefit from such a policy, did not oppose the segregation policy. Harold-Barry (2022) explains:

“The whites used their military power to subdue the people from 1890 and trample on their freedom, dignity, and sense of self-worth. The settlers were only momentarily checked by the risings in the mid-1890s before resuming, with greater determination, their plan to take from the people their land and their mines and make the locals labourers on their own property... The missionaries were caught between their appreciation of the order and infrastructure the settler presence gave them, enabling them to pursue their task of preaching the gospel in word and action, and their indignation at the cruelty and racialism of the settlers which always implied the local people were inferior.”

Some of the missionaries who supported land segregation but only advocated for more land provision for the natives include Wesleyan missionaries John White and Amos Burnet, as well as Anglican missionaries Arthur Cripps and Edgar Lloyd. Moreover, the 1923 Southern Rhodesia Missionary Conference (SMRC), the first ecumenical body aimed at promoting Christian missions in Southern Rhodesia despite concerns over the shortage of land for the natives, accepted the land segregation policy (Ruzivo, 2017:4-5). Additionally, denominations like the Methodist Church, at its Synod of 1923, supported land segregation not only as "a just but also wise policy to meet the immediate and future needs of the African people" (Gundani, 2019:3; Zvobgo, 1991:145).

While the above might seem like an unfair and unbalanced critique of missionaries such as Cripps's role in this, the premise of this discussion justifies such conclusions. Missionaries like Cripps are widely recognised within Zimbabwean mission historiography, with biographers and academics celebrating them as heroic missionaries. However, the fact that they viewed land segregation as something wise and brilliant blemishes their heroism. While their actions may have been extraordinary, their intentions are marred by their starting point. One could argue that such efforts to defend the natives' rights should have begun with recognising the evilness of the white settlers' desire to take land that did not belong to them. Cripps and other missionaries, who stood against the government on behalf of the natives but failed to denounce the ills of colonisation, are another typical example of what we call collaboration of convenience. The Church (missionaries) did not oppose the improper grabbing of native land because they too might benefit, yet they actively resisted aspects of colonial rule and prioritised the well-being of the indigenous population—though all of this could be seen as a way for them to preserve their influence with the natives (Gundani, 2019:1; Thomas, 1985:119-20). Hence Zakeyo (2012:5) concludes that,

"The missionaries' stance during the initial stages of colonialism was of complicity... and this led to the alienation of the local population from the Church."

Furthermore, the collaborative narrative should not obscure the underlying power dynamics. Even when missionaries sincerely cared for the native people, their actions often operated within colonial power structures. Their schools and hospitals, while offering essential services, also aimed to assimilate and pacify the native population (Maenzanise, 2008:71-73). A clear example of this occurred in the 1950s when Bishop Dodge of the Methodist arrived in the country. According to Maenzanise (2008:75), Bishop Dodge arrived at a time when the hierarchical structure of the Church was heavily dominated by white missionaries, leaving little room for African advancement. Bishop Dodge sought to change this but faced strong

resistance from his fellow missionaries, which disheartened him. In his dismay, Dodge (1964:32) wrote,

“Some missionaries refused to promote Africans, saying that if they did so, they themselves would be forced to leave Africa.”

His claims a few pages later show that there were indeed significant elements of the Church’s collaboration with the State that were equally oppressive as those of the State. To this end, Dodge (1964:55) wrote:

“If Christianity calls for love, why is it that some of the white people don’t show in their treatment of the Africans? The answer is, ‘They don’t believe the gospel, or they would act as Jesus did. ‘In Africa, as in Europe, America or the Orient, many look at the Church and shout ‘hypocrisy.’”

This was a form of oppression that the Church was exercising on the natives. Maenzanise (2008:75) notes that:

“...oppression permeates not only a political system, but it involves, most importantly, a spiritual system that claims God on biblical grounds. The oppressors saw themselves as members of God’s elect nation. What kind of theodicy can one propose in a system where God’s omnipotence is seen in the force of the policy, where the State maintains law and order against the majority of the population?”

The preceding discussion of the colonial era highlights the main collaboration between the Church and the State, despite occasional criticism. While the Church’s dealings with the State varied, it mostly favoured cooperation. However, this cooperation often lacked deep theological reflection within the Church to guide its actions. Looking at historical examples of the Church’s interactions with indigenous peoples shows both admirable efforts that helped natives and actions mainly motivated by protecting white interests. Notably, the underlying motive for such actions came from the white establishment rather than theological beliefs. As Harold-Barry (2022) notes, the Church, especially through its missionaries, worked to improve the lives of black individuals, even though their efforts ultimately served the interests of the white establishment.

However, despite the initial collaboration, the rise of African nationalism led natives to challenge colonial injustices and advocate for the liberation of indigenous populations. The late 1950s saw an increase in native politicians who viewed this collaboration as a threat to the prosperity of the native population. Thomas (1985:121) notes that these native politicians

“...considered the Churches to be aligned with the white establishment. At political rallies, speakers charged that missionaries asked Africans to close the eyes and pray, but when they opened them, they found the Bible in their hands and that their land was gone. Nationalists held rallies on Sunday morning to force the people to choose between party or Church.”

At this point, the Church was compelled to reconsider its stance regarding its relationship with the State. Some Church leaders became aware of this reality and embraced the challenge of colonial dominance. This marked a turning point in Church-State relations, opening the way for future conflicts and changing dynamics. However, the question remains: will the Church need to revisit its theological foundations and develop a framework that supports its mission?

2.2.1.2 Summary

In summary, scholars widely recognise the origins of Church-State relations in Zimbabwe as predominantly characterised by collaboration, with Christian missionaries playing a notable role in safeguarding the interests of white settlers. Gundani (2019:79) concisely summarises the cooperative nature of the colonial era. He writes,

“The partnership between the cross and the flag was further strengthened when missionaries became military chaplains ...With a few exceptions, the sense of kith and kin between the missionaries and white settlers subsisted throughout the colonial period. During that period, the Church assumed the position of handmaid of colonialism. With few exceptions, the mission Church was conservative and saw no contradictions between their express if sometimes tacit support for the oppressive policies of the colonial State and the liberating Gospel they purportedly propagated.”

2.2.2 Liberation War Era

The period from 1959 to 1964 is recognised by scholars such as Dachs and Rea (1979), Peadar (1979), Linden (1980), Thomas (1985), Zakeyo (2012), and Baloyi (2022) as a significant era of radical reconfiguration in Church-State relations. This shift resulted from the rise of African nationalism—a sociopolitical ideology centred on national self-determination and the creation of native states, which emerged in direct response to the increasing socio-political and economic oppression of indigenous people by settlers (Gunn, 2018:2989-2990). Due to the Church's deep entanglement with State ideology, the rise of African nationalism had a profound impact on Church-State relations.

As the natives realised the Church lacked effective political power within their communities, they began to see it as aligned with their oppressors. Consequently, African politicians launched resistance campaigns aimed at opposing and dismantling all symbols of the white establishment, including the Church (Thomas, 1985:12). At such resistance rallies, speakers, as noted by Linden (1980:59), accused missionaries of asking people to close their eyes and pray, and when they opened them, their land was gone. Rallies were often held on Sunday mornings to prevent people from attending church. This forced the Church to reconsider its position and role within Zimbabwe's socio-political landscape. To continue its mission among the natives, the Church needed to rethink how Church, State, and society should coexist.

However, this rise of African nationalism was short-lived. By 1964, Ian Smith banned all African nationalist parties, and the nationalist leaders were either in political exile, detention, or prison. Secular African newspapers were also banned, silencing the voice of the indigenous people. This created a perfect opportunity for the Church to emerge as a platform for the voiceless. Amidst this political turmoil, many Church entities took on a crucial role in fighting for the liberation of the natives (Thomas, 1985; Maenzanise, 2008).

The clergy took on various roles, from openly supporting the liberation movement to advocating for peaceful resolutions. This period marked a time of theological reflection within the Church, leading to the development of a theology that aimed to align Christian values with the pursuit of social justice. Influenced by Gutierrez's observation that the Church had historically focused on proclaiming truths while often neglecting practical efforts to improve the world, Bishop Muzorewa and fellow Rhodesian Church leaders sought to bridge this divide by actively seeking truth and working to improve the lives of all people. Bishop Abel Muzorewa's 1978 reflections highlighted the need to re-examine theological principles in light of the struggle for justice and freedom from oppression during this period. He wrote:

“It soon became clear to me that our theology needed to be clarified and our concerns needed a broader base. I felt at ease in following in the footsteps of Bishop Ralph Dodge. He, too, had stressed that the Christian faith must be proclaimed as a total gospel for the total person. The whole gospel for the whole person I believed—and still believe—has a dynamic that will lead many to Christ as their liberator, their Savior and Lord.”

Scholars such as Kriger (1993), Maenzanise (2008), Mushonga (2009), Zakeyo (2012), and Baloyi (2015), among many others, have emphasised the crucial role played by the Church in encouraging resistance to colonial oppression and advocating for the rights of the oppressed masses. Through pastoral letters, sermons, and grassroots activism, religious leaders rallied

congregants to support the liberation cause, endowing the struggle with moral legitimacy and spiritual fervour. The Liberation theological perspective became the foundation and the driving force for Church involvement in the fight against colonial rule. There was notable collaboration between Catholics and Protestants in resisting colonial rule. An example of this was in 1969, when the Rhodesian Government introduced the Constitutional Bill, which aimed to suppress the majority; both Catholics and Protestants opposed the Bill. Commenting on this incident, Peadar Kirby (1979:201) wrote:

“When the constitutional bill was published most Church leaders were extremely critical of the proposals. The Catholic bishops on 7 June issued a pastoral letter condemning the proposals because they had been drafted with 'the deliberate intention of ensuring the permanent domination of one section of the population over another' and because 'racial discrimination shall be intensified'. The Protestant Church leaders issued a separate Statement on the following day which was endorsed also by the Catholic bishops: 'These proposals to entrench separation and discrimination are a direct contradiction of the New Testament teaching that race, like all other human discriminations, has lost all divisive significance, and should not be used to regulate relationship between man and God and between man and man.'”

From this, one can begin to hear echoes of some theological reflections on the Church's actions. However, this alignment was not consistent across denominations or individual Churches. The period also experienced instances where certain Church institutions, influenced by geopolitical dynamics and concerns for their own safety, chose to remain neutral or distant from the liberation struggle. While the Catholics and other Protestant groups were finding their united voice on this matter, the Dutch Reformed opted to remain apolitical. Thomas (1985:124) notes that after the Church leaders resisted the Constitutional Bill, the Dutch Reformed Church charged that the Church leaders had exceeded “the bounds of Christ's instruction to the Church namely to preach the gospel”.

Despite the Dutch Reformed Church's decision to remain apolitical and distance itself from the liberation struggle, its stance did not stop the momentum of the movement. The broader Church continued to grow stronger, showing resilience and determination for Zimbabwe to be independent “from the jaws of colonial imbalances” (Baloyi, 2022:21). Once a collaborator with the State's agenda, the Church now found itself as an active resistor of the same agenda on which it had been built. What might have appeared as active rebellion was actually an act of obedience to a higher calling. The Catholic Bishops—whom Thomas (1985:125) considers to be the first to promote civil disobedience as an appropriate Christian response to the colonial crisis—in a pastoral letter wrote:

“We are now compelled to declare, 'We must obey God rather than man (Acts 5.29). We cannot in conscience and will not in practice accept any limitation of our freedom to deal with all people irrespective of race, as members of the human family.’”¹

This recalibrated the Church-State relationship. During this period of intense conflict, resistance became the norm. When war broke out, the Church emerged as a major “facilitator of the recruitment of young liberation fighters” (Baloyi, 2022:22). In fact, the Church played a multifaceted role during the struggle, culminating in a clergy man, Bishop Abel Muzorewa of the Methodist, becoming the first Prime Minister of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia (Thomas, 1985:132). However, this was short-lived as people realised that his rise to political power as a black clergy could not reduce the influence of the white settlers, which in turn meant he was unable to end the war (Thomas, 1985:132). This led to the Lancaster House Convention, which called for a free and fair election that resulted in Robert Gabriel Mugabe being elected as the first black Prime Minister of independent Zimbabwe (Baloyi, 2022:22).

2.2.2.1 Summary

Until now, we have observed a significant evolution in the relationship between the Church and the State. This development has seen the Church and the State shift from being collaborative partners to adversarial enemies, and eventually to a phase where the Church briefly held considerable influence within the State. Guided by a deep sense of public pastoral care mandate, the Church adopted a prophetic role and actively worked towards Zimbabwe's liberation, courageously challenging the State during a period of heightened political oppression (Maenzanise, 2008:79,88). Unlike in the colonial era, the Church in Rhodesia played an active role in society, driven by a "theology of presence" that was demonstrated through committed public pastoral care (Magezi, 2019:1,8). This, grounded in love and a commitment to responding to individual needs, served as the driving force behind the Church's prophetic engagement, which resulted in societal progress and transformation. This transition marks a shift from politically driven cooperation to a theologically motivated confrontation.

2.2.3 The Mugabe era

In the aftermath of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle, the relationship between the Church and the State was marked by optimistic collaboration. This period significantly shaped the evolving dynamics of Church-State relations, characterised by negotiation, conflict, and adaptation within Zimbabwe's socio-political landscape. Scholars like Chimhanda (2009), Chitando (2002), Chitando (2005), Manyonganise (2020), and Zakeyo (2012) describe the Church and

¹ Rhodesia Catholic Bishops' Conference, *The Land Tenure Act and the Church*, 55-6.

State relations in the nascent state under the new leadership of Robert Mugabe and his ZANU-PF party as cordial. Mugabe's policy of reconciliation, resonating with biblical principles, garnered substantial support from the Church (Ruzivo, 2020:17). Consequently, the church in Zimbabwe withdrew from political matters and focused on social and religious concerns (Manyonganise 2020:39). This paved the way for the envisioned collaboration between the Church and the State to foster nationwide human flourishing, as articulated in the 1980 ZANU-PF manifesto:

“...respect and promote the role of the Church and avoid completely interfering with the spiritual work of the Church...the Church and the State must thus feature as partners in the promotion of the welfare of the human being” (Hallencreutz, 1988:12)

This, along with the historical undertones, served as fertile ground for a more optimistic and collaborative relationship between the Church and State. The Church actively supported the new government, establishing schools, hospitals, and clinics to provide access to quality education and healthcare (Chitando, 2005; Zakeyo, 2012). This aligned with the government's early development agenda, prioritising human well-being. While reflecting the pre-colonial Church-State relations, the period after independence carried a different tone. The collaboration between Church and State now had a common goal: the prosperity of the people, both white and black. As an active partner, the Church readily assumed a public pastoral role, seemingly prioritising harmony over the traditional prophetic voice.

2.2.3.1 *Strained relations and prophetic reawakening*

However, scholars note that this honeymoon phase swiftly waned within the first decade of independence due to Gukurahundi – a brutal State repression in Matabeleland (Chimhanda, 2009; Chitando & Taringa, 2021; Chitando, 2002; Alexander, McGregor & Ranger, 2000). The new Zimbabwe's human flourishing initiative took an unexpected turn, prompting the Church to maintain its prophetic voice which it had adopted during the liberation struggle. This created strain in the once cordial Church-State relations. The adoption of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) by the Zimbabwean government in early 1991 faced significant backlash from numerous Church leaders and preachers, who argued that it undermined the pursuit of human flourishing, condemning ordinary Zimbabweans to a life of misery (Chitando, 2002:4). Increasing the ZANU-PF government “apparatchik to control all the affairs of the citizens left little space for people to make independent decisions even about their spiritual welfare” (Gundani, 2008:218). This further worsened tensions in the relationship between the Church and the State.

In 1996, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) organised a regional conference that produced a Kairos document for Zimbabwe. This document aimed to provide churches with a platform to voice opposition to ESAP, address the Matabeleland crisis, and discuss governance issues (Ruzivo, 2020:27). However, scholars note that during this period the majority of the various church bodies remained completely silent, with the exception of the Catholic church (Gundani; 2008:216). Ecumenical organisations and churches, such as the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), as highlighted by Mangwende (2017:50), primarily focused on spreading the gospel. It's worth noting that these bodies, like the EFZ, consciously or inadvertently segmented human existence into three distinct domains: spiritual, social, and political (Mangwende, 2017:50; Zakeyo, 2012:22). While they were deeply involved in spiritual matters, they also collaborated with the government on social issues, such as providing aid during times of hunger and natural disasters. However, they maintained a deliberate distance from political engagement (Mangwende, 2017:50). On the other hand, the Pentecostal body, "in search for respectability and advantage in the religious field, filled the legitimacy gap left by the mainline churches and other Church bodies" (Maxwell, 2000:262). As other church bodies distanced themselves from the State, either through active confrontation like the Catholics or through adopting an apolitical stance like the EFZ and its members, the Pentecostal body, especially the ZAOGA, developed a political theology that allowed them to have influence both at the State political level and on an individual level. They became a political opportunity for the State to propagate its agenda and legitimise itself. In turn, the leadership of such Pentecostal bodies like the ZAOGA would benefit from the "bureaucratic and material to aid" to legitimise their existence (Maxwell, 2000:262).

The mid-1990s were difficult for the Church in Zimbabwe as internal divisions deepened. Some church and ecumenical organisations remained politically neutral. This dilemma faced by the Church in the ensuing years led to discord in its prophetic voice. As the rift widened, the post-independence government adopted a different strategy to suppress this voice, executed by various ecumenical bodies such as the ZCC and the ZCBC. Unlike the earlier suppression through direct targeting, the new approach involved fostering internal division. The State promoted polarisation within the Church, supporting and amplifying the voices of compliant religious leaders while marginalising those who dared to criticise (Dombo, 2014). For example, by the early 2000s, the ZCC had retreated from its early engagements, abruptly weary of challenging the government, and withdrew its support from the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), an action suspected to be influenced by State infiltration (Zakeyo, 2012:9). Simultaneously, the leadership of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) was assumed by a pro-ZANU-PF government figure, Prophet Andrew Wutawunashe (Zakeyo, 2012:10). Although the EFZ occasionally criticised the government for various

misdeeds, such as Operation Murambatsvina, they were largely apologists for the State and openly praised it (Ruzivo, 2020:27). Its meetings and structures had been heavily infiltrated by State security agencies, resulting in most people being afraid to speak out (Mangwende, 2017:63). At this stage of history, according to Dube & Nkoane (2018:229), ZANU-PF religious apologists had successfully redefined democracy to mean supporting ZANU-PF, specifically supporting Robert Mugabe. The government co-opted many church leaders as political activists within the religious sphere, who subsequently advocated for Mugabe and ZANU-PF's superiority in exchange for government favours (Machoko, 2013:13). The ZCBC continued to speak out against government atrocities through its letters, but the government diluted the ZCBC's voice by recruiting more religious leaders to support the ZANU-PF agenda. An example of this was the establishment of the Apostolic Christian Churches of Zimbabwe (ACCZ), a religious organisation representing the white-garment Christians. Under the leadership of Johannes Ndanga, it unapologetically declared its support for Robert Mugabe and his ZANU-PF government (Dube & Nkoane, 2018:230).

2.2.3.2 Polarisation and State co-option

This strategic manoeuvring established a 'marriage of convenience' whereby the State cultivated its own 'regime enablers' among influential religious figures (Dube, 2020:1; Magezi and Tagwirei, 2022:1; Manyonganise, 2022:4). The State deliberately co-opted popular and influential religious leaders, transforming them from agents of critical reflection into tools of validation, with their pulpits becoming political platforms (Dombo, 2014:144-145; Zakeyo, 2012:12). Mugabe's administration condemned any church leader who attempted to hold the government accountable. Anyone who criticised the government was regarded as unspiritual and thus unfit to speak prophetically on national political matters. This was particularly evident in 2007 when the Catholic Bishop issued a pastoral letter condemning Mugabe and his officials for governing poorly and corruptly. In his response, Mugabe said,

"The bishops have decided to turn political and once they turn political, we regard them as no longer being spiritual, and our relations with them would be conducted as if we are dealing with political entities... This is quite a dangerous path they have chosen for themselves."²

Under President Robert Mugabe's authoritarian regime, the relationship between the Church and State in Zimbabwe deteriorated markedly, reaching a critical point defined by State

² ABC News, 2007. *Mugabe warns bishops of 'dangerous path'*. Available at: https://www.abc.net.au/news/2007-05-05/mugabe-warns-bishops-of-dangerous-path/2540336?utm_campaign=abc_news_web&utm_content=link&utm_medium=content_shared&utm_source=abc_news_web

intimidation and harassment of religious leaders. As Mugabe's government tightened its control, crackdowns on civil liberties and electoral manipulation became widespread, leading religious figures to face threats, arrests, and vilification when speaking out against government injustices. Prominent religious leaders Makandiwa, Angel, Mutendi, and Wutaunashwe aligned themselves with the regime's agenda, abandoning the critical questioning that traditionally defined their prophetic role.

Gunda (2018) emphasises that while these religious figures may not explicitly endorse government policies, their messages implicitly absolve the government of responsibility for the country's economic and social issues. Manyonganise (2022) highlights the dilemma faced by religious leaders in Zimbabwe's highly polarised environment, where the pressure to remain impartial leads to invitations from political figures, often resulting in exchanges of loyalty pledges and commitments to voter support, particularly in African Initiated Churches (AICs) where ZANU-PF politicians are present.

Nevertheless, this dynamic ultimately resulted in the erosion of the Church's influence on political affairs, significantly contributing to the government's authoritarian leanings. The Church found itself polarised, oscillating between active criticism of the government and overt sympathy, with little room for middle ground. Despite its substantial following, this polarisation made the Church ineffective in playing a meaningful role in the country's public matters (Zakeyo, 2012). Exploiting this polarisation, the State manipulated the Church's mission through various means, causing many Church bodies to either echo ZANU-PF's political agenda or align with the opposition, often motivated by fear or sympathy rather than thorough theological reflection.

2.2.3.3 Summary

In conclusion, the period of President Robert Mugabe's rule in Zimbabwe saw a complex and turbulent relationship between the Church and the state, characterised by increasing authoritarianism and polarisation. As Mugabe's government strengthened its grip on power, the Church faced the challenge of balancing its prophetic mission with pastoral care responsibilities. While some religious leaders aligned with the regime, forsaking their prophetic role and becoming complicit in state agendas, others bravely spoke out against government injustices, risking intimidation and harassment. This period highlighted the interplay between the Church's prophetic duty to challenge societal injustices and its pastoral care obligation to support and guide its followers. Nonetheless, polarisation within the Church, driven by political pressure and manipulation, ultimately compromised its capacity to perform both roles

effectively. Consequently, the Church's influence over political issues waned, aiding the consolidation of authoritarian rule in Zimbabwe under Mugabe.

2.2.4 Post-Mugabe era

The 2017 overthrow of Mugabe marked the beginning of a new chapter in Zimbabwe's political landscape, generating hope for better Church-State relations. Both church leaders and the public anticipated positive changes in governance with Mugabe no longer in power (Manyonganise, 2022:5). The new President, Emmerson Mnangagwa, seemed to attribute his rise to divine intervention. Early in his presidency, Mnangagwa frequently stated that "the voice of the people is the voice of God," positioning himself as God's chosen leader for Zimbabwe (Mudzanire & Banda, 2021:1,3). Despite the theological contradictions in this claim, many Zimbabwean Christians backed Mnangagwa, who openly claimed his Christianity and regularly used biblical references in his speeches.

However, the transition to President Emmerson Mnangagwa's leadership has not resulted in significant changes in the relationship between the Church and the State. While Mnangagwa has aimed to engage the Church with a more conciliatory tone, promising democratic reforms and economic revival, the post-Mugabe period under President Mnangagwa has continued to face challenges and complexities in Church-State relations. In fact, Masunungure & Bratton (2018:1) argue that under Mnangagwa, conditions have deteriorated. The legacy of Mugabe's era seems to underpin the new dispensation. Magezi & Tagwirei (2022:1) observe that:

“Today, Church and State relations remain compromised as leaders appear accommodative when supported and vindictive when critiqued. The prevailing situation divided the Church, leaving some pastors dining with oppressive leaders whilst others sided with the oppressed, culminating in disturbing polarisation. Ruling politicians captured some gospel ministers to sanitise the 'new dispensation' and vilify its critics.”

The administration led by President Mnangagwa has adopted a different approach from its predecessor in how it interacts with religious leaders, while also adjusting its methods. Unlike the previous government, which displayed impatience and intolerance towards critical religious figures, the Mnangagwa regime has openly praised church leaders. A key part of this shift is the ongoing reaffirmation of the inseparability of Church and State, emphasising a commitment to safeguard ecclesiastical independence from government interference.

A notable feature of this paradigm shift is the growing importance of young religious leaders, exemplified by figures such as Eubert Angel and Passion Java, who have assumed key roles within Mnangagwa's administration. Meanwhile, the government of the Second Republic has

responded to religious dissent in a manner similar to its predecessor, but with different methods, most notably by promoting the rise of pro-government ecclesiastical groups like the Zimbabwe Indigenous Inter-Denominational Council of Churches (ZIICC) (Manyonganise, 2022:12). The formation of such organisations serves two purposes: to silence dissenting voices within religious circles and to openly support the government's agenda, which constitutes another form of state-sponsored polarisation.

This ongoing polarisation is reflected in the varied responses of the Church to political developments under Mnangagwa's leadership. Ecumenical organisations such as the ZCBC, ZCC, and EFZ have consistently called for government accountability. Conversely, some religious leaders, particularly those from Pentecostal-charismatic movements and white-garment churches, have exhibited uncritical support for government policies (Dube, 2021:6-7). This divide within the Church underscores the challenges faced by religious institutions in maintaining a united voice and engaging effectively with political authorities.

2.2.4.1 Summary

In the post-Mugabe era under President Emmerson Mnangagwa, the Church in Zimbabwe has continued to navigate a fragile relationship with the State, marked by ongoing polarisation and strategic manipulation. The Church's understanding of its prophetic mandate—speaking truth to power and advocating for justice—remains at odds with its pastoral care responsibility to support and guide its followers. This dual role has been further complicated by political pressures, leading to division within the Church. Some leaders have aligned with the government, often out of fear or in pursuit of favour, while others have remained resolute in their critique, risking retribution.

This period has underscored the challenges the Church faces in balancing its prophetic voice with pastoral care amid intense political and social pressures. The Church's attempts to hold the government accountable and advocate for the people's well-being have been hindered by internal divisions and external manipulations. As a result, the Church's capacity to influence political issues and promote societal change has been markedly weakened, perpetuating a cycle of authoritarianism and repression that began under Mugabe and persists under Mnangagwa.

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the historical development of Church–State relations in Zimbabwe to understand what has happened and why these patterns have emerged within the country's socio-political context. The analysis has shown that the Church's socio-political engagement

has been significantly shaped by changing political environments and by differing interpretations of its prophetic and pastoral responsibilities. During the colonial period, much of the Church aligned itself with the colonial State, often prioritising missionary activity while remaining complicit in systems of political and social exclusion. The liberation struggle marked a decisive shift, as sections of the Church adopted a more prophetic posture, publicly challenging injustice and advocating for social transformation.

In the post-independence period under Robert Mugabe, Church–State relations became increasingly complex and contested. While some church leaders aligned themselves with political power, others sought to maintain a prophetic stance in response to growing authoritarianism. These divergent responses contributed to fragmentation within the Church and weakened its capacity to sustain a consistent and unified socio-political witness. In the post-Mugabe era under President Emmerson Mnangagwa, the Church continues to operate within a context marked by political pressure, internal division, and limited responsiveness from the State, intensifying the challenge of holding together pastoral care and prophetic voice.

Read through Osmer’s interpretive task, this historical trajectory demonstrates that the Church’s current socio-political engagement cannot be understood apart from its past interactions with political authority. Patterns of cooperation, resistance, accommodation, and division have left enduring imprints on how the Church relates to the State and to society more broadly. These historically embedded patterns continue to shape the Church’s priorities, methods, and credibility in public life.

By providing this historical and conceptual grounding, the chapter establishes a foundation for assessing contemporary ecclesial practice. This chapter provides the historical and conceptual foundation for Chapter Three, which shifts from historical description and interpretation to an empirical analysis of how prophetic voice and pastoral care are currently embodied within Zimbabwe’s churches.

3 CHAPTER 3: Prophetic and pastoral interventions by the Church in Zimbabwe

3.1 Introduction

This chapter continues the descriptive–empirical and interpretive tasks initiated in Chapter Two and brings them to completion through an empirical analysis of contemporary ecclesial practice. By examining how prophetic voice and pastoral care are currently expressed within Zimbabwean churches, the chapter provides a grounded empirical basis for the normative theological reflection developed in the subsequent chapter.

Building on the historically embedded patterns of Church–State relations identified in the previous chapter, this analysis attends to what is happening and why it is happening in the Church’s present socio-political engagement. The chapter examines how long-standing patterns of cooperation, resistance, accommodation, and division shape contemporary ecclesial responses to political, social, and economic challenges.

Although Zimbabwean churches have not always articulated their public engagement explicitly in pastoral–prophetic terms, the interaction between these roles is evident in lived practice. At times, prophetic witness and pastoral care are integrated in complementary ways; at other times, they exist in visible tension or are unevenly prioritised in response to national crises and local community needs. Drawing on examples from diverse Church traditions, the chapter analyses ecclesial engagement with issues such as political repression, corruption, economic hardship, and social injustice.

The analysis considers both structured initiatives and spontaneous responses, recognising the diversity of ecclesial approaches shaped by denominational identity, leadership posture, and socio-political context. Particular attention is given to how internal polarisation within the Zimbabwean Church has influenced, and at times constrained, the movement between prophetic voice and pastoral care.

Situated within Osmer’s practical theological framework, this chapter remains descriptive and interpretive rather than prescriptive. It establishes a critical empirical foundation for the normative theological reflection undertaken in Chapter Four and the constructive proposals developed in Chapter Five.

3.2 Defining and distinguishing the Church's pastoral and prophetic initiatives

This section defines and differentiates the Church's dual public ministry, pastoral care and prophetic witness, and provides structured examples of how these have been embodied in the Zimbabwean context. These categories are explored to demonstrate their integrated nature within the Church's mission.

3.2.1 Understanding Pastoral Care

Pastoral care, rooted in the tradition of *cura animarum* (care of the soul), refers to the Church's intentional, faith-informed response to human suffering, aimed at enhancing human flourishing (Magezi, 2024b:145; Magezi, 2019:1; McClure, 2012:275). It is theologically informed because its motivation, content, and practice are based on the Christian faith's core beliefs, values, and convictions, rather than on general human concern, therapeutic models, or broad spirituality (Magezi, 2024b:145).

Traditionally, pastoral care has concentrated on individual spiritual support, typically provided by ordained ministers to those seeking comfort or guidance. Nevertheless, recent developments have expanded this focus to address communal needs and societal issues, aligning with the principles of public theology (Pattison, 2000:15; Louw, 2012:119). This change marks a move away from individualistic, intrapsychic models towards a more public and contextually aware approach (Magezi, 2024:3; Miller-McLemore, 2018:313; Leslie, 2008). Scholars such as Faret (1986:15) and Louw (2019:97) describe this wider perspective as a stewardship of God's praxis—God working through pastoral caregivers to bring healing and promote the flourishing of all people. This flourishing is not limited to the individual but includes entire communities and all bearers of God's image. Therefore, pastoral care can no longer be confined within church walls or private spirituality; it extends into the public sphere, actively engaging with social realities and contributing to community well-being (Magezi & Nanthambwe, 2022:6; Mkandla & Dreyer, 2020:3–5; McClure, 2012:275; Graham, 2009:14; Magezi & Manzanga, 2020:4; Doehring, 2015:23; Swinton, 2007:58). This broader vision is rooted in core Christian beliefs: the Imago Dei, the redemptive mission of Christ, and the Church's calling to embody compassion and justice (Magezi, 2024; Louw, 2019).

Therefore, pastoral caregivers are compelled to engage fully in their ministry, providing care across all the psycho-physical and psycho-social dimensions (spiritual wholeness) (Louw, 2014:60; Wimberly, 2003:19). Drawing on McClure (2011), the caregiver may act prophetically, priestly, pastoral, or as a social participant—roles that are integrated depending

on the community's needs. This multidimensional model allows the Church to mediate God's Shalom in fractured contexts through both compassion and challenge. It encourages a practice of pastoral care that is inclusive and impactful, bridging the gap between personal care and public advocacy (Magezi, 2019:1; Ramsay, 2004:4). Thus, pastoral care is as much a public act as it is a private one. Magezi (2020:69) defines this public element of pastoral care comprehensively as:

“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 cope with life meaningfully.”

For this study, the definition provided by Magezi will guide our understanding of pastoral care as a distinctly Christian ministry of presence and participation that is theologically grounded and responsive to context, mediating God's healing and justice in complex public realities. It encompasses both personal and public practice, carried out not only through institutional Church structures but also through the embodied witness of individual believers in society. Central to this understanding is the realisation that in contexts such as African societies, which are often communally oriented, identity, suffering, and healing are perceived collectively rather than individually; therefore, holistic healing cannot be achieved privately without addressing the public sphere. The following section examines key pastoral initiatives that the Church in Zimbabwe undertook in response to the socio-political crisis.

3.2.2 How the Church embodies Pastoral Care in Zimbabwe

Pastoral care initiatives refer to specific actions, programmes, responses, and structures developed by the Church through its various institutions, leaders, and members to embody and operationalise pastoral care within the Zimbabwean context. These initiatives reflect the Church's effort to turn its public commitment to pastoral care into actions that promote human flourishing, reconciliation, and dignity by addressing the spiritual, emotional, social, and political wounds of individuals and communities (Magezi, 2024a:11; Magezi, 2019:5). In doing so, they demonstrate the Church's capacity to serve as a relevant, empathetic, and transformative force in Zimbabwe's public life. These pastoral care programmes appear in various contexts but can generally be classified into five main categories.

3.2.2.1 Direct aid

During periods of socio-political upheaval, the Church, through its various branches and institutions, has reliably stepped forward to offer direct aid to those most affected. This

assistance often involves providing essentials such as food, shelter, clothing, and medical care, especially in circumstances where state structures have failed or are complicit in the crisis (Bornstein, 2002; Chida & Chabata, 2016:42; Chitongo, 2013:124–43; Desportes & Moyo-Nyoni, 2022).

For example, during the Second Chimurenga (1966–1979), churches such as the Roman Catholic Church and the United Methodist Church provided critical refuge and aid to civilians. Silveira House, a Jesuit-run centre established in 1964, became a vital sanctuary offering food, shelter, and vocational training to those displaced by war (Takuva, 2003; Jesuits Global, 2020).

Once again, amid economic decline and widespread food insecurity during the Second Republic, the Church upheld its pastoral commitment. The Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), for instance, launched an ecumenical COVID-19 response initiative, distributing food parcels and hygiene kits in both urban and rural areas during lockdowns to tackle pandemic-related and ongoing economic challenges (ZCC, 2020; Global Ministries, 2020).

These efforts underscore the Church's enduring role as a frontline responder to suffering.

3.2.2.2 *Trauma counselling and Psychosocial support*

In the face of Zimbabwe's ongoing socio-political challenges, characterised by recurring episodes of politically motivated human rights violations, the Church has consistently demonstrated its pastoral care mandate. One significant expression of this has been providing trauma counselling and psychosocial support to individuals and communities grappling with the psychological, emotional, and spiritual impacts of political violence and prolonged instability (Chemvumi, 2011; Dombo, 2014:162; Mvundura, 2014). These interventions by the Church, offering trauma counselling and psychosocial support, have created spaces of hope, healing, and restoration for individuals and communities shattered by political violence, human rights abuses, and systemic injustice (Mujinga, 2024:161; Ncube, 2025:118–123; Chitando & Taringa, 2021:187–196). For example, the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance (ZCA) has actively been involved in housing and counselling victims of political violence, while also facilitating community dialogues and peace-building workshops to foster healing and reconciliation (Dombo, 2014:162; Shoko, 2023). Other church organisations have similarly utilised pastoral care models to address trauma, providing both spiritual and emotional support to victims. This has been a pervasive expression of the Church's pastoral care mandate. Since Zimbabwe's liberation struggles, the Church played a crucial role in offering pastoral care to communities traumatised by violence, displaced, and experiencing loss due to the war (Maenzanise,

2008:69; Mutambara & Sodi, 2018:8–9). Numerous Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Methodist mission stations became sanctuaries of mourning and resilience, offering requiem services, communal prayer, and biblical lament to help communities process grief. Clergy from churches like the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe and the Methodist Church remained in rural areas, providing informal trauma counselling and spiritual consolation to families dealing with loss and disappearances (Maenzanise, 2008:69–70; Moyo, 2015:70–72; Takuva, 2023:104–106). Although not exhaustive, these examples showcase the diverse and sustained ways the Church has responded pastorally to the wounds inflicted by socio-political violence and systemic injustice. They offer spaces for healing and embody the biblical call to “bind up the broken-hearted” (Isa. 61:1) through compassionate and contextually relevant pastoral care.

3.2.2.3 *Education and skills development*

Another significant way the Church in Zimbabwe has demonstrated its pastoral care mandate is through its longstanding dedication to education. Throughout various phases of the country’s socio-political history, the Church has utilised education to empower individuals and communities to navigate and endure structural challenges (Mabwe, Dimingu & Siyawamwaya, 2018:146). In doing so, the Church has addressed immediate material and developmental needs while fostering long-term resilience and dignity among marginalised populations (Masengwe & Dube, 2023b:23). Examples of this expression of the pastoral care mandate date back to the colonial era under the Smith regime, when churches accelerated the establishment and operation of mission schools as part of a broader strategy to uplift native populations. Education was seen not merely as a civilising mission but as a tool of resistance, encouraging critical consciousness and moral agency. Many leaders of the Chimurenga liberation movement emerged from these mission institutions, having received foundational intellectual and spiritual training that informed their opposition to colonial rule (Maenzanise, 2008:77–80; Machingura & Kalizi, 2024:2; Muhamba, 2019:25–26). This commitment to education has continued into the post-independence era, with churches remaining integral to providing quality education, especially in under-resourced rural areas (Mangwaya, Jeko & Manyumwa, 2012; Muderedzwa, 2021). Beyond formal schooling, however, the Church has expanded its understanding of educational ministry as part of its pastoral and developmental mission. Recognising the diverse needs of congregants, particularly among youth and women, many church groups have established vocational training centres and life-skills programmes aimed at fostering self-reliance and socio-economic empowerment. For example, denominations such as the Roman Catholic Church, ZAOGA FIF, the Salvation Army, and the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe run vocational institutes offering training in trades such as tailoring, carpentry, agriculture, and catering. These initiatives offer more than just

employability; they serve as pastoral responses to systemic economic marginalisation, providing hope, dignity, and practical tools for survival in a challenging socio-economic environment (Mabwe, Dimingu & Siyawamwaya, 2018:146–150).

3.2.2.4 Community development and Social cohesion

The Church in Zimbabwe has broadened its pastoral responsibilities through active engagement in community development projects. Magezi & Nantambwe (2022:2) observe that the concept of development is fluid, as it is understood differently by various people. In this context, community development refers to initiatives that promote community resilience, social cohesion, and networks of mutual support, especially in areas fractured by political division and economic hardships.

The Church has assumed a proactive leadership role in launching and guiding programmes that empower individuals and contribute to the comprehensive improvement of their communities. For instance, through organisations like Caritas Zimbabwe and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), churches have carried out peacebuilding efforts, built essential infrastructure such as clinics and schools, and supported sustainable agriculture and water supply projects, particularly in marginalised rural regions. These initiatives tackle poverty and are intentional efforts to rebuild social trust and interdependence among communities long divided by economic disparity or political loyalties (Caritas Zimbabwe, 2021:12–14).

Moreover, the Anglican Church and the United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe (UCCZ) have launched multi-sectoral community projects, including the construction of clinics, schools, and boreholes, not merely as infrastructural developments but as platforms for cross-community cooperation. These projects foster collective ownership, shared responsibility, and ongoing community interaction, helping to break down barriers of suspicion and historical grievances (Togarasei & Biri, 2021:4–6; Global Ministries, 2023).

3.2.2.5 Summary

These pastoral initiatives, whether through relief, emotional support, education, or development, demonstrate how the Church embodies its public pastoral mandate in tangible ways. They reflect a commitment to holistic care that is not only compassionate but also transformative. Through these efforts, the Church in Zimbabwe serves as a healing presence, a moral guide, and a significant contributor to national resilience.

3.2.3 Understanding Prophetic Mandate

As part of its mission within the public sphere, manifesting its redemptive presence, the Church, alongside its pastoral care function, holds a prophetic mandate. While pastoral care centres on healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling (Patton, 2015:13–15; Clinebell, 1984:40–42), the prophetic mandate emphasises truth-telling, confronting injustice, and urging society to align with God’s will (Brueggemann, 2018:13; Boesak, 2017:17–19; Nyiawung, 2010:2; Masengwe, 2024:2). These two, pastoral care and prophetic mandate, constitute the dual dimensions of the Church’s mission. However, they are not mutually exclusive; they are complementary facets of the Church’s mission to embody compassion and justice in the public sphere. If pastoral care attends to wounded individuals and communities, prophetic witness confronts the structures perpetuating such wounding. In Zimbabwe’s contested socio-political landscape, both elements have proven essential. To understand the prophetic initiatives that the Church has instituted in response to the socio-political crisis, it is crucial first to clarify the meaning of prophecy.

3.2.3.1 *What is the Meaning of Prophecy?*

The Cambridge Online Dictionary defines prophecy as “a statement that says what will happen in the future, especially one that is based on what you believe about a particular matter rather than existing facts.”

Newcombe & Harvey (2016:3) add that, “...prophecy usually provides information about something beyond normal human ability to predict... prophecies are predictive...” These definitions accurately sum up the contemporary Christian understanding of prophecy. For many Christians, particularly those within Pentecostal, charismatic, and white garment churches, prophecy is primarily associated with foretelling the future (Gunda, 2012:339–44).

However, the Christian understanding of prophecy originates in the Hebrew Bible, and a survey of the Hebrew Bible reveals a much broader definition. Steve McKenzie argues that:

“The intent of the genre of prophecy in the Hebrew Bible was not primarily to predict the future—certainly not hundreds of years in advance—but rather to address specific social, political, and religious circumstances in ancient Israel and Judah.”

However, I believe McKenzie’s conclusions are somewhat exaggerated. Although the primary prophecy in the Hebrew Bible is characterised more by forthtelling than foretelling, it is evident that several prophecies did not address the immediate circumstances of Israel and Judah. Forthtelling is the proclamation of God’s truth, will, and moral demands for the present context

(McDonald, 2019). It involves calling people to repentance, denouncing injustice, providing a divine perspective on socio-political realities, and urging leaders and nations towards righteousness (O'Brien, 2022).

In the Hebrew Bible, prophets served as God's spokespersons and advocates of the covenant, confronting kings, religious leaders, and society with uncomfortable truths (Coomber, 2016:14–15). They exposed idolatry, corruption, and systemic injustice, urging Israel to return to covenantal faithfulness (Gunda, 2006:22–28). Their ministry often included symbolic acts (e.g., Ezekiel), intercessory prayer, and public confrontation. Crucially, they faced opposition, rejection, and persecution for their loyalty to God's word (Jeremiah 20:12; Amos 7:10–13; Nyiawung, 2010:3–4; Gunda, 2010; Gunda, 2012:346; Vengeyi, 2010:166–67). However, they also foretold future events; thus, some biblical theologians conclude that the Old Testament comprises promises or predictions, while the New Testament represents the fulfilment (Beale, 2019; Goldsworthy, 2002; Köstenberger & O'Brien, 2001).

The New Testament reframes prophetic ministry within the life of the Church (Harris, 2000:19). While the element of revelation remains, prophecy now functions primarily for the edification, exhortation, and encouragement of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 14:3). Prophets in the early Church provided spiritual insight, correction, and guidance, strengthening believers and sharpening the Church's witness in a hostile world (Eph. 4:11–12). With the closing of the biblical canon, many Christian traditions understand prophecy today not as the reception of new revelations but as the faithful proclamation and application of God's revealed Word to contemporary situations (Carson, 2018; Storms, 2020).

3.2.3.2 *The Church's Prophetic Mandate*

In this Church Age, prophetic mandate refers to the Church's ability to interpret prevailing signs and articulate God's truth within public life. It is a God-empowered duty for the Church and its leaders to confront and challenge the persistent and enduring crises that compromise human dignity, perpetuate social injustices, and cause suffering in various circumstances (Nyiawung, 2010:2; Brueggemann, 2018:13; Masengwe, 2024:2). This involves an act of theological discernment as well as public engagement. Thus, the Church's prophetic role "stems first from its belief in God and what it means for people to live with dignity and wholeness" (Bentley, 2013:7). Furthermore, Bentley (2013:5), through a historical survey of the Church's role during the South African apartheid era and building on Brueggemann's framework, offers a more comprehensive understanding of this prophetic mandate of the Church. He suggests that this prophetic role should be understood "not only as proclamation, but also as 'practicing what you preach' while holding powers accountable for the exercise of

hard-fought freedom” (Bentley, 2013:5). Thus, he positions the prophetic role of the Church as one of action rather than merely a vocal critique of prevailing conditions. For this paper, Bentley’s definition of the prophetic mandate is adopted, as it establishes the Church as an example within the public square of how to uphold human dignity, justice, and community among all people, rather than solely vocally criticising the structures that perpetuate social injustices and cause suffering (Bentley, 2017).

3.2.4 How the Church Embodies Prophetic Mandate in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, where political repression, corruption, and economic disintegration have eroded public trust and national well-being, the Church’s prophetic role has proven indispensable; it has become a theological and missional imperative. The following section explores how the Church in Zimbabwe has embodied this prophetic calling, at times with courage and at other times with caution, through initiatives that seek to speak truth to power, advocate for justice, and encourage the nation towards repentance and renewal.

3.2.4.1 *Public statements and Pastoral letters*

One of the Church’s most visible prophetic tools in Zimbabwe has been issuing public statements and pastoral letters. In contexts where political power is unchecked and public accountability is weak, these communications serve as moral indictments against injustice and expressions of solidarity with the suffering (Gunda, 2023:31; Ndlovu & Muringa, 2025:2; Manyonganise, 2022).

Historically, these letters have addressed issues such as political violence, corruption, constitutional violations, and the erosion of public trust. For instance, in 2020, amid worsening economic and political turmoil, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops’ Conference (ZCBC) released a landmark pastoral letter titled ‘The March is Not Ended.’ The letter decried human rights violations and called for national repentance, justice, and dialogue (Manyonganise, 2022:2).

Again, in 2025, as debates intensified over proposals to extend the presidential term limit beyond the constitutional threshold of 2028, the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD) issued a bold ecumenical statement titled “Statement on Presidential Constitutional Term Limit” (ZHOCD, 2025). This letter rejected any unconstitutional amendments and was a prophetic rebuke to political manipulation (Ndlovu & Muringa, 2025:4).

These documents are not simply theological reflections; they are acts of resistance that expose injustice and uphold the rule of law. While such efforts are often met with hostility by those in power, the Church has remained resolute (Ndlovu & Muringa, 2025:9-12). In doing

so, it embodies a prophetic presence that speaks truth to power and gives voice to the voiceless.

Through these letters, the Church speak truth to power while raising public awareness. Fostering civic engagement and public awareness among citizens, reminding them of their rights, responsibilities, and hope for a just society. This prophetic stance not only strengthens the faith of believers but also promotes a culture of solidarity, accountability, and ethical leadership across religious and social divides.

3.2.4.2 Advocacy and Lobbying

Beyond issuing public statements and pastoral letters, the Church in Zimbabwe has also embodied its prophetic mandate through intentional advocacy and lobbying efforts (Gundani, 2025:27; Dombo, 2014:137). These are not merely proclamations of truth, but rather strategic engagements aimed at influencing legislation, policies, and institutional practices for the sake of justice, equity, and the well-being of the marginalised (Baloyi, 2024:2; Nyenya, 2016:19; Dlembeu, 2014:12). Unlike pastoral letters that are typically declarative and theological, advocacy and lobbying are pragmatic and action-oriented, often involving behind-the-scenes negotiations, public campaigns, and stakeholder consultations. Such efforts reflect the Church's commitment to being a moral voice and an active agent for transformation in the public sphere (Mhandara *et al*, 2013:108). A notable example is the Catholic Church's role in lobbying for the abolition of the death penalty, emphasising the sanctity of life. This advocacy contributed to the signing of the Death Penalty Abolition Act in December 2024 (CCJPZ, 2025). In another instance, during the political tension and violence in 2023, the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD) urged ZANU-PF and the opposition CCC to engage in dialogue and restore peace. This effort highlighted the Church's role in fostering national stability and reconciliation (Ndebele, 2023). Through such advocacy, the Church continues to challenge injustice prophetically and influence national policy to defend the vulnerable, thereby positioning the Church as a moral voice and an institutional influencer.

3.2.4.3 Peacebuilding and Reconciliation

Beyond speaking out against injustice and lobbying for structural reform, the prophetic mandate of the Church in Zimbabwe has manifested through active engagement and leadership in peacebuilding and reconciliation programmes (Manyonganise, 2020:16; Masondo & Musoni, 2024:5–8). These initiatives represent the Church's prophetic actions addressing the deep divisions within communities fractured by political violence, economic hardship, and historical injustices (Munemo & Nciizah, 2014). They embody a relational and

restorative dimension of the Church's prophetic witness, which transcends mere denunciation to promote healing, social cohesion, and national unity (Masondo & Musoni, 2024:5). One notable grassroots peacebuilding initiative was led by a troika of bishops: Bishop Patrick Mutume (Roman Catholic Church), Bishop Trevor Manhanga (Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe), and Bishop Sebastian Bakare (Zimbabwe Council of Churches), who began engaging political leaders in Manicaland around 2000 to foster reconciliation (Muchena, 2004:264). Leveraging their national church leadership roles, they expanded efforts to include dialogue with top political figures such as President Robert Mugabe and opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai, aiming to bridge divisions and promote national unity (Muchena, 2004:266). In 2006, further to facilitate peace and reconciliation, the ecumenical bodies came together to map out a shared national vision, 'The Zimbabwe We Want', which sought to address the continual abuse of power by the state (Manyonganise, 2020:16; Masondo & Musoni, 2024:5). In a more recent effort, church leaders from various denominations have continued to champion peace; for example, during the 2023 initiative facilitated by the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOC), where leaders from ZCC, EFZ, and ZCBC convened under the banner "Zimbabwe in Dialogue" to call for political tolerance and national healing amidst post-election tensions (Tshuma, 2024). These examples reflect the Church's enduring prophetic commitment to reconciliation and its restorative mission to repair trust and social cohesion in times of national crisis.

3.2.4.4 *Civic education and Awareness campaigns*

Another significant expression of the Church's prophetic mandate in Zimbabwe lies in its commitment to civic education and awareness campaigns. While pastoral letters proclaim truth to power and peacebuilding efforts mend fractured relationships, civic education targets the consciousness of the citizenry, empowering individuals to understand their rights, duties, and responsibilities within a democratic society (Baloyi, 2024:7; Chitando & Manyonganise, 2016). This initiative reflects the Church's belief that a flourishing society cannot emerge unless citizens are informed, engaged, and morally formed. Through these initiatives, the Church seeks to empower citizens to assess leadership critically, hold institutions accountable, and participate in nation-building in ways that reflect God's values (Gundani, 2025:43). Some of these Civic Education and Awareness Campaigns include voter education and democratic participation (Muparutsa & Chiwashira, 2025:130). In the lead-up to national elections, ecumenical bodies usually spearhead non-partisan voter education programmes encouraging citizens to participate peacefully in the democratic process as part of a civic duty and a moral responsibility. Sermons, community workshops, and radio broadcasts communicate key messages, especially in rural areas with limited access to formal education.

For instance, before the 2018 elections, the ZCC ran a campaign under the banner 'I Pray, I Vote', calling Christians to view civic engagement as an extension of their discipleship. This campaign aims to get thousands of church members to register to vote, providing training on monitoring elections and reporting irregularities (WCC, 2018). These efforts equip citizens to fulfil their civic responsibilities as a matter of faith.

3.2.4.5 *Prophetic resistance when dialogue fails*

At some point, the Church in Zimbabwe manifested its prophetic mandate through principled resistance. This involves non-violent opposition to unjust laws and practices. This form of resistance has emerged when other avenues, such as advocacy or dialogue, have failed, compelling the Church to stand for justice and human dignity, even at significant risk (Tarusarira, 2015).

For example, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) initiated the NCA in 1997 as a platform for constitutional change (Lumina, 2009; Muchadenyika, 2018). The NCA later led a successful campaign against the 2000 referendum on the proposed new constitution, contributing to the government's defeat. This event marked a significant turning point in Zimbabwean politics (Dorman, 2002:13). More recently, Pastor Evan Mawarire led the #ThisFlag movement, which prompted #ZimbabweanLivesMatter protests in 2020—peaceful demonstrations against injustice and poor governance. Many from the Church supported these protests (Nenjerama, 2021:195). Though risky, such actions demonstrate the Church's unwavering commitment to truth, justice, and acting as a moral conscience in society.

3.2.5 Summary

The preceding discussions have outlined the distinctive pastoral and prophetic initiatives the Church has actively undertaken in response to Zimbabwe's multifaceted socio-political crises. The uniqueness of these roles lies in the specific focus and modes of engagement that each employ. However, upon examining the manifestation of these roles as presented above, it becomes evident that, while functionally different, these two roles are neither mutually exclusive nor independent. Instead, they are intricately interwoven, forming a symbiotic relationship in which each role informs, supports, and enriches the other. The pastoral mandate grounds the Church in compassionate presence, healing, and restoration. In contrast, the prophetic mandate urges it to confront systems of injustice, speak truth to power, and advocate for structural transformation.

In complex socio-political contexts like Zimbabwe, characterised by volatility, trauma, and systemic inequality, this relationship becomes particularly significant. The Church's prophetic

voice gains credibility and moral authority when it originates from a community deeply involved in the people's suffering and struggles through pastoral care. Conversely, pastoral care that lacks a prophetic dimension risk complicating injustice by merely alleviating symptoms without addressing the root causes. Therefore, the next section examines how these roles interact in practice, shaping a comprehensive public pastoral approach that comforts the afflicted and challenges the oppressors.

3.3 The intertwined nature of pastoral and prophetic action

Although the language of pastoral-prophetic interaction may not always have been explicitly expressed within the Zimbabwean church context, this dynamic has often influenced the Church's practice, often implicitly. The Church has naturally oscillated between its pastoral and prophetic roles, sometimes seamlessly, sometimes with tension, and at other times concurrently, responding to various circumstances from national crises to urgent community needs. Nonetheless, deep-rooted polarisation within the broader Church has frequently shaped this movement. Some sectors have heavily prioritised pastoral care, focusing on comfort, healing, and presence, occasionally at the expense of the Church's prophetic mission to challenge injustice and speak truth to power. Conversely, others have adopted a more confrontational, truth-telling stance, often without consistent support for pastoral care. While this division of roles might, in theory, represent a complementary effort within the Church, where different groups embody various aspects of the same mission, in practice, it has too often resulted in fragmentation. Instead of fostering unity in diversity, this split has sometimes caused discord, as different parts of the Church, whether through words or actions, dispute which role should take precedence. The Church has suffered two major consequences from this discord. First, it has undermined the credibility of its public witness, as internal conflicts weaken its moral authority and obscure the coherence of its message. Second, this separation has occasionally provided the government with an opportunity to benefit from these differences by presenting itself as a supporter of the more compliant sections of the church, while marginalising or disparaging those following a more prophetic path. In doing so, the State has, in some cases, co-opted the Church for its political purposes, thereby undermining the Church's independence and integrity.

3.3.1 The need for Integration

This uneven emphasis highlights the need for a more self-aware and theologically integrated approach that affirms the interdependence of the prophetic and pastoral roles and encourages the Church to operate intentionally from this shared space. Despite internal tensions, the Zimbabwean Church has not lacked efforts that reflect a functional, though often unspoken,

integration of the prophetic and pastoral. Many ecclesial responses, whether during economic collapse, political repression, public health crises, or social disintegration, have demonstrated a theology-in-action that affirms the comfort of those suffering and challenges unjust structures. Even if applied inconsistently or unevenly, this lived praxis illustrates the Church's latent capacity to hold both mandates together. Recognising this historical interplay is the first step; embracing it as a missional identity is the urgent task confronting the Zimbabwean Church. What follows are tangible expressions of this dual engagement unfolding in practice.

3.3.2 Expressions of the Interplay in practice

3.3.2.1 *Addressing root causes and immediate needs*

In the face of national crises, the Church has simultaneously provided immediate pastoral relief while also promoting policies that address the root causes of vulnerability in a prophetic manner. The combined efforts of Zimbabwe's leading ecumenical bodies—the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), and the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC)—offer a compelling case study of how the Church demonstrates a symbiotic relationship between prophetic and pastoral mandates in tackling the fundamental causes of national suffering (Gaga, Masengwe, & Dube, 2024; Baloyi, 2022). They have continued to champion humanitarian aid relief programmes while issuing pastoral statements calling for peace, justice, and respect for human rights (Phiri, 2023; ZCBC, 2005; 2007; 2009). For instance, in 2019, the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD), which includes the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC), and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), released a joint pastoral letter titled, "Call for national Sabbath for trust and confidence-building in Zimbabwe" (Mujinga, 2023). This letter was issued when Zimbabwe was grappling with severe economic hardship, food insecurity, and political violence, and these church bodies had been providing immediate pastoral relief through humanitarian aid, counselling, and community healing programmes. Through their letter, they prophetically called for a national conversation. They proposed a seven-year 'Sabbath' respite from elections to enable the country to reconstruct its governance systems and concurrently confront the underlying causes of political unrest and systematic injustice. This prophetic exhortation encouraged political leaders and stakeholders to prioritise structural transformation and reconciliation above party considerations. This instance powerfully demonstrates how the Church embodies its dual mandate: providing physical care to suffering communities while openly opposing the sociopolitical institutions that prolong vulnerability, thus acting as both a source of healing and a prophetic voice for justice.

3.3.2.2 Amplifying the voices of the marginalised

The Church has also supported victims of injustice by providing pastoral care and amplifying their voices to seek accountability and prophetically foster transformation. It has played a significant role in elevating the voices of victims of political oppression and abuse through organisations such as the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP). The CCJP has documented serious human rights violations, particularly during the Gukurahundi period in Matabeleland and the Midlands (CCJPZ, 1997). This material has given victims a voice and provided credible evidence to hold offenders accountable, thus demonstrating the Church's prophetic witness. The CCJP has offered legal aid and psychological support to victims of violence, showing the Church's commitment to spiritual and pastoral care. Peacebuilding seminars have been organised for both pastoral and prophetic purposes (CCJPZ, 1997; 2008). The findings of the CCJP are vital for uncovering injustices and supporting ongoing initiatives for accountability, healing, and compensation. This model reflects the Church's capacity to embody its prophetic calling by confronting injustice and its pastoral responsibility by caring for those wounded by it across various contexts of political and social turmoil. Local Church-based community development and rights education through grassroots efforts equip individuals with practical skills and services to address immediate needs (pastoral), while teaching communities about their rights, campaigning for justice, and promoting civic engagement (prophetic). Numerous Church arms, from various denominations and parachurch organisations across Zimbabwe, are actively engaged in grassroots initiatives that respond to the immediate needs of their communities. These initiatives include soup kitchens, orphanages, clinics, and agricultural support programmes, demonstrating the Church's pastoral care (Matikiti, 2004; Bornstein, 2001). Importantly, many of these projects also incorporate advocacy elements, reflecting the prophetic function of the Church. They highlight and address neighbourhood injustices, involving authorities on behalf of the underprivileged and empowering local people to assert their rights. For example, a church-run AIDS support group might provide medical and emotional support while advocating for better access to antiretroviral medication at both local and national levels (Muyambo *et al*, 2016). One such example is the Chabadza Community Development Programme of the United Methodist Church. This initiative, a collaboration between the United Methodist Churches in Zimbabwe and Norway, has undertaken several community development projects nationwide. It has facilitated the construction and renovation of health facilities, particularly mother waiting shelters, in the Mutasa-Nyanga and Masvingo districts, improving access to maternal and child health services (United Methodist News Service, 2012). Besides medical treatments, the Chabadza programme has been instrumental in tackling gender-based violence (GBV). Through seminars in Harare and Mutare, the United Methodist Church has trained clergy and

church leaders on GBV, equipping them to assist survivors. Emphasising the unity of pastoral care and prophetic advocacy in addressing societal issues, these seminars focus on the Church's responsibility in offering counselling, pastoral support, and victim advocacy (United Methodist Church, 2016). Such initiatives address the symptoms of suffering and the structures that sustain it, exemplifying how local churches can be both courageous advocates and compassionate caregivers.

3.3.2.3 *The role of individual Church leaders*

Church leaders embody the balance between pastoral care and prophetic witness by offering spiritual and emotional support to their communities (pastoral) while also speaking out against injustice and advocating for systemic reform (prophetic). Through this dual role, they serve as both shepherds to their congregations and brave voices in the public arena. The words and actions of specific church leaders often reflect the Church's duties regarding prophecy and pastoral care. Pastors, bishops, and local clergy have consistently played a key role in Zimbabwe, where spiritual guidance intersects with social engagement, demonstrating a combination of compassion and courage in their leadership (Chamburuka, 2023:5–6; Tagwirei, 2023; Masengwe & Chimhanda, 2019).

Church leaders act as caregivers within pastoral care, providing those in need with practical help, emotional support, and spiritual direction. They organise weddings and funerals, assist in resolving family and community disputes, and support individuals facing poverty, loss, or despair (Hove & Moyo, 2022). The responsibilities of shepherds often extend beyond the pulpit to homes, hospitals, and public spaces.

Simultaneously, assertive leaders have taken on a visionary role, actively challenging systemic tyranny, corruption, and injustice. By demanding justice and democratic accountability, and supporting victims of political violence and socioeconomic hardship, individual church leaders such as the late Archbishop Pius Ncube of the Roman Catholic Church, Pastor Evan Mawarire of the #ThisFlag movement, and Bishop Ancelimo Magaya of the Zimbabwe Divine Destiny network serve as notable examples of courageous advocacy against state-sponsored violence and human rights abuses (Chinyadza, 2020:95–98; Masengwe & Dube, 2023).

Many lesser-known clergy effectively serve both in urban and rural areas by overseeing income-generating projects, supporting abuse survivors, educating members on justice issues, and mourning the nation's divisions. These leaders see no inherent conflict between the pastoral and prophetic roles. While the credibility of prophetic witness is strengthened by

genuine compassion and community involvement, they acknowledge that effective pastoral care depends on recognising and resisting negative influences. Such leaders see no contradiction between comforting the suffering and confronting oppressors; their pastoral presence bolsters the legitimacy of their prophetic mission.

3.3.2.4 Summary

These practices of the Church's ministry in Zimbabwe exemplify the interaction between pastoral care and prophetic mandates as a core expression of its mission and identity. The Church frequently responds to complex crises with a diverse witness, whether through trauma counselling, civic education, aid distribution, or political advocacy. Although these roles may not always be explicitly defined or deliberately integrated, they emphasise their collaborative function in both personal and public settings. Nevertheless, this dynamic synthesis has faced several obstacles.

3.3.3 Challenges and limitations in the implementation of the integral mission Approach

Despite significant contributions to pastoral care and prophetic witness, the Church in Zimbabwe has faced numerous challenges in effectively operating at the crossroads of pastoral care and prophetic mandate. These difficulties have hindered the faithful realisation of the Church's core mission, resulting in inadequate and sometimes ineffective engagement in the public arena. The following discusses some of these obstacles that have obstructed the Church's faithful testimony.

3.3.3.1 Political suppression and coercion

In the pursuit of national progress and human flourishing, the Zimbabwean government consistently demonstrates a rhetorical commitment to church-state cooperation. Declaring that 'the State and the Church have a complementary partnership', President Emmerson Mnangagwa has stated in several political addresses that God underpins the politics and development of the nation (Pindula news, 2023). However, the lived reality on the ground reveals a more complex and conditional dynamic. The state often marginalises or inhibits individuals seeking to fulfil the church's prophetic mandate, while welcoming ecclesiastical organisations that are not confrontational. Historically, church leaders and organisations opposing systemic corruption, political violence, and human rights abuses have faced harassment, government monitoring, and deliberate repression (Dombo, 2014:144–145; Mujinga, 2018:248). This selective engagement has created a climate of self-censorship and fear within the Church, undermining its ability to operate effectively at the intersection of

pastoral care and prophetic witness. As Tagwirei and Magezi (2022:1) note, many church members “have been gripped with fear and silenced from partaking in political engagements.” The Church's inability to speak out diminishes its influence and its societal role, making it less capable of challenging unjust systems (prophetic) and supporting those in need (pastoral). Thus, even if the government's rhetoric suggests a partnership with the Church, the actual restrictions placed on its prophetic capacity reveal a form of co-optation that ultimately hinders the Church's fundamental purpose. The tension between official rhetoric and the Church's real situation highlights the urgent need for a resilient public pastoral theology that resists domestication and reasserts its role as both a comforter to the vulnerable and a conscience for the nation.

3.3.3.2 *Political polarisation within the Church*

A major internal obstacle to the Church's ability to effectively combine its pastoral and prophetic roles is internal political polarisation. Rising national political tensions have seeped into ecclesiastical groups in Zimbabwe, splitting congregations and leadership structures along political lines (Dombo, 2014:143; Chitando, Taringa & Mapuranga, 2014:174). This internal conflict often appears as differing theological views, diverse public opinions on justice issues, and inconsistent reactions to government actions. Such tensions have compromised the Church's moral authority to advocate for societal change and its capacity to offer a consistent prophetic voice in the public domain. Instead of coming together to challenge systemic injustice, the Church gets caught up in intra-denominational disputes, resulting in selective pastoral care and muted prophetic criticism to avoid offending politically allied members or leaders (Tagwirei & Magezi, 2022:3). This dispute reduces confidence within the faith community and hampers the Church's ability to serve holistically, especially to victims of political violence and marginalisation, thus undermining its dual mission of compassionate solidarity and moral challenge. When political allegiance takes precedence over religious identity, the Church risks becoming a mirror of political discord rather than a force for social harmony. This internal polarisation has damaged the Church's credibility in delivering comprehensive pastoral care and weakened its prophetic voice, undermining its role as both a comfort for the suffering and a critic of unjust regimes.

3.3.3.3 *Resource Constraints*

Resource constraints significantly hinder the Church's ability to effectively fulfil its dual pastoral and prophetic roles, particularly in economically disadvantaged areas like Zimbabwe. Many churches, especially those serving rural or marginalised urban communities, face severe financial and infrastructural shortages that limit their capacity to implement long-term social

transformation efforts (Baloyi & Mapuweyi, 2023:5; Myambo, 2018). This lack of resources impacts both immediate pastoral support—such as food aid, counselling, and educational assistance—and the ability to challenge structural injustices prophetically or advocate for systemic change (Avis, 2008:3; Tagwirei, 2022:6-7. Churches frequently lack access to skilled personnel, technology, or logistical systems necessary for monitoring human rights abuses, producing prophetic theological content, or engaging in policy debates (Mudzaniire, 2022:221–223). Furthermore, donor fatigue and political scrutiny can further diminish funding, especially for prophetic acts that confront government authority. Consequently, churches may rely on charity-based responses, which weaken broader justice advocacy and perpetuate a dependency cycle that alleviates symptoms without addressing underlying systemic issues (Mudzaniire, 2022:225). This lack of institutional and material support prevents the realisation or coherence of theologically driven goals for holistic public pastoral care (Avis, 2008:3). As a result, the Church encounters barriers in functioning both as a source of comfort and a courageous advocate due to insufficient resources.

3.3.3.4 Internal focus

Another major obstacle that hampers the Church's ability to navigate the balance between pastoral care and prophetic witness faithfully is its inward focus. Some within the Church have committed themselves to a gospel that begins and ends in the spiritual realm. They believe that any wrong is remedied within the spiritual sphere. As a result, they have developed parts of the Church that are inward-looking and increasingly disconnected from the socio-political contexts in which they operate. This has led to a limited understanding of ecclesiology based on a theological stance that separates the sacred from the secular. Such a stance prioritises soul redemption while neglecting structural justice, public ethics, and human dignity, thus risking turning the Church into a refuge for avoidance rather than an agent of change. Dombo (2014:143) and Chitando *et al.* (2014:174) observe that in the post-independence era of Zimbabwe, when prophetic involvement involves considerable costs, this has resulted in theological passivity amidst systematic persecution. In these environments, the Church may lose its prophetic voice but still provide strong pastoral care within its borders, such as prayer, counselling, and charity, while remaining silent on political violence, economic marginalisation, or corruption. Furthermore, the concern about dividing individuals with differing political views often leads to misguided neutrality, which ironically allows injustice to flourish unchecked. This inward retreat threatens the missional integrity of the Church by failing to reflect the full gospel vision of Christ, who aided people and opposed authoritarian institutions (Luke 4:18–19).

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has examined how prophetic voice and pastoral care are currently expressed within Zimbabwean churches in response to socio-political challenges. Situated within Osmer's descriptive–empirical and interpretive tasks, the analysis has attended to what is happening in contemporary ecclesial practice and why these patterns have emerged. The findings indicate that the Church's public ministry frequently involves both pastoral accompaniment and prophetic engagement, as churches seek to respond to political repression, economic hardship, and social injustice within their communities.

At the same time, the analysis reveals that the relationship between pastoral care and prophetic voice is often uneven and fragmented. Ecclesial responses have been shaped by internal polarisation, political alignment, resource constraints, and the absence of a shared theological vision guiding public engagement. These factors have limited the Church's capacity to sustain a coherent and unified socio-political witness, thereby weakening its credibility and influence within the public sphere.

Read interpretively, these empirical patterns underscore the need for greater theological clarity regarding the integration of pastoral and prophetic roles. While both dimensions are recognised as essential to the Church's mission, their inconsistent articulation in practice raises an unresolved normative question about how these roles ought to be held together within faithful public ministry.

By bringing the descriptive–empirical and interpretive tasks to completion, this chapter creates the conditions for a normative theological inquiry. The following chapter therefore turns to Scripture in order to discern what ought to be happening, examining how the biblical narrative presents prophetic witness and pastoral care as complementary and interconnected expressions of God's redemptive work. This normative engagement provides the theological grounding necessary for constructive proposals regarding faithful socio-political engagement in Zimbabwe's contemporary context.

4 CHAPTER 4: Biblical foundations for the interplay between the prophetic and pastoral mandates

4.1 Introduction

The empirical analysis in Chapter Three revealed that the Church's socio-political engagement in Zimbabwe is often characterised by a fragmented witness, in which prophetic critique and pastoral care are unevenly held together. While both dimensions are widely acknowledged as essential to the Church's public calling, they are frequently practised in isolation from one another. This fragmentation points to a deeper normative question that cannot be resolved at the level of practice alone: how ought the Church to hold together prophetic voice and pastoral care in faithful socio-political engagement?

Situated within Osmer's normative task of practical theological inquiry, this chapter offers a response to this question by articulating what ought to be happening in the Church's socio-political engagement. Having examined what is happening and why, the chapter brings Scripture and theological tradition into dialogue with the empirical realities identified in Chapter Three. It argues that prophetic voice and pastoral care are not pragmatic ecclesiastical strategies but are grounded in the character and redemptive activity of God as consistently revealed throughout the biblical narrative.

Within this normative framework, prophetic voice is understood as participation in God's truth-telling and justice-seeking activity, while pastoral care is understood as participation in God's healing, sustaining, and restoring work. Scripture presents these not as competing functions but as integrated expressions of divine fidelity. Justice and mercy, confrontation and consolation, truth and compassion are held together within God's redemptive dealings with creation, Israel, the nations, and the Church.

The central question guiding this chapter is therefore: How does the biblical narrative present prophetic witness and pastoral care as integrated expressions of God's character and mission? To address this question, the chapter undertakes a biblical-theological analysis that traces the interplay of confrontation and care across key scriptural moments. Beginning with the creation and fall narratives (Gen. 1–3), and moving through the Exodus, the period of the Judges and Kings, the prophetic tradition, and culminating in the ministry of Jesus and the early Church, these texts are examined not merely as historical accounts but as normative theological witnesses.

By reading these biblical narratives as a coherent redemptive story, the chapter articulates a normative vision for the Church's public ministry that integrates prophetic witness and pastoral care. This biblical grounding provides the theological criteria necessary for evaluating contemporary ecclesial practice and prepares the way for the constructive proposals developed in the following chapter.

4. 2. The Pastoral-Prophetic mandate interplay in the Old Testament

At the core of the biblical narrative lies a profound theological assertion: that the God of Scripture is both just and compassionate (Frame, 2013:111). These two qualities are not conflicting forces but essential, inseparable aspects of His character, as Bird (2020) describes them. The Old Testament consistently depicts divine action as stemming from this unified character, revealing a coherent pattern where God interacts with His creation, upholds His covenant, and pursues His redemptive aims (Frame, 2013:147). Central to this pattern is the dynamic relationship between justice and mercy; two attributes that function together rather than in opposition. This relationship underpins the prophetic–pastoral mandate; a rhythm of confrontation and care that originates in God's nature and runs throughout the biblical story.

This pattern is first introduced in the creation and fall narrative. In Eden, God shows His care through abundant provision and moral order, yet when humanity rebels, He responds with both judgment and grace. This initial display of divine justice and mercy sets the theological tone for the rest of Scripture. From this point, the Old Testament reveals how God continues to act within history through human agency. Judges, kings, and prophets are raised as representatives of God's own character, commissioned to embody His concern for righteousness and His compassion for the broken. These leaders comfort the afflicted, challenge the corrupt, guide the lost, and call entire nations to covenant faithfulness.

Importantly, this divine engagement is not limited to Israel alone. God's justice and mercy extend beyond the covenant community, as demonstrated in His dealings with neighbouring nations. The Old Testament emphasises a theological pattern that is neither temporary nor incidental but covenantal and enduring (Da Silva, 2019:30). The prophetic–pastoral interaction is not merely a response to human crises; it reveals God's very nature. Through this dynamic, God shepherds His people, confronts injustice, heals the wounded, and ultimately invites all creation to share in His vision of wholeness and flourishing. Below is a detailed discussion of how this pattern of comfort and confrontation develops in the Old Testament narrative, starting with the creation and fall account.

4.2.1 Creation and the Fall

The biblical narrative begins with divine initiative, a God who speaks creation into existence from nothing but His word (Kidner, 2015). At the climax of this sacred act of creating, He makes humanity in His own image and commissions them to have dominion as His stewards over the rest of creation. Thus, Okoye (2025) argues, they were “viceroys of the creator on earth.” However, not only did God entrust humanity with His righteous rule, but He also blessed them and provided for them (Gen.1:26-31). Thus, the opening section of the biblical story presents God as a compassionate creator who delights in sharing His being with humanity and cares for their well-being by providing abundantly. God planted a garden in which He made all kinds of trees “pleasing to the eye and good for food”. He provided water, gold, and a suitable helper for man, so that His image bearers might flourish under His care (Gen.2). All this demonstrates His love, care, and commitment to His people.

However, embedded within God’s generous care for humanity in creation was also a clear moral boundary: a command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16–17). This command expressed not only God’s righteous rule over His creation but also humanity’s dignity and freedom to enjoy all that God had made within the covenantal order He established. Tragically, Adam and Eve chose autonomy over obedience, prioritising immediate gratification over trust in God’s provision. As Magezi and Manzanga (2024:2) observe, “man chose their way and pursued instant pleasure and gratification over God’s way, failing to obey the command that guaranteed their freedom to enjoy all God’s creation.”

In the face of this rebellion, God, who is just, could have unleashed destruction, but instead responds with both confrontation and care. Rather than abandoning humanity to the consequences of sin, He takes the initiative to seek them out. As Gen.3:9 records, “But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, ‘Where are you?’” This was not a cry of ignorance but a summons towards confession and restoration. Dereck Kidner (2015) further cements this assertion. He views Gen.3:9 as a gracious display of God’s compassion. Kidner (2015) comments, “God’s first word to fallen man has all the marks of grace. It is a question, since to help him, he must draw rather than drive him out of hiding.” Magezi and Manzanga (2024:2) rightly note, “When sin marred the image of God between God and man in Gen.3, God publicly looked out for Adam with a restorative aim... The questions framed by God are designed to induce confession.” Even in the midst of deep disappointment, God’s stance remains relational and redemptive. A display of his compassionate character.

Nevertheless, just as God shows His mercy, He also enacts His justice. God’s compassion does not undo his justice. Because he is just, just as he is merciful, God confronted man’s act

of rebellion with decisive judgment (Gen.3:14-19). God punishes them for their actions, and they become subject to the consequences of injustice. However, even in his confrontation, God's actions are again deeply consoling. He promises the eventual defeat of the serpent in what some have understood to be "the first glimmer of the gospel" (Gen.3:15; Kidner, 2015; Pettus, 2014:4-5; Cheek, 2021: 235). Again, God clothed Adam and Eve to cover their shame (Gen.3:21). This serves as a demonstration of God's intentional and holistic care. He is concerned for man's needs and meets both immediate and ultimate needs (Kidner, 2015).

This foundational narrative demonstrates and establishes the pattern for the prophetic–pastoral relationship throughout Scripture. God does not choose between confronting sin and caring for sinners. He does both, in perfect harmony. His justice does not negate His compassion, nor does His mercy erase accountability. As Assohoto and Ngewa (2006:65) rightly observe, "His punishment does not exclude mercy, and His mercy does not exclude judgment." God maintains both in tension, not as opposites, but as integral aspects of His redemptive character. Therefore, the Church, if it is to mirror God's character in the public square, must also resist the temptation to separate justice from compassion. From the beginning, the God of Scripture engages His people with both moral clarity and relational pursuit; a model of confrontation and care that remains essential for faithful ministry in contexts marked by brokenness and blame.

4.2.2 The exodus narrative as a demonstration of God's care and confrontation.

The Exodus narrative further illustrates the intertwined character of God as both a compassionate caregiver and a confrontational liberator. At its heart is a God whose redemptive work holds justice and mercy in dynamic tension. He does not simply deliver His people from Egyptian bondage; He dismantles systems of oppression at the same time (Ex. 3:19–20; 6:6; Deut. 5:15; 7:8). Liberation, in this story, is both pastoral and prophetic; it comforts the oppressed and confronts the oppressor, demonstrating that God's redemptive character holds justice and mercy in dynamic tension.

4.2.2.1 God's compassionate response to suffering

The pastoral nature (compassion) of God's character appears early in the story. When Israel groans under the Egyptian slavery, he hears them and responds with deep concern and care: *The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people... I have heard them crying out... I am concerned about their suffering"* (Ex. 3:7).

Such a response demonstrates God's commitment to his people, a firm refusal by God to remain distant and silent in the face of His people's suffering. He actively engages in their pain

to bring healing from the oppression of Egypt. This pastoral response was rooted in covenant memory: God remembers his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex.2:24). This remembrance is a deeply relational act, a sign of loyal love (*hesed*) that compels God to act on behalf of His suffering people (Alexander & Alexander, 2017; Cole, 2015). Fretheim (2010) further explains, “This does not refer to a jogging of the divine memory, as if God had forgotten promises made. ...it is a divine sense of obligation to a prior commitment.” Therefore, God’s pastoral care is inherently linked to His covenant identity; His concern for Israel’s distress reflects a love that remembers, responds, and restores.

As the people journey through the wilderness, God continues to provide for them despite their grumbling and rebellion: manna (Ex.16:11-15), water (Ex.17:6), and meat (Num. 11:31-32). Nehemiah later testifies:

“For forty years you sustained them in the wilderness; they lacked nothing” (Neh. 9:21).

These acts of care demonstrate God’s commitment to the well-being of His people even when they are undeserving. This care persists even in the face of Israel’s rebellion.

4.2.2.2 God’s pastoral presence through human agency

God’s pastoral commitment takes tangible form as God calls Moses to lead the people:

“So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people... out of Egypt” (Ex. 3:10).

Moses was the agent through whom God would enact His work. This, as Hamilton and Victor (2011:58) describe it, becomes “the scriptural pattern seems to be God’s using people to reach people.” God chooses to act through human agency to guide, sustain, and shepherd His people, hallmarks of the pastoral mandate (Ex. 3:10; Magezi & Manzanga, 2024:5; Cole, 2015).

After the golden calf incident (Ex.32), Moses, a human agent, embodies the divine compassion and pleads for divine mercy on behalf of the people. After Moses negotiated with God on behalf of Israel, he asked God to assure him that God would continue to be with them, so he requested to see God’s glory. God responded by affirming His covenantal identity, founded on his character. He declares: *“The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness...”* (Ex.34:6).

This self-revelation becomes a canonical declaration of God’s identity. As Fretheim explains, “It thus constitutes a kind of ‘canon’ of the kind of God Israel’s God is, in the light of which God’s ongoing involvement in its history is to be interpreted” (2010). Even after sin, God’s faithfulness and mercy endure. Fretheim (2010) contends: “A gracious and merciful God will

go beyond justice, forgive the people, and welcome them back into relationship, but this time without any conditions whatsoever.” This character not only anchors Israel’s hope but also shapes its theological memory and future worship.

4.2.2.3 *The Tabernacle as God’s ongoing pastoral commitment*

Exodus 40 further affirms this divine pastoral commitment. After the construction of the tabernacle,

“the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle... Throughout all their journeys... the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle” (Ex. 40:34–38).

Here, God’s abiding presence with His people becomes a symbol of His ongoing care, guiding, safeguarding, and dwelling among them (Cole, 2015). Despite their sin, God does not abandon them. He leads them personally, providing not only deliverance from external enemies but also relational nearness and covenantal companionship. His care is covenantal, not transactional.

4.2.2.4 *God’s prophetic confrontation of injustice*

Yet, God’s care does not overshadow His confrontation of injustice. The Exodus is equally a prophetic narrative. The pastoral mandate is complemented by the prophetic, as God raises Moses not only to guide but to challenge Pharaoh. The words “Let my people go” (Ex. 5:1) are not a plea but a divine demand of justice. Moses is appointed to deliver God’s indictment against Egypt’s tyranny, openly exposing and confronting Pharaoh’s obstinacy and the systemic injustice within the empire (Fretheim, 2010). He acts not only as a spiritual leader but also as a political agent of God’s justice, disrupting the oppressive status quo. The confrontation with Pharaoh is central to God’s mission in the narrative, positioning the prophetic as a vital aspect of divine liberation. The ten plagues (Ex. 7–12), God’s “mighty hand” (Ex. 6:6), and the judgment of Egypt’s gods (Ex. 12:12) represent a divine confrontation that is both spiritual and socio-political. As Moses speaks to Pharaoh, he embodies the prophetic role: a voice of God’s justice in the face of hardened imperial power.

4.2.2.5 *Prophetic challenge within God’s own people*

Notably, God’s prophetic confrontation was also inward and not limited to Egypt. The prophetic dimension also addresses Israel when they fall into disobedience. The golden calf episode (Ex. 32) illustrates this internal prophetic stance. God reacts with anger and threatens judgment against His covenant people. However, in a profound pastoral intercession, Moses pleads for mercy, and God relents (Ex. 32:14; Fretheim, 2010). This event shows that God’s

justice does not operate in isolation from His compassion. The prophetic call for faithfulness and the pastoral desire for restoration are intertwined in a covenantal tension that neither negates nor overrides the other but exists in a dialectical relationship (Brueggemann 2001:115). Moses stands between God and the people, confronting sin and pleading for mercy on their behalf. Modelling what Brueggemann (2001:115) describes as the prophetic-pastoral dialectic: confronting sin while advocating for mercy. Moses speaks truth to power and grace to a broken people. He confronts Pharaoh, comforts, and challenges the rebellious Israelites. His life exemplifies the seamless integration of confrontation and compassion.

Thus, in the Exodus narrative, the pastoral and prophetic mandates are not only contrasted but also deeply connected in practice. God observes suffering (pastoral), acts within history (prophetic), guides and sustains His people (pastoral), and calls them to covenantal faithfulness (prophetic). The narrative does not switch between these roles; instead, it merges them as two aspects of one faithful God.

Overall, the Exodus narrative offers a theological model of interconnected pastoral and prophetic duties, a pattern rooted not in church roles but in divine nature. God is both shepherd and liberator, healer and judge, merciful and just. He liberates not only through power but also through presence. Moses models leadership that embodies this integrated vocation, challenging Pharaoh while walking patiently with a vulnerable people. For the Church today, especially in contexts like Zimbabwe marked by injustice and fragility, the Exodus invites us to ask: Are we as ready to stand before Pharaoh as we are to kneel with the broken? Faithful public ministry must do both, because that is how God has always acted in history.

4.2.3 God's compassion and confrontation enacted through Israel's judges in the Judge

As the biblical story unfolds through the eras of the Judges, the monarchy, and the prophets, the dynamic between God's pastoral care and prophetic challenge continues to unfold. Far from being isolated actions, these two roles are shown as complementary facets of God's redemptive relationship with His people. They originate from the core of who God is, the God who is both just and merciful, holy and compassionate (Ex. 34:6–7).

The story in Judges continues the biblical account during a time when Israel had entered and begun to inhabit the land that God had promised them (Soggin, 1981:41). This land represented the fulfilment of God's compassionate redemption, a place of rest, provision, and growth. However, continued enjoyment of these blessings depended on obedience and loyalty to the covenant with Yahweh (Deut. 6:4-9; Josh. 24:14-24). Tragically, the book of Judges

quickly reveals a tragic pattern of disobedience (Arowo, 2022:10). Israel repeatedly abandons the LORD, pursues idols, and adopts the corrupt practices of the surrounding nations (Judg. 2:10-13; 3:5-7; 8:33-34; 10:6; 17:6,21-25; Niditch, 2011:49).

“Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals... They forsook the LORD, the God of their ancestors” (Judg. 2:11–12).

Israel became apostate (Niditch, 2011:49). Evans (2017), commenting on Judg. 2:11-12, concludes, “There is no doubt that in the mind of the writers God’s anger, which is described in repetitive detail (vv. 12, 14, 20), was fully deserved and his action in judgment fully justified.” Thus, because God is, he does not turn a blind eye to their rebellion. Instead, he confronts and judges their sin. He withdraws his protection and allows other nations to rise against them as instruments of judgment.

“In his anger against Israel, the LORD gave them into the hands of raiders who plundered them. He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around” (Judg. 2:14).

“I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the LORD and walk in it as their ancestors did” (Judg. 2:22).

Yet even in judgment, God’s compassion endures (Arowo, 2022:47-49). When people cry out under oppression, he is “moved to pity by their groaning” (Judg. 2:18). He raises judges, human agents who are His instruments to guide, deliver, and restore Israel. These judges serve as God’s representatives, enacting both his confrontation against injustice and his care for flourishing (Magezi & Manzanga, 2024: 4). Thus, the cycle of rebellion and rescue becomes a theological rhythm: prophetic confrontation leading to pastoral restoration, rooted in the unchanging character of a God who is both just and merciful. Despite this rebellion, God’s compassionate character remains constant. In a cycle of rebellion, oppression, repentance, and deliverance, God continues to intervene not out of obligation but out of pity and mercy: *“The LORD was moved to pity by their groaning... He raised judges to save them”* (Judg. 2:18).

Here, we see the pastoral mandate of God’s care operating within the chaos of politics and spirituality. Magezi and Manzanga (2024:4) rightfully conclude, “God is the ultimate judge of Israel and shows pastoral care. His presence during the reign of each judge was evidence of public pastoral care...” The judges, imperfect and often reluctant leaders, were God’s chosen agents to bring relief, justice, and temporary restoration. They were not only military deliverers but instruments of God’s pastoral care, embodying His desire to guide, protect, and reclaim His people (Gillmayr-Bucher, 2009:687-702). Still, God’s commitment to His people endures. Through the judges, He shepherds them in their mess, even as He calls them back to righteousness.

This period emphasises the deep tension at the heart of divine engagement: a holy God who must confront sin, and a loving shepherd who refuses to abandon His sheep. Once again, reaffirming the central argument of this chapter, prophetic-pastoral interplay is firmly embedded in God's character. The Church, especially in contexts of broken governance and wounded communities like Zimbabwe, must regain this integrated vision of leadership. Public pastoral care requires both the courage to challenge unjust systems and the compassion to shepherd a weary people. Without both, the Church either loses its voice or its soul.

4.2.4 Israel's monarchy and prophets as a demonstration of the interplay of God's care and confrontation.

Israel's shift to a monarchy marked a significant moment in its political and religious history. Although the monarchy arose from human desires for security and conformity (1 Sam. 8:5, 20; Baldwin, 2015), it ultimately became a divinely authorised structure through which God continued to shepherd and hold His covenant people accountable (Schellenberg, 2012:4). Therefore, still rooted in God's unchanging character, "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" (Ex. 34:6), this prophetic-pastoral relationship finds renewed expression through both the monarchy and the prophetic office. Together, these institutions serve as complementary means of divine engagement: the king fulfils the pastoral role of governance under God, and the prophet serves as the covenantal conscience, confronting disobedience and calling the nation back to fidelity.

4.2.4.1 *From Judge-Prophets to royal-prophet synergy*

Before the monarchy, figures such as Moses, Joshua, and Samuel held unified pastoral and prophetic roles. They guided the people with care and confronted them with God's truth, embodying Yahweh's shepherding kingship (Hill & Walton, 2023:181). However, Israel's request for a human king "like all the other nations" (1 Sam. 8:5) was a rejection of this theocratic structure (1 Sam. 8:7). While this request was rebellious, God's response reveals both divine confrontation and divine forbearance. Through Samuel, God issues a sobering warning about the oppressive consequences of centralised human rule (1 Sam. 8:10–18), yet He permits their request (1 Sam. 8:22), a compassionate concession rooted in His covenantal commitment (Brueggemann, 2012:63; Tsumura, 2007:253; Wright, 2004:232).

Theologically, the monarchy did not signify a withdrawal of God's reign but rather a reconfiguration of how His justice and care would be mediated. Israel's kings were to serve as stewards under God's authority, not as sovereigns in their own right. Laniak (2012:22) correctly argues that they (kings) were meant to lead followers in the same way God was

leading them. This is further supported in texts like Ezek. 34:24, where kings are called “princes,” emphasising their subordinate role. As McConville (2006:86) and Nugent (2011) suggest, Israel was intended to be distinct from the surrounding nations: justice and righteousness were not to be defined by human rulers but by Yahweh’s law. This model of governance reflected the character of God Himself: righteous yet merciful, holy yet gracious. Kings were called to uphold the covenant, defend the vulnerable, and foster communal faithfulness (Deut. 17:14–20; Ps. 72:1–4).

4.2.4.2 *The King as a shepherd-ruler*

The idea of a shepherd is a biblical metaphor used to describe those responsible for leading and caring for God’s people. In his book, *Shepherds after My Own Heart*, Timothy Laniak defines this metaphor as a form of comprehensive leadership, “characterised as much by judicious use of authority as by sympathetic expression of compassion” (2006:21). Therefore, shepherding involves an exercise that simultaneously upholds justice and mercy, confrontation and compassion; grounded in God’s unchanging character: the God who is both just and merciful, holy and compassionate (Ex. 34:6–7). This reflects the role of the King in Israel, which was expected to serve as a mediator of this tension between critique and comfort, acting as a distributor rather than the creator of that interplay (Jost, 2021:26).

Numerous kings of Israel and Judah embodied this shepherding mandate, even if imperfectly. David was the archetype of this shepherd-king ideal, with his reign providing clear examples of its embodiment (Laniak, 2006:20). God chose him to transition from tending sheep to leading His people (2 Sam. 5:2; Ps. 78:70–72). David led Israel into a period of peace and rest from their enemies; he also brought the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem as a symbol of Yahweh’s presence with His people. David’s kingship was rooted in covenantal promises (2 Sam. 23:5), and even in failure, such as the episode involving Bathsheba and Uriah, God’s confrontation through the prophet Nathan (2 Sam. 12) was met with His ongoing mercy and everlasting covenant (Hill & Walton, 2023:231)—David’s repentance and restoration show how divine confrontation never excludes compassion. God’s covenant with David (2 Sam. 7:8–16) affirms this pastoral dimension. God promises to establish David’s line, provide security for Israel, and offer mercy even when David’s descendants fall into sin. Here again we see the interplay of compassion and confrontation, a commitment to justice and discipline, but within the bounds of covenantal mercy. Thus, the monarchy serves as a means of divine stability and scrutiny, a pastoral institution with prophetic oversight.

This is exemplified in other kings, who also upheld this prophetic-pastoral tension. Hezekiah initiated widespread religious reform, re-consecrating the temple and leading the nation in

worship and repentance (2 Chr. 29–30). He demonstrated both decisive leadership and intercessory care for the people (Lowery, 1991:143–44). Additionally, Josiah, upon rediscovering the Book of the Law, responded with humility and zeal, purging Judah of idolatry and renewing covenantal faithfulness (2 Kgs. 22–23). His reforms were not only structural but spiritual, aimed at restoring proper worship and national identity under God (Lowery, 1991:190). Likewise, Asa, early in his reign, removed foreign altars, encouraged national devotion, and led a covenant renewal (2 Chr. 14–15), blending confrontation with compassion for the people’s spiritual condition.

Through such kings, we see how the monarchy, as a pastoral institution and a public office of care, was shaped by divine justice and guided by God’s law. When functioning faithfully, kings in Israel reflected the character of God: confronting sin and idolatry while caring for the people’s overall well-being. In this way, the king’s role contributed to the prophetic-pastoral dynamic that defined Israel’s theological and communal life (Jost, 2021:26). This dynamic persists throughout Israel’s royal history. Kings were both recipients and instruments of God’s care, but when they abandoned their divine mandate, prophets were raised to confront them. Prophets were sent not only to challenge their disobedience but also to mediate divine mercy through calls to repentance and restoration.

4.2.4.3 *The Prophet as covenant conscience and pastoral intercessor*

To ensure that the monarchy remained linked to God’s justice and holiness, God established the prophetic office as a parallel institution. Prophets acted as the covenantal conscience of Israel, divinely appointed voices who reminded kings and the people of their obligations under God’s law (Matthews, 2012:624–25; Redditt, 2012:587). Their ministry was naturally confrontational, condemning idolatry, oppression, and hypocrisy. However, it was also pastoral, aimed at healing the rift between God and His people. Matthews (2012:626) observes that the reality of injustice, which arises from a breach of the covenant that sets the standard for justice, is what drives the prophets’ ministry.

The prophetic office, which emerged in fuller form during the monarchy, functioned as the conscience of the nation, ensuring that royal authority remained linked to divine purposes (Matthews, 2012:624–25). Prophets like Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, and Jeremiah were called to speak on God’s behalf, often delivering messages that kings did not want to hear. Their role mainly involved forthtelling, reminding both the King and the people of God’s covenant and also foretelling the consequences of disloyalty to it (Redditt, 2012:587). Furthermore, the prophets reveal God’s unfolding and unchanging plans to redeem His people (Wright, 2006: 311). Together, the monarchy and the prophetic office represent an institutional

expression of God's dual commitment to truth and grace. Prophets hold kings and the entire nation accountable when they deviate from God's covenant with them (2 Sam. 12; 1 Kgs. 21; Isa. 1; Hatchett, 2015:1303–1305). However, the prophetic office is not merely a role of divine prosecutors; it is also an office of pastoral intercessors. They often bear the emotional burden of the people's pain and call them back to God's love, offering hope, comfort, and reassurance during times of national crisis (Williamson, 2000; Magezi & Manzanga, 2024:5). For example, Elijah confronts systemic injustice and idolatry under Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kgs. 18–21), boldly challenging the spiritual corruption of the nation. Yet, his ministry also embodies pastoral care as he becomes a channel of God's provision, restoration, and encouragement for the faithful remnant and individuals in distress (1 Kgs. 17; 19). Isaiah, on the other hand, though beginning his ministry with sharp warnings (Isa. 1–39), shifts into pastoral consolation (Isa.40-66), starting with the words, "*Comfort, comfort my people*" (Isa. 40:1). Likewise, Jeremiah the 'weeping prophet' embodies this tension most poignantly. He delivers stern oracles of judgment (Jer. 2–25) yet also intercedes for the people and weeps over their fate (Jer. 8:18–9:3). He embodies the pain of the people while also articulating the pain of God. As Brueggemann (2019) notes, the prophetic voice not only exposes divine judgment but also heralds divine promise, holding together lament and hope, confrontation and care.

Unfortunately, the monarchy's rule did not last long; it fell at the hands of human kings. Israel's monarchy failed to meet God's standards, leading the nation astray. This disobedience caused God to exile the nation as a consequence of their sin. However, the failure of the monarchy, which was not merely a structural collapse but a moral and covenantal failure, did not end God's commitment to care for His people. Beyond the monarchy, the prophetic office continued God's work of care and confrontation, embodying this dual mission. God's vision of caring for His people became part of the prophetic hope. As God says through Jeremiah: "*I know the plans I have for you... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future*" (Jer. 29:11).

The prophet foresees restoration even amid judgment, affirming that divine justice is not retributive but redemptive in nature. This prophetic hope, which encompasses both care and confrontation, was rooted in the same character of God revealed in earlier narratives: a God who is "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" (Ex. 34:6).

Once again, we see a demonstration of God's consistent character throughout the biblical narrative. God rules as both Shepherd and Sovereign, showing care through the pastoral aspects of kingship and accountability through the prophetic voice. These are not conflicting modes of divine action but two facets of a single redemptive stance: a God who confronts sin

with truth and welcomes sinners with mercy. In the prophetic-pastoral dynamic, we see not contradiction but covenantal faithfulness: the same God who walked with Adam, delivered Israel, and guided a nation through its kings and prophets.

This interaction between prophetic confrontation and pastoral care is not accidental but covenantal. The monarchy and the prophetic office together formed a theological structure that reflected God's dual commitment: to uphold justice and to extend mercy. Kings were to model righteous governance and compassion; prophets were to confront unfaithfulness and offer comfort in times of crisis. These are not competing actions but harmonised expressions of God's redemptive character.

Even when the monarchy ultimately failed and the kingdom was exiled, God did not abandon His people. The prophetic voice grew stronger during this time, not just as a call to repentance but as a promise of restoration: "I know the plans I have for you... plans to give you hope and a future" (Jer. 29:11). This vision is not sentimentality; it is the pastoral heart of God expressed through prophetic proclamation. The prophets became the embodiment of divine solidarity, suffering with the people, weeping for them, and conveying God's vision of renewal.

In Zimbabwe's context of political failure, economic injustice, and social trauma, the Church must learn again to speak like the prophets, truthfully and tenderly, confronting systems of oppression while walking with those who suffer. The prophetic-pastoral ministry of the prophets does not offer the Church a choice between critique and care. It calls for us to hold both with courage and compassion, as faithful stewards of God's mission in a wounded world.

4.2.5 The prophetic-pastoral interplay as demonstrated in God's dealings with non-Israelites.

A key aspect of the biblical narrative is that the prophetic-pastoral interplay evident in God's dealings with Israel is not limited to the covenant community but extends to individuals and nations beyond it. The Scriptures consistently depict Yahweh's redemptive concern as surpassing ethnic and geographical boundaries (Deut. 24:17–24; 1 Kgs. 8:41–43). As Magezi and Manzanga (2024:4) observe, Yahweh functions not only as Israel's covenantal Shepherd but also as an "under-shepherd to the nations," showing love, compassion, and forgiveness towards foreign peoples as part of His broader public pastoral mission. This outward focus is not incidental but fundamental, rooted in the Abrahamic covenant where God states that "all peoples on earth will be blessed" through Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 12:3). Israel was therefore chosen not just for its own benefit but as a mediating community through which divine blessing would flow to the nations. This missional dimension is reiterated in

Deuteronomy 4:5–8, where Israel is encouraged to observe God’s statutes as a public witness to surrounding nations. “Observe [these laws] carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations... What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us...?” (Deut. 4:6–7) Israel’s faithfulness to the covenant was meant to serve as a display of divine wisdom and nearness, evoking admiration and potentially drawing other nations towards Yahweh. The nation’s vocation as a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6) further reinforces this mediatory identity, positioning Israel as an instrument of God’s justice and mercy on a global scale. Consequently, the biblical narrative consistently demonstrates God confronting injustice, idolatry, and violence among the nations, while also offering mercy, warnings, and the chance of repentance (Magezi & Manzanga, 2024:4). This theological pattern reflects the missional drive built into Yahweh’s character; a God who is “gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love” (Jon. 4:2; Ex.34:6), even towards those who are not His covenant people.

The prophetic-pastoral dynamic, then, is not solely an Israelite phenomenon but a universal pattern of divine engagement that highlights God’s sovereignty and redemptive concern for all nations. For instance, God confronts Egypt’s oppression through the plagues (Exod. 7–12), yet offers opportunities for recognising His power and even permits a “mixed multitude” to join Israel’s exodus (Ex.12:38). In Jonah, Nineveh, a violent and idolatrous city, is warned through prophecy, yet is embraced with compassion when it repents (Jon. 3–4). Babylon, though used to judge Israel (Jer. 25:9), is later judged itself (Jer. 50–51), while individuals like Nebuchadnezzar receive pastoral warnings and ultimately acknowledge God’s rule (Dan. 4:34–37). Even in oracles of judgment against nations like Edom, Moab, and Tyre, God’s justice is often accompanied by promises of eventual healing and inclusion (Isa. 19:23–25). Similarly, individuals like Ruth, Rahab, and Naaman, as well as non-Israelites, experienced God’s compassion, exemplifying God’s compassionate inclusion of foreigners into His redemptive purposes (Josh. 6:17; 2 Kgs. 5; Rut. 1–4). Both Ruth and Rahab became part of Jesus’ genealogy (Matt. 1:5). The law of Israel itself looked out for the foreigner, those non-Israelites living among the covenant people. “Israel was mandated to show love and compassion to poor and marginalised people in their societies regardless of their nationality (Deut 24:17–22).” (Magezi & Manzanga, 2024:4–5). This global concern finds its ultimate mandate in the Great Commission, where the risen Christ sends His disciples to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19), affirming that the gospel is not restricted by ethnicity or geography, but is good news for the entire world. Additionally, this vision is fulfilled in the eschatological hope of Revelation, where a great multitude “from every nation, tribe, people and language” stands before God’s throne in worship (Rev. 7:9-10). There, the nations are not just included; they are gathered together with the redeemed of Israel in unified praise,

fulfilling God's promise to bless all peoples through Abraham. Thus, the prophetic-pastoral heart of God, woven throughout Scripture, reveals a mission as vast as creation and as personal as the individual, a divine invitation to all nations to join in the worship, justice, and mercy of the living God.

4.2.6 Summary of the Old Testament

The previous exploration has shown that the prophetic–pastoral relationship is not a minor theme but a core theological pattern that runs throughout the Old Testament. It is deeply woven into the biblical story and emerges from the very nature of God, who is, at the same time, merciful. From the opening chapters of Genesis to the complex history of Israel's judges, kings, prophets, and exiles, the Old Testament consistently presents God as one who both confronts sin and cares for the wounded, who holds His people accountable while continuously seeking their renewal. This pattern is not incidental or reactive, but is rooted in God's covenantal identity, as expressed in Ex. 34:6—a God who is “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.” Whether dealing with Israel's disobedience or the injustice of the nations, God's justice and mercy function in harmony, not in opposition. Throughout the narrative, this dual dynamic is evident not only in God's direct interventions but also through the actions of human agents. These figures are not merely messengers; they are living embodiments of God's ongoing engagement with the world. Most importantly, the Old Testament affirms that this divine interplay of confrontation and care is participatory: God chooses to act through human agency. Those shaped by His Word and commissioned by His Spirit become tangible instruments of His justice and mercy, bearing witness to His covenantal purposes in real historical contexts.

4.3. The prophetic-pastoral mandate interplay in the New Testament

Building upon the Old Testament's depiction of God as both just and merciful, the New Testament offers a more comprehensive and embodied vision of the prophetic–pastoral mandate. This dual mission of addressing sin and injustice (prophetic) while extending compassion and healing (pastoral) reaches its fullest expression in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and continues through His Church. Jesus ultimately reveals both God's righteous judgment and unfailing love in perfect harmony. The Gospels portray this union in His incarnational presence, His public ministry, His self-giving death, and His victorious resurrection. The early Church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, carries this integrated mission forward, living as a community shaped by truth, grace, justice, and mercy. The New Testament thus affirms and demonstrates the prophetic-pastoral interplay within Christ's life, which He entrusts to His people. What follows is an exploration of this dynamic as it unfolds

in Jesus' incarnation, ministry, death and resurrection, the early Church's life, and the eschatological vision of Revelation.

4.3.1 The incarnation as the ultimate demonstration of the prophetic-pastoral mandate interplay

The incarnation of Jesus Christ, where God becomes flesh and dwells among humanity (John 1:14), marks a pivotal moment in the biblical story, in which God's justice and mercy reach their fullest expression (Wellum, 2016). This union between divinity and humanity, as Draughon III & Brand (2015:796) explain, signifies the ultimate realisation of the prophetic-pastoral mandate and highlights the depth of God's covenantal relationship with a broken world. In this unique act, the character of God, as depicted throughout the Old Testament, "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Ex. 34:6), is made manifest in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus had to become flesh so that, through His death, He could overcome the power of death and set people free (Frame, 2013:884). The author of Hebrews provides a more straightforward explanation of why the incarnation was necessary:

"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason, he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted (Heb. 2:14-18).

On the one hand, the incarnation is an unparalleled act of divine compassion. As Magezi and Manzanga (2024:4) describe, it is the "public identification of God with human social conditions." In assuming human flesh, Jesus does not remain detached from humanity's suffering but steps fully into its pain, vulnerability, and limitations (Heb. 4:15; Wellum, 2016). This act demonstrates the pastoral dimension of God's character: a God who draws near, who walks among His people, and who enters into their woundedness to bring healing and restoration. As Frame (2013:127) summarises it, the incarnation was the "very means of our salvation." A compassionate movement toward the marginalised and oppressed to liberate them, fulfilling Old Testament imagery of a divine shepherd who seeks, heals, and gathers His flock (Ezek. 34:11–16).

At the same time, the incarnation is also a powerful act of prophetic judgment. It signals a divine confrontation with the forces of sin, injustice, and spiritual darkness. The coming of Christ into history disrupts the prevailing structures of oppression and announces the inbreaking of God's kingdom: a kingdom marked by righteousness, peace, and truth. Jesus' message, beginning with His call to repentance (Matt. 4:17), exposes the moral bankruptcy of both religious legalism and imperial power. The incarnation thus embodies the fulfilment of Old Testament prophetic hopes for a Messiah who would bring salvation and establish justice (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 7:14; 9:6–7; Mic. 5:2).

Athas (2023:814), commenting on Jesus' inaugural declaration in Luk. 4:18–19, highlights this prophetic and redemptive thrust:

“It was a claim to royal prerogative—one based not on military might, political manoeuvre, or priestly privilege but on prophetic fulfilment, love, forgiveness, and the work of God's spirit through a Davidic descendant (cf. Zech 4:6).”

Jesus's incarnation, then, is not merely a tender gesture of divine solidarity but a radical declaration that evil and injustice will not stand unchallenged. It initiates the renewal of creation by confronting all that distorts human flourishing. It brings to fulfilment the redemptive trajectory anticipated throughout the Old Testament. As Paul affirms, “all the promises of God find their ‘Yes’ in Him” (2 Cor. 1:20). In Jesus Christ, the pastoral longing for God's nearness and the prophetic expectation of God's intervention are united. Thus, the incarnation is both a pastoral embrace and a prophetic pronouncement, God with us to heal, and God among us to judge and restore.

4.3.2 Jesus' ministry as both pastoral and prophetic

The earthly ministry of Jesus Christ demonstrates a profound and seamless integration of the prophetic and pastoral mandates. As the visible image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15), Jesus embodies the justice and compassion of God in action. His life and teaching confront oppressive systems, call for repentance, and simultaneously extend mercy to the broken and marginalised. Hence, Jesus' ministry was a tangible demonstration of this interplay between the prophetic and pastoral mandates. Below is a brief discussion of how Jesus' ministry demonstrated this interplay.

Jesus begins His public ministry by announcing the coming of God's kingdom, which represents an alternative social and spiritual order that challenges the existing religious and political structures. The Kingdom of God, as Geerhardus Vos (1958:50) helpfully explains it,

“...exists where not merely God is supreme, for that is true at all times and under all circumstances, but where God supernaturally carries through his supremacy against all opposing powers and brings men to the willing recognition of the same.”

In His inaugural sermon at the synagogue in Nazareth (Luk. 4:16–30), Jesus reads from Isaiah 61 and declares its fulfilment in Himself. He identifies His mission as bringing good news to the poor, freedom for the oppressed, and sight to the blind (Laniak, 2006:200). This announcement serves as both a declaration of hope and a prophetic indictment of systemic exclusion. It entails a radical redefinition of power, in which Jesus confronts societal and spiritual injustice under the guise of a liberative mission (Magezi & Manzanga, 2004:6). The hostile reaction to His message, attempted violence from His own countrymen, highlights the disruptive nature of Jesus’ prophetic challenge. He boldly criticises the Scribes and Pharisees for their legalism, exploitation, and performative righteousness, issuing a series of prophetic warnings similar to those of Old Testament prophets such as Amos and Isaiah, who condemned hollow ritualism devoid of justice (cf. Am. 5:21–24; Isa. 1:10–17):

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices... But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness.” (Matt. 23:23)

As Brueggemann (2014:58–60) notes, Jesus’ prophetic mission is not only about critique but also about reimagining society through the lens of God’s reign—a new social reality grounded in covenantal faithfulness. His prophetic stance reaches a dramatic moment in the cleansing of the temple (Mk. 11:15–17), where He challenges the corruption of sacred space, asserting divine authority over religious and economic exploitation.

Embedded within such prophetic confrontation was a profound pastoral concern. Jesus cared for ordinary people. At various points in the Gospel narratives, Jesus is explicitly portrayed as moved by compassion, prompting Him to act pastorally in response to human suffering (Laniak, 2006:184-6). This compassion is not passive sympathy but an active, embodied expression of divine mercy. As a compassionate shepherd, Jesus provides for His flock. For example, in Mk. 6:34 (cf. Matt. 9:36), Jesus sees the crowds “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd,” and is moved to teach and care for them. Laniak (2006:185) links this notion of ‘sheep without a shepherd’ to the Old Testament motif describing a people without a king. Reading this in light of Ezekiel 34, where God is grieved over the people’s predicament due to the brutality of the shepherds, he concludes that the lack of proper leadership underpins Jesus’ compassion and enacts His vision for “a more complete discipleship.” A discipleship that would raise disciples with a “responsibility to join their king in the compassionate and powerful work that characterised the messianic kingdom.”

Again, the Gospel accounts demonstrate Jesus' compassion in His healing stories. In Mark 1:14, Jesus is moved with compassion to touch and heal a man with leprosy, breaking social and religious taboos in the process: a pattern recurring throughout the Gospel narratives. In Matthew 12, Jesus heals a man with a withered hand on a Sabbath, something that displeased the religious leaders but also demonstrated how deeply Jesus cared for people. He prioritised mercy over legalism. For Laniak (2006:188), this goes beyond prioritising mercy over the law; he rightly argues, "one of the consistent themes in Jesus' teaching is that mercy is not only prioritised over legalism, it is the heart of the law itself. Mercy and compassion, central features of pastoral leadership, involved setting people free from their burdens." Similarly, in Luke 7:13, when He encounters a grieving widow, "his heart went out to her," leading Him to raise her son from the dead. John 11:33–35 provides another clear example of this pastoral compassion. When Jesus sees Mary weeping at Lazarus's tomb, He is "deeply moved in spirit and troubled," and then He weeps. His tears, followed by a mighty miracle of resurrection, reveal the depth of divine empathy with human pain. These moments consistently reflect the pastoral dimension of Jesus' ministry, fulfilling the Old Testament vision of a shepherd-king who binds up the broken and gathers the scattered (cf. Ezek. 34:11–16). Jesus' compassion is a profound expression of God's character.

In holding these roles together, Jesus does not simply shift between prophetic and pastoral tasks; He performs them simultaneously. His rebukes are not lacking in mercy, and His acts of compassion are never separated from truth. As Brueggemann (2014:58–60) observes, Jesus' prophetic ministry is not only about exposing injustice but also about imagining and initiating a new social reality rooted in God's reign. Similarly, his pastoral ministry is not merely about emotional comfort, but about comprehensive restoration—healing bodies, restoring dignity, and reorienting lives toward God. Laniak (2006:184) offers a helpful comment that illustrates this interaction. He states that, "...the ministry of Jesus involves authoritative declarations of God's Kingdom and merciful works of healing and liberation." Therefore, Jesus' ministry embodies the prophetic–pastoral mandate in its most whole form: truth spoken in love, judgment met with mercy, and justice pursued through compassion.

4.3.3 The cross and resurrection as the climax of the prophetic–pastoral Interplay

The cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ stand as the climactic expression of God's justice and compassion within the biblical narrative. In no other event are God's justice and mercy, His confrontation of sin and His care for the broken, brought together with such dramatic clarity and theological significance. As Bolt (2004:48) aptly notes, "The cross of Jesus changed the

world.” The crucifixion is the culmination of a divine plan to reconcile a fractured world through the full expression of both divine judgment and divine compassion, not merely a historical tragedy or an unfortunate consequence of Jesus’ prophetic ministry. The resurrection, in turn, confirms that God’s justice has been satisfied and asserts the triumph of life over death, hope over despair. Together, the cross and resurrection present the most profound and decisive expression of God’s covenantal nature, holding judgment and mercy in perfect balance. What follows is a closer look at how each of these events reveals this prophetic–pastoral interplay in action.

The cross was a decisive confrontation of the root cause of injustice, human sin. New Testament writers repeatedly affirm that Jesus’ death was necessary to satisfy the righteous demands of God’s holiness. Romans 3:25-26 clearly articulates this with theological precision: “God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement... to demonstrate His righteousness.” The cross, thus, exposes the weight and consequence of sin, but at the same time demonstrates God’s justice. Jesus, the sinless one, becomes the substitute for sinners, bearing in His body the penalty that justice demands (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24). In this sense, the cross is the ultimate prophetic act: a public declaration that sin, injustice, and death cannot be ignored or tolerated by a holy God. It is a display of God’s righteousness liberating the oppressed, redeeming the sinful, and overcoming disorder through an active judgment (Jn 16:8, Ac.17:31, Rom. 5:17; Vorster, 2024: 2)

Simultaneously, the cross is the ultimate pastoral act of divine love and mercy, a clear expression of divine solidarity and redemptive grace. Jesus willingly lays down His life for His people (Jn 10:11, 15), not out of obligation but out of love (Gal. 2:20). He personifies God’s mercy. As Hebrews 4:14–16 emphasises, Jesus is the great High Priest who can sympathise with human weakness because He has entered into the depths of human suffering. His intercession is not distant or detached; it is rooted in experience and offered with compassion. The cross, therefore, is pastoral because it addresses not only guilt but also grief, shame, alienation, and despair. Thus, in the cross of Christ, we see not merely a theological necessity but the deepest expression of God’s character: His unwavering justice and unfathomable mercy held together in one redemptive act. Bolt’s (2004:78–79) reflection captures this mystery with profound clarity: in entering into the full weight of human suffering and mortality, Jesus performs the impossible; He pays the ransom that no human could ever afford to pay. In doing so, He not only satisfies the demands of divine justice but also opens the floodgates of divine compassion. The cross, then, is not just where sin is judged; it is where the broken are embraced, the alienated are reconciled, and eternal life is made available. It is the

prophetic exposure of evil and the pastoral healing of the wounded, making it the most complete embodiment of God's prophetic–pastoral mandate in redemptive history.

The resurrection affirms and vindicates this dual act. It declares that justice has been satisfied and that mercy has triumphed (Bolt, 2004:152–153). The resurrection is not simply the reversal of death but the inauguration of a new creation in which God's prophetic promises are fulfilled and His pastoral care is eternally secured (Togarasei & Berman, 2020:447). It vindicates Jesus' ministry, confirms His divine identity (Rom. 1:4), and establishes and anchors the Church's hope that death, evil, and injustice do not have the final word (1 Cor. 15:54–57; Cook, 2015:1349).

The resurrection is the cornerstone of Christian faith; it is the reason Christians persevere as they await Christ's return. To a people who had believed and followed Jesus as the king of an alternative Kingdom, His death would have been devastating. And the resurrection proclaims hope to those saying: He is coming back, and when He does, He will redeem all creation. Death is not the end for those who belong to Him. Jesus was the firstborn from the dead, signalling that there will be others (1 Cor. 15:20–24). This is the sure hope of the Christian life (Horton, 2011:24).

Paul makes this pastoral weight even clearer in 1 Corinthians 15:12–19. He argues that if Christ has not been raised, then Christian preaching is empty, faith is futile, and those who have died in Christ are lost. "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied" (v. 19). But because Christ has been raised, believers are not pitied—they are deeply comforted. The resurrection is not just a theological proof; it is a personal assurance. It tells the grieving that their loved ones are not gone forever. It tells the weary that their suffering is not in vain (Horton, 2011:40). Thus, the resurrection comforts, reassures, and sustains, demonstrating it as God's pastoral concern for His people. As Laniak (2006:190) notes, "the resurrected Jesus does not merely announce a new kingdom reality; He enacts it through personal restoration, shepherding His followers into renewed life and mission."

Moreover, the resurrection is both a prophetic stance and a pastoral one. It is prophetic in that it waged war against death and declared victory over it. It stood as God's final word of judgment against the greatest enemy to his creation. Fulfilling the Old Testament prophetic anticipations that death would be swallowed up forever (Isa. 25:8; Dan. 12:2). In this sense, the resurrection prophetically declares that God has acted decisively in history to confront the powers of sin, death, and injustice and has secured their ultimate defeat.

The cross and resurrection together form the inseparable heart of the prophetic–pastoral mandate. One confronts the horror of sin and death with divine justice; the other restores hope and life with divine mercy. In the words of Newbigin (1989:128), the cross “is the place where the absolute righteousness of God and the absolute love of God meet and are perfectly expressed.”

Together, they become the Church’s message and model: a gospel that speaks truth to power while tending gently to the wounded (Frame, 2013:1017–1019; Horton, 2011:26). Just as Christ’s mission held together truth and love, so too must the Church proclaim the message of repentance and forgiveness, righteousness and grace. This dual mandate flows from Calvary and continues to shape the Church’s prophetic witness and pastoral care in every generation.

4.3.4 The New Testament Church as the extension of the prophetic–pastoral mandate

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was not the conclusion of God’s redemptive work, but the decisive turning point that gave rise to a new community—the Church. This community was not intended to be an isolated spiritual enclave but a tangible expression of God’s continuing mission of redemption in the world. Formed through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Ac. 2:1–4), the Church was divinely empowered to continue Jesus Christ’s ministry. As Jesus Himself declared, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Ac. 1:8).

In this light, the New Testament Church is more than a fellowship of believers; it is the resurrection community, the living embodiment of Christ’s mission. It is called to bear witness both through proclamation and embodied presence. This witness involves mirroring the life and love of God in the world by extending His compassion and care, while also boldly challenging sin, injustice, and unbelief. In doing so, the Church continues the prophetic–pastoral interplay that so clearly defined the ministry of Jesus.

This interplay is foundational to the Church’s identity and calling. The New Testament consistently presents the early Church as a community that integrates prophetic proclamation: the bold confrontation of sin and injustice, with pastoral care, the compassionate work of restoration, healing, and reconciliation. This dual character is not incidental; it is rooted in the divine nature itself.

Punt (2015:1) helpfully frames this dynamic in terms of justice and reconciliation, two theological categories that function as both divine attributes and ecclesial imperatives. Justice, in this sense, aligns with the Church's prophetic responsibility to name and challenge personal and systemic sin. Reconciliation, on the other hand, embodies the Church's pastoral calling to repair, restore, and heal the broken relationships between God, individuals, and communities. Punt emphasises that in the New Testament, justice and reconciliation are not mere ethical ideals or abstract virtues, but theological commitments that shape the very nature and mission of the Church in its historical and social context.

In this way, the Church becomes a visible sign of God's reign, bearing witness to His justice by confronting sin and injustice and reflecting His mercy and love by embodying reconciliation and compassion. The resurrection, therefore, did not simply mark Christ's triumph over death; it launched a Spirit-empowered community that continues His prophetic–pastoral mission until the consummation of all things.

The following discussion will examine how this dual identity was manifested in the early Church's life, demonstrating that from its very inception, the Church possessed both a prophetic voice and a pastoral heart.

4.3.4.1 *The Great Commission as a prophetic–pastoral calling*

In Matthew 28:18–20, the risen Lord Jesus gives what has come to be known as the Great Commission, calling His followers to “go and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” This commission is not merely an evangelistic strategy, nor is it a generic command to expand religious influence. Instead, it is a missional mandate that flows from the very nature of God's redemptive work through Christ and is foundational to the Church's identity and purpose.

It was not simply a call to gather converts but a call to continue the very mission Jesus began, empowered by the Holy Spirit. The earlier discussion showed that the inauguration and growth of the Kingdom of God were deeply prophetic and pastoral. It was prophetic because it directly challenged existing structures that maintained injustice, yet it was pastoral because it provided a safe haven for those suffering from injustice, healing their brokenness. Beyond caring for the victims of injustice, it also extended its compassion towards the oppressors in a pastoral manner, calling them to repent and join the kingdom. This is the mandate that the Church is commissioned to fulfil: a continuation of confronting injustice, simultaneously comforting and facilitating the healing of the world's brokenness as it manifests in various forms. This mission is not selective or dualistic; it is holistic.

Bosch (2011:56) describes the Church's mission as bearing witness to God's kingdom through words and actions, often in tension with the dominant powers of the age. Kritzinger (2013:36) further contends, "...mission is not autonomous human activity but faithful participation in God's mission. God has revealed Godself in a dialogical and prophetic manner, speaking both a YES to humanity and a NO to its disobedience. Therefore, our involvement in God's mission can only be authentically embodied in prophetic dialogue." Thus, Jesus' ministry, which this Commission extends, was inherently prophetic, announcing the arrival of the kingdom of God, calling for repentance (Mk. 1:15), challenging religious hypocrisy (Matt. 23), and exposing oppressive systems (Luk. 4:18–19).

4.3.4.2 *The early Church's life as an expression of the prophetic-pastoral interplay*

i. Internal life

Within its internal life, the early Church maintained a vital balance between confronting falsehood and cultivating a community of love, support, and reconciliation. This prophetic–pastoral interplay shaped not only its theology but also its daily rhythms of worship and care. Peter's sermon at Pentecost (Ac. 2:14–36) exemplifies this dynamic. His prophetic indictment: "This Jesus, whom you crucified", is immediately followed by a pastoral invitation to repentance, forgiveness, and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Ac. 2:38–39). The response of the people, being "cut to the heart," highlights how prophetic confrontation can serve as a pathway to redemptive reconciliation when accompanied by genuine compassion.

This dynamic shaped the structures and habits of the early Christian community. Acts 2:42–47 describes a fellowship characterised by shared meals, prayer, generosity, and mutual devotion, exemplifying the Church's pastoral concern. Dumitraşcu (2016:2) depicts such acts as a "practical manifestation of interhuman love; it raises man from the image to the likeness of God." In this way, mercy served not only as a response to individual suffering but also as a communal testament to the transformative power of divine love. Acts of mercy addressed systemic inequities while fostering solidarity among believers, thereby strengthening both the pastoral and prophetic aspects of Christian life. This is further demonstrated in Acts 6:17, where the apostles responded decisively to the neglect of Hellenistic widows by establishing equitable care structures, ensuring that social justice and pastoral concern worked hand in hand. Throughout the New Testament, the Church is seen responding to the needs of the poor, as in Gal. 2:10; Rom. 15:25-27; 2 Cor. 8-9. As Gaventa (2003) observes, such episodes demonstrate a community "shaped by the resurrected Christ, actively embodying the justice and compassion of God."

Furthermore, mercy in the early Church was closely connected to the message of reconciliation, as Jeremy Punt (2015) notes, reconciliation and justice are fundamental concepts in New Testament theology, grounded in the identity of God and His restorative mission. Justice aligns with the Church's prophetic duty to challenge sin and dismantle unjust structures, while reconciliation embodies the pastoral desire to heal, restore, and reunite individuals and communities. The Church's embodiment of mercy, then, was not separate from these theological principles but served as a visible sign of God's reconciling and just presence among His people.

Thus, the Church's internal life served as a laboratory for the gospel, where prophetic truth and pastoral compassion united in a community that witnessed to God's love. Through prophetic proclamation, acts of justice, and merciful care, the Church fostered a new kind of humanity shaped in the likeness of Christ.

ii. External Life

Externally, the Church demonstrated a prophetic voice in its public statements and a caring heart in its service. Acts 17:6–7 recounts accusations that believers were “turning the world upside down” by recognising “another king—Jesus,” boldly challenging Roman imperial authority. Conversely, the Church attended to the vulnerable: James 1:27 describes pure religion as caring for “orphans and widows.” At the same time, James 5 balances prophetic condemnation of economic exploitation (v. 1–6) with pastoral guidance for the suffering (v. 13–20). N. T. Wright notes that following the crucified and risen Messiah “carries within it the call to speak truth to power and bind up the broken-hearted” (Wright, 2020:84).

iii. Epistles

The New Testament epistles further emphasise this prophetic–pastoral integration. Often composed in response to doctrinal confusion, moral failings, or community division, these letters combine gospel fidelity with pastoral care (Fee, 2002; Barr, 2003:235–248). Paul's letter to the Romans, for example, begins with prophetic theology (Rom. 1–11), addressing sin and affirming divine justice, and then moves into pastoral ethics (Rom. 12–15), promoting humility, service, and love (Kruse, 2012). Fee and Stuart observe that “Paul's letters frequently begin with a theological foundation that both confronts false teaching and affirms gospel truth, followed by pastoral application that shapes Christian life and community” (Fee & Stuart 2003:58).

Paul's instruction to Timothy— “preach the word; correct, rebuke and encourage” (2 Tim. 4:1–2)—exemplifies the integrated prophetic–pastoral mandate. Likewise, Peter's exhortation to

elders to “shepherd the flock of God... being examples” (1 Pet. 5:1–4) mirrors Ezekiel’s shepherd metaphor and binds pastoral care to doctrinal vigilance. Timothy Laniak describes this “shepherd–prophet” model as echoing Christ’s ministry, where leaders guard the flock and nurture the weak (Laniak 2006:234).

In summary, the early Church embodied the prophetic–pastoral mandate both internally, through rebuke, care, and spiritual formation, and externally, through bold proclamation and compassionate service. The epistles supported this dual identity by calling believers to align theological conviction with practical love. In word and deed, the Church bore faithful witness to the Kingdom of God, living out a prophetic and pastoral presence in the world.

4.3.4.3 *The book of Revelation as the climactic demonstration of the prophetic–pastoral mandate*

The book of Revelation serves as the eschatological climax of the prophetic–pastoral interplay, vividly revealing God’s justice and compassion in their most ultimate expressions. This is because Revelation brings together, in vivid and ultimate terms, the justice and mercy of God. The book emerges from a context of suffering. It was written by John, who identifies himself not as a distant theologian but as a “brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus” (Rev. 1:9; Bauckham, 1993:30). This self-identification and camaraderie with suffering believers, grounds the entire vision of Revelation in shared affliction, lived faith, enduring hope and affirming that God is not distant but powerfully present with His people (Mounce, 1997:116; Bauckham, 1993:30-31).

Amid this shared affliction, Revelation’s apocalyptic vision confronts the injustice of empire (symbolised by Babylon), exposes spiritual compromise, and calls the Church to faithful witness (Rev. 2–3; 18:18). At the heart of this vision stands the throne room scene in chapters 4 and 5, where the Lion of Judah is revealed to be the Lamb who was slain. This paradox is not incidental but central: the Lion represents messianic authority and divine justice, while the Lamb embodies sacrificial love and reconciliation. Bauckham (1993:61) notes, “The slaughtered Lamb is the key symbol of how God rules the world.” In other words, Christ’s kingship is redefined not through coercion but through faithful witness and suffering love.

This prophetic–pastoral symbolism is at once a challenge and a comfort. As Mounce (1997:116) observes, the throne room vision was meant to remind the suffering Church “that an omnipotent and omniscient God is still in control.” The Lamb is not removed from pain; He embodies it, having entered the depths of human suffering and redefined what it means to

conquer. Revelation, therefore, provides pastoral assurance that God sees the injustice, is actively confronting it, and will vindicate His faithful people.

The book's prophetic tone is unflinching. It speaks divine truth against empire and evil, proclaiming that the future belongs not to Caesar, but to Christ. As Morris (2009:23) puts it, "The future belongs...only to Christ, the Christ who was crucified for the salvation of us all." Yet alongside this prophetic boldness, Revelation also offers deep pastoral comfort. Christ walks among His churches (Rev. 1:12–13; 2:1), strengthens the persecuted (Rev. 2:9; 3:10), and promises final rest (Rev. 14:13). The vision of the New Creation (Rev. 21–22) culminates in pastoral imagery: "God will wipe every tear from their eyes" (Rev. 21:4; cf. 7:17). This is not sentimentality but a promise of complete reconciliation where justice and mercy meet perfectly.

Theologically, Revelation challenges imperial power structures and reorients Christian hope. It is not brute force that secures the Church's endurance, but the sustaining presence of Christ who overcomes through love. Wright (2011:10) emphasises that "Revelation is not just a book of future hope; it is a call to present faithfulness rooted in the Lamb's victory." The strength that sustains believers is grounded in the Lamb's faithful suffering; a pastoral model of divine solidarity; and in His ultimate triumph; a prophetic promise of judgment and restoration.

Thus, Revelation stands as the theological high point of the biblical vision of prophetic–pastoral integration. It affirms that God's justice will be executed, evil will be judged, and the faithful will be comforted. In the Lion and the Lamb, the Church sees the One who speaks truth with power and binds up the broken-hearted with compassion. Revelation calls the Church not only to endure but to bear faithful witness, to confront evil with prophetic courage and to comfort the afflicted with pastoral love, until the Lamb who was slain reigns forever.

4.3.5 Summary of the New Testament

The New Testament presents a compelling view of the prophetic–pastoral mandate, not as two separate roles but as a unified expression of God's covenantal engagement with the world. In Jesus Christ, justice and mercy come together: He confronts sin with truth and enfolds the broken with compassion. This dual mission did not end with His earthly ministry. Through His resurrection and the sending of the Spirit, Jesus commissions the Church to be His ongoing presence in the world: a community that proclaims the truth, resists evil, comforts the afflicted, and restores the wounded. From the Gospels to the epistles and culminating in Revelation, the New Testament portrays a Church that embodies and lives out this mandate. It is called to be both prophet and shepherd in a world still marked by injustice and suffering. This is not

an optional focus but the core of Christian witness: to speak God's truth boldly and to embody His love tenderly until His kingdom arrives in full.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that prophetic voice and pastoral care are not optional or competing dimensions of the Church's public ministry but are theologically grounded in the character and redemptive activity of God as revealed throughout Scripture. From creation to new creation, the biblical narrative consistently portrays God as both just and merciful, confronting sin and injustice while simultaneously sustaining, healing, and restoring those who suffer. The prophetic and pastoral mandates therefore emerge not as pragmatic ecclesial strategies but as integrated expressions of God's faithful engagement with the world.

Tracing the biblical narrative from Genesis through the Exodus, the prophetic tradition, the ministry of Jesus, and the life of the early Church, this chapter has shown a coherent pattern of divine action marked by the interplay of confrontation and consolation, judgment and grace, truth and compassion. These themes reach their culmination in the eschatological vision of Revelation, where God's final redemptive work holds together justice and restoration. Within this scriptural vision, prophetic witness and pastoral care are inseparable aspects of God's mission and must be held together in the life and witness of the Church.

Read normatively, this biblical account establishes clear theological criteria for evaluating the Church's socio-political engagement. Faithful public ministry requires the Church to embody both prophetic truth-telling and pastoral accompaniment as concurrent and mutually reinforcing practices. When either dimension is isolated or prioritised at the expense of the other, the Church's witness becomes distorted, resulting in either harsh confrontation without compassion or care that avoids truth and justice. Scripture, therefore, calls the Church to challenge what is broken while nurturing what can be restored.

Having articulated what ought to be happening through this normative theological reflection, the study now turns to the pragmatic task of practical theology. The following chapter builds on this biblical foundation by proposing a public pastoral care model through which Zimbabwean churches can embody an integrated prophetic and pastoral witness within their contemporary socio-political context. This shift from theological discernment to practical enactment seeks to support the Church in bearing a public witness that is both truthful and compassionate, courageous and caring, in response to ongoing political instability, social fragmentation, and human suffering.

5 CHAPTER 5: Developing a public-pastoral care approach for the Church in Zimbabwe

5.1 Introduction

Having examined what is happening, why it is happening, and what ought to be happening, this chapter is situated explicitly within Osmer's pragmatic task of practical theological inquiry. The focus now turns to the question of how the Church might respond faithfully in practice within Zimbabwe's contemporary socio-political context. Building on the historical analysis in Chapter Two, the empirical findings in Chapter Three, and the normative biblical reflection in Chapter Four, this chapter seeks to translate theological discernment into constructive pastoral action.

The chapter proposes a public pastoral care model that integrates prophetic voice and pastoral care as mutually reinforcing dimensions of the Church's socio-political engagement. Rather than offering abstract ideals or universal prescriptions, the model is developed as a contextually responsive framework shaped by Zimbabwe's political instability, social fragmentation, economic hardship, and ecclesial diversity. It is intended to support churches in embodying a public witness that is both truthful and compassionate, courageous and caring.

In keeping with Osmer's pragmatic task, the chapter attends to questions of leadership practice, ecclesial formation, and public engagement. It considers how churches might cultivate theological coherence, institutional accountability, and practical wisdom in navigating the tensions between confrontation and accompaniment. Attention is also given to the constraints and possibilities facing churches as they seek to enact an integrated prophetic-pastoral ministry within contested public spaces.

By proposing concrete pathways for action, this chapter completes the study's movement from description and interpretation to normative theological discernment and practical response. In doing so, it offers a constructive contribution to public pastoral theology by equipping the Church in Zimbabwe to engage socio-political realities in ways that are theologically grounded, contextually sensitive, and oriented toward the common good.

5.2 Presuppositions informing public pastoral care in Zimbabwe

To develop a feasible and effective public pastoral care strategy within Zimbabwe's complex socio-political landscape, it is vital to identify some key assumptions that underpin our discussion and conclusions. "A presupposition is something that you assume to be true,

especially something that you must assume is true in order to continue with what you are saying or thinking” (Collins Dictionary, n.d.). A practical theological reflection must be both contextual and normative, addressing both the realities on the ground and the theological vision drawn from Scripture and tradition (Osmer, 2011:2–3). Therefore, these presuppositions are a combination of observations about Zimbabwe’s socio-political environment with theological truths that shape the Church’s public identity and mission.

These presuppositions are grouped into three essential and interrelated categories that shape the development of a faithful public pastoral care model: contextual, theological, and ecclesial (Magezi, 2019:1). Contextual presuppositions reflect the socio-political, economic, and cultural realities shaping life in Zimbabwe today. Theological presuppositions express core Christian convictions about God’s character, the Church’s mission, and its public responsibility. Ecclesial presuppositions address the Church’s internal health, leadership capacity, and institutional integrity, factors that directly impact its credibility and influence.

These categories are not separate silos but overlapping spheres. Public pastoral care is practised at the intersection of society, theology, and the Church. When this happens, public pastoral care fulfils its mandate of being a “model of care for the community and its members and by the community and its members...a strategic participation in people’s lives ...” (Magezi, 2019:1). However, public pastoral care does not happen at this intersection; it becomes unhelpful. For example, if a model is shaped only by context, it may slip into reactive activism with little theological depth. If it draws solely from theology, it risks becoming abstract and disconnected from people’s lived realities. If it is restricted to internal Church dynamics, it may become self-protective and narrow. A credible and transformative approach must therefore integrate all three: grounded in real-world suffering, influenced by theological conviction, and sustained by a Church capable of meaningful engagement in Zimbabwe’s complex public life.

5.2.1 Contextual presuppositions

5.2.1.1 *Zimbabwe’s socio-political crisis is deep, systemic, and ongoing*

The brokenness in Zimbabwe stems from a longstanding system of political manipulation, economic injustice, institutional decay, and social fragmentation. It is not merely the outcome of isolated events or poor policies. These systemic failures have led to the weakening of public institutions, widespread poverty, and a pervasive culture of fear and mistrust. The repercussions are not only structural but also social and psychological, resulting in trauma, disillusionment, and a profound sense of powerlessness that spans generations.

Manyonganise (2017:9) characterises Zimbabwe as a society marked by persistent instability and hardship, where citizens live with constant uncertainty and weakened institutional support. Magezi and Tagwirei (2022:3–5) similarly point to how political and economic dysfunction have disoriented everyday life, making long-term social flourishing increasingly difficult.

Recognising this reality is crucial. Any serious model of public pastoral care must begin with the assumption that Zimbabwean society is not only struggling with policy failure but is also carrying the weight of prolonged systemic breakdown that demands holistic, public healing.

5.2.1.2 *The Church no longer holds uncontested moral authority in public life*

Zimbabwe's church once held significant cultural and moral authority. However, in recent decades, its role as the main moral voice has diminished. The public sphere has become more diverse, influenced by new groups and discourses ranging from political parties and traditional religion to civil society, online influencers, and prosperity-focused religious movements. In this changing landscape, the Church is no longer assumed to be the nation's conscience; instead, its voice now competes with others and must be earned through credibility and integrity (Nanthambwe, & Magezi, 2024:1).

Public theologians, such as Kim (2017:14), argue that in plural and contested societies, the Church must reposition itself as a participant in public moral discourse, rather than as its gatekeeper. She stresses the need for "a public theology that listens, learns, and contributes from a place of humility and theological integrity." In other words, the Church must speak to the public rather than with it. Similarly, Day and Kim (2017:4–5) describe the Church as "one of many publics," meaning its authority must now arise from lived witness rather than inherited privilege.

This shift has significant implications for pastoral care in Zimbabwe. As Myers (2010:125) notes in his reflections on holistic mission, Christian communities must resist retreating into internal spiritual comfort zones. Instead, they must engage in the public arena of development, justice, and healing, recognising that authority is relational and earned through presence, service, and coherence of word and deed.

This presupposition, therefore, assumes that the Church must navigate its public role without assuming entitlement to influence. It must speak with moral clarity that is grounded in compassion and credibility. In Zimbabwe, where the Church is sometimes co-opted or distrusted, public pastoral care must begin with listening, presence, and theological authenticity in the face of pluralism.

5.2.2 Theological presuppositions

5.2.2.1 *Pastoral and prophetic roles must be integrated as one public theological mandate*

The fragmentation between the Church's pastoral and prophetic functions has significantly limited its effectiveness in responding to Zimbabwe's complex public challenges (Magezi & Tagwirei, 2023:1). In many instances, Church leaders either lean toward pastoral ministry, which emphasises care, comfort, and personal healing, or toward prophetic engagement, which emphasises critique, confrontation, and social justice. Rarely are these functions held together in a cohesive and theologically grounded approach. As a result, the Church is often perceived as either spiritually nurturing but socially irrelevant, or politically vocal but emotionally disconnected.

Yet Scripture presents a different model. The ministry of Jesus embodied both compassion and confrontation—he comforted the wounded, welcomed the excluded, and also challenged the powerful and overturned unjust structures. This integrated witness remains the template for the Church's public identity. Brueggemann (2018:13) reminds us that prophetic ministry involves “truth-telling in the face of denial,” calling communities to see and name reality as God sees it. But if this truth-telling lacks pastoral sensitivity, it risks becoming harsh, performative, or even abusive.

Conversely, McClure (2011:229) argues that pastoral theology must encompass both consolation and critique, recognising that real care includes naming and addressing the systems that produce suffering. In public ministry, care and confrontation are not opposites—they are companions. Magezi (2019:4) reinforces this view within the Southern African context, asserting that in contexts of structural poverty, trauma, and injustice, “pastoral ministry must be deeply theological and socially engaged,” refusing to separate the needs of the soul from the cries of the society.

Therefore, this study assumes that the prophetic and pastoral roles of the Church are not separate callings, but one unified mandate: to bear public witness to God's justice and mercy in an integrated, embodied way. Public pastoral care, if it is to be credible in Zimbabwe, must recover this holistic expression of ministry, grounded in truth, expressed through compassion, and aimed at both healing the broken and transforming the unjust.

5.2.2.2 *Public pastoral care must be both contextually engaged and theologically grounded*

Effective pastoral engagement must address both the lived realities of suffering and the enduring truths of the Christian faith. In a crisis-ridden context like Zimbabwe, the ministry cannot afford to be abstract or escapist. Nor can it become so context-bound that it loses its theological foundation.

Myers (2010:125) argues that a holistic mission must connect faith with justice, healing, and development. Magezi (2019:4–5) similarly insists that pastoral care must be rooted in sound theology while being practically responsive. A credible public pastoral model must hold context and theology in creative tension. And its praxis, as Niemandt (2019:1–10) further argues, must be “rooted in Christ and grounded in neighbourhoods.”

Therefore, this study assumes that faithful public pastoral care must be contextually alert and theologically anchored. It must listen deeply to the voices of those suffering in Zimbabwe’s broken landscape, while also drawing from the wellspring of Scripture and Christian tradition to offer a vision of hope, healing, and justice. Only then can it speak with both integrity and relevance, ministering not just to souls, but to whole persons and the wider society.

5.2.3 Ecclesial presuppositions

5.2.3.1 *Political co-optation and institutional compromise remain real threats to Church integrity*

In Zimbabwe’s volatile political landscape, the Church’s public voice is often undermined not only by external pressures but also by internal compromises. While the Church has the potential to serve as a moral compass during times of national crisis, this role is frequently compromised by its entanglement with political power. Subtle forms of patronage, co-optation, and selective engagement with ruling elites can erode the Church’s prophetic credibility and lessen its capacity to speak truthfully into public life.

Magezi and Tagwirei (2022:4) emphasise how the Church’s muted critique of injustice under Zimbabwe’s so-called new dispensation exposes a troubling pattern of silence in the face of systemic abuse. Instead of embodying a prophetic imagination, much ecclesial discourse has become domesticated, shaped by political convenience rather than theological conviction. Gunda (2018:69, 76, 93) critiques this tendency, arguing that parts of the Church have often been colonised by political ideologies, producing a theology that baptises injustice instead of challenging it.

Brueggemann (2018:16) reminds us that authentic prophetic ministry does not emerge from alignment with dominant narratives, but from fidelity to God's alternative vision, one that disrupts the status quo and amplifies the voices of the marginalised. This alternative consciousness is what empowers the Church to critique injustice, embody compassion, and offer hope.

Therefore, this study presupposes that public pastoral care in Zimbabwe must be exercised with ethical vigilance and theological independence. It must resist the lure of political accommodation, even when cloaked in religious language or material benefits. In a context where ecclesial compromise is often rewarded with access and visibility, public pastoral leaders must choose integrity over influence. Only a Church disentangled from political manipulation can offer credible care, prophetic truth, and healing presence in the public sphere.

5.2.3.2 Courageous, collaborative, and theologically trained leadership is essential for effective public ministry

Addressing the deep and complex wounds of Zimbabwean society requires more than just good intentions or spontaneous activism. It calls for a new kind of leadership; leaders who are spiritually mature, theologically prepared, socially perceptive, and brave enough to speak out and act against injustice. In a climate of fear, division, and institutional exhaustion, such leadership is crucial for credible and transformative public pastoral care.

Public pastoral ministry is a disciplined and theologically informed practice. It is a cognitive praxis that requires leaders to be trained in both theological reflection and contextual engagement (Kholopa, 2022:17). As Nel (2005:446) observes, "the development of the ability to reflect, theologically, on theory and praxis, is critical in theological training," particularly for those tasked with caring for the identity of the local faith community in competent and creative ways. Similarly, Schner (1993:63) underscores that effective formation involves "the appropriation, assimilation, and internalisation of the faith tradition," enabling leaders to serve with integrity, wisdom, and vocational clarity.

Furthermore, the challenges facing Zimbabwe cannot be solved by individuals acting alone or through isolated denominational efforts. The magnitude and complexity of the crisis require collaborative, ecumenical, and cross-sector partnerships that embody the unity and diversity of the Body of Christ. Kretzschmar (2017:2) advocates for leadership that is both prophetic and enduring, not just reactive in times of crisis but dedicated to a long-term vision of justice

and healing. Such leadership requires humility, mutual accountability, and a willingness to collaborate across theological and institutional boundaries.

This study presupposes, therefore, that courageous and collaborative leadership, grounded in theological formation and public responsibility, is essential for any effective model of public pastoral care in Zimbabwe. The Church's future public witness depends not only on what is proclaimed, but also on who proclaims it, how they lead, and with whom they stand.

5.3 Theological rationale for the proposed model

The proposed model of public pastoral care in this chapter is fundamentally a theological endeavour, an effort to embody the Church's faithful participation in God's redemptive mission across the world. This section offers the theological rationale that connects the convictions outlined in Chapter 4 and Section 5.2.1 above to the form and structure of the model presented in 5.4.

The rationale provided here is essential because, without it, the proposed model risks being mistaken for a purely context-driven or human-constructed intervention. In reality, it is rooted in the theological conviction that the Church's presence and participation in the public sphere are fundamentally informed and sustained by God (van Aarde, 2008:1225). The practice of public pastoral care is not merely a response to socio-political needs; it is a participation in God's redemptive mission, an embodied theology that reflects who God is and how God acts. Contextual realities such as injustice, trauma, and social fragmentation do not define the Church's mission; instead, they highlight the need for God's redemptive presence and influence how it is authentically embodied in the world. As Useni and Dreyer (2025:2), drawing on Miroslav Volf, rightly observe, public theology affirms that Christian engagement with society is not merely an ethical choice, but a theological vocation rooted in God's call to pursue justice, healing, and reconciliation. Public pastoral care, therefore, is not simply ministry in the public sphere; it is God's ministry through the Church in the public domain. Similarly, De Beer and Swart (2014:2–3) argue that public theology becomes most credible when it emerges from a synergy between theological vision and socio-political action, not driven by expediency but by a faithful response to God's call for the common good. Thus, public pastoral care is not a reaction to crisis but a faithful participation in God's ongoing, redemptive work; it is an embodied witness that proclaims hope, justice, and compassion amid brokenness.

It is from this foundation that public pastoral care, as an expression of God's mission rather than a human initiative, arises, and from which the theological structure of the model develops. The Church does not invent its role in the public square; it discovers and lives into it through

faithful participation in what God is already doing (Wax, 2022). The theological framework that follows offers not just justification but also guidance. It clarifies how the Church, as God's agent, embodies pastoral care in ways that are both faithful to its divine calling and responsive to Zimbabwe's wounded context. Four key theological themes shape this framework: *missio Dei*, integral mission, incarnational presence, and the theology of shalom. These themes emphasise the theological importance of public pastoral care and articulate a faithful framework through which the Church engages society with humility, moral courage, and doctrinal integrity.

5.3.1 Missio Dei and Integral Mission

At the core of this model is the conviction that all Christian ministry originates from the *missio Dei*: the mission of God. This Latin term frames the Church's mission as God's initiative rather than a human effort (Bentley, 2009:19). God is the source of mission, and the Church is graciously called to engage in God's redemptive work in the world. As Harold (2018:6) states, the Church's mission is a part of this larger mission; it serves as an instrument within God's broader purposes, not as their entirety.

Bosch (1991:392) captures this with clarity: "Mission has its origin in the heart of God. God is a fountain of sending love. This is the deepest source of mission. It is impossible to penetrate deeper still; there is mission because God loves people." This theological foundation shifts the centre of mission from the Church to God: Father, Son, and Spirit. As Ott *et al.* (2010:62) affirm, grounding mission in the *missio Dei* does not diminish the role of Scripture or human responsibility. Instead, "it reframes our understanding of mission in terms of God's own character and prerogative. The mission of the church is embedded in the great drama of God's mission."

This theological orientation has significant implications. As shown in Chapter 4, Scripture consistently reveals a God who is not distant or abstract, but immanent, deeply engaged in the realities of human suffering. From Genesis to Revelation, the biblical drama reveals God as one who acts within history to bring healing, justice, and liberation.

The Church, therefore, is not the initiator of mission but a discerning participant in God's ongoing redemptive activity. As Bosch (1991:390) puts it, "Mission is not the Church's; it is God's." This perspective reorients the Church's role: not as a self-directed agent but as a responsive community, seeking where God is already at work in society and joining in that work with humility and courage.

Thus, public pastoral care must be both theologically grounded and contextually engaged. Theological grounding emerges from recognising that the Church's public role is derived from the nature of God as sender, redeemer, and sustainer (Magezi & Manzanga, 2024:2). Contextual engagement arises from discerning how this divine mission speaks into the specific wounds and traumas of Zimbabwe's social reality (Niemandt, 2019:1–10). The model begins not with human suffering, but with divine initiative. Zimbabwe's brokenness is not the starting point, but the context in which God is already at work, and into which the Church is called to respond.

This calling to respond holistically is captured in the theological concept of integral mission: a framework that affirms the inseparability of proclaiming the gospel and embodying it through acts of justice, compassion, and healing. Emerging from the Latin American evangelical tradition and championed by theologians such as René Padilla and Samuel Escobar, integral mission critiques any artificial separation between evangelism and social responsibility. As Wright (2006:313), "It is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world, as that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission – God's mission." Integral mission, then, is the Church's faithful participation in the *missio Dei* in ways that address both spiritual and structural dimensions of human suffering. The Lausanne Movement describes it as "the task of bringing the whole of life under the lordship of Jesus Christ' and includes the affirmation that there is no biblical dichotomy between evangelistic and social responsibility in bringing Christ's peace to the poor and oppressed" (Lausanne Movement, online, n.d).

In Zimbabwe's fractured society, where oppression, inequality, and trauma are both personal and systemic, public pastoral care that ignores either proclamation or social action is incomplete. Integral mission challenges the Church to reflect the fullness of Christ's ministry, which involved healing bodies, challenging injustice, forgiving sins, and restoring dignity. It is holistic because it proclaims and demonstrates the gospel simultaneously (Micah Network, 2001:1). What Flemming (2013:266) describes as the task of expressing the word through deed and demonstrating the deed through word. This resonates deeply with the biblical foundations laid out in Chapter 4, where God's redemptive acts in history are seen as both personal and public, spiritual and social.

The model of public pastoral care proposed in this study embodies an integrated theological vision that refuses to separate pastoral compassion from prophetic responsibility. It moves beyond a dichotomised approach that either focuses solely on individual care or exclusively on public advocacy. Instead, it weaves both dimensions together as contextual expressions of God's kingdom amid societal crisis (Ott *et al.*, 2010:87). This integration is essential. When

pastoral care is divorced from the social realities people face, it risks becoming a privatised and spiritually abstract exercise (Magezi, 2019:141–143). Conversely, prophetic engagement that lacks pastoral sensitivity can easily devolve into ideological activism, lacking theological grounding and relational integrity (Flemming, 2013:266–267). Integral mission offers a corrective by affirming that Christian witness must be holistic, flowing from a love that is expressed in truth (1 Jn 3:18), and embodying both the justice and the mercy of God in every sphere of life. Similarly, Wright (2006:313) insists that the mission of God, rightly understood, always holds together social concern and spiritual transformation, as both are integral to God's redemptive purpose.

5.3.2 Incarnational Presence

Another key theological theme that informs this model is the idea of the Church's incarnational presence. At the heart of Christian theology is the conviction that God took on flesh and entered human history in the person of Jesus Christ (Jn 1:14). This incarnational act is not only a revelation of God's character, but also a pattern for Christian ministry. Magezi and Manzanga (2024:5) describe this as "entry into human life [as] the public identification with human social conditions." Similarly, Ott *et al.* (2010:61, 70–71) affirm that the incarnation defines the shape of Christian mission—it is about mediating the life of Christ in the world through proximity, solidarity, and service.

In Christian theology, the incarnation underscores God's deep concern for humanity (Nanthambwe, 2024:2). A God who stepped into the mess of human life to redeem his people, who lived among the poor, touched the leper, wept with mourners, and challenged oppressive systems. As Nanthambwe (2024:2) puts it, "this act of incarnation signifies a direct engagement with human experiences, struggles and joys, emphasising a tangible connection between the divine and the human." For Bevans and Schroeder (2004:350), this incarnational engagement reflects a kenotic movement; an intentional self-emptying for the sake of others, which must define all faithful Christian mission.

This vision of presence has particular urgency in Zimbabwe, a context marked by social fragmentation, institutional decay, and intergenerational trauma. As outlined earlier, Zimbabwe is not merely going through hardship; it is a deeply wounded society in need of healing. In such a context, the Church must do more than speak; it must be seen. As Magezi and Manzanga (2024:5) note, "being incarnational is linked with visibility and relationality as one seeks to address human situations." Thus, one of the core pillars of the model, presence, flows directly from this theological conviction: ministry begins not with programmes but with proximity; showing up, listening, and standing alongside those in pain.

This incarnational presence serves as a vital corrective to disembodied theology or purely institutional ministry. Bonhoeffer's provocation rings deeply: "The Church is the Church only when it exists for others... not dominating but helping and serving." Public pastoral care, grounded in incarnational presence, means the Church must not claim privilege or power but must live among the people, sharing in their struggles, embodying Christ's love, and interpreting faith through a humble witness. Detached theological reflection cannot address real wounds, and prophetic critique alone, if not rooted in compassion, cannot offer to heal. As Bosch (1991:518) asserts, the incarnation is not merely God's entry into history but a call for the Church to "exist in solidarity with the world," especially where suffering is most acute.

Such presence, however, is never neutral. It is inherently political, not in a partisan sense, but in its capacity to disrupt systems that benefit from the Church's absence or silence. Moltmann (1993:228) describes the incarnation as "a radical protest against the dehumanising forces of history," insisting that the knowledge of the cross brings a conflict between God who becomes man and man who wants to become God. This conflict "destroys the destruction of man... and in this way, restores the humanity of dehumanized man."

Volf (2011:15) echoes this, noting that a truly public faith engages society with humility and hope, rejecting domination and disengagement in favour of reconciliatory presence. In this sense, incarnational theology is not passive. It demands a ministry of redemptive solidarity that offers not only critique but healing, not only speech but embodied witness.

Public pastoral care, rooted in this incarnational theology, must reflect that redemptive solidarity. It calls on the Church to be present where suffering exists, to challenge dehumanisation, and to embody Christ's compassionate presence by offering healing, dignity, and hope amid suffering. As Nouwen (1989:22) emphasises, Christian leaders are not called to be mere professionals but "wounded healers"; companions in pain and hope.

For the Zimbabwean Church, to be incarnational is to oppose despair by embracing solidarity, hope, and public visibility. It involves offering pastoral care not just within the sanctuary, but also on the streets, in clinic queues, and at protest lines. Thus, incarnational presence becomes not merely a theological ideal but a tangible approach. It reminds the Church that its authority derives not from institutional rank but from its readiness to be with the people, in suffering and in hope.

5.3.3 Theology of shalom- seeking wholeness in public life

The final theological theme informing the model is the biblical vision of shalom: a wholeness that encompasses justice, peace, restoration, and flourishing at personal and communal levels

(Franklin, 2020:1–2; Foster, 2010:51). This vision is powerfully expressed in passages such as Jeremiah 29:7, where God calls His people to “seek the welfare (*shalom*) of the city,” and Isaiah 58:6–12, which links acts of justice; loosening the bonds of wickedness, sharing bread with the hungry, sheltering the poor; with divine healing and societal renewal. In these texts, *shalom* is not abstract; it is profoundly moral, social, and economic.

Scholars such as Cornelius Plantinga Jr. (1995:10) argue that *shalom* is the biblical concept that most fully captures God’s vision for justice and human flourishing. He describes it as “the webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfilment, and delight.” Similarly, Walter Brueggemann (2001:16–18) insists that *shalom* embodies the prophetic imagination; a counter-vision to systems of exploitation, where peace is inseparable from justice. Christopher Wright (2006:268) also affirms that God’s mission encompasses the restoration of relationships at every level of life, including spiritual, social, economic, and ecological spheres.

Such a vision affirms that God’s redemptive mission is directed not merely toward spiritual consolation but toward the holistic restoration of communities. It invites the Church to participate in a ministry that integrates personal healing with structural transformation, embodying *shalom* as a public, pastoral, and prophetic calling in the midst of broken societies.

In Chapter 4, we saw how Jesus embodied *shalom* through acts of reconciliation, healing, and liberation (Luke 4:18–19). He became the presence of God’s peace in the world. This *shalom*, as depicted in Scripture, always extends beyond private spirituality into public life. It is the hope for redeemed communities, even nations. *Shalom*, as Franklin (2020:2) notes, reflects a hopeful vision for human relationships, characterised by the presence of an authentic and nurturing community.

This theology takes on urgent significance in Zimbabwe’s wounded public space, marked by systemic violence, corruption, economic collapse, and fractured relationships. In such a context, *shalom* is not a spiritual luxury or abstract ideal; it is a theological imperative. It reflects God’s desire for the restoration of right relationships and the flourishing of all creation. As Desmond Tutu reminds us, “God’s *shalom*... involves inevitably righteousness, justice, wholeness, fullness of life... sharing and reconciliation.” The Church is uniquely positioned to serve as a facilitator of *shalom*, not through dominance or political alignment, but through faithful witness and healing service in a pluralistic society. This vision calls for constant vigilance against political co-optation. A *shalom*-driven pastoral care model resists partisan compromise and instead embraces prophetic solidarity with the wounded and marginalised.

Thus, *shalom* theology demands a Church that seeks justice, cultivates peace, and acts for reconciliation, not merely survives in safe spaces. It shapes a model for care that integrates presence, prophetic voice, and participation in redemptive action, rooted in the conviction that God desires flourishing, not just survival. Public pastoral care, grounded in *shalom*, becomes not only compassionate ministry but missional resistance to brokenness; reflecting God's kingdom in Zimbabwe's contested public sphere.

5.3.4 Summary

The theological rationale outlined above underscores that public pastoral care is not an invention of the Church, but a faithful expression of God's mission in the world. It embodies the triune God's desire for healing, justice, and restored relationships within society. The themes of *missio Dei*, integral mission, incarnational presence, and *shalom* each illuminate the theological backbone of the model, showing how the Church's actions are shaped not by strategy alone, but by deeply held convictions about who God is and what God calls the Church to be. The following section transitions from theological grounding to structural design, presenting the proposed model's key functions, logic, and intended impact within Zimbabwe's contested public sphere.

5.4 Proposed public pastoral care model

5.4.1 Conceptual overview of the model

Building on the theological rationale and presuppositions outlined in the previous sections, this part of the chapter presents a structured model designed to guide the Church's public engagement in Zimbabwe. The proposed model aims to equip the Church to not only act from theological conviction but also with strategic clarity, pastoral sensitivity, and contextual responsiveness. It seeks to bridge the gap between theological intent and practical ministry by offering a framework that is both biblically grounded and socially engaged.

The model proposes a three-tiered structure, comprising:

1. Strategic Foundation
2. Strategic Pillars
3. Strategic Actions

These components are not standalone; instead, they build upon one another in a logical and theological progression: from conviction to posture to practice. This tiered structure ensures internal coherence and external relevance, allowing the Church to remain faithful to its identity

in Christ while effectively engaging Zimbabwe's complex public sphere. What follows is a brief discussion of these three components and their interconnection. A detailed discussion will be provided later in the chapter.

5.4.1.1 Strategic Foundation - rooted in theology and context

At the base of the model is the Strategic Foundation, which integrates two essential elements: theological clarity and contextual awareness. Theological clarity anchors the Church's public presence in the *missio Dei*, the redemptive mission of God in the world, ensuring that ministry is grounded in biblical conviction and not reactive activism. Contextual awareness, on the other hand, is an acute attentiveness to the lived realities of the socio-political context. Together, these two elements form the foundational lens through which public pastoral care is both understood and implemented.

5.4.1.2 Strategic Pillars - embodied ecclesial posture

Built on this foundation are the Strategic Pillars, which comprise three interconnected aspects of the Church's identity and engagement: presence, participation, and proclamation. These pillars shape how the Church inhabits the public square.

- i. Presence refers to the Church's incarnational ministry- being with and among the people in their suffering. This includes solidarity, listening, and visible accompaniment.
- ii. Participation captures the Church's active role in society- engaging systems, forming alliances, and facilitating healing processes.
- iii. Proclamation speaks to the Church's prophetic task- naming injustice, articulating hope, and bearing witness to God's justice and peace.

These pillars express the Church's ecclesial posture, how it stands, speaks, and serves in public. Each pillar reinforces the others. Without presence, a proclamation lacks credibility. Without participation, presence becomes passive. Without proclamation, participation can lose its theological direction.

5.4.1.3 Strategic Actions: concrete ministry practices

The final tier of the model is Strategic Actions. These translate the theological and pastoral commitments into tangible ministry practices. These actions are shaped by the pillars above and include practical expressions such as trauma healing ministries, civic education, liturgical lament, etc. These actions enable the model to function. They are not comprehensive but serve as illustrations of the kinds of responses public pastoral care can take in Zimbabwe's contested and fragile context.

In summary, this three-tiered model – Foundation, Pillars, Actions – offers an integrated and actionable approach to public pastoral care. The foundation defines the model’s theological and contextual anchoring. The pillars shape the Church’s posture. The actions apply this posture to real needs. In the sections that follow, each component will be unpacked in detail to demonstrate how this model can enable the Church in Zimbabwe to embody redemptive presence, respond prophetically, and participate meaningfully in the healing of its society.

5.4.2 The strategic framework – A model for public pastoral care

The preceding discussion outlined the theological grounding that informs the proposed model. These theological convictions outlined above ensure that the proposed public pastoral model is a deliberate and theologically informed participation in God’s redemptive mission, rather than a reactive response to social dysfunction. Building on this, the proceeding discussion of this section proposes a three-tiered model of public pastoral care that offers both conceptual clarity and practical direction for the Church in Zimbabwe. The model is built with three strategic components: Strategic foundation, Strategic pillars and Strategic actions. Each of these components builds on the other, integrating theological depth, contextual insight, and actionable direction.

This model is proposed as a dynamic guide that can be adapted across different church traditions and socio-political settings. The aim is that it serves as a bridge between theological vision and practical implementation, ensuring that the Church’s public witness remains biblically faithful, contextually sensitive, and pastorally responsive. Below is a visual representation of the model followed with a detailed explanation of each component.

5.4.2.1 Strategic foundation

The model is built on two key foundational elements: a theological understanding of God’s redemptive purposes and a contextual discernment of Zimbabwe’s historical and social landscape. Therefore, there is a need for theological clarity and contextual awareness. Anchoring the model in this dual understanding ensures it is both theologically sound and contextually relevant (de Vries, 2016:3-5). Theology provides the Church’s compass, grounding it in God’s character and redemptive purposes, while context supplies the terrain—the lived realities where that theology must be faithfully and wisely embodied. Without this foundation, any model of public pastoral care risks becoming either doctrinally disconnected or socially irrelevant.

i. Theological clarity

The Church's engagement in the public sphere, as part of the broader societal fabric, must be rooted not in institutional ambition or political convenience, but in its theological identity as a participant in the *missio Dei*: God's mission to heal, redeem, and restore creation (Bosch, 1991:390–392; Wright, 2006:313; Osmer, 2008:5). The Church, as a partner in this mission, is called to reflect the incarnational presence of Christ (Jn 1: 14), embody the wholeness of shalom (Isa. 58: 6- 12), and live as a prophetic voice against injustice (Mic. 6: 8; Luke 4: 18-19). Its ministry in the public arena, therefore, is not merely a sociological intervention but a theological vocation that is Christologically rooted, ecclesially grounded, and eschatologically hopeful.

Grounding the Church's public pastoral care theologically ensures that its ministry is not reduced to humanitarian aid or political activism but remains a distinct ecclesial act, rooted in Christ's redemptive mission and shaped by the Church's calling to healing, justice, and faithful witness. It protects the Church from the temptation to endorse the status quo uncritically; and affirms that the Church must reflect the character of God as liberator and healer (De Gruchy, 2004:27). Graham (2005:223) emphasises that "the salvation of the world, and not the survival of the Church, is and should be the guiding principle of public theology." She rejects theological engagement that merely echoes institutional interest over societal renewal. This shift in focus redirects the Church's public action from self-preservation to a redemptive presence.

Without theological clarity, the Church's pastoral efforts risk becoming mere activism, lacking the distinctiveness that stems from the gospel (Lartey, 2003:30-31). Theological grounding guards against such drift. It prepares the Church to act not just out of necessity, but out of calling. The ministry of presence, healing, advocacy, and reconciliation in public life must be rooted in a clear understanding of who God is and what God calls the Church to be in the world. In a context like Zimbabwe, where theology has sometimes been misused to justify silence, complicity, or institutional self-interest, this clarity is both prophetic and pastoral.

ii. Contextual Clarity

Alongside theological depth, the Church must develop contextual intelligence. Theology cannot be accurately expressed without considering the social, political, and historical contexts in which the people it aims to serve live. In Zimbabwe, this involves understanding issues such as the legacies of colonialism, ongoing political repression, structural poverty, intergenerational trauma, and the decline of public trust. The Church's care ministry must be "embedded within the sociopolitical and cultural matrix of its context", not as a peripheral concern but as its very backbone. As Magezi (2016; 2019; 2020) observes, pastoral caregiving

in Africa is shaped by Ubuntu relationality, cultural norms, historical trauma, and public suffering, responding not with detached theology but with contextually rooted healing.

Contextual awareness, however, does not undermine the integrity of theology; instead, it allows theology to be genuinely expressed within the real-life experiences of a specific community. While Vanhoozer (2005:312) rightly warns that theology must not permit “the concerns and questions of the present culture to set the theological agenda,” dismissing contextual discernment altogether risks producing a disembodied theology, abstract, detached, and ultimately removed from the genuine struggles of life.

Graham (2013:77) addresses this tension directly, asserting that “Christian theology becomes public when it takes seriously the concrete realities and moral struggles of its context, not to accommodate culture, but to redeem it.” In the same vein, Lartey (2003:30-31, 44, 63–64) argues that engaging with context is not a weakening of theology but its proper enactment: authentic pastoral care, he insists, “must be anchored in the vision of God’s care; otherwise, it risks becoming a secularised form of helping.”

From this perspective, contextual clarity is not opposed to theological integrity; it is its faithful unfolding in history. The Church must learn to read the signs of the times, not to conform to them, but to respond with incarnational presence and prophetic wisdom, echoing Christ’s own ministry within the particularities of human experience.

iii. Summary

Together, theological and contextual clarity establish the strategic foundation of this model. They protect public pastoral care from two extremes: doctrinal rigidity that ignores suffering and reactive activism that lacks theological depth. In the Zimbabwean context, where both dangers are real, the integration of these elements ensures that the Church’s ministry remains rooted in God and actively engaged with the world.

5.4.2.2 Strategic pillars of the model

Building on a theological and contextual basis, the proposed model of public pastoral care in Zimbabwe rests on three interconnected pillars: presence, participation, and proclamation. These pillars guide how the Church fulfils its vocation in a divided society, not by withdrawing into spiritual abstraction, but through visible, active, and courageous witness in the public sphere. They translate the strategic foundation, theological conviction, and contextual discernment into tangible practices. Each pillar represents a crucial aspect of the Church’s vocation, and together, they form a comprehensive response to the nation’s wounds.

These three pillars are grounded in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, who dwelt among the people (presence), engaged with their social realities (participation), and challenged unjust systems (proclamation). Collectively, they shape a model of pastoral care that is deeply incarnational, contextually relevant, and theologically robust.

i. Presence

The first pillar of this model is the pillar of presence. This pillar highlights the Church's intentional solidarity in spaces of human suffering. It embodies a deliberate ministry of proximity that reflects the incarnational nature of God's self-giving love in Christ (Jn 1:14). The core belief behind this pillar is that God entered human chaos to redeem and restore humanity, and that same God has invited the Church to join in His mission to redeem, heal, and restore the world. The Church engages not through passive observation, but by actively being in the trenches with people. This kind of presence calls the Church out of the margins of detachment and into the trenches of lived experience. As Magezi (2006:2) puts it, pastoral care means "being on the frontlines of life with people"—what he also describes as "being with the other" (Magezi, 2019:1–9). It is a theologically grounded companionship—a ministry not of solutions from above, but of being with those who are grieving, struggling, or marginalised. Nouwen (1989) captures this in his vision of the Church as a "wounded healer", not offering solutions from above, but ministering through shared vulnerability, listening, and compassion.

In this light, presence is not just a method; it is a missional identity. It guards the Church from becoming a Christian ghetto, disconnected from the realities of the world. Especially in post-colonial African contexts, such as Zimbabwe, this kind of presence challenges hierarchical and aloof models of leadership inherited from colonial mission frameworks. It calls instead for leaders who are rooted in the pain of their people, who listen, lament, and dwell among the wounded. To be visibly and empathetically present in Zimbabwe's contested public spaces is a theological act. It proclaims solidarity with the oppressed, affirms human dignity, and offers a living witness of hope and restoration: a Church fully engaged in the mission of God.

ii. Participation

The second pillar of this model is participation, which involves the Church's active involvement in the public sphere as both a moral witness and a communal force for transformation. Participation extends beyond mere presence; it encompasses collaboration, service, advocacy, and contributions to the nation-building process. While presence denotes solidarity, participation demands embodied agency. It involves entering public life not merely as

observers or sympathisers but as co-labourers in God's redemptive mission (*missio Dei*), contributing to the healing, justice, and flourishing of society.

A faithful ministry of the Church has theologically informed practices rooted in context and action. Participation, therefore, is a question of ecclesial integrity: What does it mean for the Church to be faithfully present and vocationally responsible in the life of the nation? It asks how the Church builds trust, nurtures belonging, catalyses social healing, and contributes to the common good in ways that reflect the kingdom of God (De Gruchy, 2004:51)

The Church's public witness is not about domination or withdrawal but about a dialogue-based, sacrificial presence that aims for justice in partnership with others. De Gruchy (2004:45–63) argues that the Church's public engagement should reject both retreat into privatised spirituality and co-option by power structures; it should instead pursue "transformative participation in civil society guided by the gospel." In contexts like Zimbabwe, characterised by socio-political instability, economic uncertainty, and diminished trust in public institutions, the Church is uniquely placed to serve as a bridge-builder, encouraging reconciliation, demonstrating ethical leadership, and restoring the social fabric through inclusive civic participation.

Moreover, participation requires a collaborative posture. The Church cannot act in isolation. As Bosch (1991:368–370) argues, authentic mission must be ecumenical and integrative, involving the Church in cooperative efforts that reflect the unity and compassion of the gospel. In this way, the Church becomes a sign and instrument of God's justice, not by asserting dominance, but by working alongside others in the pursuit of peace, restoration, and human dignity (cf. Bosch, 1991:375–380). As it participates, it echoes Christ's pattern of incarnational service, prophetic challenge, and redemptive love for the world. This public witness is most effective when embedded in relationships of mutual respect and common purpose, as Guder (2000:114–117) emphasises: the missional Church collaborates with others in seeking the welfare of the community, embodying God's reconciling intent for all creation.

iii. Proclamation

The third pillar, Proclamation, speaks to the Church's calling to tell the truth publicly, boldly, compassionately, and consistently, in the face of injustice, falsehood, and oppression. This extends beyond spoken words; it encompasses symbolic acts, moral protests, advocacy, and lamentation in public spaces.

The Church, rooted in its identity as a community shaped by God's justice, is called to proclaim and enact the gospel of divine justice, hope and care (Mic. 6:8; Lu. 4:18-19). Brueggemann

(2001:3) reminds us that prophetic ministry is not just critique: it is about evoking hope, inviting society to imagine a new reality grounded in justice, mercy, and truth.

In contexts like Zimbabwe, where political fear, manipulation, and silence often suppress moral clarity, public proclamation requires courage. It may include pastoral letters, peaceful protests, a critique of unjust policies, or a public lament. As Volf (2011:23,37) argues, public faith is most genuine when it seeks the common good humbly, not by imposing, but by imagining justice shaped by love and reconciliation rather than coercion or triumphalism. Public proclamation thus becomes a “redemptive interruption”, a disruption of normalised injustice, rooted in humility and prophetic clarity, rather than a forceful demand born of ideological anger. Boesak (2017:45) further affirms that genuine prophetic witness must be grounded in suffering solidarity, challenging not only structures of injustice but also calling the Church itself to account when it remains silent. Thus, prophetic proclamation is both a critique of empire and a call to embody hopeful resistance grounded in love and justice.

iv. Summary

These three pillars, presence, participation, and proclamation are essential to this public pastoral care model. In practice, they support each other. A Church that is present will recognise the need for participation. A Church that participates actively will often be driven to prophetic speech. A Church that speaks prophetically must stay visibly present, lest it lose relational trust.

Together, these pillars call the Church in Zimbabwe to a public ministry that is not only visible but also redemptive. They form a theological and practical triad for public pastoral care, ensuring that the Church remains spiritually rooted, contextually aware, and actively engaged in healing and restoring the nation’s public life.

5.4.2.3 Strategic Actions - turning pillars into practice

This section transitions from a theoretical to a practical discussion. It offers suggestions for effective strategies to translate the strategic pillars of presence, participation, and proclamation into tangible ministry actions, rooted in Zimbabwean public theology and informed by the realities of local ministry. Rather than prescribing a static list of universal tasks, the model proposes a discernment-based framework to help churches and theological institutions generate contextually grounded actions. These actions flow from the strategic pillars of presence, participation, and proclamation, and must be informed by theological conviction, contextual insight, and the prophetic-pastoral interplay central to faithful public ministry.

As Zimbabwe continues to face layers of political trauma, economic collapse, and social fragmentation, churches must not only ask what to do but also how and why to act in ways that reflect God's redemptive mission (Baloyi, 2024:1). In the words of Osmer (2008:33-34), practical theological wisdom grows when communities "interpret the present in light of God's purposes," discerning faithful responses to their particular time and place. This model therefore encourages churches to cultivate strategic agency, not dependency on external instructions, empowering them to act wisely and boldly in their unique settings.

i. Root actions in theological and contextual clarity

Strategic actions must be based on a dual foundation: a strong theological vision and careful discernment within the local context. A contextual analysis enables Christian communities to discern more faithfully how God might be calling them to respond within their context. Without this, the ministry risks becoming reactive, fragmented, or ideologically compromised. The Church, as Magezi and Manzanga (2024:2) explain, "...as an interpretive community in a world with social ills and must constantly seek to engage with God's patterns of praxis." 'God's patterns of praxis are redemptive, and failing to root their actions in God's redemptive praxis may cause the Church to default to general goodwill rather than transformative engagement. Therefore, each action should ask:

- a. How does this express the *missio Dei*: God's healing and justice for society?
- b. How does this speak into contextual realities?

As noted earlier in this chapter, this model does not support theology shaped by context in a reductionist sense, but one that discerns how eternal truths must be embodied within shifting human conditions (Vanhoozer, 2005:312).

ii. Discern actions collectively and prayerfully

Most challenges and struggles that shape the contextual realities are lived experiences within communities. Therefore, to effectively mediate healing and shalom, actions must be discerned communally through prayer, communal dialogue, pastoral dialogue, and theological reflection (Holland & Henriot, 1983:3). Strategic action is not individual activism but ecclesial witness. It should be ecumenical. Osmer (2008:4–5) argues that when Christian communities engage in contextual analysis together, they are better positioned to discern how God might be calling them to respond.

Congregations, pastors, theological colleges, and church networks can establish action planning forums where scripture, context, and ministry opportunities are prayerfully explored.

This encourages shared responsibility, boosts ownership, creativity, and commitment. It empowers churches to not only analyse their context but also respond with theological and pastoral integrity. When Christian communities dedicate time to examine their context collectively, they are better prepared to discern and embody God's mission in meaningful and transformative ways.

iii. Balance prophetic boldness with pastoral tenderness

In line with the prophetic–pastoral interplay outlined in previous sections, every strategic action must strike a balance between confrontation and compassion. Prophetic proclamation without relational presence risks becoming combative and ineffective, while pastoral comfort without public witness can drift into quietism. Cilliers (2004:25) underscores this tension, warning that prophetic preaching without pastoral compassion can become cruel, while pastoral care devoid of prophetic challenge can become sentimental and irrelevant. Effective public pastoral ministry thus requires a balance of presence and proclamation, rooted both in compassion and courageous truth-telling. Strategic actions must therefore integrate:

- a. proclamation (naming injustice, moral failures, or societal dysfunction),
- b. presence (being alongside the broken in compassion), and
- c. restoration (seeking redemptive outcomes rather than revenge).

Thus, modelling a redemptive interruption that is humble and hopeful, not triumphalist (Volf, 2011:15).

iv. Cultivate a national vision through local action

Although Zimbabwe's socio-political challenges are national in scope, their effects are felt locally. Therefore, any efforts to meaningfully address these challenges must be guided by a compelling national vision for justice, healing, and renewal, along with a grassroots implementation strategy. The Church's public witness must start at the grassroots level. It is at community level that the Church is closest to people's suffering and therefore best positioned to identify and address specific needs.

These local efforts should not operate in silos. Instead, they must be deliberately integrated into a broader national strategy. Manyonganise (2017:121) warns that despite the efforts of national ecumenical bodies, the disconnect between grassroots churches and national-level structures often weakens the Church's public influence. A truly transformative witness requires synergy- where local churches align their actions with a shared theological and civic vision,

participating in coordinated campaigns, public advocacy, civic education, and moral leadership.

Chitando and Togarasei (2010:156) support this integrative approach by highlighting how platforms such as the Ecumenical Church Leaders' Forum (ECLF) offer strategic space for churches to respond collaboratively to political, social, and economic issues across both provincial and national levels. Such structures demonstrate that national influence is most sustainable when built upon grassroots momentum and unity.

This "local execution of a national vision" empowers congregations not only to respond contextually but also to contribute meaningfully to Zimbabwe's collective healing. In this way, the Church becomes both prophetic and practical: animating a gospel-centred vision for the nation from the ground up.

v. Commit to ongoing evaluation and adaptation

Finally, the changes that have occurred in Zimbabwe's public space in the last decade attest to the fact that Zimbabwe's public space is fluid. Its social, religious, political and economic dynamics are constantly shifting; nothing is static. Chamburuka (2023:1) describes Zimbabwe's public space as marked by competition, exclusion, intimidation, and a "survival of the fittest" mentality, with church voices often silenced or sidelined amid these dynamics. In such a context, static strategies are quickly outdated and risk irrelevance or even harm. To stay faithful and effective, the Church's strategic actions must be regularly evaluated and adjusted. As practical theologians like Osmer (2008:4–5) argue, faithful Christian practice involves ongoing "situational analysis," interpreting the present through the lens of God's purposes. Such ongoing reflection fosters theological reflexiveness: a disciplined willingness to ask, in community and prayer. Thus, the Church must regularly ask:

- a. Is this action still bearing fruit?
- b. Have new needs emerged?
- c. Are we drifting into partisanship or losing sight of the gospel?

Ongoing reflection, storytelling, and prayerful learning ensure the Church remain grounded and responsive.

vi. A suggested process for churches

To translate this into usable practice, churches may adopt a 5-step discernment cycle:

1. Exegete the Context – Identify public wounds (e.g., corruption, trauma, apathy).

2. Exegete the Word – Discern theological themes that speak into this pain.
3. Discern the Pillar – Ask: Is this a moment for *presence*, *participation*, or *proclamation*?
4. Plan a Fitting Action – Design an action that expresses this pillar (e.g., liturgical lament, civic advocacy, trauma healing groups, or engaging local government).
5. Review and Reflect – Measure fruitfulness; adapt with humility.

vii. Summary

The strategic actions envisioned in this model are not fixed programs but faithful improvisations, shaped by theological depth and contextual honesty. The Church in Zimbabwe must continually discern how to express God’s love, justice, and healing in a society marked by contestation and wounds. This section has provided a framework to help churches develop such actions, not as isolated efforts, but as part of a holistic, incarnational, and prophetic ministry.

5.5 Core strategies for implementation

The previous section outlined and discussed the public pastoral care model we propose to guide the Church in Zimbabwe within a complex socio-political environment. The model, which is theologically grounded and contextually relevant, seeks to foster a faithful and pertinent engagement of the Church in the public sphere. It recognises the prophetic role and pastoral concern as closely linked aspects of its mission. However, a theological vision without a clear implementation strategy, risks remaining idealistic. Therefore, this section shifts focus to exploring strategies for implementing the model. The emphasis is on how the Church in Zimbabwe can embed and sustain this public pastoral care approach in its life and mission. Implementation strategies extend beyond activities; they involve shaping the Church’s culture, leadership, and partnerships to facilitate consistent and faithful witness in the public arena. The following strategic areas are suggested as essential for putting the model into practice:

5.5.1 Capacity building for public engagement

As Zimbabwe’s public sphere becomes more diverse and the Church is no longer the dominant force shaping public life, the Church needs guidance on how to participate effectively in this evolving space (Göle 2010:41). This decline of ecclesial dominance within the public sphere does not, however, signal irrelevance; instead, it invites a more deliberate and equipped presence. The reimagination of its public role must not rely on dominance but on informed and constructive engagement (Magezi & Tagwirei 2022:1–3). For Paradza (2019:4), the Church must cultivate a “Kairos consciousness” that fosters prophetic witness rooted in

local contexts. Nanthambwe and Magezi (2024:3–5) further emphasise the necessity of intentional public engagement. They argue that church communities must be positioned proactively—learning public theology, advocacy, and intersectoral collaboration—to contribute effectively to the common good.

However, this intentional public participation requires specific skills, structures, and innovative institutional approaches to be effective. Therefore, the Church in Zimbabwe must deliberately enhance the capacity of its clergy, lay leaders, theological students, and members with the skills and vision to engage the public sphere meaningfully. The Church must be equipped to understand public theology, analyse social dynamics, and engage with society constructively. Public theology must become a lived practice, embedded in ministry and discipleship—not merely a theoretical framework.

Without this shift, the Church risks being sidelined in conversations that shape national consciousness and community wellbeing, having surrendered its moral voice to politicised narratives, secular ideologies, or less accountable religious movements. The following practical strategies may guide this capacity-building effort:

- i. **Curriculum reform in theological education:** Theological institutions must seriously reconsider their training programmes. It is no longer sufficient to prepare leaders solely for pulpit preaching or church administration. Curriculum reform should encompass public theology, trauma-informed pastoral care, ethics, and civic engagement. Such training is essential as it equips church leaders to navigate not only ecclesial spaces but also marketplaces, civic society, and political arenas (Hove, 2025:1). When shepherds are well-trained in these areas, their influence extends beyond the pulpit; they become catalysts who empower their congregations to participate meaningfully in society (Magezi *et.al*, 2024:3). It also challenges denominational theological colleges, which often focus inwardly on preserving their own traditions, to broaden their perspective by training ministers to be primarily faithful stewards of the *missio Dei*, rather than mere loyalists to denominational identity. This shift promises to produce clergy who are both deeply rooted in theology and actively responsive to Zimbabwe’s social realities.
- ii. **Ongoing training and capacity building:** Churches, denominations, and ecumenical bodies should host regular training workshops to equip clergy, lay workers, and ministry teams with practical tools for public witness. These include skills in policy advocacy, conflict mediation, trauma counselling, and public communication. Such spaces also foster peer learning and contextual innovation in addressing societal challenges. Magezi *et.al* (2024:5) make a crucial observation on the significance of

ongoing training and capacity building. They note that ongoing training and capacity building “of church leaders improves the quality of church members and the growth of the church.” This growth can be attributed to two components: numerical and spiritual growth. It’s essential to note that these two components emerge when the church is positioned as both faithful to its mandate and relevant to its context.

- iii. **Contextual research and theological reflection:** Training must be rooted in local realities. Church leaders and theological students should be trained to engage in community-based research, listening to people's lived experiences, mapping social wounds, and engaging in theological reflection on Zimbabwe’s political, economic, and cultural conditions. Nanthambwe and Magezi (2024:6) stress that sustainable public ministry must emerge from an understanding of local socio-political dynamics rather than imported models.

5.5.2 Strategic collaboration and networks

The proposed model is based on the belief that the Church is one body composed of different denominations and institutions. Because of this, public pastoral care cannot be delivered in isolation; it requires a collaborative effort among various ecclesiastical bodies. As Manyonganise (2020:37–38) rightly states, “... a divided Christian movement is not able to make an effective contribution towards individual and national.” An effective ecclesiastical witness in the face of Zimbabwe’s complex socio-political and economic challenges, therefore, demands responses that transcend denominational boundaries and theological silos. Hence, the model advocates for intentional strategic partnerships—ecumenical, civil, and communal—that aim for sustainable impact.

- i. **Ecumenical Cooperation:** Zimbabwe already benefits from ecumenical platforms such as the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC), the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), and the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD), which have played a significant role in public witness, especially during electoral cycles and national crises. These bodies provide a shared space for consultation and the occasional issuance of pastoral letters or policy statements. However, much of this collaboration remains reactive and event-based. Most engagement is limited to elite clerical voices, with little trickle-down effect to congregational praxis (Ruzivo, 2020:13). To deepen impact, churches need to move beyond joint declarations towards long-term ecumenical programmes, investing in ecumenical theological training, shared platforms for

prophetic action, and grassroots discipleship that fosters a public imagination among ordinary believers (Murwira and Manyeruke, 2020:95–108). De Gruchy (2004:30) rightly reminds us that public theology is “the Church’s ministry with and for society,” not simply the domain of theologians or bishops.

- ii. **Civil society partnerships:** The Church in Zimbabwe has a long-standing partnership with civil society, particularly in areas such as humanitarian relief, health education, and voter mobilisation. Initiatives such as the Churches and Civil Society Forum (CCSF) provide a framework for such partnerships (Ncube, 2014: 283–294).³ These partnerships often work best at the local level, driven by individual relationships or project funding. Yet they remain short term projects, fragmented and usually, as Ncube (2014:289) observes, adopt organisational agendas without fully engaging the church’s theological identities. Therefore, to enhance such partnerships, the Church must develop a robust theology of public engagement that makes space for collaboration without co-optation. Such an intentional theological reflection would inform the Church on what it means to work alongside secular or interfaith partners without compromising its identity. Thus, collectively setting an ecumenical vision for civic partnerships. Another helpful approach would be to establish formal learning collaborations where church leaders and their civic society partners reflect theologically on public action, develop legal and policy literacy, and engage in joint planning. This would ensure partnerships that are both practically effective and theology-informed.
- iii. **Community Stakeholders:** At the local level, churches often engage organically with traditional chiefs, school authorities, and councillors, especially around funerals, crises, and development meetings. These interactions, while important, are often informal and reactive rather than guided by a long-term strategic vision. As previously argued, the effectiveness of public pastoral care depends significantly on the implementation of grassroots initiatives. A credible public ministry must emerge from consistent, trusted relationships at the community level. This demands deliberate investment in local capacity-building, where lay leaders are equipped to engage with community actors, mediate conflicts, and contribute to development processes. Chivasa (2021:10–12), drawing on conflict mediation work in Harare, shows how trained

³<https://www.peaceinsight.org/en/organisations/church-and-civil-society-forumccsf/?location=zimbabwe&theme>

church facilitators can nurture dialogue, build trust, and stimulate collective action when well-prepared. Gondo and Chitando (2019:132) likewise observe that churches already interact regularly with local leadership in various community settings, but these engagements lack sustained strategic depth. Churches can strengthen these relationships by identifying and training liaison teams from within their congregations, teams capable of building bridges with local leadership and engaging proactively in community development efforts.

5.5.3 Resource mobilisation

In Zimbabwe, many church-led public pastoral care initiatives falter not due to a lack of vision or conviction, but because of persistent shortages in financial, intellectual, and relational resources. This deficit is a lived reality that many pastors and congregations continually grapple with. Compounding this challenge is the misuse or mismanagement of the limited resources that do exist, often due to weak accountability structures or a lack of strategic planning (Masimba, 2013; Tagwirei, 2022). Therefore, sustainable and ethical resource mobilisation must become an intentional aspect of public pastoral care in Zimbabwe.

One promising pathway is through collaborative ecumenism, a model that encourages churches across denominations to pool resources and co-create initiatives with communities, particularly in contexts of poverty and vulnerability. Ecumenical collaboration enables churches not only to share burdens but also to multiply their impact and increase accountability (Nanthambwe & Magezi, 2024:2). To strengthen resource mobilisation capacity for public pastoral care, churches might consider the following actions:

- i. Appoint a resource mobilisation team that builds financial partnerships and applies for relevant funding opportunities.
- ii. Budget for public pastoral care work, including trauma healing, justice initiatives, and youth formation programs.
- iii. Partner with like-minded NGOs and Christian institutions for mutual learning and shared platforms.
- iv. Develop documentation and visibility strategies to communicate impact and build credibility.
- v. Build alumni and diaspora support networks for mentoring, prayer, and financial giving.
- vi. Encourage churches to dedicate a portion of their regular budget to community-facing public ministry.

5.5.5 Contextual adaptability

A key strength of this model lies in its flexibility. It should not be applied rigidly across contexts. Each community carries its own historical wounds, cultural dynamics, and socio-political challenges. Thus, the expression of pastoral presence, public participation, and prophetic proclamation must be locally discerned.

- i. **Contextual guidelines:** Churches should be equipped to interpret their own social, economic, and political realities, drawing on the model's components to craft responsive and locally rooted action plans. Effective pastoral care must arise from the lived experiences and narratives of the people, not from abstract or imported frameworks.
- ii. **Decentralised implementation:** National Church bodies and theological institutions can serve by providing broad frameworks and theological training. However, local churches must be given the freedom to interpret and apply the model creatively. As Maluleke (2000:20) stresses, theology in Africa must become a people's theology, decentralised, grassroots, and attentive to the voices on the margins.
- iii. **Storytelling and Feedback Loops:** Continuous learning through testimony and feedback should be embedded into practice. Churches can develop mechanisms for reflecting on their interventions, sharing stories of impact and failure.

By affirming the diversity of local contexts and fostering adaptability, churches are better positioned to serve as healing and hopeful witnesses in their communities.

5.5.6 Summary

This section has demonstrated how the Church can implement coordinated strategies to respond to the complexities of public suffering faithfully. The strategies outlined in this section are not final answers but tools to help the Church move from conviction to faithful presence, from theological vision to lived witness. For public pastoral care to take root in Zimbabwe, there must be sustained investment in equipping leaders, building collaborative relationships, and developing flexible ministry models that honour both the gospel's integrity and the wounds of the people. When pursued with humility and consistency, these core strategies offer a practical roadmap for churches seeking to embody God's healing presence in Zimbabwe's contested public sphere

5.6 Recommendations by stakeholder group

The previous section outlined implementation strategies for the proposed public pastoral care model. This discussion expands on those strategies by emphasising key roles within the model. To ensure successful adoption, implementation must be customised to the specific roles and capacities of main stakeholders in Zimbabwe's ecclesial and social landscape. It provides practical, scalable steps to establish an integrated prophetic and pastoral presence, translating theological reflection into faithful action (Osmer, 2008:176). These recommendations target key stakeholders within the Church ecosystem: leaders, congregations, denominations, theological institutions, and networks. Each group plays a vital role in fostering a faithful, context-aware, and transformative public witness. The aim is not to impose a universal solution but to offer tangible ideas that can guide practical actions across varied contexts.

5.6.1 For Church leaders

Church leaders serve as the primary stewards of both theological vision and pastoral practice. They sit at the frontlines of pain and power. To be both prophetic and pastoral in this role, they must be intentionally equipped. Here are some suggestions:

- i. **Prioritise theological formation:** As a leader, you should continually pursue further development in your theological education. Stay open to ongoing training. This will allow you to critically engage with theological frameworks that connect faith with justice, healing, and advocacy within the Zimbabwean context, positioning you as a strategic influence within Zimbabwe's complex socio-political environment.
- ii. **Lead from the pulpit and the pavement:** Considering Zimbabwe's complex socio-political landscape, church leaders often face the temptation to avoid addressing public issues such as injustice, poverty, and reconciliation from the pulpit. The fear of persecution is genuine and understandable. However, our convictions should be rooted in the example of Jesus Christ, who calls us to share in His suffering for the sake of others' freedom. Therefore, preach with bravery. Allow your sermons, prayers, and liturgies to speak into the public wounds of our era. But do not stop there. Be present — in the streets, in council chambers, in civic spaces where people are suffering. That is where a faithful shepherd belongs.
- iii. **Foster prophetic-pastoral discernment:** Use the suggested discernment cycle to regularly evaluate whether the current situation requires presence, participation, or proclamation; and to guide the church's response accordingly.

- iv. **Guard against political co-optation:** The realities of co-optation are unavoidable. Politicians often create strategies to co-opt influential societal figures, such as pastors, to serve their agendas. Be cautious of this. Stay alert in preserving the Church's independence from partisan agendas while confidently addressing political injustice.
- v. **Invest in lay empowerment:** Remember that your role may never take you directly to the marketplace, but your congregants spend most of their time there, in the public arena with those who are suffering. Therefore, focus your ministry on equipping your congregants to serve in everyday spaces—schools, marketplaces, and local councils. After all, that is Paul's vision of ministry leadership, "... to equip the saints for the work of ministry" (Eph. 4:11–13). Be deliberate in investing in both the practical training and spiritual formation of your congregation.
- vi. **Establish transparent governance structures:** A growing concern among Church leaders involves moral failures and scandals related to financial integrity. Protect yourself by maintaining strong ethical standards, ensuring financial accountability, and involving members in decision-making; these are vital for building trust and managing resources effectively.
- vii. **Consider bi-vocational ministry:** Consider engaging in bi-vocational ministry where possible. It may not be straightforward, but it can provide a level of freedom that financial dependence on ministry sometimes compromises. In contexts like ours, where political or economic pressures can subtly (or directly) influence the pulpit, bi-vocational work allows you to stay clear-eyed and steady. It reduces the temptation to rely on patrons whose support may come with strings attached. And more than that, it puts you alongside the people you serve, sharing their rhythms and feeling their struggles. Like Paul, who made tents while preaching the gospel, your work can become part of your witness: a sign that the gospel cannot be bought or bent.

5.6.2 For Congregations (Individual witness)

As a follower of Christ, you are not only called to worship on Sunday; you are sent to witness throughout the week. Whether you are a teacher, vendor, student, nurse, civil servant, or farmer, your life forms part of the Church's public testimony. You bring Christ into boardrooms, classrooms, market stalls, WhatsApp groups, and kombi queues. That's sacred ground, too. Here are a few ways you can live out a faithful and courageous public witness in Zimbabwe's everyday realities:

- i. **Practice honesty, even when it costs you:** Choose integrity in your work and relationships, even when dishonesty seems common. Refuse to pay or accept bribes. Speak the truth in your workplace, gently but plainly. As Proverbs says, “The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in people who are trustworthy” (Prov. 12:22). Your quiet faithfulness is a form of protest against a culture of corruption.
- ii. **Speak up for others when it’s easier to stay silent:** Whether it’s a family member, a colleague, or a stranger, if you see someone being treated unfairly, find a way to speak or act. Public witnessing often involves small acts of bravery: correcting a hurtful joke, reporting abuse, or defending someone’s dignity. As Proverbs 31:8 says, “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.”
- iii. **Pray with your eyes open:** Don’t only pray for national healing during church services. Let your daily prayers extend to your street, your workplace, your political, societal, and spiritual leaders, as well as the struggling mother at the bus stop. Carry your country in prayer as part of your worship. And where possible, pray with others, even over lunch breaks or after community meetings. Prayer in public life isn’t about performance; it’s about presence.
- iv. **Refuse to be bought by power or fear:** Political loyalty, tribalism, or fear of economic loss can tempt believers to justify injustice. Guard your conscience. Remember, your primary loyalty is not to any political party, tribe, or economic class; it’s to the kingdom of God. As Jesus said, “You cannot serve both God and money” (Matt. 6:24). That also applies to fear and power.
- v. **Build bridges, not walls:** Where there is division, strive to be a peacemaker. Avoid spreading gossip or causing discord in your family, workplace, or church. If possible, bring together people from diverse backgrounds—political, tribal, or generational—to share a meal, listen, and learn from each other. Paul encourages, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Rom. 12:18). Sometimes, public witness involves quietly rebuilding trust.
- vi. **Offer help, even when it's small:** Look for one family to support with food, offer a ride to someone going to register to vote, pass on job leads, and share trusted civic information on WhatsApp. These actions may seem small, but they are kingdom

work. Jesus noticed the widow's coin, the cup of cold water, and the mustard seed. So should we.

- vii. **Keep showing up:** Sometimes faithfulness means continuing to care when others have given up. Show up at the clinic, at community meetings, and at school councils. Your consistent, peaceful presence serves as a witness. Even if you're not loud, people notice when you are steady, principled, and hopeful in your engagement.

Remember, you don't need a title or a microphone to be salt and light. You just need courage, love, and a daily willingness to follow Jesus — publicly, patiently, and persistently. You are the Church in the world. Let your life reflect the character of Christ, wherever He has placed you.

5.6.3 Theological training institutions

Theological seminaries, colleges, and university departments are vital in this context. They serve as the breeding grounds for theological imagination and leadership growth. They are the critical thinkers shaping the theological foundations of the Church. Their role extends beyond teaching doctrine to developing leaders prepared for missional engagement in challenging environments. The following recommendations are proposed for theological training institutions.

- i. **Integrate public theology into curricula:** Enhance existing efforts so that students are empowered to do theology not from an aloof perspective but rooted and wrestling with their own context.
- ii. **Equip students with tools for contextual analysis:** Train students in socio-political exegesis and theological reflection rooted in local realities.
- iii. **Model praxis:** Encourage field-based learning through partnerships with local churches, NGOs, and civic groups where students can apply theology in real-world situations. Additionally, theological institutions are strategically located to facilitate ecumenical collaborations that can improve the implementation process.
- iv. **Promote interdisciplinary learning:** Encourage collaborations with disciplines such as psychology, political science, and development studies to improve graduates' ability for holistic care.

- v. **Spearhead public lectures and seminars:** Theological training institutions should lead in organising regular public lectures and seminars on the connection between theology and important social issues. These platforms serve as vital spaces for shaping public awareness, encouraging theological thought, and promoting informed discussion between church, academia, and society. By hosting such events, institutions help equip both clergy and laypeople to think theologically about issues such as justice, governance, trauma, and reconciliation. These forums should include diverse voices—including theologians, practitioners, civic leaders, and community members—and aim to model constructive, faith-based engagement with Zimbabwe’s real-world problems.

5.6.4 For Denominations

Denominations are organised ecclesial bodies that bring together churches sharing a common theological tradition, polity, and historical heritage. They often have defined leadership hierarchies, institutional governance systems, and doctrinal statements that influence how member churches relate to society and each other. In contexts such as Zimbabwe, where churches are key social institutions, denominations play a significant mediating role between local congregations and the broader socio-political environment. Their importance lies not only in their ability to coordinate and resource churches but also in shaping the theological narratives that inform public engagement. Given this vital position, denominations should actively assume leadership in embedding and expanding models of public pastoral care. Recommended roles include:

- i. **Provide theological and structural support:** National and regional denominational organisations should provide clear theological frameworks and pastoral guidelines that enable local congregations to participate in public ministry without fear, confusion, or compromise. This includes pastoral letters, position statements on national issues, and liturgical resources.
- ii. **Facilitate capacity building across churches:** Denominations can organise large-scale training programmes to equip churches, particularly those in rural or under-resourced areas, with skills in trauma healing, civic engagement, advocacy, and community mobilisation. These efforts ensure that public pastoral care extends beyond urban elites and becomes a church-wide vocation.

- iii. **Promote strategic unity:** Denominations are uniquely positioned to foster collaboration among their member churches. By supporting joint initiatives like advocacy campaigns, disaster response, and social audits, denominations can strengthen the Church's voice and influence in the public sphere. This strategic unity allows churches to speak with a cohesive voice on national issues, reducing fragmentation and boosting credibility.
- iv. **Institutionalise public pastoral priorities:** Public witness should not be seen as an occasional or optional duty. Denominations ought to embed it into their main programmes by incorporating themes of justice, healing, and reconciliation in synods, clergy training, denominational publications, and strategic plans. This institutionalisation shows that public pastoral care is a core part of the Church's mission.

5.6.5 Ecumenical bodies

Ecumenical bodies, such as national church councils, Christian alliances, and interdenominational fellowships, play a unique and strategic role in Zimbabwe's public theological landscape. These structures are more than just administrative platforms; they serve as theological spaces where unity, collaboration, and public witness come together. Their significance is especially notable in a context characterised by denominational fragmentation, politicised religion, and widespread public suffering. Their influence and voice make them vital catalysts for shaping the Church's collective moral and pastoral outlook. Recommendations for ecumenical Bodies:

- i. **Develop common theological statements:** Ecumenical networks should take the lead in issuing joint pastoral letters, public declarations, or position papers in response to national crises such as electoral violence, corruption, or economic injustice. These statements, rooted in the theology of shalom, integral mission, and the prophetic tradition, help articulate a unified moral vision.
- ii. **Coordinate capacity-building programs:** Ecumenical bodies should serve as hubs for training across denominations, equipping clergy and lay members with tools for trauma healing, public engagement, and civic theology. These collaborative efforts promote learning across traditions, reduce duplication, and extend their reach.

- iii. **Foster shared platforms for lament and action:** Ecumenical networks should organise national days of prayer, liturgical lament services, peace marches, and advocacy forums that bear witness to the Church's shared burden for the nation. These spaces offer visible unity in grief and resistance and open channels for healing.
- iv. **Convene theological roundtables on public issues:** Regular interdisciplinary roundtables involving theologians, pastors, civic leaders, and academics can provide fresh theological reflection on issues such as governance, gender, land justice, or youth marginalisation. These discussions help reimagine the Church's public vocation and deepen its practical wisdom for complex contexts.
- v. **Champion faith-based monitoring and advocacy:** During electoral seasons or times of civic tension, ecumenical bodies can support joint Christian observer missions, pastoral accompaniment teams, or advocacy coalitions. Their neutrality and widespread support allow them to engage effectively without seeming partisan. This strengthens the integrity and moral standing of Christian witness.

5.6.6 Summary

The discussion above highlighted some vital roles played by different stakeholders in the model. However, it also clearly showed that each stakeholder bears a unique yet interconnected responsibility in building a robust model of public pastoral care in Zimbabwe. Local congregations provide a presence. Denominations offer theological and structural support. Seminaries develop conscience and competence. Ecumenical bodies unify vision and action. Together, they form what Bosch (1991:519) calls a "community-in-mission," diverse in form but united in redemptive purpose. This section has outlined specific recommendations to help each participant move from reactive ministry to strategic, sustained, and theologically rooted engagement. In a complex socio-political context like Zimbabwe, public pastoral care is not the burden of a few, but the shared calling of the entire Church. By embracing these roles in coordinated, courageous, and Spirit-led ways, the Church can become a faithful signpost of hope, healing, and justice in the nation's contested public square. Nevertheless, as promising as this model is, its implementation will not be without difficulty. The following section explores some of the key challenges that may arise and offers pathways for their mitigation.

5.7 Potential challenges and Mitigation strategies of the Model

While the previous sections outlined and discussed various implementation strategies and described the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders in developing a robust public pastoral care model, the journey to implementation is rarely straightforward. Despite the potential of an integrated approach, realising this vision will inevitably encounter significant challenges. These challenges stem from Zimbabwe's complex socio-political landscape, institutional dynamics within the Church, and the theological tensions that emerge when faith confronts power. This section highlights key obstacles and suggests potential strategies for overcoming them. However, these strategies are not presented as ways to avoid the challenges but to minimise their impact.

5.7.1 Political co-optation and intimidation

i. Challenge:

In Zimbabwe, churches that publicly critique injustice risk being labelled as partisan or destabilising. Political actors have historically sought to co-opt church leaders, especially during election cycles, weakening the Church's prophetic voice (Dombo, 2014:144–145; Magezi & Tagwirei, 2022:1; Dube, 2020:1). This still remains a crucial challenge.

ii. Mitigation strategy:

However, in order to mitigate the threat of co-option and intimidation, the following strategic measures are suggested,

- a. Strengthen theological convictions in prophetic ministry, drawing on biblical models of speaking truth to power (Bentley, 2013).
- b. Build ecumenical solidarity to diffuse the risk from individuals to collective voices.
- c. Maintain non-partisan, values-based advocacy rooted in the gospel, not party politics.
- d. Train church leaders in risk navigation, civic literacy, and ethical public engagement.

5.7.2 Institutional fear and leadership fatigue

i. Challenge:

Many church leaders operate under personal and institutional pressure, fearing backlash from authorities or internal conflicts. Some favour a theology of silence or withdrawal, prioritising survival over public witness.

ii. Mitigation strategy:

- a. Foster peer support networks and pastoral care for church leaders themselves.
- b. Encourage slow, step-by-step implementation starting with low-risk community engagement.
- c. Celebrate small wins and share stories of impact to build confidence and spiritual resilience.
- d. Promote leadership development that includes psychological and emotional resilience.

5.7.3 Theological resistance and doctrinal inflexibility

i. Challenge:

Some theological traditions emphasise personal salvation to the exclusion of public engagement. This creates resistance to the idea of churches addressing justice, governance, or trauma.

ii. Mitigation strategy:

- a. Engage resistant leaders in biblical-theological dialogue, highlighting the public dimensions of Jesus' ministry.
- b. Develop context-specific theological resources that integrate evangelism, discipleship, and social witness.
- c. Offer exposure visits or training that demonstrate successful models of holistic ministry in similar contexts.

5.7.4 Resource constraints and administrative weakness

i. Challenge:

Public pastoral work often depends on sustained resources—financial, human, and organisational. Many congregations lack systems for planning, budgeting, or monitoring such initiatives.

ii. Mitigation Strategy:

- a. Build strategic partnerships with NGOs, mission agencies, and academic institutions.
- b. Develop modest, scalable interventions that match available capacity.
- c. Train local leaders in basic planning, budgeting, and resource mobilisation skills.

- d. Encourage sacrificial giving and transparent stewardship to restore trust in resource use.

5.7.5 Internal division and denominational competition

i. Challenge:

Rivalries among denominations can obstruct ecumenical collaboration. Suspicion regarding doctrine, resources, or leadership often fragments public testimony. doctrine, resources, or leadership prominence often fragments public witness.

ii. Mitigation Strategy:

- a. Prioritise shared action over uniform belief—start with humanitarian or justice-based collaborations.
- b. Use joint training and advocacy forums to build relationships and mutual trust.
- c. Promote a missional ecclesiology that sees unity as essential to witness in a fragmented society.

5.7.6 ConclusionSummary

In sum, the challenges outlined here are neither unexpected nor insurmountable. They underscore the reality that implementing a public pastoral care model in Zimbabwe requires both spiritual depth and strategic wisdom. By anticipating these obstacles and engaging them with resilience, collaboration, and a gospel-centred vision, the Church can sustain its prophetic and pastoral mandate even in a contested and complex environment.

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter has engaged Osmer's pragmatic task by addressing how the Church in Zimbabwe might respond faithfully to its socio-political context. Drawing together the descriptive—empirical, interpretive, and normative insights developed in the preceding chapters, the chapter has shifted the focus from theological discernment to constructive pastoral response. In doing so, it has demonstrated how conviction may be translated into contextually grounded practice.

At the centre of this contribution is the Public Pastoral Care Model, which integrates prophetic voice and pastoral care as mutually reinforcing dimensions of public ministry. Grounded in the biblical portrayal of God as both just and merciful, and attentive to Zimbabwe's political, social,

and ecclesial realities, the model addresses the fragmentation identified in earlier chapters. It offers a coherent framework through which churches may embody truthful critique alongside compassionate accompaniment in their engagement with public life.

The model's organising commitments of presence, participation, and proclamation provide practical orientation for ecclesial practice. Together, these dimensions support an incarnational, engaged, and theologically accountable form of public witness that holds together confrontation and care without collapsing one into the other. In this way, the chapter moves beyond abstract ideals to propose actionable pathways for faithful ministry.

By considering concrete entry points for leaders, congregations, denominational structures, theological institutions, and ecumenical bodies, the chapter acknowledges both the complexity and cost of integrated prophetic–pastoral engagement. While recognising resistance, constraint, and gradual progress, it affirms that sustained public witness remains a necessary task for the Church in Zimbabwe.

In completing Osmer's pragmatic task, this chapter brings the practical theological movement of the study to a coherent close. The final chapter synthesises the study's findings, articulates its core contributions, and offers concluding recommendations for sustaining integrated prophetic and pastoral engagement within Zimbabwe's contemporary socio-political context.

6 CHAPTER 6: Study Findings, Conclusion, & Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the overall findings and conclusions of this study, directly addressing the research questions. The study was primarily guided by the central research question: How can the Church in Zimbabwe effectively integrate its prophetic and pastoral care roles to fulfil its public pastoral mandate, fostering community healing and promoting holistic well-being in Zimbabwe's complex socio-political context?

To elucidate this central research question, we asked the following specifying questions:

- i. How have historical Church-State relations in Zimbabwe shaped the Church's role in socio-political engagement?
- ii. How has the Church in Zimbabwe prophetically and pastorally addressed socio-political issues, and what theological principles motivated these interventions?
- iii. What biblical and theological principles can guide the integration of prophetic and pastoral care roles in socio-political contexts?
- iv. How can a public pastoral care approach be developed to integrate prophetic and pastoral roles for effective Church engagement in Zimbabwe?

To ensure the central research question is answered effectively, the study aimed to explore and enhance the effectiveness of the Church in Zimbabwe in integrating its prophetic and pastoral care roles to fulfil its public pastoral mandate, with a focus on fostering community healing and promoting holistic well-being within Zimbabwe's complex socio-political context. The following objectives, which align with the secondary research questions, were adopted as the guiding pillars of the study.

- i. To analyse the historical relationship between the Church and the state in Zimbabwe concerning socio-political engagement.
- ii. To evaluate the prophetic and pastoral interventions undertaken by Zimbabwean churches in addressing socio-political challenges.
- iii. To identify and analyse biblical and theological principles that inform the integration of prophetic and pastoral care roles.

- iv. To develop a public pastoral care framework that integrates prophetic and pastoral care for effective Church engagement in Zimbabwe.

The following discussion presents the overall findings, conclusions and recommendations guided by the above research questions and objectives. It will conclude by outlining some areas for further study.

6.2 Study findings and Conclusions

6.2.1 Secondary research question (a): How have historical Church-State relations in Zimbabwe shaped the Church's role in socio-political engagement?

This research question aimed to explore how the historical relationship between the Church and the State in Zimbabwe has influenced the Church's socio-political engagement. The findings indicate that this relationship has evolved through four distinct historical stages, each leaving a lasting impact on the Church's public role.

- i. **Colonial Era** – The Church's partnership with colonial authorities enabled access to education, healthcare, and social welfare, but also strengthened colonial dominance, land dispossession, and cultural assimilation. This set a precedent of closeness to political power, which undermined prophetic independence and restricted structural critique.
- ii. **Liberation War** – A significant shift occurred as the Church adopted a more prophetic stance. Influenced by liberation theology and the theology of presence, church leaders opposed racial injustice, sheltered victims, and mobilised for political change. This period demonstrated the Church's potential for united prophetic action when confronted with systemic oppression.
- iii. **Mugabe Era** – Early cooperation in nation-building gradually shifted to political co-option, strategic infiltration, and polarisation. The prophetic voice was weakened, with some leaders aligning with the regime while others faced harassment for speaking out. This era exposed the vulnerability of the Church's public witness when reliant on political goodwill.
- iv. **Post-Mugabe Period** – Despite initial optimism, patterns of repression and co-option have continued. Regime-affiliated religious groups such as Pastors4ED

have further damaged the Church's credibility and cohesion, disrupting its ability to speak with one voice.

Conclusion for Research Question (a):

The study revealed that the historical relationship between the Church and the State in Zimbabwe has alternated between cooperation and confrontation, shaping the Church's current socio-political role in two main ways:

- i. Structurally, it has created enduring tensions between maintaining access to influence and retaining prophetic independence.
- ii. Theologically, it has demonstrated that the Church's most effective socio-political engagement has occurred when prophetic courage and pastoral care were integrated, as during the liberation struggle.

6.2.2 Secondary research question (b): How has the Church in Zimbabwe prophetically and pastorally addressed socio-political issues, and what theological principles motivated these interventions?

This question evaluated the prophetic and pastoral interventions undertaken by Zimbabwean churches in responding to socio-political challenges. The study found that while both roles have been exercised, they have often operated in isolation rather than in synergy.

- i. **Prophetic Interventions** – Churches issued pastoral letters, made public statements, engaged in advocacy, and criticised unjust State policies. Such interventions were especially visible during the liberation struggle and at critical moments of political crisis under Mugabe.
- ii. **Pastoral Interventions** – Churches provided humanitarian relief, counselling, trauma healing, and spiritual support for victims of violence and economic instability. These efforts addressed the immediate needs of affected communities but often lacked systemic challenge.
- iii. **Theological Drivers** – The *Missio Dei*, liberation theology, and the theology of shalom informed both streams of action. These theological frameworks emphasise God's mission in the world, the liberation of the oppressed, and holistic peace.

Conclusion for Research Question (b):

It emerged from the study that the Church in Zimbabwe has been active in both prophetic and pastoral roles but separating these functions has diminished their effectiveness. Prophetic activism without pastoral follow-up has caused burnout and limited community change, while pastoral care without prophetic challenge has left systemic injustices unaddressed. An integrated approach based on the Missio Dei, liberation theology, and shalom is essential for ongoing social and political engagement.

6.2.3 Secondary research question (c): What biblical and theological principles can guide the integration of prophetic and pastoral care roles in socio-political contexts?

This secondary research question aimed to identify and analyse the biblical foundation that informs the integration of prophetic and pastoral care roles. This study found that the integration of prophetic and pastoral roles is theologically grounded in God's character. From creation to the new creation, Scripture consistently presents God as both just and merciful, holy and compassionate; confronting sin while caring for the sinner. The biblical narrative, beginning with Genesis, continuing through the Exodus and the prophetic writings, and culminating in Jesus' ministry and the life of the early Church, shows a dynamic interplay between confrontation and comfort, judgment and grace, honesty and healing.

Conclusion for Research Question (c):

The study concluded that the Church's public witness must reflect this same divine tension. Prophetic and pastoral mandates are not opposing tasks but intertwined elements of God's redemptive purpose. Faithful ministry involves balancing both challenging injustice and confronting wrongdoing while also nurturing, healing, and offering comfort. Neglecting either aspect risks creating a Church that is either harsh and detached or silent and passive, failing to embody God's complete character. By faithfully fulfilling both prophetic and pastoral roles together, the Church reflects God's nature and accomplishes its mission in society.

6.2.4 Secondary research question (d) How can a public pastoral care approach be developed to integrate prophetic and pastoral roles for effective Church engagement in Zimbabwe?

This secondary research question aimed to develop a public pastoral care framework that integrates prophetic and pastoral care for effective Church engagement in Zimbabwe. The

study revealed that the Church in Zimbabwe needs a theologically sound and contextually relevant approach to blending its prophetic and pastoral roles. The study proposed a Public Pastoral Care Model built on three layers: strategic foundations, pillars, and actionable strategies.

- i. **Strategic Foundations:** The model rests on two key foundational elements:
 - a. **Theological grounding** – a clear understanding of God’s redemptive purposes, which integrates His justice and mercy into all public engagement.
 - b. **Contextual discernment** – a nuanced awareness of Zimbabwe’s historical, social, and political landscape, enabling the Church to respond faithfully to local realities.

These foundations ensure that the Church’s public ministry is both theologically robust and socially relevant.

- ii. **Strategic Pillars:** Building on these foundations, the model identifies three interconnected pillars: presence, participation, and proclamation.
 - a. **Presence** – the Church dwells visibly among the people, embodying God’s compassion and relational care.
 - b. **Participation** – the Church engages actively with the social realities of the community, addressing practical needs and injustices.
 - c. **Proclamation** – the Church challenges unjust systems and advocates for truth and righteousness, exercising prophetic courage.

These pillars are rooted in the life and ministry of Jesus, who exemplified presence among the marginalised, participation in their social realities, and proclamation against oppressive structures. Together, they offer a comprehensive framework for pastoral care that is incarnational, contextually responsive, and theologically coherent.

- I. **Strategic Actions:** The model transitions from theory to practice by suggesting strategies that translate these pillars into tangible ministry actions. These strategies are not prescriptive but discernment-based, allowing churches and theological institutions to develop contextually appropriate responses. Practical actions emerge at the intersection of theological conviction, contextual insight, and the integrated

prophetic-pastoral mandate, ensuring that the Church's public witness is faithful, courageous, and compassionate.

Conclusion for Research Question (d):

The study revealed that the Church in Zimbabwe can effectively merge its prophetic and pastoral roles by adopting this Public Pastoral Care Model. By anchoring ministry in God's character, recognising local realities, and implementing the pillars of presence, participation, and proclamation, the Church can address societal wounds comprehensively, offering compassionate care alongside prophetic challenge. This framework offers a practical and theologically grounded approach to maintaining a credible and transformative public witness.

6.2.5 Overall Study Findings and Conclusion

The study concluded that the Church in Zimbabwe can most effectively integrate its prophetic and pastoral roles by adopting a holistic, theologically grounded, and contextually responsive approach. Historical analysis shows that the Church's most significant societal impact occurred when prophetic courage was exercised alongside pastoral care, as exemplified during the liberation struggle, whereas separating these roles weakened its public witness. Contemporary practice, however, often reveals a disconnect between prophetic and pastoral interventions, limiting their transformative potential.

Biblical analysis shows that this integration is rooted in God's character, who is both just and merciful, compassionate and confrontational. Scripture depicts God's mission as developing through a balance of prophetic challenge and pastoral care, establishing a divine pattern for the Church's public ministry. Faithful witness, therefore, requires holding these roles in tension—challenging injustice while caring for the wounded—to avoid harshness, detachment, or silence in the face of societal brokenness.

The Public Pastoral Care Model offers a practical framework for this integration, rooted in theological clarity and contextual understanding. It is implemented through the pillars of presence, participation, and proclamation. By living incarnationally among the people, actively engaging with social realities, and courageously confronting injustice, the Church can regain credibility, promote holistic societal healing, and provide a transformative witness that reflects God's redemptive mission in Zimbabwe. Together, these pillars of the model turn theological conviction and contextual insight into meaningful, adaptable ministry actions.

In summary, the study addresses the central research question: How can the Church in Zimbabwe effectively combine its prophetic and pastoral roles to fulfil its public pastoral

mandate, fostering community healing and promoting holistic well-being within Zimbabwe's complex socio-political context?, as follows: The Church can fulfil its public pastoral mandate by adopting an integrated prophetic-pastoral approach that reflects God's character, is informed by historical and social realities, and is implemented through practical, context-aware strategies. By deliberately merging prophetic courage with pastoral compassion, the Church can restore credibility, encourage holistic societal healing, and provide a transformative witness that embodies God's redemptive mission in the nation.

6.3 Study Recommendations

Based on the findings and synthesis of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to help the Church in Zimbabwe effectively integrate prophetic and pastoral roles and fulfil its public pastoral mandate:

- i. **Leadership Development and Capacity-Building:** Church leaders should be intentionally trained in both prophetic and pastoral ministry. This includes theological formation, practical skills in public engagement, trauma-informed pastoral care, and strategies for navigating political pressures. Targeted capacity-building programs will equip leaders to exercise courage, discernment, and resilience while maintaining theological integrity.
- ii. **Denominational Policy and Support Structures:** Denominations should adopt formal theological statements and policy frameworks that affirm the inseparability of prophetic and pastoral roles. They should allocate resources to initiatives that intentionally integrate justice advocacy with compassionate care and offer tangible support to leaders who face political harassment or opposition due to their public witness.
- iii. **Ecumenical Collaboration:** Churches should strengthen collaboration across denominational boundaries to present a united Christian voice on socio-political issues. This includes joint statements, coordinated pastoral responses to crises, and shared training opportunities on integrated ministry methods. Ecumenical bodies can act as platforms for resource sharing, mutual encouragement, and collective advocacy.
- iv. **Theological Education and Curriculum Reform:** Seminaries and theological institutions should include courses on public pastoral care, prophetic ministry, and political theology. Training must equip ministers to effectively engage with Zimbabwe's socio-political realities, blending theological depth with practical skills for public ministry.

- v. **Congregational Engagement and Community Practice:** Local churches should nurture disciples who embody both compassion and justice in everyday life. Congregations ought to participate in community initiatives that combine pastoral care with prophetic advocacy, take part in civic efforts that promote the common good, and act as practical expressions of the Church's public pastoral mandate.

6.4 Areas for further Research

While this study offers a framework for integrating prophetic and pastoral roles in Zimbabwe, several areas remain open for further investigation:

- i. **Longitudinal impact of integrated public pastoral care:** Future research could monitor the long-term outcomes of churches implementing the Public Pastoral Care Model to evaluate its effectiveness in promoting societal healing, reducing political polarisation, and improving community well-being.
- ii. **Comparative Studies across African contexts:** Studies could investigate how churches in other African countries facing similar socio-political challenges integrate prophetic and pastoral roles, identifying best practices, contextual adaptations, and lessons that could be applicable to Zimbabwe.
- iii. **Gender and Leadership in integrated ministry:** Research could explore how gender dynamics influence the exercise of prophetic and pastoral roles, especially concerning women's participation in public pastoral care and leadership within Zimbabwean churches.
- iv. **Measuring congregational engagement and social impact:** Future research could develop metrics and methods to measure how local congregations engage in integrated ministry projects and the real effects on community development and social transformation.
- v. **Theological refinement and contextualisation:** Further theological research could explore biblical models of prophetic-pastoral integration, examining how Scripture and tradition can guide practices specific to the emerging socio-political and cultural realities. These areas highlight the potential to expand the theological, practical, and social understanding of integrated public pastoral care, contributing to a more comprehensive and contextually relevant body of scholarship in Zimbabwe and beyond.

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