




## CHAPTER SIX

# The Impact of Covid-19 on Liturgical Worship: The Case of the Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe

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### Abstract

This chapter discusses the impact of Covid-19 on worship in Zimbabwe, with special reference to the Lutheran Church, Eastern Diocese, Mt Pleasant Parish. The church is an orthodox and liturgical one whose historical forms of worship are biblical and evangelical. The advent of Covid-19 in March 2020 had a serious impact on worship in the church. Using a qualitative research design, a missiological approach and empirical research, the chapter argues that the pandemic adversely affected human dignity and African identity. The pandemic had negative effect on fellowship: it led to a loss of jobs and livelihood, a reduction in the number of members, a halt to offerings, and impelled sickness and death. Pastoral services such as home visits, baptism, holy communion and funerals all ceased. Weddings, revivals and prayer meetings and prison fellowship were suspended. In an effort to halt the pandemic, the government introduced lockdown measures, compounding the negative impact of the situation. The virus had social, psychological and economic effects on human values. Touted as ‘super-spreader’ of the virus, the church became ‘contagious’ although it is traditionally renowned as a place of healing. The ban on social gatherings undermined the African social fabric; restricted movements and quarantine of infected people fuelled stigma and discrimination; the wearing of masks affected the human ego; and the shunning



of funerals and avoiding of handshakes were taboo and un-cultural. In desperation, people turned to traditional medicines and online services. Vaccines met with low uptake due to conspiracy theories and cultural beliefs. The virus had crossed the Rubicon, delivering a situation that warranted divine intervention. The chapter concludes that the pandemic had negative impact on worship and undermined human dignity and African identity. Yet perhaps a new evangelism based on technology is what is needed to deal with the new phenomenon and to restore African humanness.

### **Introduction**

The Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe is a liturgical church. According to Lutheran doctrine and tradition, the church has an order of service which starts with the first hymn and includes chants punctuated by further hymns, usually five in every service. The order of service reaches its climax in the sermon and ends in reading of the Lord's Prayer and benediction. There are also special services and events such as the Holy Communion, baptism and funerals which follow certain patterns, and others that are based on the church calendar, such as Easter Sunday. The latter is anchored in singing of *litania* which alter the normal liturgy and order of service.

The onset of the Covid-19, a novel virus disease, was first reported in Wuhan City, China, in December 2019 (Odigbo, Eze & Odigbo 2020:1). In March 2020, it spread to the rest of the world and was soon detected in Zimbabwe where, as elsewhere, it posed a challenge to the Lutheran liturgical service, one with which the church had to contend. From the outset, Lutheran Christians felt that the end of the world was imminent. Most Christians regarded it as a sign that the coming of Jesus Christ was at hand. They also regarded it as divine punishment for ungodliness. It was observed to be an instrument both for bringing the people of God back to the path and of salvation. At the same time, the pandemic dehumanised members of the church as they felt impotent to intervene meaningfully to

eradicate it. As such, it was taken as a call to earnestly seek the Kingdom of God and its righteousness (Focus group discussion 25/12/21).

Both the gravity of the pandemic and government-imposed restrictive measures affected the form of worship. This chapter examines the impact of Covid-19 on liturgical worship in the Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe. It is based on research conducted in the Eastern Diocese, at Mt Pleasant parish in Harare.

### **Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

The chapter derives its theoretical framework from Choolayil and Putran (2021), who observe that the Covid-19 pandemic had a deleterious effect on human rights in society. Their study argues that although the government of Zimbabwe's aim was to roll out a set of strategies to contain transmission of the pandemic, measures like lockdown inflicted significant damage on society (Choolayil & Putan 2021:1). Although the study is based on experiences of migrant workers in India, who suffered the net effect of violations of human rights in the course of the pandemic, the observations therein are relevant to this study in terms of the impact of Covid-19 on human dignity and identity in the Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe.

This chapter is based on empirical research in the form of interviews and focus-group discussions with parishioners at Mt Pleasant Parish in Harare. It employs theological and sociological methods in articulating the influence of Covid-19 on human dignity and identity in the church.

### **Restrictive Governmental Measures**

When the virus first struck in the Chinese city of Wuhan, little did the international community anticipate its rapid spread, which occurred within months. As it was spreading across borders into Zimbabwe in March 2020, various governments had to respond swiftly to control the spread of the pandemic. The Zimbabwean government announced a raft of restrictive

lockdown measures that included maintaining social distance, wearing face masks and making use of sanitisers to try to curb the spread of the virus. Gatherings of more than 50 people were banned at workplaces, churches, funerals, weddings, shops, beer halls, restaurants and sporting facilities. Churches and other institutions had to stop operating. As one church member said, “Church *dzakavharwa*” (Church is closed) – all church activities, such as *misangano yevashandiri nezvapupu* (meetings for the women and men’s wings) and those of witnesses, ceased.

A curfew was put in place from 6:00 pm to 6:00 am to control the movement of people, except for staff providing essential services. Above all, the police and army were deployed to help maintain law and order at check points along the main roads. Some people criticised this move as one that undermined human rights (Odigbo *et al* 2020:10). Although, at times, when the pandemic appeared to have receded, some of the restrictive measures were relaxed following review, the church, beer halls and restaurants, among other facilities, remained closed. This meant that church gatherings such as church services, prayer sessions and night vigils could not take place. The result was that members felt degraded in that their activities were considered as being on par with social facilities and liquor shops.

### **Suspension of Gatherings and Introduction of Virtual Services**

The suspension of gatherings negatively impacted on the operations of the Lutheran Church. Prior to the outbreak of Covid-19, church gatherings, such as weekly Sunday services and meetings, had made worship vibrant. The norm is that the calendar is filled with various church programmes and events, such as Easter, Christmas, Thanksgiving, and the Day of Pentecost. Events such as these are observed throughout the year, boosting the church and strengthening the faith of the followers. However, the issuance of the ban by the government and the insistence that people produce Covid-19 cards as

proof of vaccination were so limiting such that church leaders scoffed at the ban on the grounds that the church's mandate is to save souls, not to drive away people (*The Zimbabwean* 15 August 2021). Nevertheless, the ban on gatherings nurtured the commencement of virtual church services.

### Virtual Services

Virtual services involved live-streaming and the posting of pre-recorded sermons to WhatsApp groups. However, the switch to virtual services paralysed the normally lively performance of the congregation, removing the vibrancy of face-to-face church sessions and diluting the impact of physical contact between preachers and congregants. Regular, in-church responses that normally enlivened the worship environment, such as facial expressions, the nodding of heads and some people standing up, clapping or shouting "Halelujah!" were not available to the preacher or to those attending (Private interview 2/10/21) as virtual services are more of a one-way communication system.

While the 'virtual church' became the 'new normal' during the lockdown period, it had some serious shortcomings. The major challenge was that most people could not afford data bundles to attend to live-streaming services; poor network coverage compounded the situation. Most areas in Harare also experience challenges with constant electricity supply, and this affected the smooth flow of services.

The virtual method of the provision of services deprived members of their natural setting of worship and enforced segregation as it allowed only a limited number of participants to attend the services, in particular, those with suitable devices. As some people remarked, "Online service *haiite inobhowa. Hazvienzani nokusangana pameso*" (Online service, it's boring and different from face-to-face interaction). This meant that the main effective mode of virtual service delivery, the use of pre-recorded sermons on WhatsApp groups, became the preserve of the affluent. Yet, in some instances, when lockdown was relaxed, people resorted to home groups

or garden services even though this risked lack of adherence to social distancing; only groups of people whose members were familiar with one another met at selected home groups. Researchers have observed that Covid-19 spread rapidly amongst people who are closely related as they were likely to eschew health safety measures on the basis that they know one another (*Zimbabwe Herald* 20 January 2021). Concerning virtual services, members felt that things were never the same, *zvakasiyana* (of a different quality; private interview 25/02/22).

### Face Masks

As Covid-19 took its toll globally in devastating and unpredictable ways, governments around the world, including that of Zimbabwe, introduced the mandatory wearing of face masks as a precautionary measure to help curb the spread of the virus. Although their efficacy has been the subject of debate, most people complied and wore face masks. As Lupton, Clark and Southerton remark, “from a health perspective it is said to offer protection to others by limiting the distance and spread of the droplets spread through inhalation, speech, sneezing and coughing” (2021:10).

Some Lutherans felt that the wearing of face masks was biblically sanctioned, and they encouraged their fellow members to use them. They referred to passages like Leviticus 13:45–46 to the effect that anyone with a “defiling disease” must “cover the lower part of their face” and engage in social distancing. Other relevant verses include Genesis 24:65 and 2 Timothy 2:15. A backlash against face masks arose when some people felt that they infringed on their freedoms and rights. Others felt that they caused discomfort and affected their breathing. Overall, the attitude was that face masks were tantamount to harnessing people like cattle using *chitomu* or *chaheki* (devices placed over the mouths of cattle during cultivation to prevent them eating crops; private interview 14/11/21). In this sense, Covid-19 diminished the dignity and identity of church members.

## **Quarantining of the Sick**

A further challenge occurred when a family member became infected and had to be isolated in line with health practices. One would all of a sudden become dangerous to the family. According to the script, as soon as one was affected, a husband and wife could not share a bed. When one was infected, neighbours supported the victim by dropping off food and other supplies at the gate in order to help care for the sick while avoiding infection. Under the strict conditions that were in place, only Ministry of Health officials could enter the homes of affected people. The idea of preparing food for the sick and leaving it at the door, in line with the quarantine policy, was a direct challenge to the dignity and identity of a family member, but it was what the Covid-19 measures dictated.

Covid-19 demanded change to the Lutheran way of life in many respects. One was not allowed in a homestead without one's hands having been washed or sanitised. This gave the impression that one was not welcome unless this task had been performed. In African thought, suggesting that one is dirty diminishes one's humanity, dignity and identity. A new ritual, the washing of hands and sanitisation, was born out of the Covid-19 challenges.

## **Impact on Church Events, Sacraments and Rituals**

Covid-19 had serious impact on church events such as Easter and Holy Communion and on other church practices.

### **Easter Events**

Easter holidays constitute one of the most important events in the Lutheran church calendar. This is a festival and cultural holiday which runs from Good Friday to Easter Sunday and celebrates the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is held annually in March or April. For the event, members gather at University of Zimbabwe chapel, the venue for prayers and Bible study, and listen to talks by invited guest speakers, such as the bishop, pastors and other professionals. For instance, in 2022,

the Easter programme included topics such as the power of prayer, mental health and 'Christianity in a new normal' (Mt Pleasant Parish Newsletter, 2022). The programme attracted large gatherings at the church. The event was punctuated with the partaking of Holy Communion. With the incursion of Covid-19 and the regulations to mitigate its spread, such religious practices had come into conflict with church tradition. The lockdown, which banned the Easter gatherings for all Christian denominations, created a strong sense of loss, anxiety, depression, anger among followers. This ban on gathering was received by some of the faithful as unacceptable and as a degradation of religious piety; it was a serious blow to the entire church. It resulted in over-interpretation of the nature of the pandemic, rumours, stigma, and marginalisation and also exacerbated conspiracy theories about the pandemic.

### **Holy Communion**

The Eucharist (Holy Communion) is the culmination of, and the most sacred sacrament in, the liturgy of the Lutheran Church. It is a central rite of the Christian religion: bread and wine are consecrated by the pastor and shared among the members of the congregation, obeying Jesus' command at the Last Supper: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). Prior to the outbreak of Covid-19, the Holy Communion had been administered using one cup for drinking wine (the blood of Christ); the practice was that the pastor used towels to clean the upper layer of the cup before giving it to the next communicant. Yet, with Covid-19, the practice had to be changed – the pastor had a tray bearing several cups, and each congregant would pick a cup, drink the wine and then drop the cup in the rubbish container. Moreover, the common practice had been that communicants queued, and the pastor administered the Lord's Supper to them. The church suspended the celebration of the Lord's Supper during intense Covid-19 lockdown periods. It was served sparingly at garden services when the pastor visited families and undertook Holy Communion with four to six households gathered in one place. These had the advantage of networking and sharing the Word

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together. The Covid-19 restrictions affected members of the church, who felt deprived of its most sacrosanct element. It literally dismantled unity in the family of God.

While the outreach programme benefited followers in the Mt Pleasant area, those beyond the suburb were disadvantaged due to the government's lockdown restrictions. It proved to be difficult for the Lutheran Eastern Diocese bishop and the dean to travel to meet parishioners. In normal situations before the outbreak of the pandemic, one or both would visit congregants in the parish once or twice per year to stay in contact with membership and stimulate growth of the church. In addition, the church leadership would visit the missionary base in Sweden and return with charity donations for the poor. However, the cessation of visits had a negative impact on the souls of the saints. In addition, the church lost a good number of its followers. Prior to Covid-19, the Lutheran Church had served as a place for socialising for members from Mberengwa district and Matabeleland South, where the church had first established roots during the missionary era. Most members had obtained their education at schools, such as Musume, Chegato, Masase, Munene and Manama high schools, in the Mberengwa and Gwanda areas. The church had also become the centre for alumni of the Lutheran schools. Without regular meetings at church, this entire social fabric unravelled, and this led to moral and spiritual decay, with some members not returning. As one commented, "Faith needs strong people not slack" (Private interview, 16/01/22). The pandemic therefore created an opportunity for the faint-hearted to vanish, and it sapped the energy of its committed membership.

### **Home Fellowship**

The practice of home gatherings and worship had been adopted by the church prior to the onset of Covid-19; later it was used as measure to circumvent the spread of the pandemic. It intensified when the pandemic gained a foothold amongst the people. Home gatherings are church services conducted in a person's house by a group of persons from the

same church who live close to one another; such gatherings became a means of continuing church services during lockdown. These small groups are referred to as cell-groups. Each cell-group has a leader who acts as an intermediary between church management and church members: members are able to contact their pastors through their cell-group leaders. If a member is hospitalised, bereaved, put to bed or wants to carry out a special thanksgiving, he or she informs the cell-group leader, who then communicates with the pastor in order to undertake further action.

Prior to the outbreak of Covid-19, many church members were not fully committed to house fellowship meetings even though these had always been encouraged by the leadership by means of announcements. The pandemic and the attendant lockdown prompted the church to revitalise house-fellowship centres, primarily through live streaming on social media platforms and WhatsApp. While such modes of interaction allowed the maintaining of the momentum of the church services, members had difficulties using the facility because of challenges that have already been mentioned – network access and operational costs via electronic devices. As a result, members felt hapless, their power weakened by the pandemic.

### **Music and Dance**

Music and dance are part of African expression of praise and worship in the Lutheran Church. This part of church service was also affected by Covid-19. Prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, congregants used to meet every Sunday and in mid-week for prayer sessions, choir and dance practice. The church services are also punctuated by music and dance. Congregants actively participate in praise and worship, thereby making the worship environment lively. Music, instruments such as piano, drums, jingles and whistles as well as dance make the church service and worship lively and interesting, especially for the youth. Examples of activities include Song 1:

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*Dai pasina Jesu wakandiponesa ndiani waizondiona?*

*Hapana waizondiona, hapana waizondiona, hapana waizondiona.*

Had it not been Jesus who saved me, is there anyone who would do so?

There is no one who could save me...

### And Song 2:

*Hosana huya uvone zvoita nyika, Hosana vuya uvone zvoita nyika*

*Musaita moyo yenyu mikukutu saThomas waramba kutendeuka*

*Wavona mavanga wotendeuka.*

Hosana come and see the world, Hosana come and see the world

Do not harden your hearts like Thomas

Who doubted resurrected Jesus until he touched his scars.

Music and dance invariably constitute a complex and inherent part of human culture and heritage. They are powerful symbolic expressions of people's identity in religious contexts. The fact that the Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe is deeply rooted in the indigenous culture is evident in its promotion of enculturation. At a gathering of the Lutheran Church men and women, youths and old people dance as an expression of faith. According to Mbiti (1976:56), conversion to the gospel takes place within a cultural framework. The gospel has been and should continue to be proclaimed in the melodies of African culture, through the words of our 1 000 languages, through the vibrant tunes of our 3 000 musical instruments, through the joyous reading of our bodies and the solemn symbols of our artists. On that note, church services or ceremonies without music and dance may be unsuccessful in the Lutheran Church. The curtailment of singing in the church in an attempt to control the spread of Covid-19 defaced the blueprint for Lutheran worship.

## **Funeral Rites**

In normal circumstances, Lutherans observe funeral rites for the dead. The Lutheran liturgy allows for funeral ceremonies to be conducted under the leadership of the priest. Lutheran Christians believe that such rituals are meant to connect people with the unseen beings. The rites involve pre-burial rituals such as a handshake when expressing condolences, the body lying in state at the deceased's homestead and viewing of the body; those of spreading the mat in the grave and the removal of shoes and metal items from the corpse; and post-burial gatherings and rituals, such as visiting the grave after burial, the distribution of deceased's property, and the unveiling of the tombstone. Shoko (2007:63) holds that some of the Lutheran practices resonate with traditional customary beliefs and practices, as is typical of Christianity in an African context. According to Petersen (2005:4), a burial following customs and tradition is necessary in order to avoid trouble in the family and in the community; funeral rituals are required to be performed in the prescribed manner to appease the spirits. If the requisite funeral rituals are not performed, people believe that the dead person will come back as a ghost to torment the family and community. In addition, failure to perform the required death rituals may cause mental illness, misfortune and deaths among family members. It is believed that if the dead are not granted due honour upon burial, according to culture and tradition, they may avenge themselves (Shoko 2007:36–37). However, the ban on viewing the bodies of Covid-19 victims and on gatherings of people at funerals meant that most ritual practices were not undertaken. Such burials somehow resembled the burials of paupers, and that scenario desacralised the funeral rituals and demeaned both the dead and the living.

## Impact on Social, Economic and Medical Matters

### The Man's Role

The role of a man in the Bible and in Shona culture was clearly spelt out and functional prior to Covid-19. The duties of the man or husband are spelt out in the Bible; these begin with leadership. The scripture is clear that the husband must be the leader of his home and have control of his life (1 Tim 3). In church, he takes up a leadership position as a bishop, pastor or elder (although, today, female pastors have also been ordained). As such, the wife submits to the husband (Eph 5:21–24). The Bible sums up the role of man as ruler, leader, teacher, lover, protector, provider, manager and priest. In Shona culture, which is patriarchal, the man is head of family, and, as the breadwinner, he provides for, protects and fends for his family. A 'real man' is defined by his power and authority over womenfolk. Yet, at the onset of the disease, the role of men was severely affected by the pandemic. Like everyone else, they had to conform to the dictates of the lockdown and stay at home. Most men suffered from depression because of 'home capture' – their movement was restricted, and they had to sit, day in and day out, at home with their wife and family. Children were also confined to their homes and schools were closed; many cases of child pregnancy were recorded, and many youths turned to drugs. The man became impotent as he watched all this happening to himself and to his family. Such experiences sucked away male power and dominance and can be seen as both anti-biblical and counter-cultural. The man's confinement at home, where he found himself bowing to the woman's dictates, violates the Pauline theology of the father as head of family (Eph 6:4). The woman is usually at home while the man is at work. In the context of Covid-19, the man's role was weakened. One Zimbabwean comedian celebrated the arrival of Covid-19 as welcome news because it disciplined husbands at home. She prayed to God to keep up the pandemic in order to tame the man:

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*Maita henyu Jehova kutiunzira virus vana baba tava kugara navo pamba. Zvanga zvanyanya vachitinyepera kuti vari kubasa kana kuona bhora ivo vari kupfambi. Mwari dai virus raramba riripo ndizvo vana baba kuti vagare pamba. (Private interview, 16/01/22).*

We thank you God for bringing this disease. Our men used to abandon us at home under the pretext that they were fending for their families or watching soccer at the club, yet they entertained prostitutes. God retain this virus indefinitely because we need our men at home.

In this manner was the father's power and dominance whittled away by the pandemic.

### **Social Impact**

Acknowledging the gravity of the Covid-19 pandemic, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2020) noted that the Covid-19 outbreak affected entire populations, but particularly social groups in the most vulnerable situations, such as people living in poverty, older persons, persons with disabilities, youth and indigenous people. The observation is relevant to members of the Lutheran Church who are part of the elderly poor, especially those without access to running water. Due to their limited movement, few obtain employment opportunities, a situation which was exacerbated by the pandemic.

Although the government received Covid-19 funds from international agencies to help ameliorate the dire situation, those resources were not adequate to the population as a whole, leaving most people vulnerable to the disease.

### **Economic Impact**

The finances of the Lutheran Church come from the people. The collections are undertaken in form of offerings (*kutsirano*), tithes, donations, and the like through fundraising activities. Prior to the outbreak of Covid-19, during church services,

members were reminded of the importance of giving tithes and abundant offerings. In response, some church members made large donations as a means of showing off their wealth. Unfortunately, Covid-19 kept many people away from church, and ongoing reminders to give were put on hold. Subsequently, members stopped giving money to the church.

Apart from tithes and offerings, the church uses projects as sources of income. These include selling chickens, a piggery, the sale of uniforms and bazaars operating at parish, deanery and diocese levels. Pastors and church workers receive their pay from funds generated by such activities. The cessation of church services meant that levels of giving declined. Some givers lost their jobs and could not sustain their offerings. As a result, available cash slowly dwindled, and this affected the operations of the church. The pastors, in particular, who survive on the offerings of church members, felt the pinch of the virus as it hurt their congregations and caused embarrassment to the man of the cloth (Earls 2020).

## **Traditional Medicine**

The onset of Covid-19 brought into the spotlight the issue of traditional medicine and its efficacy in the treatment of Covid-19. For a long time, traditional medicine in Zimbabwe has been looked down upon and scandalised by ethnographers and missionaries as evil and inferior, a matter of superstition and magic. The *n'anga* (traditional healer) has been described as a witchdoctor with the power either to kill or to support life (Shoko 2018:1). The Lutheran church has been vocal against the use of traditional medicine and recourse to traditional healers. Anyone viewed as connected to traditional healers risked being excommunicated from the church. However, with the emergence of Covid-19, some Lutheran Christians shifted to traditional medicine to save lives in the face of the ravages of the pandemic. Most people, including some prominent Christians, used traditional herbs in form of roots, tubers and the leaves of trees, which are ground into powder or soaked in water to form concoctions. Some common herbs used include

*zumbani* (*Lippia javanica*), *mufandichimuka* (which boosts immunity), *mukandanyoka*, *moringa*, *mutsine*, *mubvamaropa*, *mtarara* and *mutsambatsi* (Shoko 2007:5). Tubers include *tsangamidzi* (ginger) and *karibekantu*. Most of the herbs were supplemented with more widely used substances such as garlic, lemon, onion and honey. The methods of healing used include *kufukira* (inhaling), which resembles a form of exorcism used in traditional healing circles. While traditional medicine has not been scientifically proven as a cure for Covid-19, the popular belief is that it reduces the symptoms of the disease. Scholars affirm that traditional healing is holistic, covering both physical and spiritual dimensions (Shoko 2007:89). By switching to traditional medicine during the pandemic, Lutherans faltered in their execution of Christian faith. However, the matter ignited the calls for the enculturation of the Gospel in an African context.

### **Benefits of Covid-19**

It would be folly to depict the effects of Covid-19 as being exclusively negative and as only jeopardising dignity and identity in the Lutheran church. There are some positives that accrued from the presence of the virus in Zimbabwe. For instance, the switch to virtual services is in line with globalisation and the fourth industrial revolution, with its emphasis on technological advancement and innovation (Xu, David & Kim 2018:90). Covid-19's interaction with traditional systems represents a call for the enculturation of the gospel in Africa. In fact, Graco (2022) affirms that virtual communication globally has become the 'new normal'.

Covid-19 also benefited the church and families in that the 'stay at home' method of preventing the spread of the disease increased socialisation among family members as they spent much time together. It brought oneness to families because members were always sharing and encouraging each other to stay safe and, for those infected and affected by the virus, to take their medication. Some marriage procedures like *marooro* (lobola) became strictly family affairs in order

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to avoid the spread of Covid-19. Some interviewees had this to say:

*Vanhu vakadzidza kugara pamisha yavo zvakaderedza matambudziko echirwere uye nokupedza makuhwa. Yakatidzorera kuma natural herbs, nokuziva simba riri muma herbs. Covid-19 yakaita kuti vanhu vatsvake Mwari chaizvo (Private interview, 16/01/22).*

People learnt to stay at home, which reduced the spread of the disease, but also to minimise gossiping. It took us back to the use of traditional herbs, and, in the process, conscientised us to the power and potency of traditional medicine. Covid-19 also raised awareness among people to learn to seek God.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings recorded above, this chapter notes the dire situation Covid-19 posed in relation to the liturgy and its effect on human dignity and identity. The chapter makes the recommendations discussed below that are relevant in the post-Covid-19 era.

The church must reflect on the use of traditional medicine in its health system in the post-Covid-19 era. The use of **traditional medicines** such as herbal teas and nutritional support can be considered a complementary approach in the spirit of enculturation to support people's overall health and well-being. However, this must be guided by World Health Organization protocols, and health professionals must be consulted on the matter.

The church should be pragmatic in attending to economic needs that can help mitigate pandemics that affect people's health and wellbeing. It must have a robust resource mobilisation programme and should not totally depend on tithes and offerings for life-saving projects. It is recommended that the church diversifies its means of income so that it is

able to continue operating in case of further unpredictable eventualities such as Covid-19.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted people's daily lives and exposed deeper societal issues such as stigma and discrimination, the church must play a role in restoring **human dignity** and **identity**. This can be accomplished by recognising vulnerability and its interconnectedness with other social issues and by placing an emphasis on re-establishing people's self-respect, especially that of vulnerable people, in accordance with scripture: "I will restore you to health and heal your wounds (Jeremiah 30:17).

### Conclusion

This investigation has revealed that the pandemic led to numerous changes in the liturgical practices within the church. While the pandemic raged, a number of age-old traditions of the church, such as Easter and Holy Communion, were no longer being observed in the same way. Several liturgical practices within the church, for example, funerals and other rituals, were discontinued or modified as the lockdown restrictions were rolled out by the government. Above all, the pandemic, despite its positive role of ushering in the use of new technology, had an overwhelmingly negative effect. Restrictions on movement, the wearing of face masks and the use of sanitisers, quarantine and partaking in the use of traditional medicines affected social and economic dimensions and undermined human dignity and identity within the church. As such, it posed a challenge for Christianity: to review its approach to seeking the Kingdom of God and to devise a new mode of evangelism premised on the dictates of the new normal.

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