
THE ROLE OF CHURCH AMID COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study: To determine the role of the church amid Covid-19 pandemic in Kenya. One of God's ways of speaking to us now is through the past; history is truly a great teacher especially for Christians, and whenever we are faced with hard questions, we can always look to history to help us find the answers. The books of the Old Testament prove this point; the Israelites were no strangers to hardships. We find many instances of wars, famines, and epidemics resulting in great loss of lives in the Old Testament, and the one thing that is similar to all of these events was that God was always in control. There are many events in history where Christians exhibited unconditional love for others. Martin Luther's service during the Bubonic Plague of 1527 is one that every Christian can proudly recall. His letters to the churches during the plague shows that he was socially responsible and never acted in disregard for the life of his fellowmen. In fact, it was his priority to be present where he was needed no matter the circumstance.

Statement of the Problem: The emergence of Covid-19 and the lockdown and social-distancing that has come with it has affected every church across the world. No longer able to meet together, fellowship is now through online worship services, Bible studies and courses. With conferences, festivals and events cancelled, there has been a proliferation of webinars and seminars and 'Zoom-fatigue' for many leaders. While some parts of the Church have struggled with the loss of access to buildings, amongst evangelicals this seems to be less of an issue and contrary to some media reports, we have found that there is not a great clamor for a relaxation of rules on mass gatherings. In general, like society at large, the Church has sought to follow official advice. The emergence of Covid-19 has presented a number of ways in which community has broken down, but also opportunities for the church to step in and respond with solidarity and love. It is in the backdrop of these concerns that this study sought to determine the role of the church amid Covid-19 pandemic in Kenya.

Methodology: The study was a literature based in which relevant literature from across the world were reviewed to obtain study themes.

Result: The findings revealed that social media and other forms of technology serve as an innovative platform for religious leaders and faith-based organizations to communicate with congregations while adhering to social distancing and restriction of movement measures.

Conclusion: The communication campaign are implemented in part to support faith leaders in disseminating health and safety guidance for reopening and attending houses of worship. The messaging addressed potential concerns, fears, anxieties and the dos and don'ts" surrounding safety measures and accurate information on the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendation: It was hence recommended that just as health officials try to explain their recommendations, so experts in the scientific study of religion need to surface religion-abetted value judgments that impact behaviors relevant to viral spread. Experts need to explain where religion is causing problems and find creative ways to communicate alternative ways of thinking.

Keywords: *Role, Church, Covid-19, Pandemic, Kenya.*

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The emergence of Covid-19 and the lockdown and social-distancing that has come with it has affected every church across the world (Sulkowski & Ignatowski, 2020). No longer able to meet together, fellowship is now through online worship services, Bible studies and courses. With conferences, festivals and events cancelled, there has been a proliferation of webinars and seminars and 'Zoom-fatigue' for many leaders. The demand for religion has risen dramatically since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic with political leaders and self-organized groups urging their fellow citizens to pray (Echegaray, Brachya, Vergragt & Zhang (2021). The tendency for people to use religion to deal with crisis can be understood within the religious coping terminology where people use religion as a means to deal with adversity and uncertainty; they pray, seek a closer relation to God or explain the tragedy by reference to an Act of God (Echegaray *et al.*, 2021). Empirical evidence suggests that people impacted by adverse life events such as cancer, heart problems, death in close family, divorce, or injury are more religious than others. Adversity, caused by natural disasters, instigates people across the globe to use their religion more intensively (Bentzen, 2020).

One of God's ways of speaking to us now is through the past; history is truly a great teacher especially for Christians and whenever we are faced with hard questions we can always look to history to help us find the answers (LaMothe, 2021). The books of the Old Testament prove this point; the Israelites were no strangers to hardships. In the Holy Bible there are many instances of wars, famines and epidemics resulting in great loss of lives in the Old Testament, and the one thing that is similar to all of these events was that God was always in control (Rosenberg, 2020). There are many events in history where Christians exhibited unconditional love for others. Martin Luther's service during the Bubonic Plague of 1527 is one that every Christian can proudly recall (Butler, 2021). Martin Luther's letters to the churches during the plague shows that he was socially responsible and never acted in disregard for the life of his fellowmen, it was his priority to be present where he was needed no matter the circumstance (Butler, 2021). We can safely say that Luther was not concerned about his survival but rather saw the urgency to reach out to the lost and practice what he preached, the Gospel and the Kingdom of God; the plague did not suspend his ministry, the plague opened new doors for him to preach and live the Gospel (Duff, 2021).

COVID-19 has forced everyone to push back against the narrative of individualism and remember that we all depend on each other (Francis & Village, 2021). While some parts of the Church have struggled with the loss of access to buildings, amongst evangelicals this seems to be less of an issue and contrary to what has been reported across different media, that there is not a great clamor

for a relaxation of rules on mass gatherings (DeSouza, Parker, Spearman-McCarthy, Duncan & Black, 2021). Generally like society at large, the Church has sought to follow official advice and in this season, the advocacy work at the Evangelical Alliance has been focused on ensuring that the government's emergency powers are proportionate, time-limited and subject to parliamentary scrutiny, and that the elderly and those with learning disabilities are valued and respected in relation to the quality of care and protection they receive (DeSouza *et al*, 2021). Alongside civil liberties concerns regarding plans for tracking and proximity apps, the congregants have also been involved in a range of government roundtables and forums on the vital role of charities and faith groups during the crisis. In the face of this Covid-19 pandemic, churches are expected to play a big role in mobilizing resources so as to meet both the physical and emotional needs of their congregants and communities, as well as to practice the perspective of putting the most marginalized, vulnerable folks at the center of decision-making. This pandemic will reveal who we are, hopefully it will reveal that we are love (Pavlović, 2020).

From the engagement of the church leadership with member churches there have been innumerable stories of the Church supporting vulnerable and isolated people (Francis, Village & Lawson, 2020). This involves delivering food and medicines, providing shelter, supporting key workers and their families, resourcing parents to home-school, and supporting the elderly in their homes. According to Francis, Village and Lawson (2020), the latter has been a priority for the Church because 2.5 million older people have never used the internet. In response to Covid-19 pandemic, in some parts of the world churches have started radio stations to reach those who are house-bound, fearful and in need have comfort and hope (Adichie, 2021). Initiatives to address loneliness provide vital support for those who cannot or do not engage online, Church buildings may be closed across the globe, but the Church is very much open for business. Many churches seem to have adapted well to the new technological demands (Adichie, 2021). It is not uncommon for pastors to report that online attendance of streamed worship services is exceeding normal Sunday attendance figures, sometimes by three or four times as much. A recent poll in UK showed that one in four British adults had tuned in to at least one online religious service during lockdown. It seems that people are looking for hope, for comfort and for answers, and online sermons are proving to be appealing and accessible for many who would not ordinarily enter a church building (Cooper, Jormanainen, Shipepe & Sutinen, 2021). Undoubtedly, this presents a number of challenges for discipleship, but it is an encouraging sign of the enduring power of the gospel in dark times. It also suggests that aspects of digital church will be with us long after the virus has moved on.

Globally, the poor are disproportionately vulnerable to the economic cataclysm, which acutely affected the jobs of 1.6 billion workers that is nearly half of the global workforce (World Bank, 2021). Recently, the US Federal Reserve forecast unemployment in America to rise to 30 per cent by mid-2021. This conservative estimate is particularly alarming when one considers that US unemployment peaked at 26 per cent in the great depression of the 1930's (Hossain, 2021). In the UK, the Office for Budget Responsibility is predicting similar numbers to the Fed, confirmed by the daily news reports of escalating job losses. This prompted the Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, to declare that the UK is facing a recession on a scale (Agrawal, Jamwal & Gupta, 2020). Similarly, Daniel Hannan, a political commentator, observes that a new generation is about to learn what mass unemployment feels like. Despite the mathematical certainty of this next season it seems that many in the society, being traumatized and wearied by fighting the virus, are reluctant to acknowledge what is on the horizon (Agrawal *et al.*, 2020).

Across the globe, the role the Church is playing in dealing with the impact of Covid-19 is a wonderful testimony to the love and compassion of God and this is what it means to be salt and light (Village & Francis, 2021). Even so, there is an urgent need for church leaders to prepare Christians for the challenges and opportunities that are coming; this will require a change of tack and focus and it will also require prophetic imagination and courage. The Catholic Church's initiatives have not gone unnoticed. Philippine citizens on social media have been moved and to signify support, some have shared the hashtag #ChurchInAction on social media (Village & Francis, 2021). These posts showcase the efforts of religious groups to ease the impact of the current crisis, and reflect how citizens on social media perceive a Church that is dynamic and attune to the signs of the times. According to Adichie (2021), it is evident that religious and spiritual interventions play a crucial role in this public health crisis, they guide people to find meaning and acceptance in the midst of suffering while engaging in the deepest questions of life. They provide counsel, refuge, hope and rejuvenation for those who need it (Agrawal et al., 2020). The COVID-19 crisis calls upon all the members of the global community to understand, learn lessons, reflect and reprioritize all aspects of our lives; the physical, the mental and the spiritual.

The public role of Christianity in Africa has gained increased attention from scholars; there are a number of snapshots of the responses of churches to COVID-19 in Africa in the early weeks of disease spread on the continent (Nwaomah & Nwaomah, 2021). In many countries, churches are at the forefront of formal and informal health delivery and disease control, through medical services and faith healing. Studies have shown the influence and the limits of Christian action as governments acted quickly to reduce the spread of COVID-19 (Musyoki, 2020). In Africa, Churches have attempted to carry out their mission as measures were put in place to arrest disease. They maintained worship services, moving them online, they helped Christians make sense of the pandemic and offered themselves as repositories of public trust. In some cases, however, they were less successful than they wished in carrying out their social responsibility because many of their institutions were closed as part of the measures to restrict the spread of disease (Wild-Wood et al., 2021). In Nigeria, dioceses and parishes have been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. After the announcement of the lockdown by the government, many catholic Christians in Nigeria began to lose their faith (Bruce, 2020). The weakness of faith was majorly prompted by restrictions from participating in parish activities because of the lockdown. However, some Catholic's faith became stronger. There were some faithful who still believe that being more prayerful and clinging to God would save the world from such a calamitous situation (Wild-Wood et al., 2021). Also, the church economy was heavily affected, the various means where incomes came into the church were suspended, and the pandemic disrupted liturgical activities in the church. Church buildings were closed to the entire public and some of the faithful were only able to participate in liturgical celebrations through various social media platforms.

In Uganda, early phase religious responses to COVID-19 did not meet public expectations (Isiko, 2020). For example, whereas the Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Church and Muslim community in Uganda own some of the best hospitals in the country, none ever volunteered to provide isolation and treatment centres for COVID-19 patients although later, the Roman Catholic hospital of Lacor in Gulu expressed readiness to work with government to deal with the COVID-19 (Isiko, 2020). Instead, religious institutions were much more concerned with how religious ministers would survive during the lockdown. One of the interviewee was concerned with churches continued stance to provide mobile money numbers for their congregation to send tithes and offerings, oblivious that a great majority of the congregation were not working and instead needed

their help (Namusoke, 2020). Therefore, in the initial stages of the lockdown, there was noticeable lip service from religious and cultural institutions. The church and Muslim community took a backstage, possibly, because of the unconventional mechanisms that had been taken by government to combat COVID-19.

The Roman Catholic Church, despite the effect of COVID-19 and the lockdown on its economy, has been supporting the government and raising awareness on safety measures to combat the virus (Adichie, 2021). For instance, in the diocese of Enugu in southeast Nigeria, it was reported that Bishop Callistus Onaga supported the poor in his diocese by distributing relief and food parcels to over 52 local parishes and deaneries in the state. In Nsukka diocese, another diocese in southeast Nigeria, it was reported that Bishop Godfrey Onah provided relief and food parcels that were distributed to the poor among them (Adichie, 2021). The catholic diocese of Awka reportedly did the same by providing relief materials to those in dire need. Even with the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Catholic Church, the church did not stop in rendering help and support to the government in the health sector and other sectors (Egwu 2020).

Religious leaders and organizations have long played a fundamental role in a community, especially during a time of crisis (Chu, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic is yet another instance where religious leaders have supported their communities in terms of providing physical resources, spiritual guidance and information sharing to name a few, these elements contribute to building community resilience against the pandemic and its associated consequences (Buenaventura, Ho, & Lapid, 2020). In Kenya, religious leaders and faith-based organizations have been diligently working on several initiatives to spread factual information about the virus, implement support mechanisms and resources as well as adjust religious practices to comply with health guidelines (Mbogo, 2020). As part of the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers #SociallyDistantTownHall, the Network invited three religious actors from Kenya to discuss their religious and interreligious approaches for combating the virus with the broader Peacemakers Network. Under the umbrella of the Muslim National COVID-19 Response Committee, a group of physiologists and mental health professionals quickly recognized their need and role in supporting individuals and communities to help build mental resistance. As highlighted in one of the challenges by Professor Karama, the pandemic and its implications has caused a plethora of emotions and stress on individuals (Mbogo, 2020).

The Muslim Psychologist and Councilor Association (MPCA) is a group of 40 psychiatrists, psychologists, counselors and volunteers who offer mental health and psycho-social support to religious and traditional communities in order to mitigate the anticipated mental health crisis by dealing with the immediate distress caused by the pandemic (Feroz et al., 2020). Each of the volunteers are trained in Psychological First Aid (PFA) and are available 24/7 through a toll free hotline. Jesus was clear that people need to be regenerated, but he also calls for his people to change the world by demonstrating signs of his coming kingdom. Cities and communities need to be regenerated. Economic renewal requires political leadership, but at heart it is a grassroots phenomenon, of innovation, inspiration and determination (Feroz et al., 2020). If the Church can rise to the challenge of encouraging social and business entrepreneurship for employment it will play an important historic role. Through and beyond the pandemic this is the most practical and powerful way in which to help people and to shape the future. It is a prime opportunity to recast our relational priorities, both to God and to each other, in such a way that the 'new normal' reflects biblical principles and virtues. This is not an impossible dream, the Church has played this role many times before. Most recently, the great evangelical social reformers of the nineteenth century

provide us with encouragement for this task. Shaftesbury, Howard, More, Wilberforce, Butler, Cadbury, William and Catherine Booth, Barnardo, Mueller and many others understood the dignity of work and the value it plays in individual and social renewal (Adong, 2020). Like them, if we remain rooted in the Word of God and vocal for the gospel, I believe that God will grant us the compassion, creativity and resilience we need to radically transform our society, for his glory and for our healing.

Public health systems in the worst affected countries have been stretched to the limit and beyond, access to essential health services for many other conditions has been compromised, and the disruption of routine immunization services is putting an estimated 80 million children in rich and poor countries alike at risk of diseases like diphtheria, measles and polio (Lee & Morling, 2020). Approximately 1.2 billion students 70% of the world's student population have had their education disrupted by the closure of educational institutions. Moreover, closures, lockdowns and isolation measures have been attended by a sharply increased incidence of domestic violence and abuse against women and children. Economies have been tipped into recession, unemployment driven to record levels, the livelihoods of vast numbers of people around the world imperiled, food insecurity massively increased, and life in countries and communities already mired in poverty has been made even more precarious (Lee & Morling, 2020). While water, hygiene and waste management services are essential to prevent the transmission of the virus, this pandemic is occurring in the context of a global water crisis, in which billions of people around the world do not have access to safe drinking water, sanitation services, or even basic hand washing facilities.

Daily life for people and communities around the world has been radically altered; Physical distancing has reshaped human interaction in many contexts including worship and religious observances (Village & Francis, 2021). Many church communities have been unable to gather for months, even during the Lenten and Easter season, the holiest days in the Christian calendar. Churches and faith communities are called to accompany the most vulnerable people and communities, as well as to be in solidarity with each other (Village & Francis, 2021). Our Lord Jesus Christ shows us with his life, teachings and actions that concern, care and compassion surpass all boundaries, and in this moment of crisis, fear and division it is our calling as Christians to bring hope and healing, for the transformation of society. Even though we may not for the time being be able to gather in large numbers for worship, we remember Jesus' words that "where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Matthew 18:20), and recognize that also in the smaller gatherings required by public health protocols, our Lord is present and at work. At many times during the history of the Church, Christians have been obliged to meet only in small groups, and have yet succeeded in spreading the gospel and continuing the faith. So too can we continue to worship and witness in these times (Lee & Morling, 2020).

In this pandemic, churches and their specialized ministries have continued to serve their communities, to accompany and support those in need, and to work with their constituencies and marginalized people to overcome the challenges they face (Ezechimere, Jacob & Deborah, 2021). We have experienced how partnerships between churches in different parts of the world have strengthened in the face of this crisis, and how churches are striving to support people suffering extreme hardship in these circumstances. We have been inspired by the creativity with which churches have found ways to worship and witness even when unable to gather physically. We have seen how local bonds of community and solidarity have flourished and grown, even as at the level of our governments and societies the commitment to global solidarity has withered and xenophobia even increased (Ezechimere, Jacob & Deborah, 2021). In this Pentecost time, and in this critical

moment, we invite all member churches, ecumenical partners, specialized ministries, and ACT Alliance into a renewed relationship of sharing and active solidarity in the spirit of the first Christian community, in which “All who believed were together and had all things in common” (Acts 2:44), so that we may better serve all of God’s people through this time of crisis and change. We pray that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who guides us on our journey of life and through these challenging times, equip us with love, steadfastness, hope and courage (Saha & Dutta 2020).

As God declares in Isaiah 46:10b, “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure”, the world is experiencing what God has permitted. This does not mean that the pandemic is God’s punishment for a sinful generation. The punishment has already been meted out at the cross; Our Lord Jesus has seen to that, it is best to confess that at present we do not know God’s reason for allowing this to happen (Deguma et al., 2020). The church must rather focus its attention on how and what God wants us to do at this time. So, whatever we do or plan to do, we must act with the assurance that our Father in heaven is running the proceedings and knows the outcome. In recent times, we have been paying too much attention on the material aspects of the church that we have forgotten the basic principles that Christ taught us (Deguma et al., 2020). The world may see us as a charitable or humanitarian organization, but that does not change God’s definition of who we are and what we are to accomplish. Jesus does not give us a condition as to when or where we ought to love one another, which is to say that we are to love one another at all times. What Jesus emphasizes is how we ought to love; we ought to love as He loved us, by giving us His life. Christ’s love for us saves not just our physical body but more so our spiritual being and that very reason is why we have eternal life through Him (Brown, 2021). The spiritual role of the church during this Covid-19 pandemic is therefore to love fellow men as Christ loved the world. In so doing, the church is proclaiming the Gospel not just by words but by deeds (Brown, 2021).

Studies have shown the importance of spirituality in health care as it gives people stability and meaning (Saad & de Medeiros, 2021). Christina Puchalski, for example, enumerates its role in mortality, coping and recovery. The physical aspects of illnesses and mental suffering call for a more compassionate type of health care, which involves walking with people ‘in the midst of their pain’. As such, ‘pastoral care and other spiritual services are an integral part of health care and daily life’. But with all the government lockdown policies, how could the public avail this spiritual support? Catholic congregations in the Philippines have taken steps to provide the public with online-based Church masses, community prayers, spiritual recollections and retreats and Eucharistic adoration and processions (Saad & de Medeiros, 2021). Also, people dealing with issues about mortality, coping and recovery are provided with online formative counselling and pastoral guidance. Aside from these spiritually uplifting programmes, the Catholic Church has also provided personal protective equipment and face masks to health workers, initiated feeding programmes to the poor and has opened its doors to the homeless (Espiritu, et al., 2020). From a theological point of view, such initiatives are inspired by the 3-fold mission of Christ as king, prophet and priest. Religious leaders and organizations have long played a fundamental role in a community, especially during a time of crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic is yet another instance where religious leaders have supported their communities in terms of providing physical resources, spiritual guidance and information sharing to name a few (Bryson, Jet al., 2020). These elements contribute to building community resilience against the pandemic and its associated consequences. In Kenya, religious leaders and faith-based organizations have been diligently working on several initiatives to spread factual information about the virus, implement support mechanisms and resources as well as adjust religious practices to comply with health guidelines (Sulkowski & Ignatowski, 2020).

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Often times, human beings ignore the person and set their eyes on other things; but what is forgotten is that the individual is what makes up the church, and without the individual there is no church (Hollander, Sussman, Purdy Levering & Foster-Karim, 2020). The parable of the lost sheep in the holy bible (ref. Luke 15:3-7), the owner of the sheep leaves the 99 to search for the one that is lost. The early churches probably knew very little about best practices or crisis- management, but they knew their duty was to the person next to them, and they acted as Christ would with some even losing their lives in the process. The spiritual role of the church has not changed even today, there is no greater responsibility for the church right now than to cater to the individual next to us who have been affected in one way or the other by Covid-19 pandemic (Hollander, et al., 2020). Everyone is affected in one way or the other, there are people around us dying to be comforted. Yes, prayer and the Scriptures are our weapons; we must pray and meditate on the Scripture. Yes, charity is indispensable; we ought to give and share to those in need. We must provide sound and relevant sermons and letters through the means we have at our disposal, but these are not enough, the need of the hour is our human touch.

Religious leaders play an important role in supporting their congregants and community. During this time of crisis religious and traditional leaders can support their members to adapt to the new normal of congregational worship and other religious ceremonies, counter all forms of misinformation, stigmas and hate speech and support dialogue with youth and leaders to create lasting solutions to common challenges (Tan, Musa & Su, 2021). An all of society approach is necessary to effectively combat the pandemic and continue to build resilient and peaceful communities. The coronavirus has exposed and exacerbated deep ecclesiastical problems in the identity and witness of the church. Measures to mitigate the pandemic has pushed the church further into the downward spiral of shadowiness; for safety reasons, we have had to abstain from a physical, public gathering (Williams, Miller & Nussbaum, 2021). Not, therefore, able to hear God's word read or preached, and receive the sacrament, in a way we are used to. It has been unsettling. Religious and traditional leaders, as often in crises, serve as valuable sources of comfort, support and sources of information for local communities. As such, these leaders are well positioned to address potential concerns, fears and anxieties regarding COVID-19 (Tan, Musa & Su, 2021).

Churches contain members across the entire spectrum of vulnerability to this virus people with compromised immune systems, older folks, health care workers, and people frequenting hospitals for clinical trials, to name a few (Pavari, 2020). In responding to COVID-19 specifically, churches should ask themselves who among them is the most vulnerable and then act in the best interest of those people. Some church members are also health care professionals from medical doctors to public health specialists. Lift up the voices of the health care professionals in your community and heed their warnings. In a case someone does contract COVID-19, the social stigma is severe and isolating. When a quarantine is enacted, the social isolation may cause some to feel particularly lonely and devastated, especially if they do not have access to a computer or have computer literacy (Tan, Musa & Su, 2021). Some students who attend college campuses that are temporarily shut down have no alternative housing or food options, some people are facing racist and xenophobic attacks based on where the virus originated. All of these represent ways that community has broken down, but also opportunities for the church to step in and respond with solidarity and love. It is in the backdrop of these concerns that this study sought to determine the role of the church amid Covid-19 pandemic in Kenya.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objective of this study was to determine the role of the church amid Covid-19 pandemic in Kenya.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION

From the study objective, the question then becomes what is the role of the church amid Covid-19 pandemic in Kenya?

2.1 EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Wildman, Bulbulia, Sosis and Schjoedt (2020) while evaluating religion and the COVID-19 pandemic, indicated that returning to COVID-19 it can be said that religious community-making directly impacts viral spread either by inhibiting or accelerating social transmission, depending on the specific religious group being considered. The researcher argued that scientific study of religion can help tease apart reasons for religion making one kind of impact rather than another. Standard epidemiological models of viral spread don't take account of human factors such as religious ideologies and values. According to Wildman, Bulbulia, Sosis and Schjoedt (2020), human beings are complex and the way religion weaves itself through the lattice of human life is incredibly intricate. Surfacing such human value factors is a public obligation. The study suggested that just as health officials try to explain their recommendations, so experts in the scientific study of religion need to surface religion-abetted value judgments that impact behaviors relevant to viral spread. Experts need to explain where religion is causing problems and find creative ways to communicate alternative ways of thinking.

Kowalczyk, Roszkowski, Montane, Pawliszak, Tylkowski and Bajek (2020) conducted a study to examine whether the exposure to COVID-19 enhances the faith and to determine the role of the church in Covid-19 pandemic in Poland. The study targeted 324 respondents in which survey was conducted among Polish society from March 13 to 16, 2020. The dates were of significance in the study as it was the period when the Covid-19 fear had started to spread across Poland. The first case of infection with Covid-19 in Poland was reported on March 4, 2020. Since March 14, 2020, an epidemic emergency had been in force, and on March 15, 2020 a sanitary cordon was implemented around the Polish borders, significantly limiting border traffic. The survey was distributed among the general population via Google docs using popular mobile messengers and other social media channels. The study found that with regards to the faith, among the vast majority of participants declared to be Catholics within this group there were 51.5% of men and 48.5% of women.

Kowalczyk et al (2020) indicated that among those Catholic respondents who stated that faith plays a very important role in their lives during Covid-19 pandemic, 57.9% were men and 42.1% were women. The study showed that religious beliefs and practices are associated with various health aspects, such as ability to cope with the disease, recovery after hospitalization and a positive attitude in a difficult situation, including health. Therefore, the importance of spirituality in clinical practice has been highlighted. The study concluded that the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic has caused distinct human responses and reactions, has strengthened us and made us aware of the fragility of our human existence and we have been taught a lesson in humility, but we are also accompanied by feelings of powerlessness and fear. The study also concluded that when being exposed to a threat we use various strategies of survival, faith being one of them, which allows us

to keep hope as well as feel sense of security. The current worldwide situation can bring people together, also through joint prayer.

Wild-Wood, Grant, Adedibu, Barnard, Ojore and Way (2021) in their study sought to establish the Public role of churches in early responses to COVID-19 in Africa with specific look at Nigeria, Congo, Kenya and South Africa. The study established that the public role of Christianity in Africa had gained increased attention from scholars. In most of these countries, churches were found to be at the forefront of formal and informal health delivery and disease control, through medical services and faith healing. An examination of different approaches of Christian communities to the pandemic showed the influence and the limits of Christian action as governments acted quickly to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Using research methods (remote interviews and surveys, and analysis of authors' own denominations or congregations) consonant with physical distancing measures, the authors observed Churches attempting to carry out their mission as measures were put in place to arrest disease. They maintained worship services, moving them online, they helped Christians make sense of the pandemic and offered themselves as repositories of public trust. In some cases, however, they were less successful than they wished in carrying out their social responsibility because many of their institutions were closed as part of the measures to restrict the spread of disease.

Behera (2021) in a study dubbed 'Mission during the COVID-19 Pandemic' indicated that a year into the coronavirus pandemic, churches were searching for new ways of being in mission, according to a senior African Christian leader Rev. Nicta Luubale, general secretary of the Organization of African Instituted Churches. According to Rev. Nicta Luubale, greatest resource in the reflections were at the local community levels. Here, churches are interacting with the impacts of the pandemic on a day-to-day basis and coming up with actions to respond. However, the study found that the biggest challenge was that what people were doing within the framework of their own resources rarely gets known. So we could be missing out on the innovations that are coming from common people as they dream afresh in listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit. The study found that even amid increased global vulnerability, churches and church charities fed the hungry and attended to emergency humanitarian needs, while pastors and priests offered solace to the sick, ministered to the bereaved, and helped bury the dead. Lubaale said the impact of COVID-19 was heavy in almost all sectors with support mechanisms being stretched. The socio-economic impacts are enormous, and the vulnerability of the people in poverty has increased, according to the cleric.

A study by Alice, Reuben, Gabriel and Salimin (2021) on effects of Covid-19 pandemic on religious activities and faith of worshippers in Kenya indicated that a rise in the number of asymptomatic COVID-19 patients made it less tenable to isolate all patients in hospital-based care treatment facilities, especially as Kenya implements a home-based care model to cushion its health system from being overrun by the disease. However, the lack of sufficient objective information and skills for management of successful home based care remained an issue. The study found that NRTP collaborated with National Muslim COVID-19 Response Committee for a training of religious leaders on COVID -19 Home based Care (HBC). The activity contributed in building capacity of Imams, community workers and madrassa teachers to help families and community members around them take full control of the COVID 19 patients in terms of infection prevention, health promotion and general care. The project has ensured the capacity of women are strengthened to enable them to participate effectively in COVID-19 response. This has also been realized through integration of gender and the inclusion of youth in many of the COVID-19 response

engagements. Inter-faith collaboration between both majority and minority faiths is crucial, particularly through the sharing of knowledge, resources, and best practices where possible, especially during this global pandemic.

Marshall, (2020) evaluated the role the church plays in responding to the Ebola epidemic in West Africa. The study was a case study highlighting the complex institutional roles of religious actors and positive and less positive aspects of their involvement, and, notably, how poorly prepared international organizations proved in engaging them in a systematic fashion and the goal being to generate relevant and demanding teaching materials that highlight ethical, cultural, and religious dimensions of contemporary international development topics. The study found that religious institutions and beliefs played various and quite complex roles in this public health emergency. Religious demographics of the three countries (Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone) in West Africa differed significantly, and they were dynamic and complicated; traditional beliefs and practices played important roles alongside Muslim and Christian communities and traditions. According to the study, religious institutions are service providers, part of national health systems, and they provided substantial care as the pandemic unfolded. Traditional healing methods, still an important part of health care were especially important when people hesitated to seek help from health facilities. People's attitudes towards public health messages were colored both by religious beliefs and by the way that religious leaders they trusted responded. The study however found that poor understanding of the religious context frustrated public health strategies and behavior change communication.

In Uganda, Isiko (2020) sought to analyze the religious explanatory models of pandemics offered by the three major religions of Uganda: Christianity, Islam and African Traditional religious belief system. The COVID-19 pandemic which ravaged the whole world, Uganda inclusive, was used as a case study. Based on a qualitative research process, the study relied on key informant interviews, media reports and online sources of information. It was established that pandemics had been part of human history, pandemics provide an opportunity for human reflection on transcendent life since they are a challenge to science and human wisdom, pandemics draw people closer to religion and the spiritual due to the fear, panic, and uncertainty with which they are associated. The study indicated that religions were left with the responsibility of providing theological answers beyond what human beings can comprehend. The hope and trust that society has in religious institutions make them ultimate institutions to provide solace to millions of people affected with a pandemic for which scientists and politicians have no immediate answers. The study further found that in Uganda, several of religious institutions were taking care of vulnerable people like orphans and widows, conducting open air preaching especially among born again churches had become the order of the day with thousands of Christians gathered in one place. However, the closure of places of worship led to shortfalls in financial collections (G. Lubaale, personal interview, 1st April, 2020). Religious clerics could not find alternative sources of employment in such a short time to generate personal revenue. The lockdown led to loss of touch with parishioners, some religious institutions were unable to meet their bills in addition to maintaining business entities like the radio and television stations. In a nutshell, religious institutions were challenged theologically and financially with much of their pastoral work coming to a standstill.

Daniel (2018) assessed the role of the church in promoting HIV/AIDS awareness in Africa. The study found that the church in Africa had maximized her efforts to promote awareness about the disease. These efforts generally ranged from the provision of facts about HIV and AIDS, its modes of transmission, various types of high-risk behaviour that increase its transmission, education for

responsible and positive living, mainly focusing on human sexuality and related issues. This theme is treated in the light of the church's moral teaching emphasizing its fitness and purpose of conjugal love essentially connected with procreation as established in God's creative plan. According to the anthropological vision of Genesis, man and woman received a gift of life from God. By this gift of God's love for them they were empowered to become co-creators with God to give life to new human beings. Thus, the couple, while giving themselves to one another, they also bring forth children as a reflection of their love. The study also indicated that since the first HIV and AIDS cases were discovered in the early 1980s, the Catholic Church has directed her efforts directly at its prevention. These have focused mainly on bringing about more awareness about the disease, its nature, modes of transmission, and its social and spiritual consequences. A reasonable degree of success in this respect has been noted. In spite of prevailing misunderstandings and misconceptions in some parts of Africa, many know about the disease and how it is transmitted. Additionally, during pandemics the church is also fully involved in producing and distributing materials as an integral part of the prevention campaign. These materials range from posters, audio-visual cassettes, handbooks and booklets for counselling dealing with the role of the counsellor and how to conduct counselling sessions, booklets on the methodology of community participatory skills to help community-based trainers and leaders, manuals to guide those working with and caring for patients, and guides to help leaders and trainers to facilitate awareness workshops and seminars, just to mention a few.

Omondi (2020) sought to determine the visibility of the church in the wake of COVID-19 by focusing on Anglican Church of Kenya. The study indicated that the COVID-19 crisis has presented us with an immense challenge to this paradigm. The civil authorities stopped the physical gathering of Christians in churches, and ecclesial authorities endorsed this. In response, the churches adjusted to the order in a variety of ways to maintain visibility and witness. According to Omondi (2020) priests of the Anglican Church made personal delivery of the emblems of communion to members in their homes. In these cases, the priest celebrated the Mass on Sunday and consecrated all the bread to be taken to the parishioners. Then the priest (and a few Eucharistic ministers) went to people's homes (having cleansed their hands and kept the envelopes containing the emblems in brand new ziplock bags to avoid contamination). Depending on the size of the congregation, they applied the method for distributing the sacrament safely to people in their homes on Sundays. The study recommended that the ACK is in a liminal space concerning her visibility and a space of being in transition. She must therefore open herself to listen and search for God's involvement in the world. It is by being in conversation and interpreting God's involvement that she will be in the transition, from an institution founded on truths and established practices, to an open community, vulnerable, and exposed to the impossible possibilities of Christ's presence, outside traditional places. If the ACK, and the Anglican Church, adopt this proposal, any future suspension of physical public gathering would not affect her visibility.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This was a literature based study in which the aim of the study was to review the literature on the role of the church amid Covid-19 pandemic in Kenya. Religious leaders have a special responsibility and opportunity to counter and address misinformation, misleading teachings and rumors, which can spread rapidly throughout a community and potentially perpetuate stereotypes and hate speech. A literature search was conducted by focusing how the church in Kenya has and her role amid Covid-19 pandemic in Kenya.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the literature for across the world, social media and other forms of technology serve as an innovative platform for religious leaders and faith-based organizations to communicate with congregations while adhering to social distancing and restriction of movement measures. The communication campaign are implemented in part to support faith leaders in disseminating health and safety guidance for reopening and attending houses of worship. The messaging addressed potential concerns, fears, anxieties and the dos and don'ts" surrounding safety measures and accurate information on the COVID-19 pandemic. The social media campaign also played important role in championing attention to religious minorities in plight of the pandemic. In this global crisis, the issue of communicating and receiving accurate information has come to the forefront. Religious leaders and faith-based organizations, as well as pastoral, health, and social care workers, are some of the most trusted sources of information in communities generally even more so than governments. Religious leaders also have a special responsibility and opportunity to counter and address misinformation, misleading teachings and rumors, which can spread rapidly throughout a community and potentially perpetuate stereotypes and hate speech.

The study found that in Kenya NRTP collaborated with National Muslim COVID-19 Response Committee for a training of religious leaders on COVID -19 Home based Care (HBC). The activity contributed in building capacity of Imams, community workers and madrassa teachers to help families and community members around them take full control of the COVID 19 patients in terms of infection prevention, health promotion and general care. The project has ensured the capacity of women are strengthened to enable them to participate effectively in COVID-19 response. This has also been realized through integration of gender and the inclusion of youth in many of the COVID-19 response engagements. Inter-faith collaboration between both majority and minority faiths is crucial, particularly through the sharing of knowledge, resources, and best practices where possible, especially during this global pandemic.

The study further found that many of closed churches in Kenya found ways to reach their worshippers, relaying services and information on how to protect themselves from the virus. One of the oldest churches in Nairobi, Christ Is the Answer Ministries (CITAM), was found to be running television, radio and online broadcasts reaching around 200 000 people on Sundays. I addition they were encourage their congregants to wash their hands, sanitize, to keep distance, stay at home. This way they have been able to help the government to achieve its objective of stopping the transmission of the virus. The World Health Organization (WHO) in Kenya is collaborating with faith organizations through the Ministry of Health to bolster outreach to communities on health education and safety about COVID-19. Working with health experts, the Muslim community has established guidelines on safe burials.

An examination of different approaches of Christian communities to the pandemic showed the influence and the limits of Christian action as governments acted quickly to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Using research methods (remote interviews and surveys, and analysis of authors' own denominations or congregations) consonant with physical distancing measures, the authors observed Churches attempting to carry out their mission as measures were put in place to arrest disease. They maintained worship services, moving them online, they helped Christians make sense of the pandemic and offered themselves as repositories of public trust. In some cases, however, they were less successful than they wished in carrying out their social responsibility because many of their institutions were closed as part of the measures to restrict the spread of disease.

On the basis of the reviewed literature, churches in Kenya are interacting with the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on a day-to-day basis and coming up with actions to respond. However, the biggest challenge the church is facing is what people are doing within the framework of their own resources rarely gets known. So we could be missing out on the innovations that are coming from common people as they dream afresh in listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit. The study found that even amid increased global vulnerability, churches and church charities fed the hungry and attended to emergency humanitarian needs, while pastors and priests offered solace to the sick, ministered to the bereaved, and helped bury the dead. The impact of COVID-19 was heavy in almost all sectors with support mechanisms being stretched. The socio-economic impacts are enormous, and the vulnerability of the people in poverty has increased, according to the cleric.

The study further found that the tendency for people to use religion to deal with crisis can be understood within the religious coping terminology where people use religion as a means to deal with adversity and uncertainty. They pray, seek a closer relation to God, or explain the tragedy by reference to an Act of God. Empirical evidence suggests that people impacted by adverse life events such as cancer, heart problems, death in close family, divorce, or injury are more religious than others. Adversity, caused by natural disasters, instigates people across the globe to use their religion more intensively. While some parts of the Church have struggled with the loss of access to buildings, amongst evangelicals this seems to be less of an issue and contrary to some media reports, we have found that there is not a great clamor for a relaxation of rules on mass gatherings. In general, like society at large, the Church has sought to follow official advice. In this season, the advocacy work at the Evangelical Alliance has been focused on ensuring that the government's emergency powers are proportionate, time-limited and subject to parliamentary scrutiny, and that the elderly and those with learning disabilities are valued and respected in relation to the quality of care and protection they receive.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings from the reviewed literature, it suffices to conclude that despite the closing of the churches as one way of dealing with the spread of Covid-19 virus, many churches have been fully involved in helping the government in curtailing the spread of the various by encouraging their members to stay at home and observe the guidelines by ministry of health. For example, the study further found that many of closed churches in Kenya found ways to reach their worshipers, relaying services and information on how to protect themselves from the virus. One of the oldest churches in Nairobi, Christ Is the Answer Ministries (CITAM), was found to be running television, radio and online broadcasts reaching around 200 000 people on Sundays.

In addition they encourage their congregants to wash their hands, sanitize, to keep distance, and stay at home. This way they have been able to help the government to achieve its objective of stopping the transmission of the virus. The study concludes that from the engagement of the church leadership with member churches there have been innumerable stories of the Church supporting vulnerable and isolated people in Kenya. This involves delivering food and medicines, providing shelter, supporting key workers and their families, resourcing parents to home-school, and supporting the elderly in their homes. The latter has been a priority for the Church because 2.5 million older people have never used the internet. In addition, churches have started radio talk shows to reach out to those who are house-bound, fearful and in need have comfort and hope. Initiatives to address loneliness provide vital support for those who cannot or do not engage online. Church buildings may be closed across the globe, but the Church is very much open for business.

The study also concludes that the tendency for people to use religion to deal with crisis can be understood within the religious coping terminology where people use religion as a means to deal with adversity and uncertainty. People pray, seek a closer relation to God, or explain the tragedy by reference to an Act of God. In most cases people impacted by adverse life events such as cancer, heart problems, death in close family, divorce, or injury are more religious than others. Adversity, caused by natural disasters, instigates people across the globe to use their religion more intensively. While some parts of the Church have struggled with the loss of access to buildings, amongst evangelicals this seems to be less of an issue and contrary to some media reports, we have found that there is not a great clamor for a relaxation of rules on mass gatherings. It also suffices to conclude that like society at large, the Church in Kenya has been at the forefront in following official directives by the ministry of health. The advocacy work at the Evangelical Alliance has been focused on ensuring that the government's emergency powers are proportionate, time-limited and subject to parliamentary scrutiny, and that the elderly and those with learning disabilities are valued and respected in relation to the quality of care and protection they receive.

The study concludes that the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic has caused distinct human responses and reactions, has strengthened us and made us aware of the fragility of our human existence and we have been taught a lesson in humility, but we are also accompanied by feelings of powerlessness and fear. The study also concluded that when being exposed to a threat we use various strategies of survival, faith being one of them, which allows us to keep hope as well as feel sense of security. The current worldwide situation can bring people together, also through joint prayer. Even amid increased global vulnerability, churches and church charities have fed the hungry and attended to emergency humanitarian needs, while pastors and priests offered solace to the sick, ministered to the bereaved, and helped bury the dead. The impact of COVID-19 was heavy in almost all sectors with support mechanisms being stretched. The socio-economic impacts are enormous, and the vulnerability of the people in poverty has increased.

6.0 RECOMMENDATION

The study suggested that just as health officials try to explain their recommendations, so experts in the scientific study of religion need to surface religion-abetted value judgments that impact behaviors relevant to viral spread. Experts need to explain where religion is causing problems and find creative ways to communicate alternative ways of thinking. The study also recommends that as Muslims are set to begin observing the holy month of Ramadan, it is important for their leaders to issue guidance on safety such as practicing physical distancing, use of culturally and religiously sanctioned greetings that avoid physical contact such as waving, nodding or placing the hand over the heart. It is important to learn that COVID-19 is a disease that has shaken the world, but beyond its negative aspects, it came to help us understand that nobody has authority over nature, that human life is very fragile, that wealth has no power over death, and that the leaders of our states are limited.

The study also recommends that the church in Kenya is in a liminal space concerning her visibility and a space of being in transition. The church must therefore open herself to listen and search for God's involvement in the world. It is by being in conversation and interpreting God's involvement that she will be in the transition, from an institution founded on truths and established practices, to an open community, vulnerable, and exposed to the impossible possibilities of Christ's presence, outside traditional places. If the church, adopt this proposal, any future suspension of physical public gathering would not affect her visibility.

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