



Assessing Chaplaincy Ministry as a Christ-Woven Nest in Times of Disaster

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ABSTRACT

The Chaplaincy Ministry is practised in most closed communities, such as uniformed forces, medical institutions, funeral homes, educational institutions and orphan and vulnerable communities. Its relevance in Zimbabwe has been critiqued as it has not been able to demonstrate itself as God's presence during disasters such as cyclones. The displacement of people in Chimanimani and Chipinge communities in the Eastern side of Zimbabwe, the death of their relatives and the destruction of their properties brought some traumatic experiences that the Church was not able to deal with. Churches in Zimbabwe joined the government and civic organisations to provide humanitarian aid to the distressed communities but unfortunately missed the primary aim of the church journeying along with the distressed. This qualitative research paper argued that, unlike the government and civic organisations that give humanitarian aid and leave the devastated areas, the role of chaplaincy ministry was for the church to commit itself to the daily struggles of the traumatised populace. The paper challenged the churches in Zimbabwe to be like a Christ-woven nest that protects, provides, and prays for communities grappling with the omnipotence of God in times of disaster. The paper concluded by proffering a challenge to the church in Zimbabwe to either function as a centre of God's presence in the shattered communities or be like a charity organisation in humanitarian aid alongside the non-governmental organisations and the government which is not her call. This paper contributes significantly to scholarship as there is limited literature on chaplaincy from an African genre and more importantly resources that define the role of the church in troubled communities. This paper provides a solution for churches struggling with the approach to take when disasters loom and people are questioning the omnipotence of God during a crisis.

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Publication History

Received: 20th February, 2024

Accepted: 16th April, 2024

Published online:

3rd May, 2024

Keywords: *Chaplaincy Ministry; Woven Nest; Disaster; Cyclone Idai*

INTRODUCTION

Research on chaplaincy ministry has not received much scholarly attention in Zimbabwe in particular. Even though for a long time, most churches in Zimbabwe have been seconding clergy ministers to government departments such as the army, police prison and correctional services, tertiary institutions, funeral parlours, and hospitals. Churches with mission institutions like schools and hospitals appoint clergy to be chaplains as part of their missiological mandate.¹ Although the ministry has attained that

¹ For example, in the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, chaplaincy ministry traces its origins to 1892 when the

high degree of agency, the chaplaincy ministry remains incapacitated because of the lack of contextualised literature to enhance the efficiency of the ministry. The lack of contextualised literature has also led to the reluctance of higher learning institutions in Zimbabwe to offer a professional qualification in chaplaincy ministry.² Apart from the reluctance mentioned above, the importance given to chaplaincy as a ministry by those not stationed as chaplains also demeans the importance of the ministry. This is beside the point that even those stationed as chaplains have taken their appointments negatively and concluded that the church is punishing them for some unexplained reasons.

The first institution to professionalise chaplaincy ministry was the Zimbabwe Open University in 2014 offering modules towards a Diploma in Professional Chaplaincy to the practising clergy.³ The second institution to introduce chaplaincy as a professional course was the Catholic University in Zimbabwe offering Chaplaincy as a short course to the clergy and untrained practising chaplains in different arms of government, funeral homes among other fields of chaplaincy. The programme later developed into a Diploma in Chaplaincy offered for two years. United Theological College came third in 2017. The need for the institution was necessitated by their agreement with the Zimbabwe Defence Forces to train their chaplains who were working with some having low qualifications. The institution embraced the chaplains already practising and this engagement later forced the institution to introduce chaplaincy as a module to the ministerial students in training.

The urgent embracing of chaplaincy as a professional course by the mentioned institutions and the influx of people enrolling for the courses had been necessitated by the need for relevance in a country with many socioeconomic challenges that demand both spiritual and psychological care. Some of the unique areas that demand chaplaincy ministry are communities created by disasters such as cyclones. This paper acknowledges that Zimbabwe has encountered several cyclones, but attention will be given to Cyclone Idai which devastated the people of Chipinge and Chimanimani areas bordering the Eastern highlands of Zimbabwe. The paper argues that, instead of churches demonstrating God's presence in closed communities in times of disaster, there was a noticeable competition between churches, government, and civic organisations to provide humanitarian aid. This paper also argues that, unlike the government and civic organisations that leave humanitarian aid to the traumatised communities to assist the suffering populace in their multiple losses and vacate the disaster areas, the church has a ministry of presence that she is compelled to exercise. The paper further argues that the church should not be a visitor during times of trouble, but instead, a tabernacle among the devastated as Jesus would have done and give such communities hope in their hopelessness and homelessness caused by disasters such as Cyclone Idai. The research will conclude by critiquing the gap in the ministry of presence that the church is failing to fill during times of disaster.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding Chaplaincy

A lot of research on both the definition and historical background of chaplaincy has been offered mostly by scholars from the Western world. The word traces its routes from the Latin etymology *capelein*, *chapeleyn* and *capella*, referring to clergy who have been commissioned by a faith group or church denomination to provide pastoral and religious services in an institution, organisation or government.⁴ Chaplaincy ministry also refers to that type of ministry given to people who do not

mission schools were introduced. The missionary was both the pastor and the administrator. The pastoral role was representing chaplaincy ministry while administratively, the missionary was the principal of the school. The situation changed in 1951 when Heyi Malaba who was a layperson became the first black Principal at Waddilove Institute. The Methodist Church appointed Rev. Charles Manyoba to be the chaplain thereby separating the two offices. In the passage of time, ministers became teaching chaplains and there were conflicts with the headmasters on who c the school. The name changed to Minister in Charge and later Principal. The Church realised that the office of the minister was beyond the reach of many who needed pastoral care and the office of the chaplain was created to cater for the spiritual issues of the institution. This resulted in the school having the two ministers, one being the administrator and the other being the spiritual figure. Martin Mujinga, *Chaplaincy Ministry- A Rainbow of Hope* (Harare: Connexional Bookshop, 2012).

² The first book on Chaplaincy in Zimbabwe was a copy published by Martin Mujinga (2012).

³ The programme did not continue because the module created conflict within the University structures and it was abandoned.

⁴ Sharon Farmer, *Communities of Saint Martin: Legend and Ritual in Medieval Tour* (London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 76-96.

normally attend the school or church in their hometown thereby making the church a domicile where people are far from their homes.⁵ It has to be emphasised also that, chaplaincy ministry is not only confirmed to ministering to people of religious faith, as in most communities that demand the services of a chaplain, church membership is not compulsory. For example, chaplaincy in the hospital or uniformed forces cut across denominational affiliation or individual beliefs. Given the above definitions, chaplaincy ministry can be described as being responsible for vulnerable souls in the tempest. It demands special attention to spiritual issues, emotional inner being and psychological life of the population either in a crisis or in a community. Chaplaincy goes far beyond the appointment and it digs deeper into the contours of the soul, the mind and the heart of the people in a community or a troubled community. These communities are peculiarly closed circles both geographically and politically. It therefore means that chaplaincy ministry crosses all the religious, ethnic, social, tribal, denominational, ideological, and cultural frontiers. It is a platform where closed communities are allowed to share their stories freely using that same language, idioms and examples.

Moreover, chaplaincy ministry resembles God's presence in closed communities.⁶ It is a ministry that goes beyond one denominational politics and is tending the sheep, feeding the lamb, nurturing the weak, protecting the vulnerable and defending the vicious and the victims. Whereas the chaplain is the custodian of God's people, he/she represents the Good Shepherd- Jesus who is always there for the orphanages, prisoners, the battlefields, educational institutions, funeral parlours, hospitals, police camps, or workplaces. The chaplain functions in a sector thereby referring to chaplaincy as sector ministry or specialised ministry. A pastor ministers to families of the same vicinity while a chaplain ministers to those largely removed from the context of their backgrounds provided by family or community thereby rendering it to be a ministry in the wilderness where God-talk is negotiated unlike in the parish.⁷ In the twenty-first century, these places include refugee camps or temporary shelters created by natural disasters like cyclones. In referring to chaplaincy as God's presence in closed communities it means that the clergy do not have the freedom to enter as they might enter communities around the church. For example, closed communities have grown to include disaster communities, communities of trafficked persons and victims of forced migration. Given that these communities are relatively new in the field of chaplaincy, and critical areas that demand God's presence, pastors in Zimbabwe have not learnt much to practice ministry in such environments.

Commenting on the African church's incompetence in the fight against HIV/AIDS, Ezra Chitando avers that:

African churches are to be 'AIDS competent', their pastors must be trained to equip members with sharp minds, keen ears, warm hearts, quick feet and loud voices. Such theological training of pastors is the essential first step to overcoming ambulance theology of always arriving after the accident has already taken place.⁸

Chitando's point remains critical even in disasters such as cyclones. Pastors must be trained to equip members with sharp minds that understand the psychological and moral effects of a disaster, keen ears that are prepared to listen to the stories of traumatised communities that are repeated again and again, warm hearts to embrace their trauma, quick feet to find resources to assist them and also to visit them and loud voices to preach to them and also to protect them from further distress. Through chaplaincy ministry, the church commits itself to the daily struggles of the devastated populace.

Interpreting Christ Woven Nest

This paper is premised on the interdisciplinary field of theology and zoology which is the branch of biology. As a theological paper, the research positions chaplaincy ministry as God's presence in the ransacked communities. The paper used zoology, which is a discipline that studies the behaviour,

⁵ Mark Cobb, Chris Swift, and Andrew Todd, "Introduction to Chaplaincy Studies," in *A Handbook of Chaplaincy Studies*, ed. A. Billings (London: Routledge, 2016), 23–32.

⁶ Edwin Dean Cook, *Chaplaincy: Being God's Presence in Closed Communities* (Indiana: : Author House, 2010).

⁷ Mujinga, *Chaplaincy Ministry- A Rainbow of Hope*.

⁸ Catholic Information Services for Africa, "Africa: Church Should Drop Its 'ambulance Theology' in HIV/Aids, 2008," 2023, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200802290562.html>.

structure, physiology, classification, habits, and distribution of animals (birds in this case) on how they interact with their ecosystems.⁹ The concept of a Christ-woven nest is used to argue that a bird's nest is woven together by small pieces that, alone, are insignificant but, when fashioned together, the pieces create a beautiful whole designed for a specific purpose of providing shelter, warmth, and home to the nestlings. Disasters bring trauma that breaks people's hope, future, confidence, and emotions. This disarray of hope for the future calls for the church to bring hope to individuals in a moment of hopelessness just like what Christ would do. This process of mentoring troubled communities by the chaplain to recollect their lost hope due to disasters is resembled by the small pieces put together to build a nest. The constant care and assurance of God's presence instils hope and confidence in the traumatised individuals much as the nest brings hope and assurance to the nestlings.

When people are traumatised by disasters, their life is shattered because of many losses, and they are encouraged to move on with life though in pain. They are also encouraged to face the future, have provisions to start life anew, assurance about the presence of God and security that will enable them to deal with their vulnerability. The presence of the church in these rough patches of life is demonstrated by the presence of the chaplain who demonstrates God's presence in closed communities.¹⁰

The word nest was used in both the Old and the New Testaments to demonstrate the importance of care and provisions. For example, in (Job 39:27) the nest represented the omnipotence of God and the assurance of His ever-presence to Job who was devastated by failing to reconcile theodicy and the omnipresence of God. Job 39:26-30 reads,

Does the hawk fly by your wisdom, and spread its wings toward the south? Does the eagle mount up at your command, and make its nest on high? On the rocks, it dwells and resides, On the crag of the rock and the stronghold. From there it spies out the prey; Its eyes observe from afar. Its young ones suck up blood; And where the slain are, there it is.

In this chapter, Job continues to grapple with his challenges questioning the omnipresence of God. In the book of Job, theodicy challenges the righteousness of Job and the omnipotence of God. However, God continues to show Job that even in times of trouble, God remains in control and the Godself's presence is an assurance of a life with hope. God did not come to Job as a judge but as a loving God and a source of hope in times of trouble. The mention of an eagle nest that is built with large heaps of sticks and twigs on the cleft of a mountain presents the role of God in every situation smooth or rough. Jer 48: 28, reads, "O ye that dwell in Moab, leave the cities, and dwell in the rock, and be like the dove that maketh her nest in the sides of the hole's mouth." The example of a dove's nest beside the hole's mouth represents that the dove makes every effort to have a safe space for the nestlings. The text talks of disasters in the land and how a nest is a dwelling place of peace and protection. In Jer 49:16, the nests should not be divorced from the everyday lives of the people. This is an example of chaplaincy ministry that should provide both comfort and security in times of disaster. Other references to the importance of nests can be found in, Isaiah 34:15, and Ps 104: 17. The texts above show that each nest follows a building law of its owner, and the nestlings will grow and develop in these nests until they can fend for themselves. In (Job 29:18), Job presents a nest as a hiding place "Then I said I shall die in my nest." Chaplaincy is a ministry shaped by Christ for different people in different scenarios and remaining in Christ the maker of the nest is defined by the presence of the chaplain in any form of disaster. In Matthew 8:20 and Luke 9:58, Jesus demonstrated his vulnerability and the importance of a bird's nest in the context of his imminent death in the hands of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. Christ's woven nets assist in presenting the role of Jesus as the source of hope in the community of the hopeless and the homeless people.

⁹ Earl Hanson, "Dorchester, Zoology, Encyclopaedia Britannica," accessed November 23, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/science/zoology>.

¹⁰ Dean Cook, *Chaplaincy: Being God's Presence in Closed Communities*.

METHODOLOGY

This paper used qualitative research methodology employing desk research method of data collection. The desk research method of data collection was selected to draw data from the existing documents and previous research.¹¹ The paper noted the gap in the literature on chaplaincy in general and chaplaincy ministry in times of disaster in particular and desk research assists in closing the literature gap. This method is used to collect data and analyse the information from various secondary sources available. These documents include reports, academic publications, newspaper articles, magazines, market intelligence, government reports, databases, statistics, data sets and other online materials.¹² The purpose of desk research in this paper has been to gain a broader perspective on the problem of chaplaincy ministry in times of disaster. Using the narrative method of analysing data, the study acknowledges the availability of literature on chaplaincy from the Western world but bemoans the lack of contextualised literature that renders the relevancy of the ministry in closed communities almost an impossible task.

The desk research method has both pros and cons. On one hand, the method of data collection deals with available data. This availability of data makes research less expensive as few resources are needed to gather the data. In addition, the desk research method assists the researcher in quickly identifying the gaps in the area under study leading to the creation of new knowledge from the existing gaps. Moreover, desk research reduces the time of research as it assists the researchers to concentrate on the area they are researching. On the other hand, the method is not very reliable as most people post unverified facts on the internet which has a possibility of using wrong information that will also produce wrong results. Being aware of these merits and demerits, the paper used desk research as a method of data collection as it was the only one that proved to present the problem of lack of literature for ministry in the closed communities which is the major focus of this paper.

DISCUSSION

Impact of Cyclone Idai in the Chipinge and Chimanimani Districts

Since the beginning of the new millennium, Zimbabwe has been affected by several cyclones, namely Cyclone Eline in 2000, Cyclone Japhet in 2003, Cyclone Dineo in 2017, Cyclone Idai in 2019, Tropical Storm Chalane in 2020 and Cyclone Eloise in 2021.¹³ In total, the tropical cyclones affected approximately 600,000 households, killed over 1000 people, and damaged property valued at over USD 5 billion environments.¹⁴ In addition, serial cyclones also displaced people and damaged the environment.¹⁵ Although different cyclones led to many untold sufferings, this paper is interested in Cyclone Idai as this was torrentially proved to be a more disastrous cyclone. According to Chatiza

Zimbabwe experienced Cyclone Idai, an extreme weather condition during the weekend of 15-17 March 2019. The cyclone was the strongest recorded in the Southern Hemisphere. It developed as a tropical disturbance in the Indian Ocean and became a tropical depression by 11 March, characterised by stormy weather between Madagascar and the east coast of mainland Africa.¹⁶

The cyclone reached Zimbabwe on Friday night and heavy rains continued up to 20 March 2020. Cyclone Idai had more devastating effects as compared to other cyclones that happened previously.¹⁷

Cyclone Idai affected 270,000 people in Zimbabwe, 51,000 were displaced, more than 340 died and many others went missing. Agriculture, schools, and infrastructure all suffered heavy impacts and many people lost their homes. Chimanimani and Chipinge Districts were the hardest hit. Rivers were affected

¹¹ FieldStat, "Desk Research," accessed February 23, 2024, <https://fieldstat.com/contact/>.

¹² Hitesh Bhasin, "Desk Research: Definition, Importance and Advantages," *Marketing91*, June 12, 2023.

¹³ Emmerson Chivhenge, "The Impacts of Tropical Cyclones in Zimbabwe," 2021.

¹⁴ Chivhenge, "The Impacts of Tropical Cyclones in Zimbabwe."

¹⁵ Kudzai Chatiza, "The Impact of and Responses to Cyclone Idai in Zimbabwe: An Analysis of Policy Implications for Post-Disaster Institutional Development," October 30, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.21201/2019.5273>.

¹⁶ Chatiza, "The Impact of and Responses to Cyclone Idai in Zimbabwe: An Analysis of Policy Implications for Post-Disaster Institutional Development."

¹⁷ Chivhenge, "The Impacts of Tropical Cyclones in Zimbabwe."

by landslides, rockslides and mudslides affecting sources of water, and millions of hectares of forests and 104,620 hectares of protected areas were affected.¹⁸

Many people also lost their houses, livestock, and crop harvest.¹⁹ The devastating events caused by Cyclone Idai saw the survivors nursing physical and emotional wounds as some of the victims were moved into refugee camps and others to safer areas away from their homes.²⁰ For example, Lutheran World Relief and Interchurch Medical Assistance World Health reported that by 27 March 2019, 228,000 people were being housed in crowded shelter camps, raising concerns among aid workers and government officials about the risk of disease outbreaks.²¹ The transfer of the survivors to the new places was also a traumatic experience as this was a quick divergent from their normal life as the cyclone had brought disaster that destroyed their pride and destiny resulting in their havens becoming closed communities.

The horrific experiences witnessed by the people of Chimanimani left many hopeless. The situation was so desperate that both the young and the elders found themselves confounded by their situation. According to the Lutheran World Relief and Interchurch Medical Assistance World Health, ...the degree of damage caused by Cyclone Idai ranged from physical rampage as some people were wounded and left disabled, some lost their lives whilst others lost their beloved ones. Some were left homeless, and others had their properties and sources of income like fields destroyed. The whole community was left hopeless with life taking a new twist and the future was shattered.²²

In such a situation, the survivors needed both humanitarian aid and friends to journey with. The most difficult moment ever faced by survivors of Cyclone Idai was witnessing their separation from their loved ones as they were put in different refugee camps whilst efforts were made in trying to rescue those who were marooned by the cyclone.²³

The Church's Response to Cyclone Idai Disaster and the Need for Chaplaincy Ministry

When Cyclone Idai ravaged the people's hope in Chipinge and Chimanimani Districts, the Church responded both positively and negatively. Negatively, some churches viewed the cyclone as some form of evil spirits. For example, a report in the Daily News of 27 March 2019 shows that a good number of people perished during an African Apostolic Church all-night prayer in the devastated areas. This was in spite of the fact that some people, had perished in the same area where they camped for prayer. The Apostolic church stubbornly depended on their faith ignoring the facts of the cyclone that had claimed the lives of many people in the same area. Instead of the church to make sure that people were safe and encourage them to leave the potentially dangerous zones, the church went on to conduct its usual programmes thereby putting the lives of many people at risk. Refusing to leave the devastated areas was also caused by the fact that some had nowhere to go while others were not willing to leave their homes whilst others had other social reasons to risk remaining in their traditional homes which resulted in them losing their lives to the cyclone.

The aftermath of the devastating experience saw the Church in Zimbabwe praying and providing counselling to those whose hearts were bleeding, those parents who were wondering the whereabouts of their children who met their fate at school as well as those children who were put in different camps far from their homes. However, this help was temporary as it only lasted for a few days after the incident and yet the memories of the disaster are lifelong. One of the survivors who

¹⁸ Chatiza, "The Impact of and Responses to Cyclone Idai in Zimbabwe: An Analysis of Policy Implications for Post-Disaster Institutional Development."

¹⁹ Simon Deprez and Eléonore Labattut, *Lessons Learnt from CARE's Shelter Responses to Cyclone Idai in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe* (London: ReliefWeb, 2020), <https://reliefweb.int/report/mozambique/lessons-learnt-care-s-shelter-responses-cyclone-idai-malawi-mozambique-and-zimbabwe>.

²⁰ Desmond Manatsa, "Tropical Cyclone Idai Lessons Learned and the Way Forward for Africa Alliance for Disaster Research Institutions (AADRI)," 2019, <https://gadri.net/resources/2019/09/tropical-cyclone-idai---lessons-learned-and-way-%09forward>.

²¹ Lutheran World Relief, "Lutheran World Relief Acquires Interchurch Medical Assistance," January 2014.

²² Lutheran World Relief, "Lutheran World Relief Acquires Interchurch Medical Assistance."

²³ Chatiza, "The Impact of and Responses to Cyclone Idai in Zimbabwe: An Analysis of Policy Implications for Post-Disaster Institutional Development."

narrated his experiences to the Herald newspaper on 26 March 2019 said he was troubled by seeing homeless people in the camp for some days. The feeling of dejection and hopelessness of the people in the camp was enough evidence to call for the Church to assist the vulnerable people through the ministry of presence practised by chaplains. Instead of pronouncing God's presence in traumatic experiences, just like the government and non-governmental organisations, the church mobilised many resources for needy people. This was good but the church acted like a charity more than the feet and the mouth of God to the weak and the vulnerable. The traumatised people had emotional, spiritual, and psychological emotions to be processed and this was the responsibility of the church as it stands for God's presence in closed communities. Giving clothes and food was one of the best things that the Zimbabwean church did, however, this only addressed their physical needs but the most dangerous thing the people faced was the collapse of their inward being and this called the church to provide the ministry of presence to the distressed populace.

Just as the disciples had closed themselves inside a room fearing the Jews after the death of Jesus (John 20:19-29), the survivors of Cyclone Idai apart from being in a closed community of the refugee camp had their lives closed psychologically. It was only the presence of Jesus that opened the locked doors for the disciples to be able to start moving again. This is the testimony of the Church to give hope to those behind closed doors. Jürgen Moltmann centres hope in the lives of desperate people as the only way to attain a new future. He argues that "it is only hope that helps one to see the sun rising and setting; it is that hope that helps one to continuously hope even if there is nothing to hope for."²⁴ This hope is provided by chaplains as Christ's woven nest in the closed communities.

After the people of Chipinge and Chimanimani were left homeless, and the temporary tents provided by the Government, Non-Governmental organisations, churches, and other well-wishers became what seemed like their permanent and new homes, their traumatic experiences remained alive and they wanted individuals to journey with them during their emotional breakdown. Such kind of attention is provided by the chaplain who is always with the troubled people to empathise with them in their loss. This is the situation that differentiates a parish pastor from a chaplain whose ministry cuts across denominational affiliation and religious background. Pastors function at churches while chaplains function in closed communities. The Church in Zimbabwe visited the traumatised communities not as colleagues in the struggles, but as donors and this was unfortunate for the body of Christ.

Chaplaincy ministry as a Christ-woven ministry is always expected to close the gap of discomfort by providing comfort in desperate times. In a community of widows, widowers, orphans and the disabled, chaplaincy ministry did not prove to be a Christ-woven nest to give hope to the hopeless. Although the church took centre stage in joining the humanitarian work, more was demanded as the efforts by the church were generalised such that they focused on food items, clothes, and blankets. The God of widows and orphans who is regularly preached in the churches was not experienced as the orphans who were now adjusting to a new life in the refugee camps while not going to school. The God of widows was also not witnessed as they started relying on handouts provided to them by well-wishers in the camp. There was a need for the church to conduct post-trauma counselling for all the different age groups because they uniquely affected each group. This move was a way to prove chaplaincy as Christ's woven nest in closed communities.

The gesture by the church to convey the National Day of Mourning together with the government can be regarded as an effort by the Zimbabwean church to show and maintain the presence of God to people during that difficult period. On the one hand, the National Day of Mourning was not effective as it was not everyone who was experiencing the loss. The National Day of Mourning needed to be accompanied by the church's visibility in the traumatised communities showing that, calling for days of mourning was indeed a collective call to empathise with the affected. On the other hand, National Day of Mourning was also a message to the traumatised people that the whole nation was mourning with the people of Chimanimani and Chipinge in a bid to live the gospel that encourages them to mourn with those mourning. The church's gesture meant to remind the survivors that

²⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (London: Harper and Row, 1966).

regardless of what had befallen them God was still in control of everything; they were to continue trusting in him as a Christ-woven nest in times of distress.

The intensity of Cyclone Idai left the people in the affected areas empty and grounded. That loss left many people feeling robbed of their right to live for their lives were disturbed and inflicted permanent injuries. By providing these needs, the Church was attempting to bring the presence of God to the needy community and this is what is being referred to as Christ's woven nest. The paper argues that the church needed to take a step further to stay longer in troubled communities to preach and instil the presence of God in the people by assuring them that God remains God in every situation. Moreover, by providing a ministry of presence through chaplaincy ministry, the church would have sent the message that God is not far when it hurts and that the problems that people face in life are part of life but do not define a shuttered future. In addition, the help offered by the church though not good enough to compensate for all the destructions people had endured, that presence was an existential sign that God was still with his people although the Church could have demonstrated this by journeying with the people for a bit longer period.

Some church denominations managed to send teams of pastors and psychologists to Chimanimani and Chipinge Districts to meet some of the survivors to have time to pray and give them counselling to cope with their losses, unfortunately, their stay was noticeably short given what the communities were going through. This restorative move expected from the church was evidence of the impact of chaplaincy ministry as Christ's woven nest in closed communities particularly those displaced by the cyclone.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion above the writer would want to conclude that to a greater extent, the church did everything within its capability to maintain the presence of God during Cyclone Idai. By donating material needs to the affected people, providing counselling sessions to the psychologically affected individuals as well as reconstructing the destroyed infrastructures the church was practising God's presence in the closed communities as a Christ-woven nest. Although there are some mishaps and blame that can be put on the church like providing short-term solutions and slow reactions before the Cyclone, it was because the whole thing after the Cyclone was managed by the Government and issues of accountability and accessibility were out of the church's control and yet she was expected to be a Christ-woven nest in those circumstances. Moreover, the church also played a key role in gathering clothes, food and other material needs to help the survivors which the government and the non-governmental organisations also did and yet the church needed to step up further than humanitarian aid to a theological engagement. In a situation where most people felt their relatives were robbed of their right to live, the Church by providing those counselling services attempted to bring the presence of God the provider to a community of suffering people.

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