



Healing the Healers: Redressing Church Leadership and National Healing in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

This paper redresses Church leadership and national healing in Zimbabwe. Although numerous studies have been published on managing conflict and healing the nation, contextualized publications on healing healers in Zimbabwe are scarce. Using a qualitative literature review and Henri Nouwen's concept of "wounded healers" as a theoretical foundation, this paper fills the gap. It finds that church leaders battle with multifaceted national political, ethnic, and socio-economic conflicts. As God's holistic word bearers, church leaders in Zimbabwe have been engaging with the State and Society to foster reconciliation and healing. Instead of addressing the root causes of national conflicts, the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front victimized and persecuted dissenting voices, silencing some church leaders who facilitated prophetic engagements. Besides suffering from State oppression, ecclesial leaders who dedicated themselves to serving as national healers ultimately faced painful family, ecclesial, and community conflicts. Authoritarianism persists, and the majority of citizens continue to suffer. Consequently, this paper concludes that the painful experiences of church leaders can be powerful sources of collective healing. Instead of abandoning their prophetic mandate, wounded church leaders must reflect on, share, and use their stories to comfort, encourage, and facilitate healing for themselves and others in Zimbabwe.

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INTRODUCTION

Since time immemorial, Zimbabwe has faced multi-layered political, ethnic, and socio-economic crises.¹ Consequently, scholars, such as Nyere and Ward, agree that the nation has experienced various conflicts, resulting in tragic violence and instability, including the *Gukurahundi* massacres, where more than 20,000 people were killed by the ZANU-PF (Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front) led state in Matabeleland.² Since the political and economic instability worsened in 2008,

¹ Enoch Msindo, "Crisis! What Crisis? The Multiple Dimensions of the Zimbabwean Crisis," *South African Historical Journal* 66, no. 2 (2013): 409; Abraham Siambombe and Munyaradzi Hupile, "Zimbabwe's Economic Challenges Beyond Sanctions," *AJIS: African Journal of Inclusive Societies* 4, no. 1 (2024).

² Chengetai Nyere, "The Continuum of Political Violence in Zimbabwe," *Journal of Social Sciences* 48, no. 1–2 (2016); Gary Ward, "Political Instability in Zimbabwe," Council on Foreign Relations, 2015, accessed March 29, 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/report/political-instability-zimbabwe>; Mary Ndlovu, "Facing History in the Aftermath of Gukurahundi

Zimbabwe has endured conflicts and violence before, during, and after every presidential and harmonized election.³ Despite numerous political, governmental, non-governmental, and ecclesiastical efforts to promote national healing, we echo Machakanja's⁴ observation that:

[T]he processes of developing a framework and legislation for national healing and reconciliation in Zimbabwe remains fairly open on paper, whilst it appears to be devoid of a coherent, inclusive, consultative and participatory guided process.

To this day, little progress has been made toward achieving national healing and reconciliation. However, there is “no dispute that Zimbabwe’s accumulated history of socio-political oppression, repression and ongoing trauma has had a profound and continuing effect on different categories of people in society”.⁵ In striving to be the salt and light of the world (Matt 5:13-16) and to be hearers and doers of the word (Jas 1:22), several church leaders have engaged the state and society to promote national healing and reconciliation. Tagwirei⁶ noted that church leaders “who tried to stand up in defence of the oppressed were muzzled, which exposed the viciousness of *Zanu-PFism...*”. Meanwhile, the state divided and co-opted other church, community, and family leaders and members. As a result, some began to demonize, oppose, and harm prophetic voices. Thus, while enduring state victimization, prophetic ecclesial leaders faced complex family, denominational, ecumenical, and other painful conflicts.

Challengingly,

*[I]f the Church – the salt and light of the world (Mt 5:13–16) – loses her ‘saltiness’ and ‘lightness (activeness, influence and transformational power)’, and fails to change the sad stories and realities of people who are desperate for integral transformation, she becomes useless and irrelevant to society.*⁷

Therefore, this paper explores the healing of wounded church leaders to contribute to national healing and reconciliation in Zimbabwe. While healing occurs, this paper argues that church leaders can continue to serve the nation based on their experiences of woundedness in a broken state. The paper applies Henri Nouwen's⁸ concept of “wounded healers” as a theoretical basis. To appreciate its relevance, the following section exposes and contextualizes the notion of *wounded healers* as a theoretical framework. The following section provides an overview and critical analysis of the background, redefining healing, and offers a historical and discursive review of the church's role in conflict management, healing, and reconciliation in Zimbabwe. The paper ends with an examination of the wounds of church leaders, an exploration of pathways for church and leadership healing, a conclusion and recommendations.

Atrocities: New Media, Memory and the Discourses on Forgiveness on Selected Zimbabwean News Websites,” *Peace and Conflict Studies* 24, no. 2 (2017): Article 3; Nkululeko Sibanda, “Gukurahundi as a Cultural Event: Cultural Politics and the Culture of Violence in Matabeleland,” *Genealogy* 8, no. 4 (2024): 147, doi.org/10.3390/genealogy8040147.

³ Tendai J. Chari, “Electoral Violence and its Instrumental Logic: Mapping Press Discourse on Electoral Violence During Parliamentary and Presidential Elections in Zimbabwe,” *Journal of African Elections* 16, no. 1 (2017); Happy M. Tirivangasi, Louis Nyahunda and Tinashe C. Maramura, “Revisiting Electoral Violence in Zimbabwe: Problems and Prospects,” *International Journal of Criminology and Sociology* 10 (2021): 1066.

⁴ Pamela Machakanja, “National Healing and Reconciliation in Zimbabwe: Challenges and Opportunities,” 2010, accessed March 29, 2025, https://africaportal.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/IJR_AP_Monograph_1_Zimbabwe_WEB.pdf.

⁵ Machakanja, “National Healing and Reconciliation in Zimbabwe: Challenges and Opportunities.”

⁶ Kimion Tagwirei, “Hearing the Loud Voices of the Silent Church in Zimbabwe,” in *Regime, Religion and the Consolidation of Zanu-PFism in Zimbabwe. When Religion Becomes a Threat to Democracy*, ed. Bekithemba Dube (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023): 115.

⁷ Kimion Tagwirei, “Rebuilding the Broken Walls of Zimbabwe with the Church, Leadership and Followership,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 45, no. 1 (2024): a3054.

⁸ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1971).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Nouwen explored the concepts of 'woundedness' and 'healing' in the context of church ministry.⁹ The challenges and pains faced by church leaders are often complex, as they are expected to care for the vulnerable while being equally vulnerable themselves within their communities. Much attention is given to what church leaders should do when providing guidance and healing, but who tends to the woundedness of the healers? Nouwen offers practical insights for leaders on nurturing their emotional and spiritual well-being. Rediscovering their sense of purpose, passion, and fulfilment in ministry is essential to their healing process. He illustrates this through his own experience of rediscovering his passion for ministry through self-actualization, introspection, relaxation, and rejuvenation. This process requires rest and may involve accepting failure and mistakes. It entails acknowledging hurts, rejection, vulnerability, and abuse from those whom one is meant to assist.

Nouwen recognized that although he was a healer, he was also wounded and needed rest, introspection, and rejuvenation to heal and continue serving.¹⁰ The approach he took to address this situation serves as a framework for helping church leaders in their healing, allowing them to heal Zimbabwe. Nouwen took time off to connect with other vulnerable members of the community, realizing their desperation. Ultimately, he connected with them in their suffering because he, too, was desperate. From this experience, he coined the term "wounded healers", acknowledging that his woundedness, vulnerability, and desperation connected him with others who were likewise wounded and struggling. Nouwen's healing journey resonates with 2 Corinthians 1:4-5, which states,

God comforts us in all our troubles so that we, in turn, may be able to comfort others in any trouble with the comfort with which we have also been comforted.

Benziman, Kannai and Ahmad.¹¹ assert that:

The ability to assist in medicine enhances the physician patient relationship; the archetype is also valuable in acknowledging the cultural diversity of medical and therapeutic conventions and practices.

The wounded healer archetype processes healing through the healer's own woundedness.¹² The wounded healer embodies transformative qualities relevant to understanding recovery processes.¹³ Healers are expected to be whole and to address patients' wounds. If healers embrace their own woundedness, they can foster connection. According to Gilbert and Stickley,¹⁴ serving others through personal experience and reflections on similar issues is highly effective. Overall, Nouwen's concept of wounded healers is particularly relevant in this context, as Zimbabwean church leaders are called to heal the nation while simultaneously grappling with their own wounds.¹⁵ His work also connects to the public African value of *Ubuntu/hunhu*, which states, 'I am because we are'. Thus, being hurt inspires, enables, and enhances the ability to heal others who are also suffering.

Contextualizing National Healing in Zimbabwe

The issue of conflict and healing in Zimbabwe is complex. Developing from national political and economic crises, conflict has extended to the family, ecclesial, and community levels. After gaining independence in 1980, the nation struggled to maintain political and economic stability due to various

⁹ Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*.

¹⁰ Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*.

¹¹ Galia Benziman, Ruth Kannai and Ayesha Ahmad, "The Wounded Healer as Cultural Archetype," *Comparative Literature & Culture* 14, no. 1 (2012).

¹² Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*.

¹³ Nili Zerubavel and Margaret O. Wright, "The Dilemma of the Wounded Healer," *Psychotherapy* 49, no. 4 (2012): 482.

¹⁴ Paul Gilbert and Theo Stickley, "'Wounded healers': The Role of Lived-Experience in Mental Health Education and Practice," *The Journal of Mental Health Training, Education and Practice* 7, no. 1 (2012): 33.

¹⁵ Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*.

factors. Ansari highlights a web of interconnected issues, including ill governance, corruption, policy mismanagement, international isolation, and structural economic weaknesses.¹⁶ Vambe remarks that: *Mugabe's violent suppression of the insurrection in Matabeleland (1983–1987) ... ill-advised payments made to restive war veterans, an unplanned adventure into the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo and chaotic land reform in the 2000s, by 2017 this jewel of an economy was a shell of its former glory, hardly recognisable because Zimbabwe's economy had been killed and transformed into a basket case, and a nation of beggars...*¹⁷

Although other natural and external factors, such as droughts,¹⁸ COVID-19,¹⁹ and economic sanctions,²⁰ contributed to Zimbabwe's crises, scholars like Makombe, Kufakurinani, and Chimhete²¹ document that the country fell into multiple crises primarily due to various unsound, politically driven policies. They argue that both the former Robert Mugabe-led government and the current Emmerson Mnangagwa administration remain in denial, which has worsened the crisis by preventing accommodation of possible remedies. As a result, the majority of ordinary citizens have suffered the effects of political and economic crises for years, continuing to the present. According to Tagwirei,²² the ZANU-PF party has led Zimbabwe to severe structural degeneration, extensive deindustrialization, informalization of the economy, and the politicization, corruption, and weakening of public institutions, along with policy inconsistencies.²³ This has scared away potential investors, caused unemployment, impoverished citizens, exacerbated poverty, and disrupted households, businesses, and the social fabric of the country. However, the state has crushed and silenced dissenting voices to enforce submission.

Whether to secure electoral support or change the national trajectory from conflict to peace, the state established the National Healing, Peace, and Reconciliation Commission in 2018 to facilitate nationwide healing, peace, and reconciliation, though this effort has proven ineffective. Although the establishment of the commission is commendable, it has not achieved national healing and does not address the needs of wounded healers. The ongoing political and socio-economic crises keep Zimbabwe polarized and prophetic voices marginalized. We see that some families, churches, and communities continue to demonize church leaders who speak out against maladministration in Zimbabwe. Consequently, ecclesiastical leadership and national healing remain elusive. Nevertheless, since the integral mission of God extends beyond *kerygma* to *leitourgia*, *koinonia*, and *diakonia*, church leaders must continue to advocate for the voiceless against political and economic injustices, and for national healing, reconciliation, and restoration. However, as Langa²⁴ reports, state leaders prioritize selfish enrichment and the retention of power at all costs, enriching themselves at the nation's expense. Consequently, being prophetic is at odds with current political powers.

¹⁶ Saddique, Ansari, "Understanding Zimbabwe's Economic Collapse: Causes and Consequences", Economics Online, 2024, Accessed 5 April 2025, https://www.economicsonline.co.uk/managing_the_economy/understanding-zimbabwes-economic-collapse-causes-and-consequences.html

¹⁷ Maurice T. Vambe, "Zimbabwe: The Fall from a Jewel Status," *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* 8, no. 4-6 (2023): 181

¹⁸ Tendai Takuva and Susan Swart, "'The Hunger Games': Politics and Drought in Post-Colonial Zimbabwe, 1980–1992," *Critical African Studies* 17, no. 1 (2025): 97; End Water Poverty, "Zimbabwe's Drought: Depletion and Economic Downturn Leads to Disaster," 2019, accessed April 4, 2025, <https://endwaterpoverty.org/zimbabwes-drought-depletion-and-economic-downturn-leads-to-disaster/>.

¹⁹ Eric K. Makombe, Ushehweu Kufakurinani, and Nathaniel Chimhete, "Towards the Zimbabwean Crises," in *Zimbos Never Die: Negotiating Survival in a Challenged Economy, 1990s to 2015*, eds. Eric K. Makombe, Nathaniel Chimhete, and Paul S. Nyambara (Leiden: Brill, 2023) 1.

²⁰ Shorai Murwira Sanctions or Corruption? Zimbabwe's Economic Crisis Spurs Innovation but Divides Opinion," *Development Aid*, 2024, accessed April 4, 2025, <https://www.developmentaid.org/news-stream/post/187470/zimbabwes-economic-crisis-spurs-innovation>.

²¹ Makombe, Kufakurinani and Chimhete, "Towards the Zimbabwean crises".

²² Tagwirei, "Rebuilding the broken".

²³ Maurice T. Vambe, "Zimbabwe: The Fall from a Jewel Status," *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* 8, no. 4-6 (2023): 181

²⁴ Veneranda Langa, "Zimbabwe's ZANU-PF: Liberation Party Turned Oppressor," *The Africa Report*, 2023, accessed April 4, 2025, <https://www.theafricareport.com/315068/zimbabwes-zanu-pf-liberation-party-turned-oppressor/>.

Magezi and Tagwirei note that ZANU-PF victimizes dissent, manipulates partisanship, and uses churches as tools for power acquisition and maintenance.²⁵ This explains why various prophetic figures, such as Pius Alick Mvundla Ncube, Pastor Evan Mawarire, Talent Chiwenga, Bishop Anselm Magaya, and others, have endured state intimidation and persecution. History continues to repeat itself in Zimbabwe. Citizens cannot forget *Gukurahundi* (the Shona code-named operation meaning ‘blowing chaff away’). Ndebele reports that this massacre killed more than 20,000 people in the Matabeleland and Midlands regions when the Mugabe-led Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) sought to silence the Joshua Nkomo-led Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU) party between 1983 and 1987.²⁶

Out of fear that the state would also persecute families, churches, and communities accommodating dissenting voices, many discouraged or excommunicated members who advocated for the voiceless during *Gukurahundi*. The troubling situation for ecclesial leaders remains a dilemma to this day. How can church leaders promote national healing when they are hurt, to varying degrees, by members of their own families, churches, and communities? This submission addresses this question regarding the healing of church leadership and its contribution to national healing in Zimbabwe. Before exploring church and national healing, the wounds of national healers, and the challenges facing church leadership and national healing, the following subsection redefines healing.

Redefining Healing in Zimbabwe

Healing has been widely discussed in the context of socio-economic and political instability in Zimbabwe. However, as national, community, church, and family leaders continued to engage in harmful practices while hypocritically advocating for healing, the concept itself became increasingly unclear. As noted by Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru, and Magezi and Tagwirei, the traumas of the Zimbabwean liberation war, colonial inequality, oppression, human rights abuses, and the silencing of dissenting voices have persisted beyond independence under the ZANU-PF regime.²⁷

Church and national leaders have suffered even more since independence, with Tagwirei describing the governance system as “characterized by self-serving scheming, conquering and retaining power at all costs, corruption, polarization, command polices, weaponization of the law, victimization and criminalization of dissenting voices.”²⁸ The polarization and abuse of church, community, and family leaders and members continue, with some perpetuating harmful treatment toward their prophetic leaders.

What does healing mean in such a context? According to the Cambridge Online Dictionary, “healing” refers to “the process of becoming well again, especially after a cut or other injury, or of making someone well again”.²⁹ Therefore, healing involves restoring people to health. Importantly, healing occurs when a diagnosis is made, conditions are identified, prescriptions are provided correctly and consistently followed, and the root causes of the issues are addressed.

Given Zimbabwe’s troubling political and socio-economic situation, healing in church leadership promotes holistic well-being through truth-telling and the identification and correction of wrongs. We agree with Vengeyi³⁰ that “Zimbabweans will never move forward unless they reflect on and engage with their past”. While Vengeyi focuses on national healing, his assertion that healing requires revisiting and addressing the root causes of issues applies equally to church leadership. When the past is acknowledged and addressed, individuals can gradually come to terms with their experiences. Church leaders can heal when their subordinates, community, and family leaders honestly

²⁵ Christopher Magezi and Kimion Tagwirei, “A Critical Assessment of Church and Political Engagement in Zimbabwe Under the New Dispensation,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 43, no 1 (2022): a2527.

²⁶ Zanele Ndebele, “Politics and Memory: The Case of the Gukurahundi in Zimbabwe,” *The Funambulist*, 2021, accessed April 4, 2025, <https://thefunambulist.net/magazine/against-genocide/politics-and-memory-the-case-of-the-gukurahundi-in-zimbabwe>

²⁷ Oswell Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru, “Reconciliation, Conciliation, Integration and National Healing: Possibilities and Challenges in Zimbabwe,” *African Journal of Conflict Resolution* 13, no. 1 (2013); Magezi and Tagwirei, “A Critical Assessment.”

²⁸ Tagwirei, “Hearing the Loud Voices,” 116.

²⁹ Cambridge Online Dictionary, “Healing,” accessed June 10, 2025, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/healing>.

³⁰ Obvious Vengeyi, “Forward (N) Ever! Backward March! Towards an Afro-Centric Biblical Philosophy of Reconciliation in Zimbabwe,” *PULA: Botswana Journal of African Studies* 27, no. 1 (2013).

commit to discussing, acknowledging, and addressing past wrongs, thereby supporting and restoring the prophetic role of the Church for family, community, and national transformation.

Drawing from Barnabas's observation that "...healing is not erasing all evidence/existence of pain/wrongdoing but the ability to live with it constructively", church leadership healing does not mean undoing past wrongs but recognizing and pursuing what is right.³¹ Understanding and accommodating the prophetic role of the Church as crucial for inclusive development improves healing from ecclesiological leadership. Acknowledging the infliction of harm, church leaders, families, churches, and communities must review their past, identify how they have hurt one another, and collaboratively explore feasible ways to achieve ecclesial leadership healing. Only when families, churches, communities, and the nation have identified, admitted, and halted the ongoing injury and pain of demonizing prophetic voices can the process of church leadership healing be realized in Zimbabwe.

Reviewing Church, National, and Church Leadership Healing in Zimbabwe

Many well-meaning Church leaders have worked hard since 1980 to promote healing and transformation in people and communities. Individuals experience pain for various reasons – whether man-made, natural, or self-inflicted. Cognitive dissonance is evident in Zimbabwe's church, political, and public spheres, stemming from colonial subjugation and post-independence injustices perpetrated by surrogate leaders who took power in this racially divided country.³²

The church–state issues in Zimbabwe can be traced back to its composition before independence. There were two distinct groups: the Christian Council of Southern Rhodesia (CCSR), which had divided opinions on Rhodesia and was predominantly white, and the predominantly black Catholic Bishops of Rhodesia (CBR), who spoke with one voice.³³ Despite colonial rule, some denominations had black leaders, such as Bishop Muzorewa, who believed that he could promote peace and national healing in war-torn Zimbabwe.³⁴ He served as Prime Minister for one year following the 1979 Internal Settlement but was later viewed as a traitor for compromising the gains of the liberation struggle. While pastors and other church leaders work to help individuals heal from pain, a critical question arises: how do the healers themselves find healing?

It is not surprising that healers paradoxically need healing themselves. Rev. Canaan Banana played a significant role in supporting the liberation war but sometimes compromised the Church's prophetic function.³⁵ When former President Banana faced incarceration, few Christians supported him despite his positive contributions. This neglect continues today. For instance, Archbishop Pius Ncube of the Roman Catholic Church in Bulawayo spoke out against government injustices in Matabeleland, resulting in his victimization, yet the Church could not intervene. In a 2017 interview, Ncube mentioned he chose to live among ordinary people in rural Hwange, where he remains today. Similarly, Pastor Evan Mawarire, founder of the *#ThisFlag* Citizen Movement, faced persecution with minimal ecclesial support.³⁶ While some church leaders and citizens attended his court cases, his family endured state interrogations and eventually sought political asylum in the United States without church assistance. The Church lacked strategies for addressing such politicized cases.

Dorman argues that churches and church non-governmental organisations (NGOs) maintained an ambiguous relationship with both the state and society in colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe.³⁷ His work highlights the vulnerability of religious organizations and their leaders to politically motivated punitive laws. In the early 1980s, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) worked tirelessly to promote healing and end violence caused by *Gukurahundi* in Matabeleland and

³¹ Otim D. Barnabas, "National Healing and Reconciliation in Volatile Political Transition Periods: The Zimbabwe Perspective," 2009, accessed June 13, 2025, doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1527027.

³² Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Social Cognitive Dissonance*, 1st ed. (Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson and Company, 1957).

³³ Chenjerai J. Zvobgo, "Church and State in Rhodesia: From the Unilateral Declaration of Independence to the Pearce Commission, 1965–72," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 31, no. 2 (2005): 381.

³⁴ Norman E. Thomas, "Church and State in Zimbabwe," *A Journal of Church and State* 27, no. 1 (1985): 113.

³⁵ Chitando, Taringa and Mapuranga, "Zimbabwean Theology".

³⁶ Evan Mawarire, "Evan Mawarire, World Fellows," *Yale World Fellows*, 2020, accessed May 5, 2025, <https://worldfellows.yale.edu/podcast/2020-world-fellow-evan-mawarire/>.

³⁷ Sara Dorman, *Rocking the Boat? Church and NGOs and Democratisation in Zimbabwe* (Edinburgh: Politics Publications, 2002).

the Midlands.³⁸ Bishop Karlen of the Roman Catholic Church is remembered for confronting Mugabe about *Gukurahundi* atrocities, urging him to stop the carnage.³⁹ As a form of healing by confronting past wounds, he spearheaded the documentation of the massacre through ‘Breaking the Silence.’ The police arrested nine pastors, including a blind pastor, for allegedly gathering in Kadoma for a leadership meeting of the Christian Alliance.⁴⁰ The pastors were tortured and released after days, exemplifying how the state persecuted dissenting voices in Zimbabwe.⁴¹ In all these cases, church leaders suffered, highlighting their need for healing.

The state established an Organ for National Healing and Reconciliation and Integration (ONRHI) during the formation of the Government of National Unity in 2008 in an attempt to initiate national healing, but this has been ineffective.⁴² The state also formed the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC), which has not produced tangible results.⁴³ Ecumenical bodies such as the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC), and Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) have been writing pastoral letters and facilitating dialogue towards conflict management, national healing, and reconciliation.⁴⁴ Instead of addressing the root causes of conflict, the state has vilified and harmed church leaders.⁴⁵

In addition to state issues, church leaders have also been hurt by internal conflicts. Examples include the ongoing Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) battles,⁴⁶ Church of Christ property disputes,⁴⁷ and the United Methodist Church split.⁴⁸ While the Church should be healing the world, it is inflicting wounds on itself and its leaders. However, as Nolte and Dreyer assert, “[T]he woundedness of the healers can serve as a source of healing in their personal lives, as well as in their relations with others.”

Although church leaders grapple with their own wounds, they should use their experiences to serve others. As Arthur states, the injuries and stories of the healers can be the best source of healing for others. Their experiences of hurt and pain can create an empathic bond with their listeners.⁴⁹ His perspective aligns with Nouwen's insights on the metaphor of the wounded healer, highlighting its relevance to this discussion.⁵⁰ In light of this, our following subsection offers suggestions on how wounded healers can heal themselves and others in the Zimbabwean context.

Troubleshooting Church and National Healing in Zimbabwe

Drawing from our conceptual framework of wounded healers, this perspective suggests that personal introspection, reflection, and rejuvenation are essential for holistic renewal and transformation.

³⁸ Ishmael Gusha, “Memories of Gukurahundi Massacre and the Challenge of Reconciliation,” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 45, no. 1 (2019): 1; Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), *Report on the 1980s Disturbances in Matabeleland and Midlands* (Harare: Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, 1997).

³⁹ Nkululeko Moyo, “Late Bishop Karlen Remembered for Confronting Mugabe Over Gukurahundi,” *Southern Eye*, 2025, accessed June 5, 2025, <https://newsday.co.zw/southerneye/local/article/200037806/late-bishop-karlen-remembered-for-confronting-mugabe-over-gukurahundi>.

⁴⁰ Baptist News Global, “Zimbabwean Police Arrest 9 Pastors Attending Leadership Seminar,” *ABP News*, 2007, accessed May 6 2025, <https://baptistnews.com/article/zimbabwe-police-arrest-9-pastors-attending-leadership-seminar/>.

⁴¹ David Kaulemu, David Maxwell, and Munyaradzi Ruzivo, *Ecumenical Christianity and Politics in Zimbabwe, 1980–2023* (Cape Town: Bidvest Printers, 2025).

⁴² James Mashingaidze, “International Day of Peace, Shaping Peace Together, World Day of Peace Zimbabwe,” accessed May 10, 2025, <https://www.nprc.org.zw/international-day-of-peace-shaping-peace-together/>

⁴³ Moyo, cited by Harris, (Lovett B. Harris, “Former Speaker Calls for National Unity to Address Gukurahundi Legacy,” *CITE*, 2025, accessed May 5, 2025, <https://cite.org.zw/former-speaker-calls-for-national-unity-to-address-gukurahundi-legacy/>).

⁴⁴ The Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops (ZCB), and The Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), “The Zimbabwe We Want: Toward a National Vision for Zimbabwe: A Discussion Document,” 2006, accessed May 2, 2025, https://www.joergalt.de/fileadmin/Dateien/Joerg_Alt/Advocacy/ZIM/06_The_Simbabwe_we_want.pdf.

⁴⁵ Bekithemba Dube, “‘To Hell with Bishops’: Rethinking the Nexus of State Law and Religion in Times of Crisis in Zimbabwe,” *Religions* 12, no. 5 (2021): 304. doi.org/10.3390/rel12050304; Nyasha Chingono, “Catholic Bishops in Zimbabwe Speak Out for the First Time on Human Rights Abuses,” *The Guardian*, August 24, 2020, accessed May 5 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/aug/24/catholic-bishops-in-zimbabwe-speak-out-for-first-time-on-human-rights-abuses-mnangagwa>.

⁴⁶ Desmond Chingarande, “AFM Factions Fight over Trademark,” *Southern Eye*, 2021, <https://www.newsday.co.zw/southerneye/news/article/12087/afm-factions-fight-over-trademark>.

⁴⁷ Gift Masengwe and Bekithemba Dube, “Critical Entitlement Theory on Post Missionary in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe,” *Theologia Viatorum* 45, no. 1 (2021): a109. doi.org/10.4102/TV.v45i1.109.

⁴⁸ Reuben Deketeke, “Homosexuality Splits United Methodist Church,” *The Herald*, 2024, accessed 20 May 20, 2025, <https://www.heraldonline.co.zw/homosexuality-splits-united-methodist-church/>

⁴⁹ Frank W. Arthur, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

⁵⁰ Arthur, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*

According to Pritchett and Thompson, Henry emphasized the importance of solitude and introspection as a means of reconnecting with oneself, God, and others. Nouwen⁵¹ presents healing as a process.⁵² Similarly, the healing of wounded church leaders in Zimbabwe may be long, painful, and winding, but it is necessary.

Zimbabwe's legacy of violence is a heavy burden that everyone feels and dreads, yet it must be addressed and can be overcome. Applying Nouwen, the first step to healing is the introspective acknowledgment of past hurts, wounds, and pain.⁵³ Parties involved should confront the truth with courage, transparency, and accountability. The wounded must recognize that trauma is not just an individual issue but rather a systemic problem that impacts entire communities.⁵⁴ While in pain, the wounded can and should realize that true healing involves dismantling the systems that perpetuate their suffering. This enables collaboration with others to address their issues and facilitate their healing. Together, wounded leaders and followers can create platforms for dialogue and engagement to collectively tackle their issues. In agreement with Doetsch-Kidder and Harris, collective approaches can enhance conflict resolution, personal and collective healing, and reconciliation.⁵⁵ It is important to encourage truth-telling, apologies, and the process of forgiveness. According to Tutu, without truth-telling and forgiveness, there is no future since true reconciliation cannot be achieved by denying the past.⁵⁶ These processes align with Nouwen's emphasis on self-reflection and rejuvenation for inclusive renewal and transformation.⁵⁷ We believe that through this renewal and transformation, church leaders can be healed and rejuvenated to heal Zimbabwe. As Wimberly states, we need to reclaim our identity and dignity in God during times of crisis and suffering.⁵⁸

Since we are addressing the need for healing among church leaders, the biblical basis of Matthew 18, which teaches engagement, dialogue, forgiveness, and reconciliation, is crucial. Wounded church leaders should connect with fellow ecclesial leaders to help them overcome their pain. These interactions align with our African philosophy of *Ubuntu*.⁵⁹ Although there is no straightforward answer to healing, combining spiritual, biblical, and anthropological strategies can be beneficial. Wounded healers should intentionally seek healing, engage with others, and share their experiences to assist others.⁶⁰ This also relates to the suggestions from Dudley, Sande, and Weaver, Flannelly and Preston, which indicate that healing can be supported through reflective engagement with the past, present, and collective acknowledgment of wrongs, fostering healing and reconciliation among involved parties.⁶¹ All healing requires collective accountability. When individuals or groups refuse to act with integrity – by telling the truth, offering genuine apologies, and committing to make amends – healing remains elusive.

A significant challenge is that some church leaders operate independently and are not accountable to any higher authority, making meaningful healing even more difficult to achieve. When they face hurt, it becomes a lonely struggle to find support and healing. As Wilhoit argues, it is essential to break out of self-dialogue and imitate Jesus by engaging in continuous conversation with ourselves,

⁵¹ Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*.

⁵² Carolyn Pritchett and Mel Thompson, *Identity, Finding Myself in God Henri Nouwen's Art of Living* (Canada: Bayard Faith Resources, 2021).

⁵³ Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*.

⁵⁴ Nineequa Blanding, "What Is Healing Justice," *Non-Profit Quarterly*, 2022, accessed June 10, 2025, <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/what-is-healing-justice/>.

⁵⁵ Sharon Doetsch-Kidder and Kristyn Harris, "Healing Justice as Intersectional Feminists Praxis: Well-Being Practices for Inclusion and Liberation," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 25, no. 1 (2023).

⁵⁶ Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (Cape Town: Image, 2000).

⁵⁷ Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*; Jim Wilhoit, "Fearless Conversation with God: Henri Nouwen on Prayer and Introspection," 2014, *Biola University*, 2014, accessed May 5, 2025, <https://cct.biola.edu/fearless-conversation-god-henri-nouwen-prayer-and-introspection/>.

⁵⁸ Paul Wimberly, *Claiming God, Claiming Dignity. African American Pastoral Care* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2003).

⁵⁹ Mark Mathabane, *Lessons of Ubuntu, How an African Can Inspire Racial Healing in America* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2018).

⁶⁰ Pritchett and Thompson, *Identity*.

⁶¹ Gary Dudley, "Six Steps Towards Healing for the Wounded Leader," *Christian Leadership Alliance*, 2014, accessed April 29, 2025, <https://christianleadershipalliance.org/blog/2014/09/15/six-steps-towards-healing-for-the-wounded-leader/>; Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker, A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflicts*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004); Andrew J. Weaver, Laura T. Flannelly, and John D. Preston, *Counselling of Survivors of Traumatic Events: A Handbook for Pastors and Other Helping Professionals* (Nashville, TN Abingdon Press, 2003).

God, and others.⁶² As healing and reconciliation promote transformation, the cost must be paid; parties involved must address the issues behind their pain and work towards peace.⁶³ In line with the Zimbabwe NPRC motto, “Peace begins with me, peace begins with you, and peace begins with us”, wounded healers must apply Nouwen’s process of self-reflection, introspection, and rejuvenation to heal and enhance the healing of the nation.

CONCLUSION

The national political and socio-economic crises, along with the victimization of prophetic voices, have inflicted deep wounds on the people of Zimbabwe. While church leaders are expected to fulfil their diaconal role by promoting national healing and reconciliation, many are overwhelmed by feelings of woundedness, helplessness, and hopelessness. As a result, numerous deeply hurt church leaders are suffering in silence. Drawing on the concept of wounded healers as presented in this paper, we conclude that the painful experiences of these leaders can become powerful sources of collective healing. Rather than abandoning their prophetic mandate, wounded church leaders should reflect on, share, and use their stories to comfort, encourage, and facilitate healing for themselves and others in Zimbabwe.

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⁶² Wilhoit, *Fearless Conversation*.

⁶³ Alexander Venter, *Doing Reconciliation Racism, Reconciliation, Transformation in the Church and World* (Cape Town: Vineyard International Publishing, 2004).

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