



An Analysis of the Role of the Missional Church in Community Development

Mawethu Msebi¹ 

¹ University of Pretoria, Hartfield -Pretoria, South Africa.

ABSTRACT

This article reports findings on an analysis of the role of the Missional church in Community development. The study relied on document analysis, with data collected from hard and electronic formats. The following themes were analysed: Missional Church, Missional methods of Effective Presence, Community Development, communities, the Contribution of the missional Church to Community Development and Challenges facing the Missional Church within. The analysis reveals that a missional church is a missional community, in other words, people who are united in living God's mission in a specific neighbourhood. The study further illustrates that community development is an essential part of God's mission, whereby the church, notably the missional church promotes active citizenship to enable people to work together to improve human circumstances for the well-being of their communities. In narrating the correlation between the missional church and community development, the study elucidates the principles of community development as a cornerstone to the success of community development. Moreover, the paper argues that better relationships, reconciliation, and solidarity are the value judgments engendered by the involvement of the missional church in community development. The study further illuminates that the involvement of missional churches in community development is not easy as they face challenges like religious pluralization and racial polarisation.

Correspondence

Mawethu Msebi
Email: mawethu.msebi@gmail.com
Publication History
Received 22nd July, 2022
Accepted 12th September, 2022
Published online 27th September, 2022

Keywords: *Missional church, community development, justice, transformation*

INTRODUCTION

Churches are an essential part of communities and the entire society, and therefore, it should not be difficult for them to know the good and ills within communities. Given the deliberation mentioned above, churches are to be engaged in addressing socio-economic challenges such as gender-based violence, hunger, crime, etc., within local communities.¹ Ordinarily, church members come from local communities. For this reason, it might not be difficult for the churches to know what is happening within communities. Churches have a calling to serve the community. Keum affirms that churches need to help the people to identify the daily choices that could promote human rights, gender justice,

¹ Leepo J. Modise, "The role of the church in socio-economic transformation: Reformation as a transformation process," *Unisa Press Journals*, Vol 44, No. 3 (2018), 15.

unity, dignity, and peace.² Given the exposition above, this paper tries to integrate the context of the missional church and local communities in a way that would encourage the mission of God. Accordingly, the paper explicates the missional church, community development, community development principles, its contribution, and challenges that missional churches face within communities. In essence, the article draws themes from both the missional church and community development disciplines. Ultimately, this paper's findings are anticipated to contribute to the existing body of literature regarding missional churches and community development.

METHODOLOGY

This article employed a qualitative research approach. Thus, its content is based on findings emanated from document analysis. The researcher examined and interpreted the existing literature to find the meaning, ideas, voice, and knowledge already established around this topic.³ For instance, this article used the literature from the World Council of Churches' Edinburg 2010⁴ as written by Balia and Kim, and *Together towards Life: mission and evangelism in changing landscapes*⁵ as the base documents supplemented by scholarly articles. From these documents, the author discussed the following five themes: Missional Church, Missional methods of Effective Presence, Community Development, Communities, the Contribution of the Missional Church to Community Development and Challenges facing the Missional Church within.

MISSIONAL CHURCH

Niemandt describes the missional church as a group of people living out God's mission, which he has called them on earth.⁶ Similarly, Dreyer delineates a church, notably a missional church, as the body of Christ that has to make Christ present in the world.⁷ The above definitions illustrate that the missional church is God's gift to the world, and its mission is to give new life and proclaim the loving presence of God to the world.⁸ The gospels attest to the above deliberations by stating that the purpose of the missional church is "to go into the world" and "make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19, Lk 24:48, Ac. 1:8). However, to achieve this Great Commission, the missional church has to practice the highest standards of ethical conduct of morality as its life should correspond with the earthly life of Christ. The Great Commission illuminates the missional church's role in the world, which is to witness the world of a reconciling God.⁹

The Missional Context of the Church

The word missional denotes the local church's role within the local community. Missional covers precise views on the mission's goal, including what a mission is and how it might be done.¹⁰ For instance, local churches might view community development as part of their missional goal. Pali argues that the latter would happen when development is linked to the church's mission and is used to enable humanity to live fully and confront social injustices.¹¹ Niemandt alludes that mission declares

² Jooseop Keum, *Together towards Life: mission and evangelism in changing landscapes*, (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2013), 28.

³ Glenn A. Bowen, Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method, *Qualitative Research Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2009), 27.

⁴ Daryl Balia & Kirsteen Kim (eds.), *Witnessing to Christ*, (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2010), 1-322.

⁵ Keum, *Together towards Life*, 1-96.

⁶ C.J.P Nelus Niemandt, "Trends in missional ecclesiology," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, Vol 68, No.1 (2012), 7.

⁷ Wim Dreyer, "Church, mission and ethics. Being church with integrity," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, Vol. 72, No. 1 (2016), 5.

⁸ Keum, *Together towards Life*, 7.

⁹ Dreyer, *Church, mission and ethics*, 6.

¹⁰ Attie Van Niekerk, "The missional congregation in the South African context," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, Vol. 70, No. 1 (2014), 1.

¹¹ Khamadi J. Pali, "The role of ministers in community development: The DRCA OFS as a case study," *Acta Theologica*, Vol 41, No. 2 (2019), 202.

life in its entirety and engages in the thriving of formation.¹² Thus, the missional church has to ensure good governance that leads to justice being practiced within communities. Most importantly, God's spirit must be discerned to bring life in its entirety to God's people. The latter could be acknowledged in many instances, including the liberation of the oppressed, the healing and reconciliation of broken communities, and the restoration of creation.¹³ The aspects described above would include the involvement of the missional church in development projects like building schools, libraries, and sports and recreation facilities among local communities. Likewise, the missional church has a reason to offer services such as pastoral care and counselling when needed among local communities. The above deliberations illustrate that the missional church is not an institution that attracts people to the church; it is an organisation that goes to people in their contexts and builds and nurtures relationships with them.

The Mission of God

The mission of God explains how the Lord, through his love, brings the sinful world of his fallen creation to the redeemed world.¹⁴ In fact, the notion of a missional church is firmly persuaded by the understanding of its mission as *Missio Dei* or the mission of God.¹⁵ Considering the above assertion, Wright posits that biblical ethics are essential in practicing the mission of God. Wright further accentuates that there could be no biblical mission without biblical ethics.¹⁶ The above scholar's argument divulges that the mission of the Lord to bless all nations is fundamentally correlated to the Christian demands regarding righteousness and justice. In supporting this exposition, Msebi posits that the issues related to righteousness and justice, particularly social justice, impact people's daily lives; hence churches as the transformation agents need to deal with them within communities.¹⁷ However, Msebi suggests that missional churches must collaborate with all community segments, including young people, when addressing such issues.¹⁸ The success of stakeholders' involvement, including missional churches, will be manifested by the improved life conditions amongst communities. The above assertions illustrate that all people, that is, Christians and non-Christians, should live through the moral standards of God's way.¹⁹ Based on evolving ecclesiology, the mission of God's people is a faithful presence. In other words, people should take care of all the creation and become a blessing to all the nations of the earth.²⁰

Faithful Presence

Fitch states that faithful presence defines the reality that God is present in the world, and he uses faithful people in his presence to make himself concrete and real amongst the world's struggle and pain.²¹ In this light, Hunter postulates that faithful presence occurs when churches, predominantly missional churches, are thoroughly contemporary and dedicated in the areas of social inspiration.²² Considering the exposition above, missional churches have a reason to be present and commit to showing God's love among families, neighbourhoods, charity institutions, and places of work. In light

¹² Nelus C.J.P. Niemandt, "Together towards life and mission: A basis for good governance in church and society today," *Verbum et Ecclesia*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (2015), 3.

¹³ Keum, *Together towards Life*, 37.

¹⁴ Christopher J.H. Wright, *The mission of God's people*. (USA: Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2010), 46.

¹⁵ Johannes J. Knoetze, "Welcoming Africa's children: The nature and implications of being a missional church," *Verbum et Ecclesia*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2016), 1.

¹⁶ Wright, *The mission of God's people*, 94.

¹⁷ Mawethu Msebi, "The Importance of Christian Youth Ministry Involvement in Community Development in the Mayibuye Community," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2022), 40.

¹⁸ Msebi, *The Importance of Christian Youth Ministry Involvement in Community Development*, 40.

¹⁹ Wright, *The mission of God's people*, 94.

²⁰ Niemandt, *Trends in missional ecclesiology*, 6.

²¹ David, Fitch E., *Faithful presence: seven disciples that shape the church for mission*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 10.

²² James D. Hunter, *To change the world: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 247.

of the above, faithful presence plays a critical role in transforming local communities as it inspires deep-rooted and foundational care for each other. Furthermore, faithful presence encourages Christians to express their faith in faithful practice.²³ In this reality, missional churches must be present among communities, and they need to care for the poor and the marginalized. For example, they might provide food, shelter, prayers, and so forth to the needy. Roxburgh coincides with the latter view; he accentuates that Jesus encourages Christians to leave their church buildings to reach out to neighbourhoods and communities.²⁴ The above arguments illuminate that the faithful presence and involvement of missional churches within communities allow them to understand community challenges. Thus, it would be easy for missional churches to participate in community development activities. Consequently, if missional churches are faithful and present, apply missional methods of effective presence, and are visible among communities, they are discerning God's future.

MISSIONAL METHODS OF EFFECTIVE PRESENCE

Demonstrate God's love for all humanity

The missional church should illustrate the Lord's love for all humanity through acts of service.²⁵ Demonstrating and giving God's love to people is an excellent element of community development. For instance, in some communities, orphans and older adults need love; therefore, missional churches have a reason to visit such institutions within local communities. Most importantly, the visits would also give activities like cleaning, distributing food parcels, toys, and more. Hansen emphasises that under the circumstances mentioned above, the world needs the love of Jesus Christ.²⁶ The above realities illustrate that missional churches may have to demonstrate God's love through acts of service. Also, missional churches are to correct or ameliorate community problems. This would allow people to experience love through community development programmes or specialised Christian ministries that bring together knowledge, gifts, skills, and leadership.²⁷

Christian leadership

Pellowe contends that Christian leadership is core to local communities.²⁸ Pellowe further argues that for Christian leaders to lead effectively, it would be imperative for them to get support from other institutions, including the specialised ministries that care for the poor and deprived. Taking into account the importance of Christian leadership, churches today need some imaginative and thoughtful people to get together for theological and missional reflection. Hansen affirms that the church today ordinarily stresses the love of the Lord at the expense of a traumatic encounter with the Lord's holiness.²⁹ This is a significant challenge; hence Christian knowledgeable leaders have to highlight the deficiencies of the current social order. In acknowledging the above assertion, Pellowe accentuates that Christians would want to consider God's ideal human society and develop concrete proposals for what the missional church could do to help the communities and organisations to move closer to God's ideal.³⁰

The Coalition of Gospel

Hansen notes that churches ought to establish a coalition of Gospel within communities.³¹ For Hansen, gospel coalitions encourage, educate, and transform the present and next-generation Christian leaders

²³ Hilary Russel, *A Faithful Presence Working Together for the Common Good*, (London: SCM Press, 2015), 73.

²⁴ Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the neighbourhood*, (USA: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 169.

²⁵ John Pellowe, *A Faithful Presence: Community Leadership*.

https://www.cccc.org/news_blogs/john/2017/01/23/a-faithful-presence/ (Accessed on 23/04/2022), 1.

²⁶ Collin Hansen, *Revisiting 'Faithful Presence': To Change the World Five Years Later*, (Deerfield, Illinois: The Gospel Coalition, 2015), 4.

²⁷ Pellowe, *A Faithful Presence*, 1.

²⁸ Pellowe, *A Faithful presence*, 1.

²⁹ Hansen, *Revisiting faithful presence*, 44.

³⁰ Pellowe, *A Faithful Presence*, 1.

³¹ Hansen, *Revisiting faithful Presence*, 105.

by encouraging gospel-centred values and practices that glorify Jesus Christ. The gospel-centred principles and practices benefit those for whom Jesus shed his life's blood. Hansen further attests that a biblically based and cohesive mission is the only sustainable future for the missional church.³² Correspondingly, Christians have to champion the gospel of Jesus Christ with precision, sympathy, courage, and enjoyment. The championing should be connecting hearts with fellow Christians across denominational, racial, and class lines. Likewise, Christians, specifically missional churches, should work together to ensure that the gospel of Christ is honestly communicated to the contemporary world.³³ In so doing, missional churches would play a significant role in fighting challenges like crime, violence, domestic violence, and so forth within communities and society. In supporting the idea of gospel coalition, De Beer further asserts that Christian or non-church-based organisations need to work with community-based organisations to curb challenges facing the communities.³⁴ For example, The Social Justice Coalition, a community-based organization in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, works as an agent for socio-economic liberation and the welfare of local communities.³⁵

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Community development is a process that involves the members of the community who aspire to improve community life collectively.³⁶ Dhamotharan further narrates that community development becomes successful when the management processes such as planning, decision-making, reflection on achieved results, and more are organised in a way that allows local communities to participate. In this light, community development encompasses cultivating the social environment as people who have identified themselves as a community and are ready to act to bring improvement to their area.³⁷ This improvement would need skills; therefore, missional churches should not just focus on spiritual needs but to assist people in acquiring life skills like entrepreneurial skills.³⁸ Such skills are fundamental in community development as they give the church and community members the knowledge of catching the fish rather than giving them.

Principles of Community Development

The principles of community development are the bedrock of community development, and they form the framework and guidelines for developing activities to have a holistic approach.³⁹ For effective community development, missional churches ought to ensure that it attains community development principles. The principles of community development ordinarily influence the attainment of developmental goals. Then, missional churches should focus on such principles for the success of developing projects within local communities.

Building Awareness

Goel alludes that during the last few years, social workers have been encouraged to be involved in environmental matters and build awareness at a local level.⁴⁰ The encouragement focused on issues that address the detrimental effects of unsustainable, insufficient, and unjust practices in the ecological sphere. In this light, Balia and Kim contend that missional churches and congregations as social institutes ought to be motivated and empowered to institute persistent training and education regarding

³² Hansen, *Revisiting faithful Presence*, 105.

³³ Hansen, *Revisiting faithful Presence*, 105.

³⁴ De Beer, *Urban social movements in South Africa today*, 3-4.

³⁵ De Beer, *Urban social movements in South Africa today*, 4.

³⁶ Mohan Dhamotharan, *Handbook on integrated community: Seven D approach to community capacity development*, (Japan: Asian Productivity Organization, 2009), 10.

³⁷ Ignatius Swart, *The Churches and the Development Debate: Perspectives on a Fourth Generation Approach*, (Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2006), 58.

³⁸ Manyaka-Boshielo, "The role of a missional social entrepreneurial church in a township community", 8.

³⁹ Abdul-Lateef A. Latopa & Mohammed B. Saidu, *Analysis of Values and Principles of Community development: A response to the Challenges of Real-World Situations* (2015), 9.

⁴⁰ Kalpana Goel, *Understanding Community and Community Development Defining the Concept of Community*. (Australia: University of South Austrian, 2014), 11.

awareness and the significance of interfaith engagement.⁴¹ Therefore, churches, including missional churches, should venture outside their comfort zones to introduce awareness programmes within communities. In other words, churches need to ensure that theological education does not only serve to build up the church from the viewpoint of the reign of the Lord. Missional churches should use theological education to create social awareness, political discernment, social involvement, and community empowerment.⁴²

Empowerment

Kim, Morison, Watts, and Busza define empowering as the process of enhancing peoples' capacity to make better choices and transmuting such choices into preferred actions and results.⁴³ Similarly, Ahmed and Talib comprehend empowerment as any process that illustrates the improvement of how people take control over their lives.⁴⁴ The above expositions highlight that empowerment is one of the fundamental principles of community development. In this respect, the missional church should acknowledge empowerment to influence community development. In acknowledging the importance of empowerment, Manyaka-Boshielo affirms that empowering the community could be attained through community involvement, capacity building, and access to relevant information.⁴⁵ For Manyaka-Boshielo, empowering members of the community is significant. Also, recognising the community involvement and voice in decision-making forms the basis of community development. On the contrary, Goel postulates that not all community members have equal opportunities to participate in community development projects.⁴⁶ Thus, such are the gaps that might be closed by the involvement of the missional churches amongst local communities. Linthicum concurs with the latter view as he encourages the missional churches to be involved in projects that empower the local communities.⁴⁷ Linthicum expatiates on the debate by arguing that if the missional church is reluctant to empower its community to deal with local problems directly, it fails to deal with the root of the issues in the community. In essence, if community members are not empowered to deal with their problems personally, community development projects in their communities might not be sustainable.

Sustainability

Sustainability is one of the essential principles of community development.⁴⁸ Keum alludes that the mission with a formation at its core is a constructive movement within churches through campaigns for eco-justice and more sustainable lifestyles in local communities.⁴⁹ In this way, local churches have a reason to partake in drafting and implementing inner-city and rural ecological policies to tidy up and rebuild cities and rural areas in balance with nature, honoring the cultural integrity of all communities. This involvement might include projects such as building schools, libraries, and other amenities within local communities. In the same sense, for sustainability, churches, particularly missional churches, are to provide training, facilitation, and support for the development programmes introduced to the communities.⁵⁰ In addition, missional churches may have to team up with local organisations to offer long-term services meant to eradicate poverty, fight against gender inequity, protect natural resources,

⁴¹ Daryl Balia & Kirsteen Kim (eds.), *Witnessing to Christ*, (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2010), 46.

⁴² Balia & Kim (eds.), *Witnessing to Christ*, 168.

⁴³ Julla Kim, Linda Morison, Charlotte Watts & Joanna Busza, "Understanding the impact of a microfinance intervention on women's empowerment and reduction of intimate partner violence in South Africa," *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol 97, No. 10 (2007), 39.

⁴⁴ Muhammad S. Ahmed & Abu N.B. Talib, "Analysis of community empowerment on projects sustainability: Moderating role of sense community," *Journal for Quality -of- Life Measurement*, Vol, 129, No.3 (2016), 1041.

⁴⁵ Semape J. Manyaka-Boshielo, "The role of a missional social entrepreneurial church in a township community," *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, Vol. 74, No. 1 (2018), 5.

⁴⁶ Goel, *Understanding Community and Community Development*, 8.

⁴⁷ Robert C. Linthicum, *Transforming power: Biblical strategies for making a difference in your community*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 152.

⁴⁸ Goel, *Understanding Community and Community Development*, 10.

⁴⁹ Keum, *Together towards Life*, 10.

⁵⁰ Russel, *A Faithful Presence*, 60.

etc.⁵¹ Such services should be offered to community members regardless of religion, political affiliation, or gender. Eventually, the Holy Spirit is the life-giver who builds awareness, sustains and empowers life, and renews the whole creation.⁵²

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE MISSIONAL CHURCH TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The missional church has a significant role in community development since local communities are antagonized by several adversities like poverty, hunger, and gender-related issues, to mention a few. Keum identifies good governance that leads to justice practice as an essential role that a missional church has to play among local communities.⁵³ De Gruchy coincides with Keum by acknowledging the restoration of justice as the significant element of reconciliation.⁵⁴

Reconciliation

Boesak alludes that reconciliation is radical because it goes to the roots of injustice, and it needs to be affected by the community, predominantly the wronged community.⁵⁵ In light of the above, reconciliation is vital in the gospel as Jesus Christ says that the heart of Christianity is to love God and thy neighbours (Mt 22:37-39). Thus, missional churches might have to thrust the reconciliation agenda as they could reach out to many people and stimulate a moral influence that imparts reconciliation among neighbourhoods.⁵⁶ A reconciled community is a relational, peaceful, and developed community. In other words, reconciliation is centric on community development as it brings peace and nurtures relationships among community members.⁵⁷ For practical reconciliation, the missional church would want to ensure that people collapse all racial, ethnic, and economic barriers within communities. Therefore, if those barriers are broken down, Christians could engage in effective community development.

Relationships

A relationship is an enduring association between at least two persons.⁵⁸ In this context, Boren attests that to be in the neighbourhood or community is to be relational, and to be relational is to be present.⁵⁹ Boren further contends that missional engagement is not fundamentally about saving people's lives; it has more to do with illustrating God's life together. This can only happen if God's people establish and maintain community relationships.⁶⁰ Then, for a missional church's involvement in community development, it is essential to foster relationships of respect and trust among individuals of diverse faiths. In recognising the significance of relationships, Karim and Sakdan posit that missional churches should extend reconciliation to all spheres of government. The extension of relations to the different development stakeholders leads to the success of development in local communities.⁶¹ To elaborate on this factor further, Keum deliberates that missional churches might use evangelism to inspire the

⁵¹ Steven Jerie, "The Role Of The Church In Sustainable Environmental Management In Zimbabwe: A Case Study Of The Bulawayo Archdiocese Of The Roman Catholic Church," *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, Volume 12, No.8, (2010), 220.

⁵² Keum, *Together towards Life*, 43.

⁵³ Keum, *Together towards Life*, 37.

⁵⁴ John W. De Gruchy, *Reconciliation. Restoring Justice*. (London: Fortress Press, 2002), 201.

⁵⁵ Allan Boesak, "And Zacchaeus remained in the tree: Reconciliation and justice and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission," *Verbum et Ecclesia*, Vol. 28, No. 3(2008), 636.

⁵⁶ Christoffel H. Thesnaar, "Seeking feasible reconciliation: A transdisciplinary contextual approach to reconciliation," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, Vol. 70, No. 2 (2014), 2.

⁵⁷ Karen Brounéus, *Reconciliation: Theory and Practice for Development Cooperation*, (Stockholm: Sida, 2003), 3.

⁵⁸ Saif R Farooqi, "The Construct of Relationship Quality," *Journal of Relationships Research*, Vol. 5, Issue 2 (2014), 1.

⁵⁹ Scott, M. Boren, *Missional small groups: becoming a community that makes a difference in the world*, (Michigan, USA: Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 2010), 133.

⁶⁰ Boren, *Missional small groups*, 133.

⁶¹ Khofizhoah M.Karim & Mohd F. Sakdan, "Relationship Between Community Involvement and Development Impact: A Case of Tourism Island in Malaysia," *International Journal of Innovative Technology and Exploring Engineering*, Volume 8, Issue 7S2 (2019), 398.

building of interpersonal and community relationships.⁶² As a result, Shambare and Kgatla contend that relationships draw the church community, local community, and individual believers to the value of responsible living.⁶³

Solidarity

Loh and Shear define solidarity as a shared identity and norms among people with a common interest in which a rupture affects them emotionally and in other ways.⁶⁴ For these authors, solidarity could be expanded beyond the local level, enabling exploration of the relationships amongst humans, communities, and the natural world. In acknowledging the importance of solidarity, Baron and Pali exhort that missional churches are expected to stand in solidarity with the oppressed to break any bondage, including racial oppression.⁶⁵ In expatiating on this argument, scholars like Sparks, Soerens, and Friesen contend that a missional church should stand in solidarity with its neighbours.⁶⁶ These scholars believe that the missional church and its neighbours should share a desire to see their area as an excellent place to live. Moreover, a church in solidarity with its neighbours will desire clean air to breathe, good schools for children, liveable vocations that serve the common good, justice for all, a voice of how things are governed, etc. In essence, a missional church has to ensure that it plays a role in implementing the abovementioned development activities within local communities. Truly, missional churches have a reason to engage with those in need and confront the injustices within communities.⁶⁷

CHALLENGES FACING THE MISSIONAL CHURCH WITHIN COMMUNITIES

Churches, especially missional churches, have a vital role to play in communities; nevertheless, in doing so, they have to be prepared to face challenges such as religious pluralism and racial polarization that prohibits the success of the development in local communities.

Religious Pluralism

Religious pluralism is the challenge faced by all faith communities, including missional churches today, as they have to shift from tolerating genuine pluralism.⁶⁸ In supporting the above assertion, Keum contends that there are tensions between individuals and communities of diverse religious convictions and interpretations of Christian witness.⁶⁹ For example, Christians and Muslims clash in countries like Indonesia.⁷⁰ Such challenges and tensions hinder the development of communities and society. In other words, development might not be successful in such environments because for effective community development; all community members should work together regardless of religion and beliefs. Moreover, living arrangements are almost organised in some areas according to certain beliefs and religions. Therefore, such situations may contribute to a lack of cohesion and cooperation in community development initiatives. The missional church may mitigate the above risk by considering scholarly suggestions on maintaining a peaceful co-existence amidst people of different beliefs. For instance, Nkuna's work on the convergence of interfaith dialogue and evangelism suggests

⁶² Keum, *Together towards Life*, 23.

⁶³ Canon B. Shambare & Selaelo T. Kgatla. "Church, mission and reconstruction: Being a church with integrity in reconstruction discourse in post-colonial Zimbabwe," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, Vol. 74, No. 1 (2018), 3.

⁶⁴ Penn Loh & Boone Shear, "Solidarity economy and community development: emerging cases in three Massachusetts cities, *Community Development*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (2015), 249.

⁶⁵ Eugene Baron & Khamadi J. Pali, "The shaping and formation of a missional ecclesiology of township congregations in the Mangaung Metro municipality during Covid 19," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, Vol. 77, No.3 (2021), 2.

⁶⁶ Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens & Dwight J. Friesen, *The new parish. How neighbourhood churches are transforming mission, disciples and community*, (Downers Grove, USA InterVarsity Press, 2014), 47.

⁶⁷ Baron & Pali, *The shaping and formation of a missional ecclesiology*, 8.

⁶⁸ Balia & Kim (eds.), *Witnessing to Christ*, 42.

⁶⁹ Keum, *Together towards Life*, 33.

⁷⁰ Balia & Kim (eds.), *Witnessing to Christ*, 42.

that this peaceful co-existence may be achieved through the understanding of and harnessing the complementary relationship between interfaith dialogue and evangelism.⁷¹ He argues that this understanding may promote mutual respect between the evangelizer and other faith.⁷² In this regard, this paper argues that such mutual respect may help the missional church to encourage people of various faiths to collaborate in developing their communities without discrimination.

Racial Polarization

Perkins posits that race has divided people so efficiently in separate churches, communities, neighbourhoods, relationships and agendas.⁷³ Therefore, it is tough for the missional church to attack the problems related to communities. Considering the above assertion, more than twenty years after the civil rights movement, people, especially Christians, still have to discuss racism. Likewise, it is unfortunate that race still plays a decisive role in the out-workings of Christianity.⁷⁴ Taking into account the severity of racism, some people have left their countries due to racism. Additionally, racism has lasting effects on all people, including Christians and non-Christians. As Christians, looking through the eyes of Christ at the problems facing the inner cities, the skin colour of the poor should be irrelevant. However, this is not the case. Perkins expresses that it is sad but true that many white Christians look at the inner cities, see black or brown and label the problem as “not my fault” and “not my responsibility.”⁷⁵ There are no justifiable grounds for accepting one race as superior to another. Indeed, community development could not be successful in communities or societies where racism is rife. In such situations, the conscience of the missional church should be pricked to rise above such limitations. Race has been such a significant player in people’s history. Knoetze coincides with the above realities; he further exhorts that to ensure the development within local communities, missional churches should focus on immediate context and social issues, such as racism, that hinder progress.⁷⁶ In this instance, any attempts to solve problems would mean acknowledging the race problem first instead of denying it as a critical issue.⁷⁷

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from this study have identified the recommendations below for conducting further empirical studies:

- The missional church should take initiatives that inspire transformation within local communities.
- The importance of the missional churches' contribution to community development.

CONCLUSION

The study dealt with the role of the missional church in community development. A literature study was employed to understand the missional church’s participation in changing the local communities for the better. Secondary data revealed that the missional church’s participation in community development is essential as local communities face various socio-economic challenges. The study identified gaps and recommended further empirical studies on missional church and community development.

⁷¹ Vusi G. Nkuna, “Convergence of Evangelism and Interfaith Dialogue: A Missional Reflection,” *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies*, Vol. 7, No.10 (2021), 185.

⁷² Nkuna, *Convergence of Evangelism and Interfaith Dialogue*, 187.

⁷³ John M. Perkins, *The call to Christian Community Development*, (Michigan, USA: Baker Books, 1993.), 24.

⁷⁴ Perkins, *The call to Christian Community Development*, 24

⁷⁵ Perkins, *The call to Christian Community Development*, 24.

⁷⁶ Johannes J. Knoetze, “Transforming theological education is not the accumulation of knowledge, but the development of consciousness,” *Verbum et Ecclesia*, Vol. 41, No. 1(2020), 2.

⁷⁷ Perkins, *The call to Christian Community Development*, 24.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ahmed, Muhammad S. & Talib, Abu N.B. "Analysis of community empowerment on projects sustainability: Moderating role of sense community." *Journal for Quality-of-Life Measurement*, Vol, 129, No.3 (2016).
- Balia, Daryl & Kim, Kirsteen (eds.). *Witnessing to Christ*. Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2010.
- Baron Eugene & Pali Khamadi J. "The shaping and formation of a missional ecclesiology of township congregations in the Mangaung Metro municipality during Covid 19." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, Vol. 77, No.3 (2021): 1-11.
- Boesak, Allan. "And Zacchaeus remained in the tree: Reconciliation and justice and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission." *Verbum et Ecclesia*, Vol. 28, No. 3(2008): 636–654.
- Boren, Scott M. *Missional small groups: becoming a community that makes a difference in the world*. Michigan, USA: Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 2010.
- Bowen, Glenn A. "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method." *Qualitative Research Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2009): 27-40.
- Brounéus Karen. *Reconciliation: Theory and Practice for Development Cooperation*. Stockholm: Sida, 2003.
- De Beer, Stephan F. "Urban social movements in South Africa today: Its meaning for theological education and the church." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, Vol. 73, No.3 (2017): 1-11.
- De Gruchy, John.W. *Reconciliation. Restoring Justice*. (London: Fortress Press, 2002).
- Dhamotharan, Mohan. *Handbook on integrated community: Seven D approach to community capacity development*. Japan: Asian Productivity Organization, 2009.
- Dreyer, Wim. "Church, mission and ethics. Being church with integrity." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, Vol. 72, No. 1 (2016): 1-8.
- Farooqi, Saif R. "The Construct of Relationship Quality." *Journal of Relationships Research*, Vol. 5, Issue 2 (2014): 1-11.
- Fitch, David E. *Faithful presence: seven disciples that shape the church for mission*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016.
- Goel, Kalpana. *Understanding Community and Community Development Defining the Concept of Community*. Australia: University of South Austrian, 2014.
- Jerie, Steven. "The Role Of The Church In Sustainable Environmental Management In Zimbabwe: A Case Study Of The Bulawayo Archdiocese Of The Roman Catholic Church." *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, Volume 12, No.8, (2010): 217-226.
- Hansen, Collin. *Revisiting 'Faithful Presence': To Change the World Five Years Later*. Deerfield, Illinois: The Gospel Coalition, 2015.
- Hunter, James D. *To change the world: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Keum, Jooseop. *Together towards Life: mission and evangelism in changing landscapes*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013.
- Karim, Khofizhoah M. & Sakdan, Mohd F. "Relationship Between Community Involvement and Development Impact: A Case of Tourism Island in Malaysia." *International Journal of Innovative Technology and Exploring Engineering*, Volume 8, Issue 7S2 (2019): 394-400.
- Kim, Julla, Charlotte Watts, Linda Morrison & Joanna Busza. "Understanding the impact of a microfinance intervention on women's empowerment and reduction of intimate partner violence in South Africa." *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol 97, No. 10 (2007): 1-10.
- Knoetze, Johannes J. "Welcoming Africa's children: The nature and implications of being a missional church." *Verbum et Ecclesia*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2016): 1-8.
- Knoetze, Johannes J. "Transforming theological education is not the accumulation of knowledge, but the development of consciousness." *Verbum et Ecclesia*, Vol. 41, No. 1(2020): 1-8.
- Latopa, Abdul-Lateef A. & Saidu, Mohammed B. *Analysis of Values and Principles of Community development: A response to the Challenges of Real-World Situations* (2015): 1-22.

- Linthicum, Robert C. *Transforming power: Biblical strategies for making a difference in your community*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003.
- Livingston, James K. *A Missiology of the Road: Early Perspective in David Bosch's Theology of Mission and Evangelism*. Cambridge, England: James Clarke & Co., 2014.
- Modise, Leepo J. "The role of the church in socio-economic transformation: Reformation as a transformation process." *Unisa Press Journals*, Vol 44, No. 3 (2018): 1-16.
- Msebi, Mawethu. "The Importance of Christian Youth Ministry Involvement in Community Development in the Mayibuye Community." *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2022): 36-47.
- Mwambazambi, Kalemba & Banza, Albert K. "Four-dimensional conversion for spiritual leadership development: A missiological approach for African churches." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, Vol 70, No. 3 (2014): 1-9.
- Niemandt, Nelus C.J.P. "Trends in missional ecclesiology". *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, Vol 68, No.1 (2012): 1-9.
- Niemandt, Nelus C.J.P. "Together towards life and mission: A basis for good governance in church and society today." *Verbum et Ecclesia*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (2015): 1-10.
- Nkuna, Vusimuzi G. "Convergence of Evangelism and Interfaith Dialogue: A Missional Reflection." *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 10 (2021): 178-189.
- Pali, Khamadi J. "The role of ministers in community development: The DRCA OFS as a case study." *Acta Theologica*, Vol 41, No. 2 (2019): 200-221.
- Perkins, John M. *The call to Christian Community Development*. (Michigan, USA: Baker Books, 1993).
- Pellowe, John. *A Faithful Presence: Community Leadership*. [online-https://www.cccc.org/news_blogs/john/2017/01/23/a-faithful-presence/ (Accessed on 23/04/2022).
- Roxburgh, Alan J. *Missional: Joining God in the neighbourhood*. USA: Baker Publishing Group, 2011.
- Russel, Hilary. *A Faithful Presence Working Together for the Common Good*. London: SCM Press, 2015.
- Thesnaar, Christoffel H. "Seeking feasible reconciliation: A transdisciplinary contextual approach to reconciliation." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, Vol. 70, No. 2 (2014): 1-8.
- Shambare, Canon. B. & Kgatla, Selaelo T. "Church, mission and reconstruction: Being a church with integrity in reconstruction discourse in post-colonial Zimbabwe." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* Vol. 74, No. 1 (2018): 1-12.
- Sparks Paul, Soerens Tim and Friesen Dwight J. *The new parish. How neighbourhood churches are transforming mission, disciples and community*. Downers Grove, USA InterVarsity Press, 2014.
- Swart, Ignatius. *The Churches and the Development Debate: Perspectives on a Fourth Generation Approach*. Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2006.
- Van Niekerk, Attie. "The missional congregation in the South African context." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, Vol. 70, No. 1 (2014): 1-6.
- Wright, Christopher J.H., 2010. *The mission of God's people*. USA: Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2010.

ABOUT AUTHOR

Mawethu Msebi is a licensed minister at the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa and a registered Religious Specialist with the Association of Christian Religious Practitioners in South Africa. He holds a Master of Theology (Practical Theology/Community Development) from the University of Pretoria, South Africa, and a Master of Business Administration (MBA) from the University of Reading, United Kingdom. He is currently a PhD student at the University of Pretoria. He is also a Business Accountant in Practice with the Southern African Institute for Business Accountants. His research interests include youth ministry and community development.