

Pandemic ecclesiology: Church re-actualisation during the pandemic



Authors:

Gernaída K.R. Pakpahan¹ 
 Fibry J. Nugroho² 
 Priskila I. Benyamin³ 
 Frans Pantan⁴ 
 Wiryohadi Wiryohadi⁵ 

Affiliations:

¹Department of Theology,
 Faculty of Theology, Sekolah
 Tinggi Teologi Bethel
 Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia

²Department of Theology,
 Faculty of Theology, Sekolah
 Tinggi Teologi Sangkakala,
 Salatiga, Indonesia

³Department of Research and
 Evaluation Education, Faculty
 of Research and Evaluation
 Education, Universitas Negeri
 Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia

⁴Department of Christian
 Education, Faculty of
 Christian Education, Sekolah
 Tinggi Teologi Bethel
 Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia

⁵Department of Pastoral
 Counseling, Sekolah Tinggi
 Teologi Bethel Indonesia,
 Jakarta, Indonesia

Corresponding author:

Gernaída Pakpahan,
 20121016@sttbi.ac.id

Dates:

Received: 22 Oct. 2021
 Accepted: 22 Jan. 2022
 Published: 16 Mar. 2022

How to cite this article:

Pakpahan, G.K.R., Nugroho,
 F.J., Benyamin, P.I., Pantan, F.
 & Wiryohadi, W., 2022,
 'Pandemic ecclesiology:
 Church re-actualisation
 during the pandemic', *HTS
 Theologiese Studies/
 Theological Studies* 78(4),
 a7201. [https://doi.
 org/10.4102/hts.v78i4.7201](https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i4.7201)

Read online:



Scan this QR
 code with your
 smart phone or
 mobile device
 to read online.

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has brought significant changes to the life of the Christian church in Indonesia. Such changes can degrade the essence of the fellowship of believers. The reality of the COVID-19 pandemic, which became the church's starting point, has triggered a change in the pattern of carrying out its duties and services to the people and their environment. The church can adapt and transform its ministry innovations as a living organisation. The church needs to reinterpret the effectiveness of its presence through adapting new service patterns, namely onsite services to virtual services or hybrid services, to remain relevant to every dimension of rapid change in all aspects. This research study analyses the actualisation of church ecclesiology in the midst and after the pandemic. Using descriptive qualitative methods with interactive data analysis from Miles and Huberman, the following points have been found: (1) virtual ministry as a church reality, (2) a pneumatic encounter spirituality characterises the church, (3) ecclesiology in the context of universal communion and (4) the sacrament as a means of manifesting divine power.

Contribution: This study provides the concept of collaboration between ecclesiology as a principle and technology as a method. Ecclesiology and technology can realise the ministry of church unity. Collaboration between principles and methods in the church will build a flexible church in all conditions. However, the principles and duties of the church vocation are not neglected.

Keywords: communion; sacrament; pneumatic; virtual; technology; ministry.

Introduction

Since the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, church services have changed drastically, which requires the church to adapt quickly to provide the best service. Restrictions on worship in church buildings during the pandemic and compliance with the application of health protocols are the obligations of each individual for the creation of joint health in the community. Empirical facts show that many churches are not ready to implement life in the new normal (Manguma 2021). The activities originally carried out onsite in the church building have now almost all shifted to a technology-based virtual world. It is undeniable that the availability of the latest technological devices and the skills to use them are also significant needs that must be met. Churches have appeared in almost every digital medium, including e-mail, websites, internet forums, videos and social networking sites (Hutchings 2013). Fellowships and congregation meetings are now commonly held online via Zoom, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Google Meet and other link-based platforms (Singarimbun 2021). Worship in the virtual world has become a church reality where there are interactions between individuals and the church community (Bock & Armstrong 2021).

The adaptation of virtual ministries is a challenge that the church must face wisely, considering how people are migrating from a world where initially social contact is determined by the physical presence and then changing to a virtual world where social contact is described by what appears on the screen (Dreyer 2019). This phenomenon is increasingly leading to changes in the model of civilisation. So, all activities of the society, including the church, will be carried out with a virtual civilisation model that touches every aspect of human life.

It must be understood that all church members do not readily accept virtual ministry, where online media is used as the primary way of communication in church life (Jun 2020). Although, historically, virtual services have existed for a long time, namely, when church services connect to technology. As the technology advances, the church also serves with newspapers, radio,

Copyright: © 2022. The Authors. Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

television and other media (Denson 2011). In a global world order that connects to the Internet, all church members realise that virtual reality is a reality that supports community life activities, including the church. However, many residents, especially the older generation, are still unfamiliar with these technological devices, and therefore, virtual services are not receiving a good reception. It seems that the old culture of social interaction is still a strong choice for this group.

The utterly different response by the younger generation, such as the millennial generation and the generation after it, where the Internet is vital in carrying out their life activities. Humans connected to the Internet get various conveniences in carrying out their life activities (Bock & Armstrong 2021). In addition, the availability of various platform facilities can provide space for humans to obtain a lot of information quickly and cheaply. In other words, technological facilities have helped humans to optimise their potential and achievements.

It must be realised that technological developments have provided new experiences and various benefits for humans; for example, virtual worship services provide many choices (Lövheim & Linderman 2005). Because apart from the worship held at the local church, everyone can easily access various services simultaneously. In other words, everyone is free to choose and follow worship according to their needs. Study materials enrich knowledge or find answers to various questions that arise in one's mind. In addition to vast opportunities, one can choose the right time to not interfere with other tasks. Of course, it must be appreciated that there are members of the congregation who have a solid emotional bond with their church, prioritising remaining faithful to worship in their local church (Hosea 2019). The openness of access to information media has provided an opportunity for every individual to follow the worship he or she 'likes' according to his or her 'needs'. Church membership can also switch from being an administratively documented membership in a local church to being a follower of certain servants of God on YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and other social media (Rahmawati 2020).

The church, in particular, Gereja Bethel Indonesia, needs to actualise its service patterns and systems relevant to the community and environment with the practical implications of changing situations. The most important thing in the essence of worship is to experience fellowship or encounter with the life (Triune God). Therefore, worship is fundamental and absolute (Nel 2016). For Christians, worship can use various places and media, such as church buildings, public buildings, radio, television, Zoom, YouTube, Instagram, Google meet and other platforms. That is why the congregation needs to be continuously educated to adapt to the changing world without leaving its worship activities (Jun 2020).

These modifications change the experience of Christian spirituality from a physical encounter to a virtual one

(Sopacoly & Lattu 2020). Currently, the virtual ministry also can carry out missions virtually (Jun 2020). Church ministries have started to adapt to enter the virtual space, and traditional pastoral care is migrating to digital (Sanjaya 2020). The digital era provides an opportunity in the Christian dimension to measure the risk of moving worship to a virtual space (Horsfield 2015). An in-depth study is needed regarding the actualisation of ecclesiology during a pandemic. This study presents an analysis of ecclesiology during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study can provide the concept of a Pentecostal church that is relevant in every situation.

The church will not return to its full pattern and service system before the pandemic. Life will continue to run in a new dimension, and humans will experience the changes in the future. In this context, the church's presence needed to transform innovation in carrying out its duties and vocations in a relevant way. Therefore, the Church is required to be able to develop creativity and flexibility in order to realise excellent service for the congregation. After the COVID-19 pandemic, there will be changes and updates that occur. Responding to this situation, the church is required to continue to exist and carry out its duties. On that basis, this research study is aimed at actualising the church's ecclesiology during and after the pandemic. Thus, the discussion focuses on 'how is the actualisation of church ecclesiology in and after the pandemic?' This question is discussed in the following sections.

Research methods

This study is a type of research with a qualitative approach, namely, research based on the philosophy of post-positivism where truth is by the nature of the object, used to examine the condition of natural objects, where the researcher as the vital instrument and research results emphasise meaning rather than generalisation (Creswell 2013). To present the data so that it is easy to understand, the analysis interactive model from Miles and Huberman is used, which divides the steps into several parts, namely data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification (Moleong 2014). The data were generated from interviews and questionnaires distributed to local churches of the Indonesian Bethel Church in Indonesia with representatives from each region, namely Western Indonesia, Central Indonesia and Eastern Indonesia. The selection of these three regions represents the prominent regions in Indonesia. Interviews were conducted with key informants, namely pastors and several congregations representing the younger and older generations. Furthermore, the data in the field are analysed to build a post-pandemic church building by paying attention to the changes that occur.

Virtual ministry as a church reality

We live in an era of disruption, marked by massive innovation and changes in all aspects. It has fundamentally changed all existing systems, arrangements and landscapes in new ways. Then another fact is that the latest advances have followed

this era in science and technology, which have contributed significantly to improving the quality of human life. That is why humans can connect easily and quickly without limits through the Internet-of-things facilities. In particular, information and communication technology facilities have enabled us to work more efficiently and effectively. The place is no longer the main obstacle for humans to carry out various activities. Meeting places and times have become more flexible (Lövheim & Linderman 2005). In this case, the church also benefits from the various facilities of the platform. Human activities had been carried out in the virtual world, including church services. Bock explained that the church always uses technology as a tool for worship. The church uses technology in line with the history of technology's presence (Bock & Armstrong 2021). All forms of activity involving hardware 'hardware' and software 'software' in processing, managing, storing, distributing and utilising information are general understanding of information technology. From time to time, information technology has experienced significant developments. For example, starting with the delivery of information through scratching symbols on cave walls, the use of 'kentongan' sounds in villages to facsimile technology, computers, cell phones, ATMS (Benyamin, Sinaga & Gracia 2021). The use of smartphone technology and the massive use of social media through internet connections are what Hodkinson (2011) calls an integrated network of different communicative options. From its inception, the church has used this technology to spread the gospel message.

In history, when writing his letter in the New Testament, Apostle Paul used a pen and paper (papyrus), both of which were innovative technologies at that time. Martin Luther used the printing press to get the word of God into the hands of ordinary people. Even Billy Graham is famous for his revival services and televised evangelism. This means that the church found ways to convey the gospel's message early on through a wide variety of available tools. Now is our turn to use social media to write about the next era in church history (McKinney 2014).

The extent to which a group of people who meet and interact online who can consider a community has been the subject of great debate over the past three decades. In the 1990s, scholars began to pay serious attention to technology and the methods people use to gather together online and the types of discussions and practices that are the focal point of these groups. There have been three waves in its history. The first wave, scholars initially approached the Internet with interest, as they sought to describe the practice of online living and the blurred boundaries of online culture. Do questions also asked about what happens online? How is it possible for this social aggregation to occur? Moreover, what effect does online life have on individual and group identity? The second wave put forward a critical discussion regarding the impact of the online community in the late 1990s. Hence, questions are asked such as '[h]ow do we study online mediated communities?' 'What is the role of online media for

congregational faith growth?' The third wave is geared towards the theory of online worship and fellowship. These studies provide exciting conclusions about how religious groups might civilise technology, such as the Internet to be incorporated into the community and provide opportunities for self-expression within the community without boundaries (Hutchings 2013).

The ability of Internet to facilitate and mediate social relationships has shifted many people's ideas about friendship, relationships and community in an era of networking based on digital technology (Campbell 2013). The Internet has brought the church as a community to a gathering point in the virtual world. The preference of digital practices towards networked culture changes the formation of social order that previously centred on loyalty and commitment to one community to a tentative community (Horsfield 2015).

As a community, the church is the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit. The church is a community of God's people called from the world sucked into communion with Christ. Therefore, the church has a unique identity, namely God's beloved people (cf. Pt 2:9). The church understands the visible and invisible church (Arrington 2015). Understanding implies that as the body of Christ, the Church has received a special call to live in unity to love one another. The church as the body (soma) of Christ signifies a special bond between the Christ and the church (Van Niftrik & Boland 2015).

Moreover, as members of the body of Christ, the basic logic is that believers must be closely related to one another based on Christ's love (cf. 1 Cor 12:26; Setyobekti, Kathryn & Sumen 2021). The Bible clearly says that although there are many members, there is only one body (1 Cor 12:12). Through the testimony of the Bible, believers should realise that basically, God created the Church in various ways to love one another and be responsible for one another.

The Pentecostal Church also carries out its duties in *koinonia*, *pastoralia*, *marturia*, *didaskalia* and others amid the dynamics of world development in all its aspects, namely social, political, cultural, and economic (Tanojo 2020). Church services will continue to take place amid various dynamics of changing times. That is why the virtual ministry is a necessity in carrying out the main tasks of the church, including fellowship (*koinonia*), *marturia* (*witnessing*), teaching (*didaskalia*), ministry (*diaconia*) and pastoralism (*pastoralia*). However, it is true that in practice, it needs reinterpreting as a result of social change. In general, fundamental changes in social life occur because of the underlying events, both predictable and previously unpredictable, such as natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic that have changed the way people live (Pradipta 2020).

Now, the virtual space has become an effective means of fellowship (*koinonia*) for congregation members. Due to restrictions on social interaction because of the COVID-19 pandemic, church services have moved to the Zoom room,

YouTube, Instagram, and other facilities. Thus, all activities of worship, faith-building, counselling, and prayers are carried out online just like in the real world without reducing the essence of fellowship itself, namely celebrating God's presence. Within the framework of Christian theology, it is understood that God is the spirit not limited by place, time and other means. He is pleased to be present in whatever media his people use (Parish 2020).

In the context of today's digital era, churches are created virtually through digital worship, at least it has become an expansion of the Kingdom of God, which is no longer limited by territorial boundaries and geographical area because internet technology has brought freedom to express the form of service provided to the community digital today. The world in the digital era has presented a society that is familiar with gadgets, so daily consumption is present in cyberspace. However, live streaming services have become an option for everyone to choose to worship.

In the future, it seems likely that the number of individuals who use networked technologies to build a highly individualised form of religious belief will continue to increase (Howard 2011), especially in this research, namely the Indonesian Bethel Church congregation. Pentecostal Church is adapting to the conditions of the times. It includes a community of believers who participate in an online church service. The community that exists in an online church is a group of people. It is a virtual place where they meet; however, they participate online in nature: sing, listen, take notes, talk to each other and so on (Hutchings 2013).

The task of the church to be the salt and the light of the world through the testimony of its life can be realised through information and communication technology. It also means that the command of Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:18–20 can realise, namely making all nations become disciples of Christ (Johns 2010). The use of information and communication technology to proclaim the gospel shows that there has been a shift in the pattern of church testimony, namely from onsite evangelism patterns to virtual or online ministry patterns. The ministry of evangelism virtually has an unlimited reach, beyond space and time, which has often been an obstacle in evangelism in the past. On a specific side, the information and communication technology has weaknesses and strengths, namely, misused in spreading the destructive content, such as hoaxes and others. However, the advantage is the flexibility and unlimited reach as long as it connects to the Internet. Therefore, the appropriate use of technology is an excellent blessing for implementing the church's marturia.

The church is also in charge of teaching (*didaskalia*). Jesus Christ has become an ideal and perfect teacher or role model in teaching. He taught his disciples with a wide variety of approaches and methods. The teaching space he uses is not limited by place and time; but in every life situation, home, synagogue, by the beach, on the hill or in the temple. The fundamental focus and core of his teachings are the Kingdom

of God. Jesus as the Great teacher taught by the power of God, namely the power that liberates, heals and restores. His disciples experience spiritual freedom and are complete by signs of physical health (Chai 2021). The flexibility of Jesus Christ in teaching has a connecting point with learning patterns through virtual or online, which is not tied to a particular place or situation. Not only that, Jesus Christ used any means as his teaching aids. In the era of technology as it is now, the virtual learning process is believed to grow the congregation's faith (Setyobekti 2017). Nevertheless, vigilance must still be activated because false teachings can often develop quickly and massively through virtual media.

Elvis noted that 'adaptive pedagogy' is shown by all stakeholders who imitate Jesus as a person who can adapt. Jesus took the same attitude of pedagogical adaptation that has marked his interactions with others throughout the gospels. In particular, his dialogue with Peter challenges the disciple's understanding and commitment to him, which are part of Jesus' larger pedagogical scheme (Elvis 2020). The most considerable adaptation is his incarnation. God became man, God as the soul's guide that can adapt. Discipleship is not carried out statically but is a process according to its capacity (Sturdevant 2016).

Another duty and calling of the church are to shepherd God's people, namely church members. Pastoral duties through virtual modes are very complicated because the limitation of church members is in the pseudo category, or it is difficult to distinguish between permanent and non-permanent members (Hardori 2014). However, it is understood that all visitors in virtual worship are entitled to the same service. Another complication is that their needs are always expressed clearly, honestly, and openly. Members also do not always reveal their identity (anonymous) as in real life (Bock & Armstrong 2021). Many of them live in the darkness of sin; however, they are people in need of pastoral care. That is why shepherding is done with the motivation of love, as the Great Shepherd has set an excellent example for pastoral work. A shepherd connects with his sheep (Lk 15:1–7; Mt 18:12–14; Mk 6:34; Jn 10:1–18). The good shepherd will seek out the stray sheep. He is even willing to leave a flock of sheep lost in search of a lost sheep (Snaith 1971). The goal is for all the sheep to enjoy and experience happiness and joy. The good shepherd will serve, care for and even be willing to offer his life (Jn 10:10). The Apostle Peter advised the church elders to shepherd the Church of God (1 Pt 5:2). Shepherding is done with humility and dedication. The church pastor must feed, care for, watch over his sheep and set an example of useful life.

One of the facts of life in a globalised world is poverty caused by many factors, including power, resources, policies, culture and education. The church must not turn a blind eye to this fact of life, and he must be proactive in providing diaconal services aimed at helping the improvement and development of a complete human being (Leer-Helgesen 2018). One of the essential tasks of the church is to provide care to others, for example, assisting

the poor and marginalised groups in a society. This form of service has been exemplified by Jesus Christ, namely providing healing to the sick, food to the hungry, water to the thirsty and release to the bound. Jesus Christ's concern for the physically and spiritually poor is very prominent (Mt 5:3). Jesus Christ also said that the poor will always exist in the community (Mt 26:11). That is why the deacon ministry that began in the early church era (Ac 6:1) must be carried out continuously by the church throughout the ages (Leer-Helgesen 2018).

The church as a pneumatic encounter spirituality

The experience of encountering God in the Trinitarian concept (father, son and Holy Spirit) is essential for worship in the church. Providing space in the experience of encountering the Spirit of God as the omnipresent who cannot be limited by space and time is a must (Macchia 2020). The narrative recorded in the history of God's people and the church that they have repeatedly experienced difficult times but still feel God's presence in the church as the body of Christ. This condition became the experience of Jesus in the face of temptation in the desert for 40 days. The fact of his victory over the temptation of food, position and power is a guarantee of victory for believers whom the Spirit of God leads in facing struggles (Gratia 2020). On that basis, it believes that even the pandemic period will not limit the Spirit of God working for his church. The Spirit of God is present as a power that comforts, strengthens, restores and accompanies his people in every situation and dimension of life. The following are at least three principles of a believer's pneumatic encounter with the Spirit of God, namely:

Firstly, the church has a pneumatic spirit of spirituality, and the encounter with the Spirit of God provides space for its members to experience living fellowship with God and others (Vondey 2020). God's providence during a famine, war, natural disasters, exile and other hardships. They were looking at experiences of prophets and leaders who kept their spirituality in suffering like Samuel, the man of God who kept praying for his goodness when facing pressure from the nations around Israel (1 Sm 7:5; 8:6; 12:19). Likewise, prophet Jeremiah prophesied the fall of people of Judah for their disobedience, and there was an invasion of foreign nations and the plunder of the property of the people of Judah. Even so, Jeremiah continued to convey his prophetic voice so that the people would continue to pray for God's grace and mercy to become a reformer for them. In this case, it is clear that God's immanence is still experienced through prayer and hope that Yahweh can help and be with the people (Jr 33:3). The same thing happened to Daniel, who kept awake in his perseverance, praying three times a day in the land of exile, for which he was threatened with punishment because it was considered a violation of the king's commandment (Dn 6:11). In such a situation, Daniel still showed the spirit of his spiritual life, namely holding fast to God's sovereignty over his life.

The powers of the Holy Spirit constitute the Church of Jesus Christ as his mystical body. Jesus called them together and made them members of his mystical body. Thus, the idea of the church as the mystical body of Christ is not an illusion. Instead, it is a way of expressing that church members live the divine life by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who makes the church and becomes the mystical body of Jesus Christ. From this perspective, the role of the Holy Spirit as the soul of the church is evident and visible.

Secondly, the church is a pneumatic fellowship in Pentecostal Church. The Spirit of God works beyond the boundaries of space and time (Macchia 2020). Jesus Christ wanted to convey the message in his conversation with the woman at Jacob's well. The presence of the Spirit of God restores the understanding of Israelite worship practices that have centred in Jerusalem as a holy city. Likewise, the Samaritans considered Jacob's mountain and well to be a place of God's presence. However, God is present among people who worship him in spirit and truth (Jn 4:24) in all places and times. In general, from the understanding of Christian theology it is believed that the Spirit of God has the power to enter material space, but he cannot be controlled by matter (Rajagukguk & Sugiono 2020). The Spirit of God is present beyond space and time, so he cannot be controlled by space and time. Therefore, virtual facilities become a suitable means of expressing God's presence, greeting his people in all places, spaces and times.

Thirdly, the church is empowering by the Holy Spirit. God wants man to develop his spiritual capacity continuously, and this is what Jesus Christ promised through the presence of the Holy Spirit (Gultom 2013). The presence of the Holy Spirit as a divine third person has the power to equip believers with spiritual gifts. In addition, the Spirit of God helps his people to enter into individual fellowship with him, fellowship with family, and fellowship in community, both physically and virtually. Thus, everyone can have pneumatic spiritual experiences in various dimensions of life.

Ekklesia as a form of universal communion

One of the characteristics of the church is holy and universal. It means that the church is a community of all nations called and consecrated to belong to Christ. So, the main foundation of the fellowship of believers is unity in the body of Christ. Communion celebrated Eucharistic meal as a form of gratitude for the reality of the living communion between God and his people and the fellowship of fellow people who sucked into it. The following are certain essential things related to the church as a universal community:

Firstly, the church is considered as the body of Christ. As the body of Christ, the church should not be exclusive but inclusive. There appears to be a unified understanding that Christ is the head in the church's inclusiveness, with the Church as a member of his body (Shenk 1996). With such an understanding, every member of the church and believer

place himself or herself as an equally integral part of other fellow followers of Christ. The ultimate goal of the unity of the body of Christ is to worship and glorify Christ as the only lord and saviour of humankind (Arrington 2015). In order to maintain togetherness as members of the body of Christ, it is necessary to build harmonious brotherhood solidarity and love each other sincerely. The question is how to realise those lofty ideals during the current COVID-19 pandemic? Related to this question, technology and information facilities are the answer, that is, fellowship maintains through togetherness activities in virtual spaces with platform facilities, including Zoom, WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, Google Meet, Instagram and others (Jun 2020). Humans have used these facilities to build social interactions without barriers of time, space, social, culture, language, religion, ethnicity and nation. Through virtual services, there are opportunities for all ethnic groups, irrespective of social and educational levels to become Christ's disciples. This is the hope and prayer of Jesus so that his disciples can become one in realising the task of preaching the gospel (cf. Mt 28:19–20 and Jn 17:21).

Secondly, the church is a means of humanising one's fellow beings. The Bible's testimony says that all humans have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rm 3:23). The fact is that man's sinfulness has made him suffer spiritually, morally, intellectually, emotionally, and physically. In such a condition of human helplessness, he needs the grace of God through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Within the framework of understanding Christian theology, believers become representatives of Christ in carrying out the task of humanising their fellow human beings, namely conveying the good news or the Gospel of Christ to others. The duty of service is the call for all believers. Thus, the church needs to mobilise all members to carry out services to others using digital technology, especially millennials who are relatively fast and easy to master. Of course, it is necessary to provide continuous assistance to minimise the negative aspects of digital technology (Gelfgren 2011). What is equally important is that all services to humanising the fellow human beings must be based on noble values, namely the motivation of love, sincerity and dedication. The ultimate goal of services performed is to lead everyone to the decision to devote himself and all his competence to the glory of God.

Thirdly, Oikos is the forerunner of the universal Church. Home is the primary and first place where human life begins. Noble values of life that are instilled in the house become the forerunner of the values of life in the church community, society and nation. In other words, the quality of life of a church community and nation is the determined factor formed in the house (Oikos). Therefore, the church must educate Christian families regarding the importance of faith, character and service competence education according to the talents of each family member and church member (Chai 2021). The strategy needs to explore, find and develop optimally every potential possessed by each church member or family member to dedicate to realising the welfare of human life in all sectors (Pantan & Benyamin 2020). Indeed, church members with reliable competence and excellent character are

potential assets of the church, society and nation. In this context, the family is said to be the forerunner of the universal church. Thus, its presence as a community of church members widely represents the Kingdom of God on this earth.

Sacraments as means of divine power

According to Christian theology, in general, the sacrament is a celebration interpreted as mediation or a visible symbol of God's invisible grace. There are two essential sacraments in the Protestant Church: the sacrament of baptism and the sacrament of holy communion. In principle, the essence of the sacrament is a sign and seal set by God to mark and seal God's promises in the gospel because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross so that we award the forgiveness of sins and eternal life (Hadiwijono 2015). These two sacraments can be described as follows:

Firstly, the sacrament of baptism is a sacred act of God. From the understanding of Christian theology, the sacrament of baptism is visible evidence that human sins are forgiven and sanctified by the work of Christ on the cross. The believer receives supernatural power to transfer from the power of darkness to become the complete possession of Christ (Arrington 2015). God's plan of salvation is realising in Christ through his coming, death and resurrection. It is a great mystery of God's work because man cannot do it. Nevertheless, the mystery of God is now made manifest in the work of Christ, for it is Christ himself who carries out the mystery (Col 2:2).

Secondly, the sacrament of holy communion is a sign and seal of God's covenant. This sacrament is a celebration of God's great love for human beings. The critical meaning of the sacrament of holy communion is that God fulfils his promise through Christ's sacrifice on the cross, believers receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. By performing a sign, Allah provides assurance of his mercy. Furthermore, the sacrament is interpreted as a seal that states purity to be trusted (Hadiwijono 2015). The celebration of Holy Communion can be interpreted as a warning to the reality of human life that cracked; however, there is an opportunity to fix it (Kruger 2018).

Based on the brief explanation above, the sacrament provides a theological message in its meaning. The depth and richness of the meaning of the sacrament of holy communion and water baptism are explained as follows:

The sacrament contains the saving power of God. Salvation is a fundamental need of all sinners, and this can only be found in Jesus Christ, who died on the cross. On that basis, the essential thing in the administration of the sacrament is the encounter with Christ in the living space of sinful humans. The media used, such as water and wine, are not the determinants of the presence of God's power. However, God has the power to use all media as a means of his presence (Mpofu 2021).

The sacrament is a means of experiencing the power of God. The Bible testifies that physicians are professionals who acts as healers. One of the crucial duties of the priests of Israel was to examine someone who was declared sick or someone who declared cured. Water is an essential means of purification to express one's holiness and healing. Even in baptism, water is an essential means by which God expresses his saving power. Thus, the sacrament opens the way for a person to experience the healing power declared through the conviction of faith in Christ.

The sacrament is a means of experiencing God's presence. Celebrating the presence of God in the sacrament is a special moment for believers to respond to the salvation that God has given them. Indeed, the nature of the sacrament cannot be reduced by the limitations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

Based on the exposure of the study to the research observations, several conclusions can be drawn:

Firstly, change is necessary, and no person nor institution can avoid it. Therefore, the church must carry out a relevant process of self-actualisation in a world that experiences dynamics of continuous change.

Secondly, the development of digital science and technology is understood as God's grace for his people (his church) to increase the productivity of religious services. Therefore, the church must transform the innovation and creativity of religious services based on digital technology. Through such efforts, the church effectively reaches the unreached world community.

Thirdly, the church must not lose its identity as a divine institution devoted to the extraordinary task of being the salt and light of the world. However, the church must not be exclusive but be inclusive.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Indonesian Bethel Church for providing the opportunity to conduct research observations.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

All of the listed authors contributed to the writing of this article. G.K.R.P. and F.J.N. acted as compilers of the research paradigm and concept. P.I.B. was instrumental in observing several churches and gathering information. F.P. and W.W. played a role in concluding the research results, translation, and layout.

Ethical considerations

This study followed all ethical standards for research without any direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research work received no specific grant from any funding agency in public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing does not apply to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

References

- Arrington, F.L., 2015, *Pentecostal perspective Christian doctrine*, ANDI, Yogyakarta.
- Benyamin, P.I., Sinaga, U.P. & Gracia, F.Y., 2021, 'Use of digital "platforms" in Christian religious education learning in the era of disruption', *REGULA FIDEI: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Kristen* 6(1), 60–68.
- Bock, D.L. & Armstrong, J.J., 2021, *Virtual reality church: Traps and opportunities*, Literatur Perkantas, Jakarta.
- Campbell, H.A., 2013, 'Community', in H.A. Campbell (ed.), *Digital religion: Understanding religious practice in new media worlds*, pp. 57–71, Routledge, New York, NY.
- Chai, T., 2014, 'Pentecostal theological education and ministerial formation', in W. Ma, V.-M. Kärkkäinen, & J.K. Asamoah-Gyadu (eds.), *Pentecostal mission and global Christianity*, pp. 349–359, Wipf and Stock, Eugene, OR.
- Creswell, J.W., 2013, *Pendekatan Kualitatif, Kuantitatif dan Mixed*, Ketiga ed., Pustaka Pelajar, Yogyakarta.
- Denson, S., 2011, 'Faith in technology: Televangelism and the mediation of immediate experience', *Phenomenology & Practice*, <https://doi.org/10.29173/pandpr19847>
- Dreyer, W.A., 2019, 'Being church in the era of "homo digitalis"', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 40(1), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v40i1.1999>
- Elvis, M., 2020, 'Pedagogy in the digital age in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic', *Jurnal Ilmu Teologi dan Pendidikan Agama Kristen* 1(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.25278/jitpk.v1i1.472>
- Gelfgren, S., 2011, 'Virtual churches, participatory culture, and secularization', *Journal of Technology, Theology, & Religion* 2(1), 1–30.
- Gratia, Y.P., 2020, 'Ulasan Buku Daniela C. Augustine: Pentecost, hospitality and transfiguration – toward a spirit-inspired vision of social transformation', *Diegesis: Jurnal Teologi* 5(1), 11–14.
- Gultom, J., 2013, 'Pneumatologi Amos Yong dan Refleksi Misiologi (Perspektif Pentakosta/Kharismatik Indonesia)', *Jurnal Antusias* 2(4), 157–169.
- Hadiwijono, H., 2015, *Christian faith*, BPK Gunung Mulia, Jakarta.
- Hardori, J., 2014, 'The lost of pastoral ministry', J. Gultom & F. Pantan (eds.), *Reaffirming our identity: Isu-isu Terpilih Menjawab Perubahan Sekaligus Mempertahankan Identitas*, pp. 285–304, Bethel Press, Jakarta.
- Hodkinson, P., 2011, *Media, culture and society*, Sage, London.
- Horsfield, P., 2015, *From Jesus to the internet*, John Wiley & Sons Ltd, West Sussex.
- Hosea, A., 2019, 'Karakteristik Pendidikan Iman dalam Pentakostalisme', *Diegesis: Jurnal Teologi* 4(2), 51–57. <https://doi.org/10.46933/dgs.vol4i251-57>
- Howard, R.G., 2011, *Digital Jesus*, New York University Press, New York, NY.
- Hutchings, T., 2013, 'Considering religious community through online churches', in H.A. Campbell (ed.), *Digital religion*, pp. 164–172, Routledge, New York, NY.
- Johns, C.B., 2010, *Pentecostal formation: A pedagogy among the oppressed*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, OR.
- Jun, G., 2020, 'Virtual reality church as a new mission frontier in the metaverse: Exploring theological controversies and missional potential of virtual reality church', *Transformation* 37(4), 297–305. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265378820963155>
- Kruger, F.P., 2018, 'Participation in Christ's body and his blood during celebration of Holy Communion as illuminated by the meaningful lenses of cognition and recognition', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 74(2), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i2.4767>
- Leer-Helgesen, A., 2018, 'Rethinking diakonia and transforming our world', *Ecumenical Review* 70(1), 147–162. <https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12336>

- Lövheim, M. & Linderman, A.G., 2005, 'Religion and Cyberspace', in M.T. Hojsgaard & M. Warburg (eds.), *Constructing religious identity on the Internet*, Taylor & Francis e-Library, New York, NY.
- Macchia, F.D., 2020, 'Spirit baptism and spiritual formation: A pentecostal proposal', *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 13(1), 44–61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1939790920903262>
- Manguma, V.V.E., 2021, 'Strategi Generasi Millennial Bertahan Hidup Dalam Masa Pandemi Covid-19', *Emik* 4(1), 84–97. <https://doi.org/10.46918/emik.v4i1.934>
- McKinney, D., 2014, 'Social media in the Church', PhD thesis, University of Arkansas.
- Moleong, L.J., 2014, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*, Remaja Rosdakarya, Bandung.
- Mpofu, B., 2021, 'Rethinking the eucharist in the aftermath of covid-19 disruptions: A comparative study of reformed and pentecostal theology of sacraments', *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 77(4), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.6547>
- Nel, M., 2016, 'Attempting to develop a Pentecostal theology of worship', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 37(1), 187–188. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v37i1.1661>
- Pantan, F. & Benyamin, P.I., 2020, 'The role of families in children's education during the Covid-19 pandemic', *KHARISMATA: Jurnal Teologi Pantekosta* 3(1), 13–24. <https://doi.org/10.47167/kharis.v3i1.43>
- Parish, H., 2020, 'The absence of presence and the presence of absence: Social distancing, sacraments, and the virtual religious community during the covid-19 pandemic', *Religions* 11(6), 276. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11060276>
- Pradipta, D.A., 2020, 'Penafsiran Teks Mazmur 91 Yang Benar Dalam Merefleksikan Pritiwa Pandemi Covid-19', *Jurnal Gamaliel: Teologi Praktika* 2(2), 132–145.
- Rahmawati, 2020, 'Rancang Bangun Sistem Pengolahan Data Gereja GPII Jemaat Wara Tirowali Palopo', Universitas Cokroaminoto Palopo.
- Rajagukguk, J.S.P. & Sugiono, L., 2020, 'Tinjauan Liturgis Unsur-Unsur Ibadah Pentakosta Terhadap Kedewasaan Rohani', *Matheo: Jurnal Teologi/Kependetaan* 10(1), 37–51. <https://doi.org/10.47562/matheo.v10i1.101>
- Sanjaya, Y., 2020, 'Amanat Penggembalaan dalam ruang virtual', *THRANOS: Jurnal Teologi Kristen* 1(2), 99–114. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/kvxu9>
- Setyobekti, A.B., 2017, *Pondasi Iman*, Bethel Press, Jakarta.
- Setyobekti, A.B., Kathryn, S. & Sumen, S., 2021, 'Implementasi Nilai-nilai Bhineka Tunggal Ika dalam Membingkai Keberagaman Pejabat Gereja Bethel Indonesia di DKI Jakarta', *Jurnal Theologia dan Pendidikan Agama Kristen* 4(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.47166/sot.v4i1.29>
- Shenk, W.R., 1996, 'Toward a global church history', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 20(2), 50–57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/239693939602000201>
- Singarimbun, K., 2021, 'E-Church as a virtual service communities during COVID-19 pandemics', *Jurnal Komunikasi Ikatan Sarjana Komunikasi Indonesia* 6(1), 96–106. <https://doi.org/10.25008/jkiski.v6i1.509>
- Snaith, N., 1971, 'Jerusalem in the time of Jesus. By Joachim Jeremias', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 24(2), 229–230. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930600012849>
- Sopacoly, M.M. & Lattu, I.Y.M., 2020, 'Kekristenan dan Spiritualitas Online: Cybertheology sebagai Sumbangsih Berteologi di Indonesia', *GEMA TEOLOGIKA: Jurnal Teologi Kontekstual dan Filsafat Keilahan* 5(2), 137. <https://doi.org/10.21460/gema.2020.52.604>
- Sturdevant, J.S., 2016, *The adaptable Jesus of the fourth Gospel*, Novum Testamentum, Supplements, Brill, s.l.
- Tanojo, W., 2020, 'Impact of Diakonia, Koinonia and Marturia services for the growth of the Indonesian Christian Church Resident Sudirman Surabaya', *Journal Didaskalia* 3(2), 38–49. <https://doi.org/10.33856/didaskalia.v3i2.193>
- Van Niftrik, G.C. & Boland, B.J., 2015, *Dogmatics today*, 21st edn., BPK Gunung Mulia, Jakarta.
- Vondey, W., 2020, 'Pentecostalism as a theological tradition', *Pneuma* 42(3–4), 521–535. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700747-bja10003>