

The pastoral role in moral regeneration – A South African perspective

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Dates:

Received: 15 Jun. 2023

Accepted: 02 Nov. 2023

Published: 15 Jan. 2024

How to cite this article:

Baloyi, M.E., 2024, 'The pastoral role in moral regeneration – A South African perspective', *In die Skriflig* 58(1), a2993. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v58i1.2993>

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In the past, the role of the pastor was not only recognised by the church in which he served, but also by the entire community. Government, institutions, and society at large to an extent relied on pastors to help build up communities. For this reason, politicians and the media sought pastoral opinions in times of strife, boycotts, and other upheavals. Public offences such as rape, murder, robbery, violence and other crimes have always been described as the deeds of evil people whose lives are far removed from the Christian and other religions. What makes corruption and crime worse in our country, is the perception of moral degeneration, among other reasons. It is a concern of this researcher that, instead of pastoral leadership preaching peace and addressing issues related to moral regeneration, they are becoming part of the problem rather than the solution. This article intends to show, by way of research, that, for pastors and ministers to participate in corrupt and immoral deeds, is problematic not only for the churches they serve, but also the communities in which they live. This article offers pastoral guidelines on the church's responsibility in combatting pastors' immoral actions.

Contribution: Church pastors, as community leaders, have some responsibility for eliminating and reducing rather than dismissing or contributing to the moral degeneration engulfing South Africa. It is the conviction of this author that, if pastors practise what they preach, half of the fight against moral degeneration would be won through their exemplary lives. The pastoral position has a moral impact and an influence in local communities.

Keywords: African community; custodians; immoral behaviour; leadership; marriage breakers; misconduct; pastoral caregivers; rape; South Africa; violence.

Introduction

Pastors should (and do) play a significant role in their respective communities, which needs to be acknowledged. Schuhmann and Damen (2018:406) argue that pastors in a secular context (in local villages and towns) represent the good in the community. This aligns with the views of Taylor (1989; 2007) and Murdoch (1970:13) who define pastoral care as the ways in which a local pastor engages with people in an attempt to orient them in their moral space. '[M]oral space comprises not only questions concerning our obligations towards others but also questions of how to live a full life and of how to live with dignity.' From this, one may argue that, in most South African contexts, the pastor is generally identified as a good figure who plays a positive, ethical, and moral role within the community in which he or she lives.

For Chivasa (2017:3), a pastor is a spiritual leader whose responsibility is to provide pastoral care. Much respect and dignity are accorded to the clergy in villages and townships by both congregants and the community at large. As a result, pastors' lives have been in the spotlight in most communities, and their mistakes are usually seen as reason to disrupt the faith of those communities. Besides their roles of evangelising and building the church, pastoral leaders directly, or indirectly play an important role in moral regeneration, for instance by encouraging youth to avoid drugs, and keeping them busy with church-related activities. Communities expect pastors to be helpful not only at funerals, but also during other disasters and unforeseen calamities. For example, on 23 September 2023, the Collins Chabane mayor convened the pastors in Malamulele Community Hall to pray for many things, including an end to crime and accidents on the roads. Modisa and Mzondi (2022:1) acknowledge that during the Covid-19 lockdown it became difficult (if not impossible) for pastors to convey the message of hope and faith to people who had lost loved ones or their income or were faced with isolation and loneliness. Ubuntu or the notion of caring for others, which is supposed to be part and parcel of African pastors' lives, is inclusive of being exemplary in terms of ethical and moral values and imparting these in the context of their specific practice.

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A serious question arises: What happens when pastors do not conduct themselves as expected? That question forms the backbone of this investigation, which was prompted by pastoral caregivers coming under the media spotlight for their bad behaviour. Two examples are those of Pastors Amotose and Zondi who were brought to court for having been accused of raping congregants (Bezuidenhout 2023; Kgosana 2023). Before addressing this serious problem, the author concurs with the North-West premier that we can no longer shy away from saying something is wrong, even when it is done by our own leaders (Malope 2013).

Problem statement and focus of the study

Recent media coverage about pastors has been negative, as the focus was on allegations of church leaders raping women and girls, neglecting their families, and making congregants pay for prayers (Damba 2014; Kgosana 2023). Clearly some pastors are conducting themselves contrary to what society expects of them, and contrary to the tenets of their calling. There are reports of a considerable number of pastors flouting their pastoral duties towards their communities (Kgatle 2020). This begs the question: will communities continue to trust and depend on their pastoral caregivers when the latter's image is tarnished? Indeed, while most were called, ordained, and employed for a particular purpose in their churches, the community at large regards many pastors as having a hand in this country's moral degeneration. Although it is not fair to paint all pastors with the same brush, the aim here is to understand whether something can be done to correct this negative view of men of the cloth. Theology must be used to address this lamentable situation. Admittedly, it is becoming a headache for those pastors seeking to remain faithful to their calling that they are being viewed through the same lens as those who are unfaithful. For them, it is a terrible burden to bear. The focus now falls on some of the problems this article seeks to discuss.

Theoretical argument, relevance, and method of the study

The central theoretical argument of this study is that the bad and evil actions of pastors have a negative impact on the communities they ought to serve. Surely half of the battle against immorality would be won if there were a way to address, illuminate and combat the immorality of some religious leaders. Statistics show that most South Africans believe in Christian leadership (Kabongo 2020). This study will identify some of the offences committed by Christian leaders, particularly pastors, by way of media reports in newspapers, on TV, and on the radio. This article will be mainly theoretical, although in some instances, relevant case studies will be cited. While most of the bad press concerns pastors in South Africa, this study will confine itself to the local context to avoid unnecessary generalisations. The immoral lives of pastors encompass many aspects as will be highlighted, but for the current purposes, attention will be

given to scandals relating to money and sex. Where the lives of people are misdirected and/or ignored by pastoral leadership, it is imperative that theology heed the people's cries.

Socio-political context of the research

Being part of a community implies that church pastors are not immune to or exempt from the unfavourable socioeconomic and political conditions in which the country finds itself. As a result, they may find themselves trapped by the ensuing challenges. This research is undertaken within the South African context, where socioeconomic and political instability have become the order of the day (Cilliers & Aucoin 2016). While Covid-19 exposed educational and social inequalities in society, the political sphere has notably failed to curb the corruption, abuses of power and gender-based violence which are escalating at an alarming rate (Baloyi 2021). Many church pastors who are equally vulnerable to social problems have grasped every opportunity to use the Bible to make money to survive. It is easy for pastors to give in to immoral temptations due to the socially polarised context in which they find themselves (Radebe & Phooka 2017). Without underestimating the impact of this country's social, ecclesial, societal, political, and patriarchal problems, this article does not intend to deal with every social problem as it relates to pastors; hence, it is vital to limit the scope to some of the immoral issues relating to pastoral activities. Baloyi (2008) already pointed out how patriarchy and religion, due to a misreading and misinterpretation of the Bible on topics such as the headship of men, play a role in entrenching gender inequality that leads to abuse.

Practical issues on the immorality of pastors

In the article entitled 'Drama unfolds in pastor's trial', Damba (2014:5) reports that the pastor in question was denied bail in the Khayelitsha Magistrate's Court, where he faced six counts of rape after two girls from his church pressed charges against him. Although there were two groups in court – one supporting the pastor and the other condemning him – the 'drama' related to a man of the cloth being behind bars for immoral behaviour. The problem of moral degeneration has been a challenge for South Africa for a long time, but it appears to be growing. Government, some traditional leaders, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been trying to reverse this trend without apparent success. Worryingly, just as government and other stakeholders are trying to engage with issues of immorality, those spiritual leaders who should channel their energies towards finding possible solutions, are becoming part of the problem (Tshehle 2012:10). Although immorality is a way of life for many, the issue becomes even more complex and confusing when pastors join the ranks of the offenders. Mojela (2014:12) is correct in saying, '[t]oday we live in a society that is full of uncertainty and immoral behaviour.

Our community leaders set an unholy path of corruption'. The general understanding is that spiritual leaders, such as pastors and other church leaders, are tasked with community leadership (Pali 2019). Among other leading figures in this country, the Premier of North-West, Thandi Modise, has indicated that there are growing calls for united action against moral decay and its underlying factors in our society (Tshehle 2012:9). Even though the context of the premier's speech was teenage pregnancies, the fact remains that this is a moral issue that should be the leading topic on the agenda in our country.

In the *Daily Sun*, dated 08 July 2011, the headline 'Cops bust church' was accompanied by a picture in which three pastors of the Presbyterian Church of Africa in Motherwell, Port Elizabeth, were being loaded into the back of a police van. Sizani and Sigwela (2011:3) reported that the clergy in question had been engaged in a battle for power so extreme that the police intervened by arresting them and 17 other members of the church. This is an illustration of how pastors, instead of helping to solve church differences in peaceful ways as expected, make headlines for bad behaviour. If media reports focus on one or two pastors who are caught in some wrongdoing, that is not good for the nation. Communities expect that, when violence occurs, pastoral leaders should support the police in bringing about peace rather than being the instigators of violent acts.

In 2012 the worshippers at the Remnant International Church in Tshwane were shocked when their leading pastor, a bishop, decided to leave his wife in full view of his church members. The wife alleged that the bishop had left their marital home in Pretoria East two months before the incident. After telling her story, indicating that he no longer took proper care of his two children, the church suspected him of having an affair outside of marriage (Thamage & Ramotsho 2012:6). It proved to be a very disturbing moment for many congregants who had always looked up to this pastor as their leader and motivator.

On 15 February 2013, a pastor was arrested by the police upon leaving the premises of the Acts of Harvesters Church in Vosloorus (Ekurhuleni) after leading members of the church had reported him for allegedly embezzled funds amounting to around R200 000. One claimant reported being shocked to realise that only R4700 was left in the account when he checked the church's bank statements. He went on to say, '[t]he pastor withdrew the money without consulting us. I asked the pastor about the church funds, but he failed to give me answers that made sense' (Mnguni 2013:4).

A certain pastor angered his wife-to-be and some members of the church when he stated that, being a virgin, he wanted to marry a very young and lovely congregant. According to Langa (2013), after becoming engaged and setting a date to marry the young lady, it was discovered that the pastor was not a virgin, but previously had a child with another woman who responded furiously to the news of his latest romance, saying:

I had sex with Bheki last week. We have been engaged since 2005 and I have been waiting for him to set our wedding date. Now he made a fool of me, and he is going to pay for it. I took care of him and our baby. We had so many plans for our future together, but now he dumps me like this. I will be at his wedding, and I will trash it. (p. 3)

According to a South African Press Association (SAPA 2013) report, a 17-year-old girl was raped by her pastor in Phokeng, near Rustenburg, when he promised her a private prayer session. Given most people's belief in the power of prayer, it is despicable that he deceived the child and raped her. She had trusted the pastor to help change her life for the better, while he had his own selfish and nefarious intentions.

Kotlolo (2013:120) also reported that a 48-year-old pastor was alleged to have raped his 14-year-old niece in Soshanguve outside Pretoria. Besides the issue being a sex scandal, it is unimaginable that the leader of a flock would force himself on a very young girl who was fit to be his daughter. Moreover, it is questionable how this pastor could handle youth-related issues and the education of the youth in his church. Sadly, the life, and future of this young girl was irrevocably harmed by a once-respected community leader.

The article entitled 'Priest and his wife bust for the same rape' (Thamage 2013:5), bears testimony to the fact that spiritual leaders who are expected to guide people along a moral path, sometimes become the very people who should be feared by their followers. It became the main headline of the *Daily Sun* when a married pastor lied in order to have sex with one of his church members. According to the reporter, a certain married pastor of the Acts of Spirits Church in Soshanguve, Extension 11, reached a written agreement (in a diary) with a female member of his church that they should have sex until they could get married in 2015 (Masango 2013:1-2). It was only discovered after about three months that the pastor was cheating on his wife who worked in Johannesburg.

Another pastor is also said to have been involved in breaking up a family by being in love with a married woman who responded to her husband's accusations, saying, 'I am happy with the pastor' (Sibiya 2014:5). This kind of sin seems to afflict many pastors, bringing the churches they represent into disrepute.

According to Sifile (2016:1), a 40-year-old pastor in Carletonville, west of Johannesburg, was jailed after facing three counts of rape, kidnapping, assault, illegally pointing a firearm, and possession of an unlicensed firearm. The article entitled 'Horny Bishop's 4-5 surprise' (Sisulu 2014), reports on a bishop who was caught sending the wife of his faithful deacon an SMS picture of his private parts. The angry husband declared, 'I am going to take this conversation to the church leaders. You are trying to seduce my wife while I am still alive' (Sisulu 2014:1-2). The couple threatened to leave the church and join another, because they had lost trust in the leading pastor whom they had honoured for years. The wife

of the bishop also testified that, when she tried to ask him about the matter, he became evasive.

In another incident, a popular and well-known married pastor's naked body was pictured on the internet and in the *Daily Sun* (Luhanga & Buthelezi 2015:1–2), as he was walking around in the nude in the house, while a woman (possibly a girlfriend) took pictures. A week later, the pastor confirmed that the woman was sent to humiliate him, threatening that the photos would be posted online (Buthelezi 2015:3).

South Africa as a country is growing accustomed to reading about immorality with many offences affecting other people's rights and dignity. The wife of a known pastor in Soweto, who started receiving messages from an aggrieved woman, said, '[s]he started sending me messages that my husband should start acting like a pastor and that he should pay her back' (Saba 2014:13). This, after the pastor concerned had obtained R4500 from a woman to use as a bribe to buy her a driver's licence from the Department of Transport. After he failed to deliver on his promise, the angry woman demanded her money back, and began messaging the pastor's wife. It is painful when these kinds of offences are committed by spiritual leaders who should be trying to promote the wellbeing, dignity, and moral life of their people.

What prompted this particular research, was a report entitled 'Let's kill him: Residents' fury over rape pastor' (Sigwela & Sizani 2014:4) in which an angry mob demanded the release of a man arrested for assaulting a pastor accused of rape in Masangwanaville, Port Elizabeth. Clearly there are many causes and types of immorality – all of which end up destroying people's lives. While some pastors cheat on their wives, others are involved in fights. This is sad for both the ministry of the church and for the ordinary citizens who look up to church leaders for signs of hope in a hopeless situation. It is so unfortunate that pastors make the front pages of newspapers and online articles for all the wrong reasons. As Rainer (2014:10) notes, the media love the sensational stories behind clergy's failings, given the expectations and trust of the people. Wagner (ed. 2005) has the same question, asking '[w]hy do some Christian leaders, who appear to be pillars of strength, fall into sin?'

Makhaya (2013:14) reports that a certain Pastor Mbhoro drew a firearm when challenged by church members. The misuse and reckless handling of guns costs so many lives in this country that granting licences for firearms is becoming very difficult for the government. As the reporter pointed out, Pastor Mbhoro's heart was supposed to be that of a servant when challenged (Makhaya 2013:14).

As the country grapples with the issue of land redistribution, Mkhulisi (2013:6) reported that a certain pastor illegally sold plots of land in Lenasia and Ennerdale. Not only was the government offended by the action of this 75-year-old pastor, but so were many other citizens who had borrowed money from the banks to buy the land, only to have it stolen from

them. The elderly pastor was sentenced to three years in prison, but his actions betrayed the trust of the community. Instead of assisting by ensuring that the land redistribution programme unfolds peacefully, he filled his own pockets and left South African citizens out of pocket. While it would be wrong for any ordinary citizen to commit such crimes, it is even worse when church leaders, such as pastors, are the culprits.

These examples show that addressing the immoral lives of pastors, who are seen as leaders in the community, can help us address immorality in this country more generally. Similar sentiments are articulated by Mokwele (2014:5) who laments that our country is full of supposedly God-fearing pastors who are accused of heinous crimes.

Practical causes of pastors' immorality

There are several underlying causes which might explain why pastors become immoral. This section aims to discuss some of those.

The spirit of lust

The front-page headline, 'Pastor pokes his flock', is a report by Mdluli (2021:1) of the Christian pastor of a local church who impregnated several female congregants before fleeing. One of the breaking stories was that, among those impregnated women, two were a mother and daughter. It appears that there are two sides to this story: Jennifer LeClaire (2013:1) defines the spirit of Jezebel as a spirit of seduction that woos people into sexual immorality and idolatry. Revelation 2:20 deals with the Jezebel spirit and its motives – a kind of demonic behaviour that drives some females to seduce males. Mike Bradley (2011:1) argues that this spirit is cunning and difficult to deal with once it moves and attaches to a person. Many male pastors have been driven to seduce females in- and outside their churches, and that is how this kind of spirit destroys them and their congregations. Importantly, the spirit of Jezebel (lust, in this context) is also present in men. A pastor who helped to shelter a homeless family living in the bush, allegedly asked Phumzile, one of the family members, for sex to thank him for his help. Having put them up in his church, Phumzile claims the pastor demanded sex from her in lieu of rent (Masipa 2014:3). This is a very bad representation of pastoral caregivers who, after helping people, expected repayment in this way. The same spirit of seduction was with Amnon who ended up raping his own sister in 2 Samuel 13. According to Woodbridge and Joubert's study (2018), Amnon caused Tamar psychological distress, which only became visible after the rape. Their study unveils how lust can be dangerous at times, as it affects not only the raped, but also the rapist in a psychological and moral way (Woodbridge & Joubert 2018:108). The rape of the half-sister sparked resentment, hatred, and frustration, which ended up causing Amnon to be killed by his half-brother, Absalom. The family bond, which David tried to maintain, was shaken by this transgression, and its subsequent revenge (Rudman 1998:328).

Lack of true commitment to the work and to prayers

Given that many pastors are guilty of immoral living, it has become unclear whether their devotional life is at all properly maintained. Serving God's children takes a considerable amount of time, meaning there is little, or no time for succumbing to temptation. The example of Martha and Mary from Luke 10:38–42 can be used to argue that those who stay at the feet of Jesus Christ, as Mary did, are not vulnerable to falling into sin. The well-known story of King David committing adultery with Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11, typifies how his remaining behind when his army went to battle, affected him negatively. There is always a danger of temptation for someone who is not fruitfully occupied. David is one such example, because when he remained behind in the city while his troops went out, he happened to see the naked woman whom he later wanted for a wife regardless of the fact that she was married to Uriah.

The misuse of alcohol

Proverbs 23:29–35 gives a clear indication that immoral practices are likely to occur when someone is under the influence of alcohol. When a person starts drinking heavily, it affects their judgement negatively. Proverbs 23: indicates that the eyes of a drunk person become less discerning, and they see bad things which could 'invite' them into wrongdoing. Their speech is no longer judicious, and their language and vocabulary are no longer good and acceptable; instead, they speak about anything, bad or good. Adeboye (2014) warns such people, saying:

Ephesians 5:18 (The Holy Bible) says you should be filled with the Holy Spirit and not with wine. If you truly want Jesus Christ living in your house, remove all thrones you have created for the devil. (pp. 1–2)

In other words, anything that will tempt you to drink, should be removed. This is sage advice, because alcohol and drugs have destroyed many church leaders and, if nothing is done, will ruin their lives.

When a pastor is made a god

In the article 'Deliver us from patriarchy', Chisale (2020) gives evidence of the patriarchy adversely affecting not only the Lutheran church, but also most Christian churches. In her view, the structures of the church are established in such a way as to protect the patriarchy at the expense of gender equality (Chisale 2020). The church hierarchy places pastors and their wives at the top, creating an environment in which they have an unquestioning authority. This might lead to an abuse of power. Absolute trust in so-called 'men of God' under biblical titles such as 'prophet' and 'apostle', creates the impression that these individuals are untouchable. It is in this spirit that Banda (2020:7) calls for the investigation into the kinds of the trust offered to the 'men or women of God' who, just like the African authority of a king or chief, cannot be told anything, and rule with an iron fist. Being a law unto

themselves is something that even manifests in the political world, and it takes time to confront and expose those who abuse power by squandering funds and stealing from the poor: tenderpreneurs and Covid-preneurs are but two examples.

In the same way, some pastors from different denominations believe they are the sole authorities in their churches with the right to instruct members what to do and what not to do; yet, they themselves cannot be corrected. Many churches fall victim to so-called 'know-it-all' pastors whose church members are not allowed to question blatantly foolhardy or wrong ideas. Being a pastor is also dangerous in a sense, because many members look to them as the source of all their solutions. This is not necessarily bad, unless the pastors themselves develop a spirit of pride and soon cannot recognise their own personal shortcomings. Some believe pastors are spiritual beings who are perfect and immune to criticism. They go so far as to threaten those who question the church or preaching, scaring them by saying the devil is causing them to waver. As no one wants to be identified with the devil, people remain quiet even if they see evidence of bad behaviour in their pastor's life. Pastor Joe McKeever (2014:1), in his blog, lists 10 reasons why an individual might become disappointed in his or her pastor: one way is to expect their pastors to be different from ordinary people, and to be without sin. This might prompt a pastor to adopt the image of being an extraordinary person whose small transgressions and evil ways should be protected by church members keen to preserve the image of a sinless pastor. While Baloyi (2016) exposed how Western theology creates a hierarchy which will only keep the mother church or funding church and its pastor the unquestionable authority, the African independent churches and Pentecostals also use African patriarchal structures to constitute their own hierarchies where those at the top are entrusted with all the power and feel entitled to abuse congregants without being held accountable. One example in South Africa is that of known scandals around Omotoso who invited girls for prayer meetings during which he made sexual advances. When he was arrested for alleged rape, his members showed their support by protesting at the magistrate's office for his release (Banda 2020:7). Sadly, it has become the norm in our society to place full trust in authority figures, meaning that people are blind to their mistakes. From politics to social life, it has become accepted practice to defend and fight to protect abusers. The well-known statement by a female politician, 'We will defend Zuma with our buttocks', while fighting to protect the former president of South Africa from corruption charges, says it all (SAPA 2014:1).

The end results or consequences of a pastor's immoral life

Just as his or her good works have an effect on the community, so does a leader's (in this case the pastor's) immorality. The consequences can be life changing.

Betraying the trust of the community

Trust is at the core of every healthy relationship. When you trust someone, your mind is at peace, and even the thought of that person brings joy to your heart. When it is broken, however, there is a deep and unsettling pain at even the mention of the offender's name. (Bubna-Litic 2013:4)

This is how Bubna-Litic (2013) interprets the role of trust in most people's lives. This is something all religious servants should bear in mind for the sake of whoever trusts them in their churches and communities. It takes longer to gain people's trust than to destroy it. Trust must be earned, but the reality is that trust is also given. People who admire their leader wish to show them trust. Notably, that is not 'blind trust', but a kind of trust which also expects accountability and has the expectation that the trusted person will not to betray their trust (Daman 2011:1). This is the trust that most communities aspire to in respect of their pastors, particularly because they depend on them for many things, including teachings, prayers, and hope. In her article entitled 'When pastors need deliverance', Doris Wagner (2018) argues that when a pastor commits evil, the church is wounded and the flock is scattered, which means that damage control is often impossible once trust has been lost.

When a pastor is appointed in the church and community, certain expectations cannot be avoided. One of those is that the pastor's role will be to help bring peace and moral regeneration among the people. The community develops trust in the pastor's abilities and strength, and that is why many are surprised if the pastor reacts or responds contrary to their expectations. Pastors and priests are expected to be honest and to lead by example (Mokone 2014:10).

A disappointment to the community

It is widely believed that pastors should encourage and embrace good morals; therefore, it is disappointing for congregants if a pastor is caught acting immorally. As Mokone (2014:10) states, 'I am shocked and disappointed to see priests and pastors, who are supposed to be God-fearing, supporting and embracing corruption.' Similarly, in cases of alleged wrongdoing by others in the public eye, it is unwise for pastors to become judges instead of waiting for the law to run its course before someone is condemned or punished. The community expects the pastoral leadership to bring peace and stability when things get out of hand. A recent example of pastors being outspoken, involved their criticism of the Public Protector, Thuli Madonsela. Pastors have a moral obligation and right to speak out and hold her accountable as long as they are not motivated by gender bias.

Luhanga and Buthelezi (2015) refer to a comment from someone who watched the video of the naked pastor:

In the olden days when families were faced with misunderstanding, they went to pastors. But these days some pastors are the ones who break people's families. There is no one left to trust. (p. 2)

Although this statement is a blatant generalisation, people tend to stereotype once they have lost trust in an authority figure.

Offering spiritual care to people living with HIV and AIDS

According to Oluduro (2010), faith-based communities under the leadership of their religions and pastoral leaders need to understand their formidable task of speaking truth as well as taking steps to curb the spread of the HIV epidemic. Falsehoods and misinformation about this pandemic need to be corrected. For instance, some believe the pandemic was God's punishment for mankind's sexual immorality. That notion has to be corrected through pastoral interventions which give the correct interpretation of the scriptures. Importantly, the emotional support and coping skills of the pastor as leader in the community can be helpful for infected people (Sempene & Masango 2013:6). Pastors are teachers and motivators who are expected to live as they teach, and to behave in ways that are honest, peaceful, and loving. The church's response to HIV is more than a community demand, because God wants to see his church's responsibility being fulfilled towards the sick. This is the emphasis of Belshaw, Calderisi and Sugden (2001) in their writing 'Faith in development'.

The way forward

Pastors are leaders of the community

In their published research entitled 'The pastor as an ecumenical leader', Hove and Moyo (2022) describe the roles of local pastors among the black community. In their view, it is not easy to confine the teachings and preachings of a local pastor to his or her own congregation members, as pastors are involved with community service, thereby influencing almost everyone in the vicinity in different ways. As strong as their influence can be, so their weaknesses can be glaring (Hove & Moyo 2022:7). Jentile (2021), who wrote about pastoral leadership in the context of the Baptist Convention of South Africa (BCSA), notes that the leadership of a pastor filters down to the entire community, because members of the church are also members of the larger community. In an African context, it is not easy to isolate the benefits of the pastor's leadership from the community at large (Jentile 2021:8).

The truth is that spiritual leaders need good theological training on leadership as well as what it means to be accountable. Rainer (2014:1) is correct in stating that these qualities shape dynamic and competent leaders who prioritise the wellbeing of their people. Granade (2010) believes pastors are more than a preacher, as they have an opportunity to engage in local leadership, for example by serving on the board of a school or business. Before the community trusts and accepts a pastor as their leader, the church in which the pastor serves should help to develop his or her leadership qualities. In the article 'The church's responsibility to the pastor', Green (2007) explains how the

church can enhance the honesty and leadership qualities of a pastor. It is not the focus here to discuss how churches should remunerate pastors, but it should be understood that if their livelihoods are taken care of, the church will minimise the risk of any discontent or greed arising. Linton (2014) supports this argument. Thus, the role of the local church in the community is closely intertwined with that of pastoral leadership (Manala 2010).

Pastors must be wary of the 'devil's' tricks

Young male pastors need to be careful when counselling the opposite sex. Wagner (ed. 2005) refers to the spirit of Jezebel to summarise how the devil can use women to seduce male pastors and other church officials with the aim of destroying the church and the pastoral voice. Pastors also have to be wary of their own lusts and desires, and must put in place strategies to fight temptation. They must admit to their own sin and weakness. An admission of guilt has always been a good way to start dealing with particular guilt. In 2 Corinthians 12:10, Paul teaches us to admit our guilt, saying, 'When I am weak, then I am strong'. Similarly, he states, 'Let him who thinks he stands take heed, lest he fall' (1 Cor 10:12). Although it is difficult, it is advisable that pastors deal constantly with their own thoughts. In Matthew 5:29 we read, 'If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away.' Although this must not be interpreted literally, Paul indicates how determined Christians should be when dealing with sin. Praying, living a disciplined life, and spending more time with one's spouse are examples of the advice Cole (1996:2) gives to pastors. As much as the devil has his own ways of putting people in danger, men and women have a responsibility to be on guard and to take the right decisions for their lives and the lives of others without facilitating the devil's efforts.

Pastors need mentoring

It is a challenge for a newly ordained or appointed pastor to work in the community without some kind of mentoring. Although he or she may theoretically be qualified, for the sake of practical life in the community, some kind of mentoring by senior pastors may help to guide him or her in the field. Some community members – even church members – work to bring down a new pastor whom they know is inexperienced. Such malice can be avoided if a new pastor is surrounded by experienced pastors. Rick Warren (2022) uses the practical example of LeBron James when arguing that every pastor needs a mentor. According to him, LeBron is one of the best basketball players on the planet, but he still needs a coach. No one can claim to know it all; rather, to succeed in any field (pastoral work included), they need someone with experience, character, values, and trust to be there for them. This aspect is often ignored by pastors, and it makes them easy prey for the enemy who wants to bring down the church. For this reason, pastoral theology must be seen as another opportunity for teaching, training and mentoring, and is an important part of restoring pastoral integrity (Resane 2020:6).

Christian pastors as custodians of moral regeneration

As Dale (1986) states:

[B]y accepting the office of a pastor, a person must accept the responsibilities that come with being recognised as a moral fixture before others. We are subject to the same frailties as those we serve and must remember that the greatest way to guide our communities through their moral quandaries is to live rightly through our own. (p. 2)

Clearly, many communities look to their pastors for moral guidance. Matsane (2004:96) argues that the church is a faith community that is called to serve as a moral community in society. Thus, pastors, besides being interpreters of the word of God, are also expected to preach, and to practise what they preach through leading by example and leading from the front. That explains why Christian pastors are expected to carry and uphold the morality that Jesus Christ stood and lived for and preached about. He loves all people, conversing with prostitutes as well as eating with sinners like Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1–10), but he never became a prostitute or sinner himself. In the article entitled 'Angie Motshekga turns to prayer' (2013), the chairperson of the moral regeneration movement in Mpumalanga, Micah Nthali, hinted that it was about time that pastors be put in schools to pray for educators and learners as a way to regenerate morals in the lives of this country's children. Without going into the details of Nthali's address, it is important to note that the church is seen (through its pastoral services) as a custodian of moral regeneration. This kind of realisation provides an opportunity for the church to use its resources to build up the community and the nation rather than destroying people's faith in the church.

The church's responsibility for the life of their pastor

In the view of this author, it should primarily be the church's task to ensure that its own pastor's moral life is protected at all costs. This is a particularly difficult task in some of the independent churches where the pastor owns the church and becomes its one and only 'king'. The truth is that, in such churches, the pastor alone decides who must stay and who must go so that members of the church simply become passive passengers who never want to go against their pastor. Some pastors consider their title as a command to have a hand and decision in everything, and, as such, they become unquestionable authorities in their churches. In his article entitled 'Your pastor: Shepherd or CEO?', David Gordon (2002) argues that the CEO is given final authority for decision-making, while the pastor's role is to guide the church through the leadership of God's word. This means God's word must decide instead of one person deciding.

The principles that should be used to govern the lives of church members and their leaders are laid out in the Bible. These principles are evidently not followed in cases where churches protect their pastors rather than calling them to order. The Bible is clear in Matthew 18 that the disciplinary

code of the church should be applied to all members, pastors included. A pastor must be a steward of God who is answerable to God for his or her leadership of the church (Tt 1:7). The type of pastor who wishes to 'lord it' over others is discouraged in the Bible; rather, the pastor is expected to be an example of truth, love and godliness for God's flock to follow (1 Tm 4:12).

Financial issues

The teaching about people being content with what they have, is not new. In Paul's letter to the Philippians (4:12) the argument is very clear: to be content, one must be realistic (cf. Mt 6:25–34; Ec 1:15). Accepting a situation one cannot change, helps one to avoid unethical ways of acquiring wealth. Churches need to ensure that their pastors are taken good care of financially. It is indeed a pity when pastors serve their congregations faithfully yet go to sleep on an empty stomach. The Bible teaches in Galatians 6:6 that those who receive the word of God must share all good things with those who teach them. It is an obligation that the church must pay their pastor well, ensure that his or her children's school fees are paid, and so on. Churches cannot prevent pastors from looking for money elsewhere if they do not take care of them. Many pastors use unacceptable ways of acquiring wealth, simply because the churches they serve are penny pinchers. It is in this context that pastors in financially poor churches should engage in tent-making to help them avoid the agony of encountering financial problems that might lure them into acquiring wealth in the wrong ways.

Pastoral counselling for immoral pastors

Chivasa's research (2017), which focused on the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) in Zimbabwe and related church policies, offers a good vision for helping the church deal with the immoral lives of pastors, but it is worth remembering that churches differ in terms of the policies governing their management and leadership, allowing some pastors to become 'gods'. Pastors need other pastors to help them in this regard. The one-on-one conversation between pastors may sometimes be difficult, but in situations where one pastor is immoral, it should be prioritised. The caregiver first needs to ensure that the immoral pastor accepts the reality of being involved in affairs outside of marriage or in misappropriating funds without resisting or denying the truth. This open acceptance will open doors for discussion on how to end such practices. After this, a therapist should help the client identify other associated sinful or evil acts that partnered or caused those transgressions, for instance, unfaithfulness, keeping bad company, et cetera. According to the therapist, Schaumburg (2013), this will help to sort out the root causes, which might be an unhappy marriage in the pastor's home. Some church policies may need to be revised so that the pastor is not tasked with solving church and marital problems alone. Justice must prevail in the different aspects of our lives, in our country, and among the pastors too – mindful of the saying that to know justice, is to know the Lord (Jr 9:23–24). For justice to be served, pastors, and

political leaders must be the first to be held accountable and must show exemplary leadership.

Conclusion

The undeniable truth is that pastors have a very strong influence and role to play in communities. In turn, communities look up to them as custodians of their moral regeneration. If pastors' ethical and moral leadership is interrupted or blackened by unacceptable behaviour, the hopes not only of their church, but of the entire community will be dashed. Of course, this research is not intended to make a general statement about all pastoral caregivers, but only those who err, with a few examples having been used as case studies. It is important to reiterate that not every pastor is guilty of misdeeds. The immoral life displayed by some pastoral leaders in this country has left many congregants and communities without faith in the church and its leadership. This leaves theology and the Christian church without the pride and influence it should have in communities. Through mentoring, a pastor's life can be (re) built. It is also important that pastors or church leaders occupy themselves with their church responsibilities so that they are left with little time to be distracted by temptations. Churches must ensure that their pastors are well taken care of – both materially and spiritually.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author has declared that no competing interest exist.

Author's contributions

M.E.B. is the sole author of this article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human participants. An application for ethical approval was made to the University of South Africa research ethics committee and ethics consent was received on 17 May 2023. The ethics approval number is 90163346-CREC-CHS-2023.

Funding information

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

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable 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 author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author, and publisher.

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