Impact of the Church on Conflict Transformation of Political Crises at Community Level: A Case Study of two Church Denominations in Dzivarasekwa, Harare

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Abstract

This study, based on Lederach's conflict transformation (CT) theory, analyses the participation of the local church in CT of political crises in Zimbabwe at the grassroots level – from 2005 to 2020. It compares the CT interventions of one Pentecostal church denomination and of one African Independent Church denomination in the Dzivarasekwa suburb of Harare. A convergent parallel mixed methods design was used. SPSS software was used to analyse quantitative data while the NVivo application was used for qualitative data analysis. One key finding is that both denominations believe CT entails community engagement. Major challenges to local churches' CT participation include financial constraints, repressive laws and church executives' fear of victimisation. The study concludes that the impact of the local churches is low because their interventions are limited to congregation members and their immediate neighbours. Another conclusion is that CT is politicised in Zimbabwe, which restricts effective church participation. The study

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makes some recommendations to address this most effective in achieving peace in the region.

Keywords: church, conflict transformation, political conflict, community engagement

1. Introduction

Politically motivated human rights violations by the Zimbabwean state against its citizens have been escalating since 2000 (Amnesty International 2007:35; Human Rights Watch 2012). One response has been the establishment in Zimbabwe of national conflict transformation institutions such as, in 2013, the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC). The macro-level conflict transformation approaches of the church in Zimbabwe have been led by ecumenical Christian organisations such as the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC) and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), primarily in the form of pastoral letters urging the government to resolve political crises peacefully (EFZ 2020; ZCBC 2022).

While there is substantial scholarly discourse on the conflict transformation (CT) initiatives by Zimbabwe's Christian actors at the macro-level in response to politically motivated violence, little has been done to document the CT accomplishments of Zimbabwe's churches at the grassroots micro-level. In light of this knowledge gap, the study sought to establish, compare and contrast the impact of CT interventions of two church denominations located in Harare's Dzivarasekwa suburb – Life Connect Ministry (LCM) and African Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe (AAFM) – on political crises at community level. The main research question addressed by the study was: what has been the contribution of the local church in Zimbabwe to the transformation of political conflict at the micro-level between 2005 and 2020?

The research questions of the study were:

1 What do the executives of the two Dzivarasekwa church denomination believe their role in CT of political crises to be?

2 What strategies have been used by each of the Dzivarasekwa church denominations to prevent political conflict and to promote peace in the Dzivarasekwa community?

3 What factors have influenced the participation of the two Dzivarasekwa church denominations in CT of political crises in Zimbabwe?

4 What is the level of participation of each of the Dzivarasekwa church denominations in CT of political crises in Zimbabwe?

5 What has been the impact of each Dzivarasekwa church denomination's CT interventions on the Dzivarasekwa community?

2. Background of the Life Connect Ministry (LCM) and African Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe (AAFM)

LCM is a fairly new Pentecostal church that was founded in 2016 and which has church assemblies in three Harare suburbs, the largest of which is in the low income suburb of Dzivarasekwa. The vision of this church is to be effective in every community that it serves by engaging with community members in order to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ and to offer them healing for all ailments. Vondey (2017:216) postulates that Pentecostal missiology concerns itself with divine healing, which is not only the restoration of physical or mental health, but also rectification of political and socio-economic ailments. Some Pentecostal churches thus bestow divine healing upon those they serve through social activism and political advocacy (Frahm-Arp 2019:324). This outlook informs the LCM founding pastor's active role in the Dzivarasekwa Peace Committee which he co-founded in 2017 with a local non-government organisation (NGO) he was involved with, in response to violent political clashes in

Dzivarasekwa. At the time of the study the Dzivarasekwa LCM assembly had 35 active church members.

The AAFM church is an African Independent Church (AIC) with assemblies across Zimbabwe, including one in Dzivarasekwa which was established in 2012. It was founded by Reverend Isaac Chiumbu in 1945, who began his ministry as a preacher under the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM), a Pentecostal church that was led by white missionaries and which spread to Rhodesia in 1915. After a disagreement, Chiumbu left AFM and founded AAFM (Hwata 2005:34). Though AICs have different beliefs and practices, a common thread uniting them is the desire to express their Christianity from an African traditional world view, which includes wearing uniforms, praying in indigenous languages and employing exuberant worship services (Chitando 2004:120). A feature of some AICs, shared by AAFM, is black economic empowerment through self-employment in trades, such as basket weaving and carpentry (Chitando 2004:121). At the time of the study, the Dzivarasekwa assembly of AAFM had 50 active church members.

Dzivarasekwa, where the two church denominations in the study are situated, is a working class suburb in the Harare metropolitan province with a population of 91 412 (48% male and 52% female) (ZimStat 2022:89). It is likely that this population reflects the national statistic of 63% under the age of 24, some 55% of whom are unemployed (UNFPA 2021:2; ZimStat 2022:5). It also suffers from perennial water and sanitation problems because of the scarcity of piped municipal water and other municipal services (Tanyanyiwa 2011:324; ZimNews 2020). All these factors seem to have contributed to Dzivarasekwa becoming a hot spot in Zimbabwe, with politically motivated, violent clashes over the years between the youth and various state agents (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum [ZHRNF] 2018:4).

3. Conflict transformation theory and the role of the church

CT theory formed the theoretical framework of this study. It describes a relationship-centred process that entails constructively changing relationships, attitudes and behaviours in violence-prone conflict environments, in order to promote sustainable peace and long-term socio-economic and political change (Lederach 2014:16). Inequitable social systems induce both structural and direct violence because political elites exploit other citizens. Political conflict creates a barrier at the macro-, meso- and micro-levels (Fuerst-Bjelis and Leimgruber 2020:4).

Paffenholz (2013:10) and Lederach (2019:23) have established that elitist approaches to CT such as round-table negotiations by political and religious leaders are ineffectual because they exclude grassroots actors such as leaders of the local church. The inclusion of conflict-affected communities in CT aids agency as it allows them to participate in making resolutions that will affect their lives (Lederach 2019:23).

Major proponents of CT include Johan Galtung (1969), John Burton (1969), Adam Curle (1971), Kumar Rupesinghe (1992) and John Paul Lederach (1995). Lederach's theory of conflict transformation considers CT through three lenses: one for the presenting situation, a second to delve deeper into the relationships of parties to the conflict, and a third to provide a conceptual framework that addresses how the relationships must change in order to produce sustainable peace (2014:12). Key assumptions of Lederach's theory of CT include: it is relationship-based with a focus on transforming relationships at the personal, relational, structural and cultural levels, and conflict is natural in human interaction and affords learning opportunities that foster stronger relationships and peaceful outcomes (Lederach 2014:32). Lederach's discourse of CT is buttressed by Sithole (2020:126) who argues that when the quality of social familiarity among community members is high, this creates a natural conflict prevention mechanism and empowers communities

in CT. This is in terms of reinforcing social networks and encouraging community initiatives to resolve conflicts.

The framework of CT as discussed above became a relevant theoretical guide to assess LCM and AAFM in Dzivarasekwa, in relation to their experiences in CT.

4. Unpacking the relationship between the Church and the state

A number of models of church–state relations exist, the three main ones being state–church systems, separation systems, and hybrid systems. In state–church systems, there is close cooperation between the state and the church, while in separation systems there is no official state religion and the state allows freedom of religion. Hybrid or cooperationist systems separate state and church but the two parties may form treaties to cooperate on specific activities (Sandberg and Doe 2007:4). Thomas (1985:115) and Ranger (2008:9) confess to challenges in categorising church–state relations in pre-independent Zimbabwe because of its religious pluralism. Thomas (1985) thus confines his study to Protestant churches and divides their relations with the state into three historical eras. The first one covering 1890–1964 was pioneered by early White missionaries who are better known for facilitating the entry and settlement of White settlers into colonial Zimbabwe (Welch 2008:94). The government policy was to ensure consolidation of White settler expansionist and racist interests with those of the missionaries, which resulted in harsh government controls over missionaries (Thomas 1985:116). White missionaries were given some latitude in building and running schools and hospitals for Black people, but were not allowed to criticise the status quo. This period of church–state relations may be characterised as close cooperation.

The next era, covering 1964–1971, was marked by a schism between church and state due to militancy by the church against the White establishment. For the first time in the country's history, in 1964 church leaders from different denominations publicly demonstrated against

the state to protest against the deportation from Rhodesia of Bishop Dodge, the President of the Christian Council of Rhodesia (CCR), an ecumenical body of mostly Protestant churches (Thomas 1985:122). His crime was criticising Prime Minister Ian Smith's proposed independence from Britain and his racist policies in relation to Blacks. When the state proceeded to ban African nationalist parties such as the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and their leaders, as well as secular African newspapers, the church rose up as "the voice of the voiceless" (1985:122). White Catholic church leaders joined those from Protestant churches to object to the growing body of legislation whose purpose was to entrench White supremacy in colonial Zimbabwe. It was these fiery missionaries who mentored some of the earliest politically active Black clergy, including Bishop Abel Muzorewa, Reverend Canaan Banana and Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole (Thomas 1985:127).

Thomas's final epoch, covering 1971–1980, was when African nationalism intensified. It was led by Muzorewa and Banana who had been elected as leaders of the secular African National Council (ANC). Although the ANC espoused a non-violent response to the escalating liberation war, some of its church members opted for a more radical approach. For example, from 1972, Reverend Ramakgapola of the Lutheran Church, inspired by the nationalist fervour of ANC leaders, began vigorously recruiting Black students and unemployed youths to join the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) (Bhebe 1999:158). However, the CCR focused on humanitarian activities catering to those who had been orphaned, widowed or displaced by the war (Thomas 1985:130). The Catholic Church upheld the church's prophetic voice through the predominantly White Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, which would investigate and chronicle the settler army's atrocities against Black civilians (Thomas 1985:131).

Although church–state relations had become either uncertain or openly hostile during the war years, Prime Minister Robert Mugabe's heartfelt message of reconciliation allayed fears in the Church of any repercussions against them (Mugabe 1980:3). Indeed, Zimbabwe's first president

was the same Reverend Banana who had co-led the colonial-era ANC. Church–state relations, soon after Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, were of the hybrid model. The then Prime Minister, Robert Mugabe, called on the church to cooperate with the state in re-developing the country whose infrastructure had been ravaged by the liberation war. The CCR had become the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) from 1980 and its member churches eagerly partnered with government on various development programmes across the country (Chirongoma 2020:134; Ruzivo 2020:16).

The fledgling reconciliation between church and state began however to falter in the early 1980s in the face of massacres in Matabeleland. The Catholic Church broke ranks with the ZCC and, through the ZCBC and the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), launched scathing attacks on the government over these atrocities (Ruzivo 2020:22). The ZCC, however, remained mute on both Gukurahundi and 1985 election violence (Ruzivo 2020:23).

The introduction of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in 1991 and its devastating economic impact on Zimbabwe's citizens woke the ZCC from its quiescence. In partnership with church-linked and well-funded international non-government organisations (INGOs), ZCC embarked earnestly on democratic reform advocacy (Murwira and Manyeruke 2020:99). By the late 1990s, after a succession of violent political elections, the ZCC was steeped in political advocacy, placing it greatly at odds with the state. The latter took issue with ZCC's foreign donors and accused it of being their puppet and agitating for regime change (Murwira and Manyeruke 2020:102). Every national election since 2000 has been marred by violence, which galvanised the hitherto passive Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) to join the ZCBC and the ZCC in roundly condemning state violence against its detractors (Research Advocacy Unit 2018:2). This opposition began to dissipate in the face of the state's divisive tactics against the church. For example, certain individual leaders of mainline Pentecostal and AIC churches were courted and feted by the state, while the rest were relegated

to the periphery of Zimbabwe's socio-economic and/or political issues as enemies of the state (Manyonganise 2017:122). Religion was thus "weaponised" by the state to counter dissenting voices and to clothe government in legitimacy in relation to its less savoury activities.

Such a fragmented approach by the state indicates that church–state relations in Zimbabwe continue to be diverse and complicated. This has resulted in severely circumscribed political and social spaces in Zimbabwe and significantly hinders the impact of the church in the CT of political crises.

5. Localism and conflict transformation

CT emerged when scholars such as Lederach were attempting to describe and emphasise certain facets of peacebuilding. This explains why Lederach (1997:20) defines peacebuilding as "a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates, and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to *transform* conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships". In this paper, peacebuilding is synonymous with CT. Ojendal et al. (2017:30) postulate that localism or the 'local turn' of peacebuilding is a manifestation of the fourth generation of peacebuilding (after UN peacekeeping missions, interventions after the Cold War and state-building processes). They advocate more participatory, bottom-up and agency-oriented methods, inclusion of varied voices, and the establishment of formal and informal local governance bodies (Ojendal et al. 2017:31). Ojendal et al. (2017:36) caution against regarding localism as a universal cure for CT. Some of the pitfalls they cite include romanticising traditional approaches that may, instead, entrench existing elites, the risk of the local peace initiative being disconnected from the larger conflict, and the tendency of localism to be targeted at the national level while side-lining grassroots and subnational actors.

Although considerable research has been undertaken globally and in Africa on national-level religious actors in CT, not much is documented about the involvement in CT of the local grassroots church that is

embedded in conflict-affected communities. Tearfund NGO (Gourlay et al. 2019:1), which has been partnering with the local church of any denomination to bring succour to the needy in conflict-affected states, maintains that local churches' involvement in CT "has mostly been a hidden story". Consequently, Tearfund commissioned a study in different countries in which it operates to establish local churches' CT interventions (Gourlay et al. 2019:10). Some of their findings include advocating for the vulnerable, community-level mediation between warring parties, preaching and counselling to promote community healing, sheltering those displaced by conflict, and providing emergency relief to the communities (Gourlay et al. 2019:31). It was also found that most of the church leaders in these local churches were greatly motivated to engage in CT by a sense of calling based on the Great Commission found in the Bible in the Book of Matthew, Chapter 28:18–20. Despite impediments such as persecution of local church leaders and lack of funding for CT interventions, the local grassroots churches in this study have established themselves in their communities as oases of hope and as legitimate actors in crisis environments (Gourlay et al. 2019:64).

A similar study was documented by Oyola (2015:62) in respect of the CT activities of a local grassroots Catholic church in Choco, Colombia. Motivated by a form of liberation theology called "accompaniment", these church leaders identified with and advocated for the poor and the marginalised by promoting social justice (2015:66). Together with strategic partners, they assisted with activities to reduce the humanitarian crises precipitated by the displacement of people in war-ravaged communities (2015:70). Initially, impediments to the local church's CT initiatives were in the form of armed actors murdering church personnel, but it transitioned to struggling to help the impoverished indigenous communities who own the land to desist from signing their heritage away to transnational companies seeking Colombia's natural resources (Oyola 2019:81).

Tarusarira and Ganiel (2014:62; 2020:73) have attributed the perceived failure of the church in Zimbabwe to effectively hold the government accountable for human rights violations to the rise of non-conformist Christian ecumenical groups. Unlike the church, these ecumenical groups, such as Churches in Manicaland (CiM), emphasise a grassroots approach to Zimbabwe's political and other crises. As a result, their membership is open to anybody, clergy or laity and of different Christian doctrinal backgrounds, who espouses their aims of serving people at the grassroots level who have been affected by various crises in Zimbabwe (2020:75). The CT activities of CiM include dialogue with traditional leaders in conflict-affected rural areas and training community members on civic issues (2014:70). The impact of CiM's interventions is difficult to measure since these are very low key (Tarusarira and Ganiel 2014:71).

6. Analysing the impact of the church

A mixed methods research design was adopted for the study so that the weaknesses of each method (quantitative and qualitative) could be minimised (Ragab and Arisha, 2017:5). This means that two research philosophies, interpretivism and positivism, were employed into a hybrid now known as pragmatism. The interpretivist approach was useful in developing a deeper contextual understanding of the lived experiences of survivors of political conflict in Dzivarasekwa and their interpretation of the part that the two local churches have played in transforming their situations from conflict situations in the period concerned (Saunders et al. 2009:140). The positivist philosophy featured equally and employed a discernible social reality to generate quantitative measurement in respect of the participation of the two local Dzivarasekwa churches in the transformation of political conflict (Saunders et al. 2009:135).

Creswell's (2014:280) convergent parallel mixed methods design was selected since it requires collecting both qualitative and quantitative data concurrently using the same constructs. The triangulation of results from the key informant and other interview participants, focus group discussion (FGD) participants, as well as those from the congregants

and their leaders through questionnaires, increased the validity of the findings. Elaboration and clarification, also known as corroboration of results from one method with the results from the other, improved interpretability and meaningfulness (Green et al. 1989, cited in Ragab and Arisha 2017:5). Given the character of the convergent parallel mixed methods approach where quantitative and qualitative findings are mixed (QUAN + QUAL), it is generally believed that validity of the research results is enhanced (Morse 1991, cited in Creswell 2014:280). In this study, the qualitative data obtained from interviews with Dzivarasekwa church executive participants was used to clarify quantitative results from the congregation participants obtained from the questionnaires.

The population of the study was drawn from one Dzivarasekwa church assembly of each of the LCM and AAFM churches, as well as from the community where the two churches are located. The target population (N) was 100, consisting of 85 congregants (including one of the two key informants), the remaining key informant, ten focus group discussion members, and five survivors of political violence. LCM has a membership of 35 while AAFM has 50 members. One senior pastor for LCM represented the church executive in responding to the questionnaire.

Probability sampling was used for the quantitative strand of this mixed methodology study to ensure that every member of the target population received an equal chance of being selected (Creswell and Creswell, 2018:212). Stratified random sampling was used in the selection of respondents to the questionnaire from the heterogeneous population of congregants and church leaders. The sampling frame for the questionnaire respondents comprised church pastors, other church leaders and adult congregants of either gender, in order to ensure a fair representation (Creswell and Creswell, 2018:212). The same rationale was applied to stratified random sampling of FGD participants. The sampling frame for the FGD comprised Dzivarasekwa residents who: reside within 3 km of the churches (walking distance), are adults of either gender, and may or may not be affiliated with any church or any political party. Purposive sampling of the survivors of political

violence was based on the researcher approaching survivors from a list of families known in the community to have suffered some type of loss after incidences of political upheaval. Researcher bias was minimised because none of the participants was known to the researcher and those who responded to the invitation to participate in the study did so of their own free will and without any inducements. Table 1.1 below outlines the sample frame from which the study data was obtained.

Table 1.1: Sampling frame for the study

Sample category	Sampling technique	Total participants	Data collection instrument used
Church executive	Purposive sampling	2	Interviews
Church congregations and leaders	Stratified random sampling	75	Questionnaires
Community	Stratified random sampling	10	Focus group discussions
Survivors of politically motivated violence	Purposive sampling	5	Interviews

The questionnaire was administered to 75 members of the congregation and the church executives and leaders of both LCM and AAFM church assemblies. The LCM church executive administered 32 copies of the questionnaire and 43 were administered for AAFM. This data collection tool was inexpensive and offered quick results from quantitative data. These data sets were analysed using the SPSS application.

One interview guide with 12 open-ended questions was used to collect qualitative data from the church executives of both the LCM and AAFM Dzivarasekwa church assemblies, as key informants. Each interview participant had an informed perspective on their denomination's theology and other aspects relevant to the study, which promoted the validity of the research findings (Creswell and Creswell 2018:215). The executives of the AAFM and LCM were interviewed at their

respective Dzivarasekwa homes and the interviews lasted 90 and 120 minutes, respectively.

A separate interview guide with 10 open-ended questions was used for the three survivors of political conflict participants to confirm or refute key findings from both the congregants and the church assembly leadership participants. Two of the survivors were interviewed separately at their homes in Dzivarasekwa and the third was interviewed at his Harare office. Each of these interviews lasted about 45 minutes. Two other survivors of politically motivated violence who had originally agreed to avail themselves for interviews declined to attend because of business commitments at the time. The qualitative data sets were analysed using the NVivo application.

Since both LCM and AAFM are situated on the same street in Dzivarasekwa, they serve the same community. Therefore, only one FGD was necessary to document the perceptions and experiences of community members regarding the CT activities of each church denomination. These qualitative data findings were triangulated with those from key informants, the survivors of politically motivated violence, as well as the churches' congregants, leadership and executive. The FGD was held at the LCM church in Dzivarasekwa and lasted 76 minutes.

Of the 10 participants who had been recruited for the FGD, eight of these came: two men and six women. Eight is an acceptable group size which ensured that detailed lived experiences were shared (Creswell and Creswell, 2018:263). Five open-ended questions were asked, with opinions being elicited from each participant. To ensure accuracy and completeness of the conversations, there was a moderator to guide the discussion and a research assistant to record responses and general observations. The recorder also assigned a code to each participant to maintain anonymity, but made sure to document gender and a general description by which each one could be easily recalled.

6.1 Demographic information on research participants

Of the 73 research participants, 62% were female (45) and 38% were male (28). In terms of age groups, 29% were 26–35, 25% were 18–25, 20% were 36–45, 14% were 46–60 and 12% were aged 60 and above. No questionnaire respondent held an office in any political party or organisation and 92% of questionnaire respondents had no political affiliation. Of the 8% of respondents who were politically affiliated to parties (which they declined to disclose), three were members of AAFM and one a member of LCM. Two of the three survivors of political violence were actively involved in opposition politics, while the remainder held no political affiliation. The pastors for both LCM and AAFM professed no political affiliation.

6.2 What do the two Dzivarasekwa church denomination executives believe their role in conflict transformation of political crises to be?

Both executives, Pst1_LCM and Pst2_AAFM, believe that their churches must be involved in the transformation of political crises by engaging the community for peacebuilding. For example, each pastor sheltered persons in his own home for protracted periods. These individuals had been displaced by political violence in 2005 and 2008 after state operations 'Murambatsvina' and 'Mavhotera Papi?', respectively. This transformed the relationships the pastors had with these congregants, to whom they grew closer and much like members of their families (Lederach 2014:24). It seems Pst1_LCM was more seized with matters of community than Pst2_AAFM, since the former made 24 references to it, and the latter six. This is validated by Pst1_LCM's active membership in both an ecumenical body in Dzivarasekwa and in a local peace committee. Such involvement is consistent with the fourth generation of CT in Ojendal et al. (2017:31). Although Pst2_AAFM was aware of both of these bodies, he was not a member of either one. When queried on it,

he responded, "The Catholic Church is active in politics, so there's no need for AAFM to duplicate."

Both executives believe CT entails helping the community and questionnaire responses from congregant participants elaborate on the manner in which such help is rendered by each denomination. All participants associate community with loving one another, promoting peace, training for empowerment and encouragement during political stress. Such demonstrations of love constitute a relational process that builds mutual trust between the local churches and the surrounding community (Lederach 2014:16). Pst1_LCM lamented that, "The politics of hate that began with the liberation war is still at work in this nation," and must therefore be countered with "the politics of love". However, there was a divergence of findings because none of the survivors of political violence who participated in the study was ever engaged by either one of these pastors after their tribulations, despite living within walking distance of one another. Rather, each survivor approached the pastors of his/her own denomination for assistance, who then rebuffed them because of the "political" nature of their complaints. Apparently, it did not occur to these survivors to approach pastors outside of their own denominations, such as Pst1_LCM or Pst2_AAFM. Most of the FGD participants (70%) acknowledged that Pst1_LCM was involved in CT in the Dzivarasekwa community. There was convergence of results between the quantitative findings from the congregant participants and the qualitative findings from the church executive participants (Table 1.2). However, there was divergence between church executives' results and those of the survivor participants, which may be attributed to the executives' limited focus on their denominations rather than on community members, regardless of their denominational or religious orientation. Thus, the poor quality of the relationship between these parties exacerbated the survivors' conflict environment (Sithole 2020:126).

Table 1.2: Corroboration of church executives' conception of church role in CT

Description of church's community engagement in CT	Number of participants who mentioned it	Thematic distribution by church denomination			Thematic distribution by gender	
n = 73						
		LCM n = 34	AAFM n = 31	Other n = 8	Male n = 28	Female n = 45
Help	65	32	30	3	24	41
Love	17	4	11	2	10	7
Prayer	9	3	4	2	3	6

6.3 What strategies were used by each of the Dzivarasekwa church denominations to prevent political conflict and to promote peace in the Dzivarasekwa community?

Church congregation participant responses derived from the questionnaires revealed that while AAFM concentrated their CT initiatives on peace prayer rallies and counselling victims of political violence, LCM was active in counselling victims of political violence, peace prayer rallies, mediation between parties in political conflict, peace training, infrastructure development and providing humanitarian aid to those affected by political violence. These interventions bring structural transformation to Dzivarasekwa by fostering non-violent mechanisms to deal with violence, as well as by developing structures to meet basic human needs (Lederach 2014:26). Transformation may also be found at the personal level, as these interventions maximise community members'

potential for growth after suffering conflict (Lederach 2014: 25). LCM's CT strategies are congruent with the radical social justice activities that characterised certain pastors before Zimbabwe's independence (Bhebe 1999:158). Pst2_AAFM's strategies for CT typify the diffident approach of most of Zimbabwe's post-independence churches (Ruzivo, 2020:27) on matters concerning the state's human rights abuses.

However, two thirds of both the survivor and of the FGD participants have never witnessed, participated in or benefitted from any of the CT strategies listed above through either church denomination. A 31-year-old male survivor of political violence who is also an opposition party supporter bitterly exclaimed, "Church pastors are selfish and unwilling to help others … only my [political] party helped me." Pst1_LCM indicated that it was difficult to conduct CT activities in Dzivarasekwa because some community members, including peer pastors, regularly report him for political activism to political elites, such that he and his family are occasionally threatened with violence by ruling party youth militias. In fact, the findings revealed that the militias burned some LCM church property in 2018 in retribution for perceived LCM support for the political opposition. He said, "When youth militias are deployed in the community to commit violent acts, they are wielding state power using weapons and authority delegated to them by the state." Pst2_AAFM declined to recruit community members who do not belong to his church for this research study, fearing that others may misinterpret his actions as "political" and that he could be labelled an enemy of the state. Given public reports about the arrests of politically active clergy and the politically motivated tribulations of Pst1_LCM, his fears are understandable.

The qualitative data analysis showed strong convergence with the quantitative findings in respect of peace prayer rallies. Additional CT strategies that emerged were cleaning campaigns, stakeholder engagement and skills training. In keeping with AIC doctrine, Pst2_AAFM's cleaning campaigns and training of others in entrepreneurial

skills such as making vehicle lubricants for sale, are rooted in a desire to empower, which promotes peace.

6.4 What factors have influenced the participation of the two Dzivarasekwa church denominations in conflict transformation of political crises in Zimbabwe?

Factors that influence each denomination's capability in and appetite for participating in CT of political crises were aggregated, resulting in ranking by congregation questionnaire participants as: financial constraints, harsh laws like the Public Order and Security Act (POSA), fear of victimisation, church doctrine, and pastors' incapacity to engage in politics. Buchanan (2020:6) maintains that Western donors, the traditional funders for CT initiatives, are no longer forthcoming because of the politicisation and demonisation of foreign aid to recipient organisations by destination governments. Quantitative analysis shows that there is no statistically significant difference in either denomination's participants' aggregated ranking of financial constraints as the biggest factor that reduces their church's participation in CT, which is consistent with the findings for grassroots churches in conflict-affected states by Gourlay et al. (2019:64).

Although repressive laws have an aggregated ranking as the second biggest hindrance to the CT participation of both denominations, there is a statistically significant difference in the way this factor is perceived by each denomination. Sixty-seven per cent (67%) of participants for the Pentecostal church LCM ranked harsh laws second, as opposed to 23% from the AIC AAFM. It is likely that LCM perceptions of oppressive legislation such as POSA are derived from the lived experiences of Pst1_LCM over the years. For example, in 2019, Pst1_LCM and his family were forced to abandon their home on many evenings and to seek refuge elsewhere because of fear of rampaging militias who would attempt to invade their house. Save for church doctrine, the four other factors which were found to influence church involvement in CT have political connotations in Zimbabwe. Lederach's CT theory (2014:26)

helps us to understand that the state is exhibiting cultural patterns that promote violent expressions of conflict which, in turn, increases fear and discouragement in the relationship between the state and the local church.

Divergence of qualitative and quantitative findings occurred because all of the survivor of political conflict participants cited pastors' fear of victimisation, ranked overall third by congregation participants, as the major factor hampering local church participation in CT. Pst1_AAFM's utterance that "Church service is sensitive – one must be careful what and how one preaches, lest one be labelled a political activist," seems to buttress this observation. One 49-year-old female survivor of political violence who is also a member of LCM explained that, "Anybody can inform the police or soldiers that the church is meeting to conspire against the ruling party, which would lead to arrests, violence and threats of shutting down our church." Indeed, as Tarusarira (2020:73) has stated, it is church leaders' unresponsiveness to Zimbabwe's political crises at the grassroots level that has spawned non-conformist Christian organisations that are advocating social justice at the micro-level.

6.5 What is the level of participation of each of the Dzivarasekwa church denominations in conflict transformation of political crises in Zimbabwe?

There is a significant difference in the levels of participation in CT between the two church denominations: LCM has participated considerably more than AAFM. This finding is based on participants' having witnessed, participated in or benefitted from a selection of CT activities conducted by these denominations during the past 15 years. Pst1_LCM is always at the forefront of his denomination's CT activities and even helped to establish a multi-stakeholder Dzivarasekwa peace committee in 2017. He fervently believes that, "The [local] church must always promote peace" in the community, which will help change attitudes of political intolerance and violent behaviours in this politically charged community. Although the results from survivor participants diverged from the

above findings, 25% of FGD participants said that they had personally benefitted from peace training or humanitarian support from LCM. One 27-year-old female FGD participant said, "I am one of these LCM peace trainees and am now engaging in conflict transformation at a family level: learning the ropes and building capacity so that I begin to engage [in CT] at the community level."

While the findings of this study indicate that funding has affected these two denominations' CT participation levels, the prayer peace rallies, counselling and mediation that Pst1_LCM have been conducting seem to belie this point. Nganje (2021:125) points out that grassroots CT in Africa has been acknowledged since the 1990s as "self-help" peace-building mechanisms by members of communities in conflict. This implies that CT often proceeds on a small budget and garners some successes in managing diverse conflicts.

The lower CT participation of AAFM is consistent with Ruzivo's (2020:27) observations about Zimbabwean churches post-independence, but that for LCM is irregular, especially for a Pentecostal church in Africa, which are often castigated for ostentation and commoditisation (Adebayo 2019:133). This anomaly may be attributed to Pst1_LCM's personal ideology: "The Church in Zimbabwe must lead in the politics of loving one another," in order to foster reconciliation and healing in the nation. The fact of Pst1_LCM's persisting in his CT activities despite threats to himself and in relation to the destruction of church property, speaks to his intrepid nature.

Unlike Pst1_LCM, Pst2_AAFM is inhibited by AIC doctrine that exhorts him to, "submit to the governors placed over [us]" (quoting the Bible – the Book of Romans 13, King James Version) by never (re)acting to government in a manner that may be deemed defiant. He adds: "The Church [pastor] must love everyone and not be aligned to any political party."

6.6 What has been the impact on the Dzivarasekwa community of each Dzivarasekwa church denomination's conflict transformation interventions?

The overall impact of the aforementioned CT interventions in Dzivarasekwa has been the promotion of a more peaceful environment. This is because the two churches' interventions have encouraged the community to respond to violence in ways that maximise positive change (Lederach 2014:16). However, there is a statistically significant difference in the impact made by each church denomination, with LCM impact being greater than that of AAFM. This is owing to the higher number and frequency of CT interventions conducted by LCM during the period studied.

The word 'peace' had the third highest frequency in this study, indicating the preoccupation participants had with this concept. The two denominations' initiatives may not yet have yielded socio-economic or political change, but there is an appreciation among the study participants that this process has begun. The local church is therefore helping the community to identify mechanisms within its cultural setting that will help them to address constructively political conflict in order to attain sustainable peaceful outcomes (Lederach 2014:26).

Behaviour and attitude changes when faced with potential or actual political conflict have been encouraged by both church executives leading peace prayers in the community, Pst1_LCM's mediation between conflicting political party actors, and through counselling by both pastors of the survivors of political conflict and of the perpetrators themselves. Educational and entrepreneurship empowerment programmes by both denominations have focused mainly on the youth, but also on women in the case of AAFM. One 33-year-old male FGD participant said, "In Dzivarasekwa many people are idle and living in poverty so they are susceptible to manipulation by political parties." The church denominations' CT activities, including the pastors' demonstration of community being one family, have made Dzivarasekwa's youth less

predisposed to violence. The local churches are therefore transforming the youth at the relational level by urging them to acknowledge inter-group relationships (Lederach 2014:26).

Another impact of these CT activities on Dzivarasekwa is the community's growing realisation of their own agency in CT of political crises in their midst (Lederach 2019:23; Nganje 2021:135). All the FGD participants agreed with one disabled 41-year-old female participant who said that, "We residents should take care of each other and resolve disputes amicably … because the politicians and the police never help us."

It seems that although LCM has been carrying out more CT activities than AAFM, their impact has been limited to members of the LCM church and to community members with whom Pst1_LCM has personally interacted. This dilutes LCM's overall impact on the Dzivarasekwa community. Pst1_LCM complained, "I don't have enough of a platform" from which to conduct CT initiatives, given both a limited budget and the criminalisation of CT activities deemed critical of the government (ZHRNF 2018).

Quantitative findings from the Dzivarasekwa church congregants, church executives and their leadership teams, as well as qualitative findings from the two church executives, Dzivarasekwa community members and from survivors of political violence in the community, were checked for corroboration. There was corroboration between the quantitative and the qualitative findings in respect of the church executives' conception of the role of their churches in CT, showing it as a relationship-based process to construct new behaviours and attitudes in conflict-ridden areas (Lederach 2014:16).

Although the results from the quantitative analysis revealed many CT strategies employed by the two church denominations, those from the qualitative analysis controverted this finding since 67% of the study participants have never benefitted from them. The churches' intentional or unintentional CT practice within a limited radius, in itself compromises community members' quality of social familiarity with

one another, which is an important factor in CT in a community (Sithole 2020:126).

While the quantitative analysis revealed the local church's constraints in CT over the past 15 years, the qualitative analysis revealed the prevalence of government interference in this matter. Evidently, church–state relations continue to demonstrate government's intolerance of the local church as anything but a development partner (Chirongoma 2020:134).

The quantitative analysis also helped to distinguish the two church denominations' level of participation in CT and to differentiate the CT interventions each one has undertaken. Qualitative data obtained from the key informant interviews clarified contributory factors behind these differences. For instance, Pst2_AAFM does not believe in church-based advocacy, meaning the local churches in Dzivarasekwa are divided and weakened in respect of CT (Tarusarira 2020:69).

Statistical analysis of the quantitative data corroborated that of the qualitative data in respect of the impact of LCM and AAFM's CT strategies resulting in a more peaceful environment in Dzivarasekwa. This study demonstrated that the local church in Zimbabwe is a serious socio-political actor with the moral authority to stand as an interlocutor on behalf of the voiceless community (Gourlay et al. 2019:64). However, the local church needs to do more to promote sustainable peace and long-term socio-economic and political change (Lederach 2014:16).

7. Conclusion and recommendations

The contribution of Zimbabwe's local churches to CT of political crises over the past 15 years has had a limited scope and impact, given government antagonism towards it. CT manifested through counselling survivors of politically motivated violence, peace training, praying for and preaching about peace, mediation between and counselling of conflict political actors, and economic empowerment programmes.

Many challenges have impeded the participation of the local church in CT at the micro-level, the foremost of which are financial constraints

and repressive legislation. In addition, local churches are divided about advocacy, which weakens the CT thrust. Consequently, grassroots churches in Zimbabwe were unable to make much of an impact in political CT in their communities over the past 15 years.

CT in Zimbabwe is highly politicised, with the government seeking to monopolise its every facet. State power has been violently brought to bear to ensure that the grassroots church is not allowed to engage the community in CT. As a result, fear of reprisals for engaging in CT is pervasive among local church executives, congregants and the community. This hampers the realisation of sustainable peace.

The Zimbabwe government must make CT inclusive so that community churches and community members can participate in activities and decision-making that affect them. Government funding must be availed to train and otherwise equip local churches as partners in peacebuilding leading to sustainable peace in Zimbabwe. A strong theological foundation would support grassroots churches so that they can unite and speak up for the marginalised, in order to right social ills.

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