



# A biblical foundation for public pastoral care practice: A biblical reflection



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The rise of public theology has resulted in a challenge for pastoral care to consider public issues. Therefore, the need for pastoral care to be public has given birth to the notion of public pastoral care. With pastoral care as a Christian religious practice, its biblical and theological basis must be established. This article poses the question: What is the biblical basis of public pastoral care? It articulates a theology of public pastoral care to address this question by arguing that public pastoral care originates with God, who revealed himself to humankind in biblical history, culminating with the incarnation of Jesus. The Bible presents a normative and authoritative approach to public pastoral care. The numerous places in the Bible where God addresses poverty, social injustice, marginalisation, et cetera from a public pastoral care perspective provide a heuristic framework to guide public pastoral care practice. Thus, this article carefully outlines a biblical framework of public pastoral care.

**Contribution:** This article employs a literature study approach. It contributes to practical theology, especially pastoral care, by articulating a public pastoral care theology. It defines public pastoral care and then provides a concise discussion of the biblical basis that undergirds it.

**Keywords:** public pastoral care; theology of public pastoral care; biblical basis of public pastoral care; pastoral care, public pastoral care theology; biblical foundation of public pastoral care; reflection on public pastoral care.

## Introduction and background

Pastoral care and the undergirding pastoral theology are assumed to be clearly understood and shared by all pastoral care practitioners. However, assuming that recent pastoral care movements inclusively refers to care from a broad religious and spiritual perspective, is simply incorrect (Magezi 2020a). Armstrong (2001:17), referring to pastoral care, laments that 'it seems the entire field has been taken hostage by the modern academic disciplines of social science and psychology. This was not always the case in evangelical churches'. Louw (2016) advised that pastoral theology is a normative science. There are norms for human conduct derived from the normative framework of Scripture. Ağılkaya-Şahin (2016) surveyed the history and developments in pastoral care and concluded that:

Pastoral care is widely accepted as an encounter and relationship in which both the context of Church and religious content are clear. The pastoral counsellor, who is generally a clergy member, represents the Church. The religious dimension is the ultimate concern in the relationship. Thus, pastoral care and counselling is marked with establishing a relationship to God and with prayer. (p. 71)

In his critique of the modern developments in pastoral care, Patton (1988:7) maintains that 'pastoral care tradition very much revolved around the activities of recognised church leaders'. Thus, despite the developments in pastoral care that may refer to broad religious groups, it is located within church content, and the Bible is central to the caring practice. 'The Bible is appealed to and consulted in all matters of Christian life' (Patton 1988:106). Therefore, a claim to pastoral care should have a biblical basis. Sadly, some 'pastoral theologians seem to have almost completely avoided considering the Bible' in the formulation of their pastoral care (Patton 1988:106).

The rise in public theology has resulted in a push for pastoral care to have a public dimension. McClure (2012:7) advises that pastoral care should not merely function as a private good among faith and within faith communities, but it should function as a public and social good. Miller-McLemore (2018:311) observes three developments that account for the rise of public pastoral care, namely the interest in congregational studies, the call for public theology, and the rise of liberation movements. Therefore, to capture the public dimension of pastoral care, Magezi (2020b) succinctly explains that:

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Public pastoral care is (1) caring for people from a Christian spiritual perspective whereby (2) the care is provided to people in different public spaces and contexts (3) to address holistic issues affecting people such as spiritual, social, emotional, cultural, economic, political and others (4) to enable them to meaningfully cope with life. (p. 69)

Magezi's definition (2020b) of public pastoral care, as indicated above, builds on the position held by many other pastoral care theologians who recommend pastoral care to address public issues (Louw 2016; McClure 2012; Miller-McLemore 2004; 2005; 2012; 2015; Ramsay 2004; 2014). However, from the above discussion, the following question to ground public pastoral care arises: What is its biblical basis? Indeed, for public pastoral care to be legitimately theologically public in caregiving, the following basic question should be addressed: What is the biblical basis of public pastoral care? Therefore, this article aims to articulate a theology of public pastoral care.

The presupposition of this article is that public pastoral care originates with God, who revealed himself to humankind in biblical history, with the culminating of Jesus' incarnation (Heb 1:1–2). The Bible presents a normative and authoritative approach to public pastoral care. There are numerous places in the Bible where God addresses poverty, social injustice, marginalisation, et cetera from a public pastoral care perspective (Williams 2014:160). The fact of God revealing himself to commune with humankind, forms the basis of his public pastoral care (Juma 2015:10). He revealed himself to humankind primarily to love and care for his creation, as demonstrated by sending his Son to die for humankind (Jn 3:16; Hendriks 2007:1004). Thus, the article explores the biblical basis of public pastoral care in the Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT).

## Public pastoral care notion in the Old Testament

### The temptation as a demonstration of God's pastoral care

The Genesis 3 narrative shows the degeneration of Adam and Eve from the initial perfection portrayed in Genesis 1:31 (Wenham 1994:62), where God pronounced that everything He had made 'was very good'. The lure of instant pleasure and gratification led the two to breach God's command not to eat of the fruit (Ross 1985:34; Wenham 1994:63). When sin marred the image of God between God and man in Genesis 3, God publicly looked out for Adam with a restorative aim (Gn 3:9, 21). In Genesis 3:9–20, Adam and Eve are compassionately approached by God. The questions framed by God are designed to induce confession. The Genesis 3 narrative demonstrates God's public pastoral care for his people in an environment where man alienates himself from the Creator (Manzanga & Mageza 2020).

God pronounced the lasting effects of man's disobedience with a warfare between man and the serpent (Gn 3:15). The warfare will last a long time, but there is promise of hope in Genesis 3:15 that man will crush the head of the serpent. In seed form, there is a hint of a Saviour for humanity as alluded to in Genesis 3:15 (Wenham 1994:63). Instead of letting the man and woman instantly face death (Ezk 18:20; Rm 6:23), God demonstrates his longsuffering and patience with mankind (Longman III & Dillard 2006:57). Although the couple lived outside the garden, they were saved by God and restored back to fellowship with him. The animal skins that God used to cover the couple with, further serve as a public demonstration of God's public pastoral care. God graciously responded to Adam and Eve to mitigate against death (Longman III & Dillard 2006:57). This was fulfilled in Christ, where God accepted the sacrifice of his Son to clothe believers in righteousness (Rm 3:21–26; Ross 1985:33).

Public pastoral care emanates from God's heart as love and compassion for his creatures. We also discern that public pastoral care is intentional, as God took the initiative to approach Adam and Eve. Although God shows public pastoral care, the consequences of Adam and Eve's disobedience remain. Man must labour for food, and woman must experience increased pain during childbirth (Gn 3:16–18). In public pastoral care, God demonstrates that 'punishment does not exclude mercy, and that his mercy does not exclude judgement' (Assohoto & Ngewa 2006:65). It would be misleading to think of public pastoral care where consequences to sin or retribution do not exist. It is also important to learn from God, particularly how He forgives and still allows the result(s) of sin to be felt without harming the person but by promoting a sense of human flourishing for individuals and society.

God's acts of public pastoral care are aimed at healing the estranged souls, sustaining them by giving hope, guiding them to confession, and reconciling them with himself for fellowship (Clebsch & Jaekles 1964:4). Furthermore, pastoral care is seen in engaging them in a discussion and provision of coverings for their naked bodies. Thus, the care of souls and physical provisions for body coverings in this narrative is evidence of holistic public pastoral care. It follows that pastoral theologians should appropriate the nature of God by being equally constrained by love and compassion (2 Cor 5:14) in public pastoral care. In practising public pastoral care, the church is regarded as an interpretive community in a world with social ills and must constantly seek to engage with God's patterns of praxis (Hendriks 2007:1011). With the God-human relationships seen in the Genesis 3 narrative, the church should show practical concern couched in love and compassion for issues that affect people in- and outside the church (Hurding 1995:45).

### The Cain and Abel narrative as pastoral care

Further reference is made to the biblical basis of public pastoral care in the Cain and Abel narrative in Genesis 4. Eve gave birth to Cain and Abel. Upon giving birth to Cain, she

said, 'I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord' (Gn 4:1). She still acknowledges the soul healing and reconciliation she learned from God in chapter 3.

A public issue or social ill becomes discernible when the two brothers brought the produce of their labour as offerings before the Lord (Gn 4:4-5). God showed favour for Abel's offering and did not approve of Cain's offering. Abel presented what aligned very well with Leviticus 3:16, 'a pleasing aroma to God' (Assohoto & Ngewa 2006:67). Moved by jealousy, Cain murdered his brother (Gn 4:6-8) when God had disregarded his offering (Wenham 1994:64). God identified the social ill of disobedience, jealousy, and murder.

God publicly approached Cain and confronted him about his behaviour, which he openly denied and made fun of (Gn 4:9; Wenham 1994:64). Cain's sin did not only affect Abel, but also his community and ultimately, he displeased God. From a public pastoral care perspective, God takes the initiative to ask Cain with a restorative motive. The pastoral care motive is discerned in God's words, 'If you do well, will you not be accepted. And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it' (Gn 4:7). Thus, God's public pastoral care is focused on restoring Cain back to him.

Consequently, pastoral care can sometimes be confrontational, underpinned by love and compassion for people. Wisdom should be applied to decide the most suitable approach in each situation. Pastoral care also guides people towards transformation as discerned in God giving room for Cain to change, although he seems to have a desire to transgress more (Gn 4:23). Guiding people to make prudent choices in public pastoral care does not isolate the merciful judgement of God as seen with Cain (Gn 4:13; Benner 2003:15). Concisely God demonstrated his public pastoral care by confronting Cain (promoting dialogue), by sparing him from death, by allowing him to do well, and by punishing him publicly for his own good and the community around him (Manzanga & Mageza 2020).

### **Deliverance of Israel from Egyptian oppression as pastoral care**

The biblical basis of public pastoral care is further demonstrated by God delivering Israel from Egyptian slavery. God's demonstration of love undergirds his pastoral care for Israel (Ex 19:4; 1 Ki 8:23; 2 Chr 6:14; Ps 98:3; 130:7; 136:11; Hs 3:1). Pastoral care came after God saw (Ex 3:7) the suffering, slavery, murder, and exploitation of the Jews by the Egyptians (vv. 7-9). By visible acts, God came to answer the plea of the suffering Jews through the human agency of Moses (Ex 3:10). The Lord knew that Moses could not quickly accept (Ex 3:11) the public pastoral care task. God reminded Moses of his pastoral care for Moses' forefathers, '... I am the God of your fathers, ... Abraham, ... Isaac, ... God of Jacob' (Ex 3:6). In mentioning the patriarchs, God is reminding Moses of his ever-present (Ex 3:12) public pastoral care. This reveals the 'continuity between the patriarchs and the

Israelite nation both in the present and the future' (Ndjerareou 2006:91).

Inherent in the name 'LORD' is also the unchanging, loving, and compassionate character of God. God gave Moses and Israel the assurance that 'he has always existed and will always exist. It is assurance of permanent presence among his people' (Ndjerareou 2006:91). Presence, in this case, means public pastoral care through actions of compassion and care for his people. God, as the divine pastor, expresses the pertinent pastoral care aspects through Moses by divine acts and signs. After such visible acts of deliverance, the Lord said to Israel, 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself' (Ex 19:4). Public pastoral care should facilitate comfort, liberate, and instil hope in the lives of the suffering (Louw 1998:74).

Public pastoral care is evident when God interfaces with human challenges and cares about the longings of human beings (Juma 2015:3). In wilderness experiences, God's public response to the plight of Israel revealed some of his pastoral care attributes and divine nature (Hanson 2017:27). Moses describes God's attributes, namely that he is merciful, abounding in love and faithfulness, forgiving, and not overlooking sin, as public pastoral care (Ex 34:6-7a). Moses and Israel were accustomed to the presence of the Lord, which demonstrated his public pastoral care. For instance, in Exodus 33:15, Moses said, 'If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here', and the Lord promised that 'My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest' (Ex 33:14). Living among his people and caring for them is a clear public pastoral care on a biblical basis. Reciprocity is expected from those who have received pastoral care. The community of Israel was not passive but responded to God based on what they had witnessed and learned about God's public pastoral care. On behalf of Israel's community, Miriam and her maidens composed and sang a song to God (Ex 15:20-21; Hanson 2017:27). This means that public pastoral care, which accurately speaks to the human situation, should evoke a response. The response serves as a marker to detect if restoration and transformation have occurred in the community receiving pastoral care. Thus, when the Lord said Israel had to deal justly with others and not oppress people because they were once oppressed, Israel had to listen (Ex 23:9). God had taught Israel that oppression is inhumane and degrading. Israel had to extend public pastoral care to those needing it.

### **Israel's judges as pastoral care in Judges**

The book receives its name from the 'rulers' or 'judges' who guided the fortunes of Israel between the death of Joshua and the rise of Solomon (Harrison 1969:366). Webb (2001:261) states that 'much of the book is devoted to account of the reigns of Israel's kings, beginning with Saul, David and Solomon'. The special relationship that God had with Israel is expressed as judgement and salvation in the Israelite history based on their covenant relationship with God (Webb

1994:26). Judges were raised by God to execute leadership, judgement, exorcising enemies, and to settle disputes among the Israelites. In other words, judges were appointed to deal with social and political public issues that hampered human flourishing among the Israelites. God demonstrates his public pastoral care for Israel through the appointed judges. Sometimes, such public pastoral care was inconvenienced by both the disobedience of the judge and Israelites as they had disregarded the covenant by doing what was good in their own eyes (Jdg 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). The individualistic attitude in the community of Israel served as a source of oppression and marginalisation of other people. Judges such as Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson had their own flaws when they led Israel. Yet God exercised pastoral care through such leaders to deliver his people from the hand of the enemy (Adeyemo 2006:296). God's public pastoral care is evident in his forbearance over the nation of Israel's constant disobedience to fulfil the covenant stipulations.

God is the ultimate judge of Israel and shows pastoral care. His presence during the reign of each judge was evidence of public pastoral care as the following verse suggests:

Whenever the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge. For the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them. (Jdg 2:18; cf. 10:11–12)

The biblical basis of the public pastoral care of God is evident in being the judge, pitying his people for the pain and oppression they went through and, eventually, delivering his people.

### **The calling of prophets and their roles as demonstration of pastoral care**

The biblical basis of public pastoral care is also demonstrated in the calling and ministries of the biblical prophets. Contexts of pain, suffering, oppression, and injustice continued to dominate the biblical history. The prophets communicated God's will, and public pastoral care remained clear for the common good of society. Biblical prophecy was clustered around times of crisis, which included religious and political crises as public concerns. There were messages for kings and common people that aimed to address anomalies in society (Hill & Walton 2009:159) to promote human flourishing.

In a public pastoral care manner, God continued to meet people where they were theologically, emotionally, physically, culturally, and communally (Leslie 2008:95). God never intended his will for the people to be hidden as he addressed the social problems of society (Is 113–23) in the prophetic era. His public pastoral care intentions could be discerned in the following words, 'Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save or his ear dull, that it cannot hear' (Is 59:1). God's promise to listen and save the suffering is a clear declaration of his public pastoral care against public issues that concerned Israel and other nations. At the core of his public pastoral care is restoring human worth and dignity

(Hendriks 2007:1004; Juma 2015:5; Koopman 2012:2; Masango 2010:1).

God set Ezekiel as a watchman in Ezekiel 33 to further demonstrate the biblical basis of public pastoral care. 'People that have been broken and expelled from their land are promised healing, restoration and return to their ancestral land' (Habtu 2006:997). The watchman's role was to identify an upcoming public social ill (the enemy), and because of devotion and love for his people, he had to herald the enemy's coming to save his people. The watchman draws his role and character from God as the ultimate watchman in public pastoral care. The watchman's ministry is public and calls for a pastoral care disposition. God is the ultimate watchman (through human agency) over the issues confronting Israel.

God accused the nations in Amos 1:3–2:16 of crimes against humanity. The crimes included physical violence and oppression of the less privileged in society by the rich. The longest accusation is pronounced against Israel (Am 2:6–16). Israel should have treated others better, given its history of being oppressed in Egypt and later divinely delivered by God. It is a community of faith that has forgotten to appropriate its story to understand its identity (Hendriks 2007:1004) and how it should transform. Thus, through Amos and other prophets, God confronts social ills for the restoration of society. God revealed himself as the God who listened to the cries of the suffering without social standing (Hendriks 2007:1007). The biblical prophetic literature is littered with many examples of public pastoral care. However, God's public pastoral care was also demonstrated to non-Israelite people.

### **God's public pastoral care to non-Israelites**

The Israelite Yahweh demonstrated public pastoral care to Israel as an under-shepherd to other nations. It is important to note that God's public pastoral care was not limited to Israel alone. Beyond the nation of Israel, the Lord showed love, compassion, and forgiveness to foreign nationalities as his broader public pastoral care as seen in 1 Kings 8:60 and further, 1 Samuel 17:46, compare Philippians 2:10 and Revelation 7:9–12. For example, Rahab (and her family), a non-Israelite woman, is saved physically and spiritually from destruction (Jos 6:17). In addition, the inclusion of the Gibeonites among the Israelites (although through deceptive means) reveals God's public pastoral care concern for Gentiles (Jos 9). A pagan and most cruel city of Nineveh receives love and compassion from God through a reluctant preacher (Jnh 1–4).

The biblical prophets further preached to foreign nations to show God's public pastoral concern. By demonstrating his public pastoral care to nations, God also challenged institutions of society to conform to his will. Finally, the Lord constantly reminded Israel that they were slaves in Egypt (Lv 26:13). Consequently, Israel was mandated to show love and compassion to poor and marginalised people in their societies

regardless of their nationality (Dt 24:17–22). Drawing from God's public pastoral role, it emerges that the church should learn that God holistically cared for people's physical and spiritual needs. The church, as a representative of God in society, must intentionally go beyond its members in caring for the poor, sick and marginalised of society.

## The biblical basis of public pastoral care in the New Testament

The NT further sheds light on the biblical basis of public pastoral care. The commandment to love one's neighbour as yourself (Mt 22:39) remains key as the NT interprets the OT (Kerlin 2014:2; Leslie 2008:95–96). The ministry of Jesus best demonstrates how the Matthew 22:39 teaching can be lived out in a manner that promotes human well-being. Jesus presents the ideal public pastoral care in the complexities of life by addressing different socially dehumanising issues of society. The following discussion highlights the NT biblical basis of public pastoral care.

### The incarnational nature of Jesus' ministry as public pastoral care

John 1:14 is important in establishing the biblical notion of public pastoral care. The key in this verse is the phrase, '... the Word became flesh and dwelt among us'. It also summarises the birth of Jesus (Mt 1:18–25; Lk 2:1–7; cf. Is 7:10–14). Jesus' incarnation and entry into human life is the public identification with human social conditions. 'The divine word had become the human Jesus' (Guthrie 1994:1026). The word dwelt among humanity, which recalls God in the OT dwelling among his people (Ex 13:21) in the Tabernacle. Jesus' dwelling among humanity was a public event, and John testified to seeing him and beholding his glory. Jesus interacted and identified with humanity through the incarnation. For instance, immediately after stating the word became flesh in John 1:14, the following section, John 2:1–12:50 demonstrates the public ministry of Jesus. The incarnation of Jesus was intended to love, sympathise, restore, and heal the social ills of communities. The incarnation, culminating in the death and resurrection of Jesus, serves as a demonstration of God being with humanity (Magezi 2017:5).

As a notion of biblical pastoral care, being incarnational is linked with visibility and relational as one seeks to address human situations. Jesus lived in a manner that displayed '... grace and truth' (Jn 1:14), which John still recalls when he penned down the fourth Gospel. This means that another aspect of incarnational pastoral care is 'the commitment to live out theological beliefs and values' (Magezi 2017:6) in and outside the church context by the community of faith. This is one of the key elements that makes pastoral care public. Without the incarnational aspect, public pastoral care ceases to be publicly relevant to the community. Incarnational public pastoral care must be 'a representation of the living presence of the Lord' (Louw 1998:24) among his people. The beginning of Jesus' ministry further displays the biblical notion of public pastoral care.

### The public pastoral care ministry of Jesus in Luke

After completing the Jewish rites, Jesus made a public announcement in Nazareth of public pastoral care to: (Lk 4:18–19; cf. Is 61:1–2; Isaak 2006:1239; Masango 2010:1):

- proclaim the good news to the poor
- proclaim freedom for the prisoners
- give sight to the blind
- release the oppressed
- proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

He publicly challenged the existing religious beliefs that failed to liberate communities and social structures. Thus, public pastoral care 'should be concerned with how Christian faith addresses matters in society at large. It is concerned with the 'public relevance' of Christian beliefs and doctrines' (Williams 2014:159).

The five-fold public ministry in Luke 4:18–19 is summarised as a liberation message (Isaak 2006:1239) and clearly identifies public issues that warranted Jesus' public pastoral care. The public proclamation of his liberating message emerges from a heart of love and compassion for the common good of society. Christ's ministry in this passage challenges and sets a biblical basis for pastoral care ministry to be public (Masango 2010:1). Jesus cared for those in degrading human conditions. This echoes Isaiah 61:1–2. Public pastoral care should be able to speak for the voiceless and marginalised in our communities (Fiorenza 1990:131). Examples of the marginalised and despised people during Jesus' ministry included the Samaritan woman (Jn 4), widows (Lk 7:11–17), healing of a woman who had been subject to bleeding for 12 years (Lk 8:43 ff.), healing of a woman with a disabling spirit (Lk 8:43 ff.) - and also: (Lk 13:10 ff.), et cetera.

Jesus was not spared from the opposition when confronting oppressive situations in society. This calls for wisdom to navigate through unwelcome situations in public pastoral care. Thus, Jesus grew in wisdom, stature, and favour with men and God (Lk 2:52). What is this wisdom in public pastoral care? Miller-McLemore (2012:274–275) states, 'Wisdom here refers to the deep or insightful understanding of life and people achieved through reflective and integrated experience.' Jesus' utilisation of wisdom in interacting with each situation played an important role.

Above all, the biblical basis of public pastoral care in the Luke passage by Jesus was dependent on the empowering Spirit of the Lord (Lk 4:18) and seeking to liberate the marginalised and oppressed in society by existing community structures. Hendriks (2007:1002) states that the Holy Spirit is the power of faith communities that leads to conversion – a form of transformation that changes attitudes and intentions. Jesus proclaimed that the Spirit of the Lord was upon him. The role of the Spirit allows public pastoral caregivers to accord a voice to the speechless, give eyes to see and understand things better, liberate the oppressed, and restore the marginalised to the community.

## Compassion stories as public pastoral care in Matthew, Mark, and Luke

The biblical basis of public pastoral care is further demonstrated in compassion stories in the synoptic Gospels. The biblical basis of public pastoral care focuses on the theme of compassion in selected passages.

The word *compassion* means 'to have pity, a feeling of distress through the ills of others or to be moved as to one's inwards [*splanchna*], to be moved with compassion, to yearn with compassion' (Vine, Unger & White 1985:116). The word is used often in connection with Jesus' ministry to the multitude and individuals (Vine et al. 1985:116) with socially, physically, and spiritually depressing public conditions.

Firstly, in Matthew 9:35–36, Jesus dealt with public issues such as liberating people from oppressing issues. When he set his eyes on the crowds of people, '... he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd' (Mt 9:36; cf. Mt 14:14; 15:32; Mk 6:34; 8:2). The passage is suggestive of socially oppressing structures affecting the population and their inability to emerge victorious from the oppression. Kapolyo (2006) states that:

[P]olitically, they bore the burden of heavy taxes, servitude, and human rights violations. Their religious leaders were not providing teaching, pastoral care or help with material needs. They endured leprosy, fevers, chronic illnesses, demon possession, blindness, paralysis and many other troubles. (p. 1156)

Through compassion, Jesus provided public pastoral care by restoring, healing, and challenging oppressive political and religious structures. Citing Heitink, Louw (1998:24) states that 'pastoral care can be typified as an encounter with the Gospel in these four biblical areas: compassion, grace, living care, salvation and service'. Louw (2011:1) further argues for a sustainable God to reframe a compassionate presence against 'zombie categories' of Christian spirituality. Instead of being passive, public pastoral care should actively detect social ills and imagine ways of addressing the inhumane conditions.

Secondly, Luke 10:33 demonstrates public pastoral care through compassion. This verse occurs in the context of the parable of the good Samaritan in which a man was attacked by robbers and 'left half dead' (Lk 10:30). The parable illustrates what it means for one to love his neighbour through compassionate care. Jesus deliberately made the socially despised Samaritan a hero in the parable. The Samaritan showed public pastoral care by feeling compassion, identifying the need, and offering healing public practical care to the victim. Isaak (2006:1251) discerns that 'The Samaritan was moved with compassion that overcame religious and racial animosity, and he treated the Jew with a sense of *Ubuntu*.' This means societal differences should serve as opportunities for public pastoral care. The parable, through the priest and the Levite, challenges private religious understandings by the ecclesial community, which fails to

impact those around. Jesus also had compassion for tax collectors (Mt 11:19; cf. Mk 2:16; Lk 7:34). His pastoral care was primarily focused on the house of Israel (Mt 15:24), but this did not deter him from showing compassion to the marginalised of non-Jewish races (v. 31). Thus, Jesus' broader public pastoral care was focused on the outcasts and poor of society whom he said would join the messianic banquet (Mt 14:16–24; Jn 3:17; Isaak 2006:1251).

## Shepherding role of Jesus and the apostles as public pastoral care

Jesus used the shepherd metaphor for himself as the good shepherd and mentioned that he sacrificed his life for the sheep (Jn 10:11). The metaphor involves compassion (Mk 8:2) and suggests deep care as displayed in the public ministry of Jesus. Shepherding involves finding, nurturing, and restoring back to the community of faith for growth (Masango 2010:3).

The primary quality of good shepherds is their willingness to sacrifice themselves for the sheep. Jesus spoke about giving up his own life (Guthrie 1994:1047). We know we cannot literally die like Jesus, but we could certainly give sacrificial love and devotion in our public pastoral care. Self-sacrifice as shepherding is also clear in Philippians 2:6–9. We read that Jesus sacrificed himself for the sake of humanity's salvation. Shepherding also involves mutual knowledge of the shepherd and the sheep such as that the sheep know the shepherd's voice (Jn 10:3–4). In addition, the shepherd leads the sheep out, '... goes before them, and sheep follow him, for they know his voice' (Jn 10:4). Public pastoral care as shepherding looks out for the needs of the people and seeks to address them. Out of love and devotion, the shepherd carries the burden of the weak sheep (Mt 11:28–30).

The shepherding ministry of Jesus did not end with his ascension. He commissioned his disciples, who later became apostles, to continue with his shepherding care ministry. Couched in the great commission (Mt 28:19–20) are some attributes of public pastoral care. Such attributes include the willingness to minister, calling disciples, and teaching people to observe Christ's commandments. The future ministry of apostles hinged on the attributes of this commissioning. Jesus wanted these men to be shepherds, as could be understood from John 21:15–19 when Simon Peter is repeatedly instructed to feed Jesus' sheep. Feeding of the sheep no doubt assumes a shepherding role, which could only be executed from a pastoral care perspective.

Standing on the shoulders of Jesus, the apostles exercised healing, encouragement, rebuke, et cetera, in their public pastoral care. In his farewell to Ephesian elders, Paul entreats the elders to protect the sheep from the enemy (Ac 20:20–30). The notion of public pastoral care involves defending and protecting from both internal and external harm. Once more, the shepherd notion prevalent in Christ's ministry is still in sight. All public pastoral care is subject to the chief Shepherd (I Pt 5:4; 2:25; Heb 13:20; Rv 7:17).

The incarnation of Jesus remains a constant public reminder for the church that pastoral care is public and transcendent of socio-religious boundaries in caring for humanity. Humanity, in this case, refers to Jew and Gentile. The church must look out for demeaning human situations outside its membership and respond as God would. The neighbour concept should challenge the church to be sensitive and respond to other's conditions. The underpinning point in public pastoral care is addressing human situations and pointing humanity to God, who revealed himself in Jesus and is now present to liberate people (Cone 2000:31). Thus, the biblical basis of public pastoral care begins with God and continues based on the example he set.

## Conclusion

This article considers the theology of public pastoral care by exploring its biblical basis. It highlights that, in the Old Testament, God's disposition to public pastoral is evident through the temptation as a demonstration of God's pastoral care, the Cain and Abel story as pastoral care, the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian oppression as pastoral care, Israel's judges as pastoral care in Judges, the calling of prophets and their roles as demonstration of pastoral care, and God's public pastoral care to Gentiles. In the New Testament, public pastoral care can be discerned through the incarnational nature of Jesus' ministry as public pastoral care, the public pastoral care ministry of Jesus in Luke, compassion stories as public pastoral care in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and the shepherding role of Jesus and the apostles as public pastoral care. This public pastoral care with a biblical and theological basis is both implicit and explicit.

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## Authors' contributions

V.M. and P.M. contributed equally to this work.

## Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects

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## Data availability

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