

**Commitment of church members as an expression of the
understanding of the Missio Dei: a case study.**

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the

degree of

PHILOSOPHIAE DOCTOR

In the faculty of Theology and Religion

Department of Science of Religion and Missiology

University of Pretoria

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September 2024

DECLARATION

I, Seala Jack Montja, student number 23283719 hereby declare that this dissertation, *“Commitment of Church Members as an Expression of the Understanding of the Missio Dei: A Case Study,”* is submitted in accordance with the requirements for the Doctoral degree at the University of Pretoria, is my original work and has not previously been submitted to any other institution of higher learning. All sources cited or quoted in this research paper are indicated and acknowledged with a comprehensive list of references.



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Seala Jack Montja

30 August 2024

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to my wife, Jacobeth, Sons, Kholo and Tshidi, daughter, Rose, and my grandchildren. To my late mother Johanna, father Frans, and all the Montja family, Bakone ba ntshidikgolo, relatives, and friends. This is for you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would also acknowledge the contribution of fellow congregants and colleagues in the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ, more over those who participated through interviews to collect qualitative information and general sharing of information regarding their views. A special word of gratitude to Rev J M Motloba, Prof M J Manala, and Dr Z Banda thank you so much for your assistance and encouragement.

I would like to express my gratitude to my promoter, Prof Jaco Beyers, for his support and encouragement. There were days when it seemed impossible to continue, but his words of encouragement gave me hope and strength to continue.

Lastly, I thank the Almighty God for the love, mercy, wisdom, and strength to complete this research. To God be the Glory!

ABSTRACT

Commitment of church members as an expression of the understanding of the Missio Dei: A case study. The study is an attempt to investigate the impact the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ (MRCC) and other mainline churches had before in the society and community versus where we are right now. The goal is to find solutions to restore the MRCC to its former glory. In the past, the church used to contribute not only to the spiritual needs of society but also to address needs holistically. Schools and hospitals serviced by the church made the church to be there for the people.

The study will assist in evaluating what caused the church to no longer be addressing the needs of the people. Why is the mainline church declining? What happened to the mainline church's vision and mission? The study will also confirm whether my assumptions are true or not, that the mainline churches have lost direction in Mission.

The mission is the activity of God. "Karl Barth was the first in the modern period to articulate mission as an activity of God himself" in his paper at the Brandenburg Missionary Conference in 1932 (Bosch 1991:389). The term Missio Dei simply means the mission of God. "The important term Missio Dei (Mission of God) needs a biblical foundation. The sending of God by God is a foundational motive in the New Testament. Even at the very beginning, of salvation history, shortly after creation, God became the first missionary. In Jesus, God is the missionary par excellence, and in the Holy Spirit, God is the most successful missionary. The mission is part of the nature of God, and therefore mission can only be described holistically and in a manner that transforms human mission into the image of God's mission" (Schirrmacher 2017:1).

This research will utilize questionnaire instruments to measure the specific behaviour and value changes in some of the congregations of the MRCC. This will be done

through the administration of questionnaires. Commitment of church members of the MRCC will be evaluated on four factors: Church attendance, Church participation, Church volunteering, and Church contribution. The conclusion reached on the research validates the assumptions that the problem is the commitment of members in the church.

KEY TERMS:

Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ, Mission, Missiology, Ecclesiology, Church commitment, church attendance, church giving, church commitment, church participatory, church volunteering,

LANGUAGE EDITOR

This dissertation was edited with the assistance of online language editing tools.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DRC	Dutch Reformed Church
BHK	Bantu Hervormde Kerk
HKSA	Hervormde Kerk in Suidelike Afrika
IMC	International Mission Commission
MRCC	Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ
MRMU	Maranatha Reformed Mothers Union
MRWL	Maranatha Reformed Women's League
MRFU	Maranatha Reformed Fathers Union
NHKA	Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika
WCC	World Council of Churches
ZHS	Zulu Hervormde Sendingkerk

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The need for this study comes from the observation I have made at Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ (MRCC) in Mamelodi. I have been a minister for 11 years in this congregation. My observations and concerns are the decline in membership and decrease in concern for mission in the mainline churches of which the MRCC is an example. Historically mainline churches in Southern Africa established schools, hospitals, and hospices that gave dignity to the marginalized and the poor in society. People like the late Tata Mandela, who went to Healdtown, a Wesleyan missionary secondary school are very good examples of the product of such activity. The mainline churches in Southern Africa today seem to have lost the strong mission tradition. Instead, mainline churches are dying both in membership and missiological vision. Provided below is the Mission Statement and Visions of the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ:

MRCC Church order – *“The Church is the congregation of those who have been called, and continue to be called, kept and cherished by Christ for himself, throughout all ages and places through his Word and Spirit. It is the body of Christ and the true Communion of the believers in which believers, who are members of Jesus Christ, share in Christ all he has, namely forgiveness of sin, the resurrection of the body and eternal life which are gifts obtained and received by faith alone. (Source: Article 1 of Church Order: Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ).*

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The problem statement will clarify what is the research question to be addressed in this research. The focus of this study will be to look at the history of one of the mainline churches (MRCC). It will evaluate the existence of MRCC in Southern Africa and the impact it had before on society and community versus where we are right now. In the past, MRCC like other mainline churches used to have an impact and contribute not only to the spiritual needs of society but also to address needs holistically. Schools and hospitals were the results of this type of service rendered by the church. The church was good at providing holistically social and spiritual services and the church was there for the people.

The decline and lack of such services in the community by the church, make the church to be unrealistic and irrelevant in our communities. This situation prompts one to ask questions and to find solutions

In Matthew 25:34-36 Jesus taught that the Mission of the church is to take care of the prisoners, the sick, the weak, the thirsty, and strangers. Currently, the church has become a Sunday event only. The church is only active and available for the people on Sunday. Even if there are any other activities besides Sunday church service, they do not have the same impact as in the past. One example can be mentioned here, there used to be a crèche in Mamelodi MRCC congregation in the past, but no longer so.

There is a decline in church membership which affects church attendance. There are fewer people attending worship services than before. The decline in attendance shows that many people are no more committed to the church than before. The decline in membership also is an indication that members lack commitment.

1.3 THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to assist in evaluating what caused the church to no longer be addressing the needs of the people. Why is the mainline church declining? What happened to the mainline church's vision and mission? The study will also confirm whether my assumptions are true or not, that the mainline churches have lost direction

in their mission. It will also contribute to the conversation that seeks to find solutions to increase the commitment of members in the MRCC. The main question is what causes the church not to be what it was before? Is the decline in service caused by the decline of members? What causes the decline? Is it the lack of non-commitment of members?

1.4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We cannot talk about Mission without talking about Theology. Theology and Mission are interwoven. We cannot divorce the two. Bosch (1991:16) suggests that “Mission is the mother of theology”. The mission is not the task of the church but rather the task of God. God is the one who sends. Guder (2000:21) explains how, in 1952, Barth drew the attention of the church to the fact that the mission is not that of the church but God’s. The mission is not about church growth but is all about the kingdom of God. The mission is about everyone knowing and accepting Jesus as the Lord and Savior of our lives. This insight brought a major shift from ecclesiocentric missiology to theocentric missiology.

Guder (1998:4) explains it further: This ecclesiocentric understanding of mission has been replaced during this century by a profoundly theocentric reconceptualization of Christian mission. We have come to see that mission is not merely an activity of the church. Rather mission is the result of God’s initiative rooted in God’s purposes to restore and heal creation. “Mission’ means ‘sending’ and is the central biblical theme describing the purpose of God’s action in history...God’s character and purpose as sending or missionary God redefines our understanding of the Trinity.”

Bosch (1991:391) explains further: “Since God’s concern is for the entire world, this should also be the scope of the *missio Dei*. It affects all people in all aspects of their existence. The mission is God’s turning to the world in respect of creation, care, redemption, and consummation.” This is a holistic approach we should understand Mission, that through Mission God is gathering all his people for their well-being in all aspects of all.

God uses the church to do mission. The church becomes the instrument of the community that witnesses the love and grace of God. Bosch (1991:519) puts it thus:

“Mission is quite simply, the participation of Christians in the liberating mission of Jesus waging on a future that verifiable experience seems to belie. It is the good news of God’s love, incarnated in the witness of a community, for the sake of the world.”

1.4.1 MISSIO DEI

In simple terms, *missio Dei* is an expression that mission is primarily a part of who God is, rather than an activity or aspect of the church. Mission is what God sends the church into the world to do. When we think of the mission of God we are mindful of the Great commandment. The mission is the task of God to save the lost through the church. This chapter will deal with the definition of mission and its purpose. David J. Bosch succinctly observed, “The term mission presupposes a sender, a person sent by the sender, those to whom one is sent, and an assignment.” It is all about being sent, going, and taking a message somewhere, usually in an official capacity (Bosch 1991:1-2).

Garcia (2009:95) correctly suggests the purpose of mission as, “simply put, the mission is the redeeming action of the triune God toward people and the creation, the goal of which is to restore human relations with God in Christ and to bring every aspect of life under the lordship of Christ. The mission of the church as a partner of God is based on this mission of God; the *missio ecclesiarum* reflects the *missio Dei*” (Garcia 2009:95). The purpose of the mission is to restore and save human relations from sin.

The church is the congregation of those who have been called, and continue to be called, kept, and cherished by Christ for himself, throughout all ages and places through his Word and Spirit. It is the body of Christ and the true communion of the believers in which believers, who are members of Jesus Christ, share in Christ all he has, namely forgiveness of sin, the resurrection of the body, and eternal life which are gifts obtained and received by faith alone. The mission is the activity of God. Karl Barth was the first in the modern period “to articulate mission as an activity of God himself” in his paper at the Brandenburg Missionary Conference in 1932 (Bosch 1991:389).

The term *Missio Dei* simply means the mission of God. “The important term *Missio Dei* (Mission of God) needs a biblical foundation. The sending of God by God is a foundational motive in the New Testament. Even at the very beginning of salvation history, shortly after creation, God became the first missionary. In Jesus, God is the missionary par excellence, and in the Holy Spirit, God is the most successful missionary. The mission is part of the nature of God, and therefore mission can only

be described holistically and in a manner that transforms human mission into the image of God's mission" (Schirmacher 2017:1).

From the beginning, *Missio Dei*, or the mission of God was not a clear term without confusion. The term has its origin in the Reformed tradition among theologians like Karl Barth (1886-1968) and Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676). Voetius played an important role in the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619). In David Bosch's *Transforming Mission*, he describes Voetius as the first Protestant to have developed a comprehensive 'theology of mission' (Bosch 1991:257–258).

1.4.2 Origin of the term *Missio Dei*

In his definition of *missio Dei*, David Bosch mentions that the theological origin of this concept is to be found in the covenantal Reformed Theology of the post-Reformation. (Bosch 1991:8). According to Bosch (1991:389-390) in the late 1930s Karl Barth was one of the first theologians to articulate mission "as an activity of God himself." Later in 1952, the concept of *missio Dei* was articulated more clearly (without yet being named) at the Willengen Conference of the International Mission Commission (IMC) in 1952 in Germany.

Muller (1987:67) indicates that the Latin term *missio Dei* was coined as early as the fourth century by Aurelius Augustine to describe the sending acts within the Trinity, the Father's sending of the Son and the sending of the Holy Spirit. From then on, *missio Dei* became a major term employed in Catholic and Orthodox dogmatics. The concept is more specifically derived from trinitarian theology, the sending of the Son by the Father, and the Spirit by the Son. It was then expanded to a fourth mode, by God's sending of the Church. This is expressed most explicitly in John 20:21 "As the Father has sent me, so am I sending you."

The German missionary leader Karl Hartenstein used the term to describe the main theological emphasis of the conference. This became the new understanding and starting point of the mission. "This was truly a new departure in the understanding of mission, one which rested on the pioneering theological work of Karl Barth" (Ross, Keum, Avtzi, Hewitt 2016:62).

In this new understanding mission is not the activity of the church but of God. Bosch (1991:390) puts it correctly that, “In the new image mission is not primary an activity of the church, but an attribute of God, God a is missionary God... Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world, the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission. There is a church because there is mission, not vice versa. To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God’s love towards people since God is a fountain of sending love.”

Missio Dei remains the action of God who then uses the church. Flett (2014:76) correctly states that, “Missio Dei remains an action of God’s perfect life. He has not simply handed this over to the human, to the Christian community, or to history as such. The missionary sending of the church, in other words, cannot be detached from the work of the Spirit and the Son.”

This new understanding means that the church is missionary by its nature because it has its origin in in the mission of God. “The church on earth is by its nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:30).

In 1952 when the International Mission Commission (IMC) met, five points under discussion influenced the direction of the meeting:

- 1) Backdrop of Western colonialism in decline and communist revolution in China,
- 2) Mission was under question as the United Nations signalled an era of international cooperation.
- 3) Mission reinterpreted as the mission of God rather than an activity of the church
- 4) Church-centred understanding of mission in tension with a broader conception
- 5) The participants for the first time of leaders of Pentecostal churches.

During this time there was a crisis that was affecting the mission of the church and there was a need to meet and discuss these concerns. The concern or crises prompted a quest for a deeper and more serious understanding of the Missio Dei. The term “Missio Dei” was not yet adopted in 1952 at the World Council of Churches (WCC) Missions Conference in Willingen in Germany. Though many people agreed that

mission is the activity of God. The term was coined soon after the conference by German missionary leader Karl Hartenstein.

Since I have indicated that there was a concern, the conference came to this conclusion. A statement on the missionary calling of the church and the following five points were discussed:

1. The Missionary situation and the rule of God: It was agreed that everyone should work towards God and put their whole trust in him who was cast out and crucified by humans, but was raised by God to the right of His power. His rule is hidden between his kingdom and the evil forces. Ross, Keum, Avtzi, Hewitt (2016:65) put it correctly, “these good tidings of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for the testimony to all the nations, and then the end shall come.” The mission should continue until the end as said in Mathew 28:16-18.
2. Missionary obligation of the church: The church is mandated by God to do a mission. The church has been given the authority to be the witness to all. “God has created all things and all men that in them the glory of His love might be reflected, nothing excluded from the reach of his redeeming love” (Ross, Keum, Avtzi, Hewitt 2016:65). God has sent his son Jesus to seek and save all the lost from all nations. God has sent his Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus to gather us together. Through the Spirit, we became in Christ ambassadors of Christ Jesus beseeching all men to be reconciled to him.
3. Total missionary task: The church has a mandate to preach the gospel according to the instruction in Matthew 16. “God sends forth the church to carry out his work to the ends of the earth, to all nations and to end of time (Ross, Keum, Avtzi, Hewitt 2016:66). No place is too far for the church to reach, the church is sent to all places far and nearer to accomplish the total missionary task. The church is sent to all types of people. “The church is sent to every social, political and religious community of mankind, both to those near at hand and those far off” (Ross, Keum, Avtzi, Hewitt 2016:66).

4. Solidarity with the world: The church should always be a witness to what God has done to the world. The church can't stand against the world. "The church's words and works, its whole life of mission, are to be a witness to what God has done, doing, and will do in Christ. But this word witness cannot possibly mean that the church stands over against the world, detached from it and regarding it from a position of superior righteousness or security. The church is in the world, and as the Lord, the nearer it draws to the world" (Ross, Keum, Avtzi, Hewitt 2016:67).
5. Discerning the signs of the times: The church is called to discern or understand the signs of the times. Throughout the mission journey, there were difficult and good times. Jesus warned his disciples to discern the signs of the time always. "To human sight, this may be a time of darkness and confusion. But eyes opened by the crucified will discern in it sure signs of God's sovereign rule" (Ross, Keum, Avtzi, Hewitt 2016:67). The church should not give up on mission even at the darkest moment because God is working his miracle to save all nations.

1.4.3 Current meaning of Missio Dei

It has been a long journey since 1932 at the conference when Karl Barth became one of the first theologians to define mission as the work of God himself (Bosch 1991:17-18). From then on, there were many developments and understandings of the missio Dei. From this time, it was very clear that Mission belongs to God and not to the church. The church became the partner with God in mission. In 1938 at the Tambaram meeting of the IMC, it was also emphasised that missio Dei is the activity of God. Karl Hartenstein confirms what Karl Barth said that missio Dei is the activity of God. "The delegates confessed that only 'through a creative act of God His Kingdom will be consummated in the final establishment of a new Heaven and a New Earth', and 'We are convinced that only this eschatological attitude can prevent the Church from becoming secularised'" (Flett 2010:12).

At Willingen, in 1952 it was confirmed that the *missio Dei* is the activity of God and not the church. After Willingen, the *Missio Dei* had a new meaning to those who embraced it, including Protestantism, according to Bosch (1991:390). According to Bosch, the *Missio Dei* paradigm was first embraced by the conciliar Protestantism, but also by other ecclesial bodies, including the Eastern Orthodox Churches, many evangelicals, and the Catholic Church, as we can see from some of the documents of the Second Vatican Council (Bosch 1991:390-391). From this point of view, the mission becomes independent. This causes a problem and confusion because now the role of the church in mission is underplayed. “In this case, the mission seems to be independent of the church and strictly understood as God’s activity. The Christological dimension of the mission of God is insufficiently stressed, leaving the impression that even the Christian character of the mission is unimportant” (Sonia 2017:73).

In 2004 the Lutheran World Federation published a new document about mission in which the relation between church and mission is re-evaluated. According to it, “mission is of the very being of the church. To be in mission is not optional for the church. Mission is constitutive of its being as the “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic” church (Nicene Creed)” (Lutheran World Federation 2004:28). This confirms that even though mission is the activity of God, the church has a role to play since it was sent to do mission.

Different denominations came to understand the *missio Dei* differently, but it was a consensus that mission is God’s activity.

- 1) Roman Catholic and Orthodox missions. The main development became more evident in Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches right after the WCC, Willingen conference in 1952. The Willingen conference had already served to expand the *missio Dei* within its Trinitarian doctrine; “...God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the [Holy] Spirit ...Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world” (Bosch 1991: 390). This was the beginning of a new understanding of mission and later on, it developed further.

Turner (no date:9) puts it correctly, “It prompted the Roman Catholic Church to view mission as Trinitarian. Ad Gentes, according to Bevans and Schroeder, was key here because it gave the Trinitarian basis of God stirring up a mission for his people to come into a relationship with him and for his church to cohesively cooperate. This incarnational and practical mission to share and suffer within different contexts is all part of the communion with the triune God.” This model becomes one of the best as it has the “multidimensional and evolving nature of Mission” (Kim 2012:26).

2) Three approaches to mission: Trinitarian, Liberating service, and reign of God, Christ as Savior. David Bosch offers his definition of mission in his book *Transforming Mission*. He highlights that mission comes from “a perspective of commitment to Christian faith” and also “gives expression to the dynamic relationship between God and the word” (Bosch 1991:9-10). This is evident from Genesis to Revelation in the Bible. God was always concerned about the Israelites and had a relationship with them. Bosch (1991:10) went further to distinguish between missions and missions. The singular refers to the *Missio Dei* (Mission of God) while the plural missions are about *Missio ecclesiae*, which speak of the missionary ventures of the church. Theology of Mission:

- Tritarian Mission. The mission is born out of the heart of the Trinity. It is the instruction from God to the church. The church has been mandated to do a mission. In Matthew 28 it is clear that the church has been given the authority to do a mission. Jesus is the one giving authority to the church to do mission.

Lesslie Newbigin in his book *The Open Secret: Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (1995:12) writes: “Today the situation is different. The question ‘What right do you have to preach to us?’ is asked with confidence and a vehemence unusual fifty years ago. To this question, it is useless to answer by quoting the Great Commission or other texts of Scripture. Why should a Hindu accept the authority of the Christian Scriptures? It is useless to point to the achievements of Christianity in

human history, the record is too ambiguous for that. Nor is it enough to speak of being constrained love, for what has to be shown is that it is truly a work of love to call men and women out of their traditional allegiances, and to invite them to accept with all the cost involved the yoke of obedience to Christ.”

When we read the Gospel we learn that the question of authority was raised right from the onset. In Matthew 7:29, men noted that He spoke ‘as one who had authority’. Newbigin (1995:14) puts it correctly, “the authority of Jesus was of a different kind; he spoke as one who himself had authority.”. Authority plays an important role in the mission. The authority of Jesus is the authority of a Triune God. This is the same authority with which He did his miracles, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and raising the dead.

God the Father plays an important role in the Trinity. We understand the role of the Father in Genesis 1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth, this is the proof that all was created by God the Father in the Trinity. The mission is the proclamation of the action of the Father. From Genesis to Malachi we read about the God who always wanted to save his creation. After the fall of Adam in the garden, God continues to care about this creation. His mission became more evident in the New Testament when he sent his only begotten Son to the world.

The main purpose was to save his creation. In the Gospel of Mark, we read Jesus announcing or proclaiming the kingdom of God. He was calling all to believe in the word and have eternal life. The mission is only possible through faith in God. John when introducing Jesus, speaks of the one who was there in the beginning. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Mission is understood as rooted in self-giving love of God. “Mission, therefore, is understood fundamentally as rooted in the continual self-giving and self-revelation of God with the history of creation, Trinitarian processions are understood not only as movement within the mystery of

God, as such, but as God moving in saving love within the world” (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:287).

Newbigin (1995:30) writes: “The Bible is unique among the sacred books of the world’s religions in that it is in structure a history of the cosmos. It claims to show us the shape, the structure, the origin, and the goal not merely of human history, but of cosmic history. It does not accept a view of nature as simply the arena upon which the drama of human history is played out. Much less does it seek the secret of the individual’s true being within the self for which the public history of the world can have no ultimate significance. Rather it sees the history of the nations and history of nature within the large framework of God’s history – the carrying forward to its completion of the gracious purpose that has its source in the love of the Father for the Son in the unity of the Spirit.”

The role of the Son in mission becomes love in action. Jesus became the sacrifice for all. Jesus’ mission was in his words and action. “Jesus proclaimed the reign of God and sent out his disciples to do the same. But that is not all. His mission was not only a matter of words, and neither is ours” (Newbigin 1995:40). It becomes the question of accepting Jesus as our Lord and Saviour or rejecting him. Those who accept will inherit everlasting life but those who reject him will have to die. Newbigin (1995:42) states, “So complete is the identification of the presence of Jesus with the presence of the kingdom that a man’s or woman’s acknowledgment or denial of Jesus settles the question of that person’s acceptance or rejection of by God.”

The Spirit’s role in mission is to witness mission as hope in action. We will agree that mission is only possible through the Spirit. “Mission is not just something that the church does, it is something that is done by the Spirit, who himself is the witness, who changes both the world and the church, who always goes before the church in its missionary journey” (Newbigin 1995:56). The powerful work of the Spirit is first noticed in the Old Testament when God created man and breath his Spirit of life in his

nostrils. Life begins with the Spirit. According to the biblical record, the Holy Spirit does not first appear at Pentecost but the Spirit of God was present and active from the moment of creation (Gen 1:2), and is breathed into us to make us human (Gen .2:7) (Kim 2012:33).

Newbigin (1995:57) writes: “Spirit is the word used in English versions of the Bible to translate the Hebrew word ‘ruach’, meaning ‘wind’ or ‘breath’. A person’s breath is the secret of life, and the Spirit of the Lord (ruach Yahweh) is the very life of the Lord himself to give life and power, wisdom and speech, knowledge and understanding of humans. It is the living, mighty, self-communicating presence of God himself. From the very beginning of the New Testament, the coming of Jesus, his words and works are connected directly with the power of the Spirit. It is by the Spirit that the Spirit conceives Jesus, that he is anointed at his baptism, and by the Spirit, he is driven into the desert for his encounter with Satan. In the power of the Spirit, he enters upon his ministry of teaching and healing. (Luke 4:14,18 Mark 12:18). The disciples were told to wait for the baptism of the Spirit. It happened and the promise was fulfilled on Pentecost in the book of Acts, when the Spirit empowered the disciples. The Spirit becomes the central point of the mission.”

- Mission as the Liberating service and reign of God: This is developed by Evangelii Nuntiandi (EN) and Conciliar Protestantism. Bevans & Schroeder (2004:305) write: “Jesus’ work as an evangelizer, the pope insists, was the proclamation of kingdom or reign of God, and this is so important that, by comparison, everything else becomes ‘the rest’, which is ‘given in addition.’ Only the kingdom, therefore, is absolute, and it makes everything else relative’ (EN 8), the reference is to Mt 6:33. It is of this kingdom that Jesus speaks in his parables, witnesses to in his works of healing and nourishment, and embodies in the very mystery of his person. Key to understanding this kingdom is the notion of salvation, which Jesus makes available to everyone he meets, on the sole condition that the person opens up fully to God’s love by undergoing a

total interior renewal ... a radical conversion, a profound change of mind and heart.”

Jesus came to liberate our creation and it has now become the responsibility of the church since the church has to share the good news of salvation. “Mission in other words, is what it means to be church, because to be church means to share in the mission of Jesus, which was to preach, to serve and to witness with his whole heart to the kingdom of God” (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:306). The church continues what was started by Jesus and the disciples. The church remains in the world, our Lord Jesus ascended and returned to the Father. The church continues to proclaim the liberating good news of the Lord and the reign of God in the world. The Kingdom reign of God holistically completes the picture of *the missio Dei* concept. The believers reveal ever-growing relationships with their loving God their creator which simultaneously brings them together as one body of believers, the priesthood of believers, and participating in one mission, the *missio Dei*; the final result is where the triune God is eternally glorified. Jesus came to the glorification of God.

Laing (2019:91) puts it correctly, “The church is missional in its very character. God is continually sending the church into the world. The church is at the periphery – not to symbolize unimportance – but to show that the church, correctly understood, is the church for others. The church should exist at the boundaries of the Kingdom of God. The mission is integral to the local church's life, and it is erroneous for any church to devolve or delegate mission to the exclusive agency of mission organizations.” The church by preaching the gospel becomes the presence of the reign of the Lord. Christ as Saviour: The Mission proclaims Jesus Christ as the universal Saviour. This is presented by *Redemptoris Missio* (RM) and Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians. Bevans & Schroeder (2004:324) write: “Reflecting on the origins of the church, the pope points out that from the very beginning, there was a clear affirmation that “Christ is the one Saviour of all, the only one able

to reveal God and lead to God.” It is perhaps significant that the first text of scripture quoted in the first chapter is from Acts 4, verse 10 and 12. The latter verse reads: “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men and women by which we must be saved.” However, this rather “exclusive” Christology is modified somewhat in other parts of the chapter. Indeed, it is affirmed several times in different parts of the encyclical that God’s grace through the Holy Spirit “offers” everyone the possibility of sharing in the Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God (RM 6,10,28 quoting GS 22).

- Jesus as saviour. We will understand that some people may not know Jesus or have not heard about him. Through the mission, Jesus continues to be proclaimed the universal Saviour who died and rose to save all who believe in him irrespective of where they were born or living. The mission continues Jesus’s proclamation as our Saviour locally and abroad. No one should be denied the opportunity to be saved since all have a right to the whole truth and this now makes the church continue to be in mission.

Van Engelsen (2003:493-494) writes: “Secondly, the evangelical documents strongly tie the understanding of the salvific work of the Son to the historical redemptive work of Jesus Christ by repeatedly referring to the historical realities of his life, death, resurrection, and exaltation, and strongly emphasizing his uniqueness: “The Lord Jesus Christ is the unique revelation of God and the only Saviour of the world. Salvation is found in Christ alone.” This uniqueness is not only expressed in positive terms but also exclusivist terms: “In the face of competing truth claims, we proclaim with humility that Christ is the only Saviour.” The Millennial Manifesto says, “Recognizing the dangers of universalism, religious pluralism and syncretism, we proclaim the uniqueness of Jesus the Messiah...as confessed by the Church through the centuries.” Jesus remains the universal Saviour of humankind and all creation throughout the mission.

- 3) The late 20th century models of mission (1919-1991): Bevans and Schroeder outlined the model as, firstly, ‘the church’s mission in the overflowing communion of the *Trinitarian God*’ traced in the Vatican II’s *Ad Gentes*” Secondly, “the mission of a patient God establishing his reign through freedom and justice, a model introduced through pope Paul VI’s office” third; ‘a Christological model of mission developed by pope Jean-Paul II” (Bevans & Schroeder 2004: 284-303).

Missio Dei is a model of mission. We agree that mission is the activity of God. Kim (1999:25) puts it correctly that “*Missio Dei* is understood to be the purposes and activities of God in and for the whole universe.” From the three arguments or approaches of mission: Mission is Trinitarian, liberating service and reign of God, and Christ as a Saviour, Further, within a 21st century context Bevans and Schroeder suggest a new theology for today; “mission as prophetic dialogue.”

Bevans & Schroeder (2004: 348) write: Mission today should first and foremost be characterized as an exercise of dialogue. Just as the interior life of God is a perfect communion of gift and reception, identity and openness to the other, communion in relationship and communion in mission, so the church that is called into being by that mission must be a community that not only gives of itself in service to the world and to the peoples of the world’s cultures but learns from its involvement and expands its imagination of the depths of God unfathomable riches. And just at the Triune God’s missionary presence in creation is never about imposition but always about persuasion and freedom-respecting love, mission can no longer proceed in ways that neglect the freedom and dignity of human beings

- Mission as Prophetic Dialogue: Two words become very important here. Since we understand that mission is God’s activities, now we learn to move further to deal with “prophecy” and “dialogue.” “Christian mission, then, is participation in the dialogical life and mission of the Trinity. But that dialogue is prophetic” (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:349).

- **Prophecy:** Bevans (1989:5) writes about the way God acts in the world, mission is also prophetic because God's inner nature is prophetic, and because God is prophetic in dealing with creation. In the dialogue that is the Trinity, the Holy Mystery eternally "speaks forth" the Word and, through the Word, breathes forth the Spirit. From the first moment of creation, that Spirit has been breathed forth upon the whole of creation and has been made concrete in the incarnate Word. It is the Spirit who comes with power upon the prophets who anoints them to speak God's Word faithfully, to bring good news to the oppressed, healing to those who are discouraged, liberty to captives, release to prisoners, comfort to those who mourn, but condemnation to those who have betrayed the covenant (see Is 61:1-4).

Prophecy comes from God, though God uses the prophets or the church to spread or send the message. The Holy Spirit moves human beings to deliver the prophecy or the message. The mission brings good news to all the creation. "Mission today rather, is something much more modest and at the same time much more exciting and indeed, more urgent. It is much more exciting because it is about God's gracious invitation to humanity to share in the dynamic communion that is the same time God's self-giving mission life, it is more urgent in the world of globalized poverty, religious violence, and a new appreciation of local culture and subaltern traditions, the vision and praxis of Jesus of Nazareth can bring new healing and new light" (Bevans & Schroeder 2004: 285).

- **Dialogue:** Bevans (1989:2) states, "Mission is the witness and proclamation of God's love and action revealed in the concrete history of Jesus of Nazareth, and is an invitation to relationship and partnership with God through relationship with him, in the power of his Holy Spirit. Any adequate understanding of the mission today, we said, needed to be the result of a synthesis of these three positions. The mission is, in the words of John Paul II (echoing earlier formulations in church

teaching), a mission is a “single but complex reality, and develops in a variety of ways.” The name that Roger and I gave to the synthesis we offered in our book was “prophetic dialogue.” The term “prophetic dialogue” was not Roger’s and my invention. It was the understanding of the mission proposed by the Tenth General Chapter of our religious congregation, the Society of the Divine Word. Roger and I have developed the term in our own way, however, which differs significantly from how it was developed in the Chapter document and other SVD publications.”

From the beginning, we learn that God had a dialogue when he created heaven and earth. Bevens (1989:3) says that “God’s mission-in-dialogue, always present through the Spirit and incarnate and concrete in Jesus, has now been entrusted to the church. Through Baptism, Christians share the very life and of the Trinity, and so they are enjoined to carry out God’s mission in the same dialogical way.” The mission of God has been and is still in dialogue today. It requires Christians who do mission today to try to be in dialogue with those they serve. “They need to respect and be challenged and changed by the local people’s culture. They need to recognize the holiness of their religious traditions” (Bevens 1989:3). This gives an overview of the history and understanding of the concept of *Missio Dei*. How this applies to the context of the MRCC will now be discussed.

1.5 MRCC CONTEXT

1.5.1 Origin and History of the MRCC

We can't speak of the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ without mentioning the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika (NHKA). Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ, formerly known as Hervormde Kerk in Suidelike Afrika is the product of the mission work of the NHKA. "The HKSA is one of the Reformed churches, being the product of the mission work of the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika (NHKA). The merciful service of the HKSA is, as set out in the "Kerkwet en bearings", the mandate both of the whole congregation as a body and of individual Christians (Art 5 & Bep 74, 75 & 76)" (Manala, Dreyer 2001:1097).

The Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ (MRCC) which was known as Hervormde Kerk in Suidelike Afrika, was the result of the breakaway from another church known as the Free Church of Scotland. They officially break away on 29 April 1923. The church was established in 1923. According to Dreyer (2009:31), on the 29th of April 1923 the evangelist Andrew Mlaba, along with approximately 400 congregants broke away from the Free Church of Scotland in Kwazulu-Natal. This was because the Free Church allowed missionaries, who were not ordained, to minister the sacraments.

Rev Mlaba read about the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika (NHKA) in the newspapers. He requested a meeting with the church leadership, with a view of "getting material and spiritual support" from the NHKA (cf. Dreyer 2009:32). Banda (1996:63) on the other hand states that Rev Mlaba's reason was to seek the "protection and membership of the 'NHK van Natal'." Banda tries to explain "protection" in the political context of the time, thus explaining the rationale why Rev Mlaba sought protection.

The name Hervormde Kerk in Suidelike Afrika was not the first name, since the church went through several name changes. At first, the church was referred to as *Zulu Hervormde Sendingkerk* and it was based at Lufafa. A second group joined Rev Mlaba in 1927. The group was under the leadership of the Dutch Reformed Church evangelist Mayaba (Dreyer 2009:32). A more active minister, Rev Stephanus Phillipus Mpanza, an evangelist in the Dutch Reformed Church, was called to the congregation to continue with the work started by Rev Mlaba.

When Rev Mlaba became too old for his duties, Rev Mpanza accepted the call, was ordained, and established a new mission post at New Canaan. He continued to play an important role in the development of the Zulu mission (Dreyer 2009:32-33). According to Banda (1996:96) the coming of Rev Mpanza to Lufafa was a breath of fresh air and a game changer “he breathed new life into the church and spurred congregations towards greater activity with a high level of competence and dedication.” Rev Mpanza was dedicated to his work as a minister of religion.

He was a very involved person, especially when it came to pastoral work. Banda (1996:96) says Rev Mpanza “did extensive visitation to congregations, making rounds virtually to all outposts manned by his other colleagues and where necessary visiting the sick and serving the sacraments wherever he went.” The extensive visitation helped in the numerical growth of the church in Lufafa. The visitation also allowed him to know his flock to an extent that he was highly involved in dispute resolution. He attempted to resolve several quarrels in a spirit of finding peace where stern steps were necessary he acted accordingly (Banda 1996:96).

He also believed in ‘orderly church governance’. Banda (1996:96) says that “he held and insisted on properly constituted church council meetings. He regarded their decisions as authoritative...” It seems to the researcher that it was because of his dedicated service to the church that it grew and expanded in Zululand. One of his assistants, Simon Sithole, was appointed as an evangelist in 1952. He was appointed for the area “between Pietermaritzburg and Durban” (cf. Dreyer 2009:33). As a result of that appointment a new church was built at Gracourt.

After some time, Dreyer states that something wonderful happened in 1955 when “the whole *Independent Zulu Methodist Church* with four ministers (Mhlane, Mbonwa, Mchunu, and Mazibuko) applied for inclusion in the Hervormde Sendingkerk (2009:33). The influence of Rev Mpanza’s hard work did not confine itself to Zululand, but a new development took place in the same year (1955), with the establishment of a Sotho speaking congregation near Koster in the former Transvaal. The congregation was served by an evangelist Lukas Tsoai. A year later his brother, Abiel Tsoai, started missionary work near Hekpoort. Due to these developments, the name of the mission church changed to *Bantu Hervormde Kerk (BHK)* (2009:33).

The BHK held the first General Church Assembly from 19-22 July 1977 at Turfloop. A decision was then taken to rename the church *Hervormde Kerk in Suidelike Afrika* (HKSA) and the first moderator to be elected by the HKSA was Rev A Kupa (Dreyer 2009:35). The name Hervormde Kerk in Suidelike Afrika (HKSA) was changed to Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ (MRCC) in 2006 at Bizana, Eastern Cape during the tenth General Church Assembly. In 2022 the church held the 15th General Church Assembly. In 2023 the church celebrated its Centenary.

1.5.2 The structure of MRCC

The Church consists of three distinctive levels or spheres of governance which are interdependent and interrelated and which are connected via the relationship of corporative governance. They are:

- Church Council at the congregational level – the church council is the authority of the congregation.
- Circuit Assembly at Regional Level – the circuit assembly is the congregation's representative meeting which meets once a year.
- The circuit commission.
- General Church Assembly at the national level

1.5.3 Composition of the MRCC

The Church is composed of all congregations which have been established in partnership and through the assistance of the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk as guardian, wards, preaching posts, and mission fields bearing or purporting to exist under the name of the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ (MRCC Church Order 2016). There are Sixty-nine congregations and thirteen Mission Fields in the MRCC.

Table 1

Term	Statistics
14 th General Church Assembly	No stats
15 th General Church Assembly	11725

Table 2

14th GCA

MRCC Congregations	62
MRCC Mission Fields	5
MRCC Full-Time Ministers	54
MRCC Part-time Ministers	5
MRCC Circuits	11
MRCC Membership	NO stats

Table 3

15th GCA

MRCC Congregations	69
MRCC Mission Fields	13
MRCC Full-Time Ministers	49
MRCC Part-time Ministers	23
MRCC Circuits	11
MRCC Membership	11725

Tables 1, 2 and 3 Statistics recorded by MRCC General Church Assemblies by the 14th and 15th GCA's

1.5.4 The Decline in MRCC/ Statistics

The decline in the MRCC membership has been evident for the past few years. It has been a concern that was proven through past General Church Assemblies and Circuit Assemblies. The great concern is a big decline between 1988/89 when it was recorded that there were 22,027 confirmed members, and in 1990, when the number declined dramatically to 17,285 confirmed members. There was a decline of 4,742 confirmed members recorded during this period. This is a great concern and something must be done about the situation.

Table 4: Statistics from Almanak en Klein Preekbundel (6TH issue 1987)

1977/78	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983/84	1985/86
6655	7849	47367	7367	10536	11675	11221

Table 5: Statistics from Almanak en Klein Preekbundel (7TH issue 1994)

1988/89	1990	1991	1992	1993
22027	17285	11172	11347	11566

Table 6: Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ Mamelodi Congregation 5-year Stats Table (Source: MRCC Mamelodi ABC forms)

Name of Church	2014- 2015	2015- 2016	2017- 2018	2018- 2019	2019- 2020
MRCC Mamelodi	527	533	553	540	490

Table 6 shows the membership of the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ, Mamelodi congregation. These are the statistics for the five past years. From 2014 to 2015 Mamelodi had five hundred and twenty-seven members. From 2015 to 2016 it had five hundred and thirty-three members. In year 3, there were five hundred and fifty-three members. In year 4, there were five hundred and forty members. In year 5,

there were four hundred and ninety members. This statistic is for only confirmed members of the congregation.

The church is now a hundred years old and statistics show that there is a crisis, the church is declining in membership and in the number of ministers. These concerns have prompted ministers like Rev Motloba and Prof Manala to research the decline in the church. Both Rev Motloba and Prof Manala's works are in Practical Theology.

Rev Motloba researched family visits, to find out if the lack of family visits is one of the factors contributing to church membership decline. Prof Manala wrote several articles on the well-being of the MRCC and how to maintain it and ensure its growth. The church decline is a concern in many traditional churches, there is a strong drive to do research and find solutions to this problem.

1.6 MRCC UNDERSTANDING OF THE MISSIO DEI

There are not that many people whom we can look at for an understanding of the Missio Dei in the MRCC. The reason is that very few ministers have researched or written about the mission of the MRCC. There are not enough written documents on the Mission of the MRCC. Since I have mentioned that the MRCC is a child of the NHKA I would look closely at the relationship of the MRCC and the NHKA on mission. This proves that no matter what happens in the MRCC, the NHKA is the biggest contributor and influencer. The relationship is one hundred years old and the MRCC celebrated its centenary in 2023 in Madadeni in New Castle KwaZulu Natal.

Dreyer (2024:1) writes that the MRCC is one of the South African churches with roots in the reformed tradition. Since 1923, the histories of the MRCC and the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika (NHKA) were (and still are) interwoven. The NHKA is one of the reformed churches in South Africa, with roots in the Dutch Reformation. However, the NHKA does not understand itself as Calvinistic, but rather as reformational, influenced by the theologies of Calvin, Bullinger, Brunner, Barth, and even Luther. For many years, the MRCC was regarded as a mission church, supported by the NHKA. Ministers and members from both the MRCC and the NHKA contributed to the growth and development of the MRCC.

I believe that the MRCC shared the same sentiments with the NHKA regarding mission work. We will now be close to the NHKA as the founder of the MRCC and this hundred-year relationship. We will also remember that the MRCC is the product of NHKA mission activities. It was only in 1954 that the NHKA had a proper plan and documents showing they were taking the mission seriously.

Later “In 1954, a new commission for mission work and evangelism was appointed by the 50th General Assembly, and for the first time, synod funds were approved for mission work” (Dreyer 2009:33). The chairperson of this commission was Prof P.S. Dreyer. There are many people who played a significant role from 1928 till today. Among them, the two most prominent people are Prof P.S. Dreyer (NHKA) and Dr Rev Z. Banda (former minister in the MRCC).

1.6.1 Mission Theology of Prof P.S. Dreyer and his contribution to the MRCC

Dreyer (2024:1) writes: “Petrus Secundus Dreyer was born on the 23rd November 1921 in Pietersburg (Polokwane). His family struggled financially, and he could not attend school. In 1930, his father received a government appointment as a livestock inspector in the small Karoo towns of Pofadder, then Kenhardt, and finally at Williston. Dreyer started his formal education in 1931, at the age of nine. With assistance from the DRC of Williston, he then went to Stellenbosch where he matriculated in 1937, at the age of 16 (Dreyer 1999:35). With only 7 years of formal education behind him, Dreyer received a bursary from the NHKA to study theology at the University of Pretoria. In April 1937, he started with Greek, Hebrew, Latin, and Philosophy. At the age of 19, he completed his B.A., and 3 years later (1942), he finished his degree in theology. Because he was too young, the NHKA refused to ordain him as a minister. In 1945, he completed an M.A. in Philosophy with a thesis on Kantian ethics. In the same year, he was ordained as a minister in the NHKA congregation of Witbank.”

P.S. Dreyer became active in the MRCC from 1954 to 1989. According to Dreyer (2024:2) “For 35 years, he facilitated the mission work of the NHKA and MRCC through theological reflection, visionary leadership, and hands-on involvement. In the early years, as a part-time Superintendent of Mission, he travelled across South Africa to supervise the establishment of new mission posts and congregations in MRCC. During

this time, 60 new congregations were established. He spent 35 years in this position of leadership.”

Here are the six pillars of his mission. (Dreyer (1959:63–66)

- It is important to preach or proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ without falsifying it.
- The dogma and confession of the church should be contextualized with the mission situation. Missionaries should respect indigenous people. They should learn about their cultures and values (P.S. Dreyer started with extensive research on Zulu culture and religious beliefs, as well as the language).
- Indigenous churches like the MRCC should be established. We will remember how the MRCC grew from Zulu-speaking people to almost all Indigenous South African languages.
- Mission and Indigenous churches should be free from interference and control of the state.
- There should be a common understanding of the diversity of various cultures without judgment.

There are two important areas of the church, where one can point out without fear and favour that Prof P.S. Dreyer became very successful on them, viz establishment of MRCC congregations and Training of MRCC ministers.

1.6.1.1 Establishment of Congregations

In 1954 Prof P.S. Dreyer as the commission chairperson had such great influence that sixty new congregations were established in the MRCC. A total of sixty new congregations is a major achievement that must be applauded. During this, it does not mean there were no problems and challenges. In 1955 there was a great achievement when the whole Independent Zulu Methodist church applied to be accepted in the then Hervormde Sendingkerk due to their policies. That was the beginning of the growth of the MRCC. It was during the same era when a Sotho-speaking congregation was established. “In the same year, a new development took place, with the establishment

of Sotho speaking congregations” (Dreyer 2009:33). Now it shows that the MRCC's understanding of mission was the growth of the church beyond language and territory.

1.6.1.2 Establishment of Theological Education for black ministers (MRCC ministers)

P.S. Dreyer became instrumental in the training of black ministers of the MRCC. As a lecturer at the University of Pretoria, he managed to assist in training black ministers of the MRCC. More than 200 ministers and evangelists received theological education facilitated and funded by the NHKA. Dreyer, as a negotiator on behalf of the NHKA, was instrumental in convincing the South African government to make provision for the theological education of black students (Van der Westhuizen 1990:45).

As early as 1930 there was a plan for the training of black ministers that required that there should be joint training of black and white ministers which proved to be impossible due to the Apartheid politics of that time. Since joint training would not happen, the NHKA planned to buy land in Kwazulu-Natal to train black ministers, which also did not occur. In 1954, during the meeting of the Mission board where P.S. Dreyer was a chairperson, it was decided that:

(1) An independent church in black communities; (2) ministry in these communities must be done by ministers from the various black communities who understand the language and customs; and (3) these ministers should have a sound theological education. It proves that it was impossible since the University of Pretoria rejected the application for black ministers to be trained there. Later in 1953, the first black minister/evangelist Pamowakle Zulu was sent to train as a teacher. He was supposed to train as a teacher and later as an evangelist. P.S. Dreyer was appointed to oversee his education (Van Tonder 1977:73). From 1954 the training of black ministers for the MRCC began. The first minister to be trained under the supervision of Prof P.S. Dreyer was Rev P. Zulu. The training was done by the Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria. During these years total of fourteen ministers were trained, twelve Sotho speaking and two Zulu speaking. They were all trained at Barton Keep (former Mission office of NHKA) in Pretoria.

Later in 1961 the theological training of black ministers was moved to the Faculty of Theology at the University of Limpopo former University of the North. In 1986 the NKHA opened Hervormde Teologiese Opleiding (HTO – Reformed Theological

Training) in Hammanskraal. This was the theological institution for the training of black ministers of the MRCC. The theological training was later renamed The Africa Institute for Missiology (AIM). Many theological students who became ministers in the MRCC were trained here, including Prof Manala and Dr. Z.J. Banda. They are both lecturers at the University of South Africa (UNISA). “Up to now, 183 students trained by the NHKA, have been ordained as ministers, and services of approximately 40 trained missionaries (evangelists) have been used” (Dreyer 2009:35). The church is no longer using the services of evangelists.

The journey was not easy, since we understand the political landscape of South Africa before 1994. One will always have questions about whether the NHKA did the correct thing when coming to the mission in relation to the MRCC. Dreyer (2024:7) writes: “The establishment of an indigenous, black church could be seen in a negative light. In the context of the period 1950–1990, the heyday of apartheid, driving an extensive mission project required courage, time, effort, and resources. The existence of the MRCC as an independent and indigenous church is not the result of racism but of theological reflection and the conviction that the gospel of Jesus Christ should be contextual. Mission and church should reflect a fundamental respect for the Indigenous cultures, language, and beliefs of all people, to become truly contextual.” Also, see the discussion of various contextual ecclesiologies in Kärkkäinen (2002:168–238). The establishment of an independent, Indigenous church was primarily driven by Dreyer’s conviction that the mission may never lose the fundamental respect for Indigenous culture, language, and beliefs.

1.7. MOST RESENT DEVELOPMENT OF MISSION IN THE MRCC

There are very few developments in the mission of the MRCC. At the moment the MRCC is struggling financially and there is no more funding for mission support from the NHKA. The statistics also show that there is a decline in membership of the MRCC. The only contribution one can boast about is the history of the existence of the church for a hundred years. Some ministers contributed through their research (thesis) and publications. Most pastors of the MRCC, like Rev Motloba and Prof Manala, made contributions to Practical Theology. Only Dr Z.J. Banda contributed from a missiological point of view.

1.7.1 Mission Theology of Dr Z Banda

Rev Banda had a very good influence on the MRCC. He became the chairperson of the church for two consecutive terms. He was first elected at the 3rd Moderamen in 1985. He was re-elected as chairperson in 1988 as the 4th Moderamen. In 1996 he completed his Master's Dissertation from the University of South Africa with a dissertation entitled "From Open Resistance to cautious involvement: The Emergence of Mission in the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk in Africa.". In his research, he identifies that the relationship between the MRCC and the NHKA was a success in the end though he suggests the following as his point of departure. Banda (1996:178) writes,

- Mission is essential and not accidental. The church is missionary by its nature (Bosch 1991:372)
- Mission is an integral part of the church. You cannot separate the church from mission or mission from the church. "Mission is not only the duty of a white church or an older church but also the black and the younger church."
- Provision and sharing of resources. Rev Banda feels very strongly that the NHKA had an opportunity to share its resources to the fullest but it did not achieve it.
- Race and Culture. Race and culture should not be the obstacles to hinder the mission. The mission is above race and culture.
- Developing the MRCC to full independence. The church should empower its mission.

1.8 THE RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

This study works with the hypothesis that the decline of the impact of mainline churches can be reversed if the commitment of church members increase. According to Hinn (2022:1), church commitment is divided into six (6) categories; these are:

- ***Commitment to Gathering*** - members gather to Worship God (Acts 2:46).
- ***Commitment to Discipling*** - churches are called to live the great Commission (Matthew 28:16).
- ***Commitment to Serving*** - we are called to the work of service (Ephesians 4:11-16).
- ***Commitment to Giving*** - we are called to be generous, giving is never about the amount but is always about the heart (2 Corinthians 8-9).
- ***Commitment to Preserving*** - we are called to preserve unity in the body of Christ. We are warned to guard against any form of division (1 Corinthians 12:12-16).
- ***Commitment to Reaching*** - the church of Christ is called to reach the lost when there is still time. That time is now (Mark 16:15-16)!

1.9 METHODOLOGY

The method is how to do something. Methodology suggests how research or inquiries will be done in the survey (The research Plan or Research design) and indicates what is worth investigating. “In short, as has been said elsewhere, method is about “how to” and methodology is about “why to” collect data a certain way” (Jackson, Drummond & Camara 1997:21). According to the study done by Creswell (2003), a researcher needs to focus on three methods when carrying out business research: Quantitative, Qualitative and mixed method approaches. (Sharma 2018:3).

- Qualitative research is turning systematic empirical research into meaning. It is planned according to the rules formed by members of the qualitative research community. Qualitative research is used to investigate phenomena difficult to quantify by numbers. In simple terms, it is a method of observation focused on gathering non-numerical data. These may include concepts, feelings, opinions, interpretations, and meanings.

It is used to research behavior, thinking, and understanding because this differs from generation to generation and between places. Human behavior can change through different stages of life since it is not static. Questionnaires, documents and participation observation, and ethnography are used as tools to achieve that goal (Creswell 2009:15).

Limitations of Quantitative research method. Quantitative research is difficult, expensive and requires a lot of time to perform the analysis. This type of research is planned carefully in order to ensure complete randomization and correct designation of control groups. In Quantitative research you read literature, but you can select what you read, so you can somehow control the flow of information and how you apply it.

- Quantitative Research Methodology is used to quantify the problem by way of generating numerical data. It is statistical, and it has numbers attached to it. It is a social science research that collects and works with numerical data and

seeks to interpret meaning from data that help understand social life through study. It is used to see how people understand their social realities and its consequences. Data can be transformed into usable statistics (Creswell 2009:14).

Limitations of Qualitative Research method. Due to the volume of data it makes analysis and interpretation time consuming. The researcher's presence during data gathering, which is often unavoidable in qualitative research, can affect the subjects' responses. The respondent may not feel comfortable to answer some questions face to face. For example, in Qualitative research you as researcher do not have control over the information. You interview people and they can say whatever they want. Then you need to work with the information (Creswell 2009:15).

Although qualitative research is often described in opposition to quantitative research, my understanding is that both qualitative and quantitative approaches complement each other, and many researchers use mixed methods in their projects, combining the strengths of both approaches. John W. Creswell, an American academic, is one researcher well known for his work on mixed methods (Multimethodology).

- Mixed Method is the simultaneous use of qualitative and quantitative methods within a single investigation. It originated from the social sciences but has now expanded to other disciplines like health and medicine. “The basic assumption is that the uses of both quantitative and qualitative methods in combination, provide a better understanding of the research problem and question than either method by itself” (Creswell 2012:535).

I will use a mixed-method approach, which is a combination of both quantitative (numbers) and qualitative (feelings) methods. I will use data collection methods, including case studies, interviews, and focus group discussions through participation and observation. I will use the interview because it contained a discussion of how many times per month people attend church activities and how much they presented as offering to the church. The interview will assist with numbers of members and how many times did the activity happens. This

is all part of the quantifying method. I will use qualitative in the interview to get information about how church members feels about church activities, like attendance and church offerings. It will assist to know how they understand the importance of participating in the work of church like attending funerals of the members of the church. It will assist in finding out how much of their time is used for church activities. Their views will assist me to have an informed research and be able to interpret and analyse the information. Interpreting the data and statistics as though the information gathered through a literature study will contribute to the analysis. I have acquired the necessary permission for ethical clearance to proceed with this research. add a description of how the mixed methods approach consisted of a count of membership of the church as well as quantifying attendance and participation of members A detailed explanation of how data will be gathered and interpreted will be discussed in the next chapter (Chapter 3).

1.10 PROPOSED CONTRIBUTION

Missio Dei is a Latin Christian theological term that can be translated as the Mission of God. This work of God has its origin in and is explained in the New Testament (Matthew 28:16-20). It is very difficult to trace this specific work of God from the Old Testament. The word *Missio Dei*, meaning “mission of God” was first articulated at the Brandenburg Missionary Conference in 1932 by Karl Barth just after the First World War (Bosch 1991:389-391). During this time, it became clear that mission is the activity of God himself.

In the New Testament, we see the Great Commission as the origin and the beginning of the *Missio Dei* in the Bible. It is recorded in all four Gospels. We see the sending of believers to all nations by Jesus Christ himself after his resurrection and before his Ascension. It is recorded in Matthew 28:16-20, Mark 16;14-16, John 20;19-23, and Luke 24;44-49. “And he said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15).

Matthew understands that the Great Commission is the heart and the core business of the *Missio Dei*. The *Missio Dei* has three goals according to Gisbertus Voetius, a Dutch theologian belonging to the seventeenth-century Second Reformation School of Dutch Theologians. Kritzinger and Saayman (1994:1) state that, “According to Voetius, the immediate aim of the mission was the conversion of Gentiles, this immediate aim was subordinate to the second goal, the planting of the church, and the ultimate goal, to which both these were subordinate, was the glory and manifestation of God’s divine grace” (Kritzinger and Saayman 1994:1).

The conversion is the immediate goal of the mission. It is the first task the believers and missionaries could do. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you, and look, I am with you always, even to the end of age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

The planting of churches is done by the Holy Spirit in partnership with those who are “converted” after hearing the Word and been taught how to observe all things Jesus taught us. The converted in the church, which are the church herself, missionary organizations and individuals respond through participation and involvement in the glory and manifestation of God’s grace. “It is very important to realize that our involvement, as churches, as mission organizations, or as individuals, in the *Missio Dei* is a response of God’s graceful love” (Kritzinger and Saayman 1994:1).

This study will contribute to Missionary Ecclesiology. Ecclesiology is the study of churches, and how theology is applied to the nature of that particular church since we understand that churches differ according to their interpretation of the Bible, which is doctrine (Karkkainen 2002:9).

There are three major church doctrine categories: Service doctrine, joint doctrine, and multinational doctrine (Karkkainen 2002:9). Missionary Ecclesiology emphasises the communal dimension of the whole church mission. The calling of individual Christians, including the calling of the Gentiles and all other nations excluded in the Old Testament covenant as per the Great Commission. The argument is that mission is not just a task of the church but it is its nature. Two theologians became more radical on the subject

of mission being the activity of God. Karkkainen states, “Two theologians have been in the forefront to wake up the church and theology to challenge of mission, the late South African David Bosch and Bishop Leslie Newbigin” (Karkkainen 2002:9).

Karkkainen (2002:154-155) summarises Newbigin’s ecclesiology by dividing Christians into three streams. First, he emphasizes that the “church of God is to be found where there is the preaching of the gospel and right administration of the sacraments.” The signs of the true church are where the word of God is preached. The word should be preached so that people should repent. They cannot repent unless they hear the word. To him, the church is where people are “incorporated into a church.” The incorporation is through the sacraments. When we participate in the church sacraments we are incorporated in the continuous church. The final one is the “living experience of the Spirit”. Newbigin, like the Reformers, emphasizes the Holy Spirit’s role in the *Missio Dei*. “The disciples are not promised the full victory of God’s kingdom now; they are promised immediately the *arrabon* – the advance installment that will make them the living evidence of the reality that is promised. The real presence of God’s own life lived in their common life will be evidence, the witness to all the nations, that the full reality of God’s victorious reign is on the way” (Newbigin 1995:58).

The new information will add to the already known academic space of Missiology. It will contribute new knowledge and assist the MRCC how to increase commitment in the church. This will also assist members to have commitment in the church as the expression of understanding the *Missio Dei*. It will also assist ministers how to encourage members to have commitment in the MRCC.

- Commitment is defined as the “state of being dedicated or devoted to something or someone” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary 1989). Commitment is about dedication and devotion. In the church, commitment will mean the total commitment of Christians or members to God. Dunaetz, Cullum, and Barron, (2018:126) define commitment as, a “Christian’s attitude toward his or her church. We define *church commitment* as “A Christian’s sense of attachment and loyalty to the church that he or she attends most frequently.”

- Commitment has a positive impact, while lack of commitment has negative and disastrous results. When members are committed, they will flourish at their church or do well in whatever they do. When people are engaged at work they will have a strong relationship with other people, they will share their goals with their leaders. In a nutshell, where members are committed the church will flourish since the members will perform beyond the limits. According to Collen (2013:526), “Some of the antecedents of an individual’s organisational commitment include having shared goals with leadership, desiring to retain one’s relationship with people in the organisation, and job satisfaction, while some of the consequences include a willingness to work hard for the organisation, increased quality of one’s work performance, greater job satisfaction, and lower turnover and absenteeism.”
- Fanning understands commitment as the relationship with God. He also understands commitment not only as a relationship but as a relationship that demands obedience. “Jesus stressed the importance of commitment. Jesus would call people into a relationship with Him that demanded commitment and obedience” (Fanning 2001:26).
- I understand commitment as fuel or motivation that push human beings to another level. Without commitment nothing will happen in our lives. Commitment is that voice during hard times that reminds us, that whisper in our ears that no matter we are going through now, we should know joy shall come in the morning. I understand commitment as the decision to do what needs to be done, whatever the cost. The motivation comes from the love of Christ. “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5). There are different levels of commitment which I will discuss in detail in Chapter 5.

This concludes Chapter 1 as an overview of what this research entails and how this research will be conducted.

1.11 AN OVERVIEW OF THE MARANATHA REFORMED CHURCH OF CHRIST

- MRCC Church Order

The Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ is a church born in South Africa in 1923. The Church Order consists of 17 Articles.

Article 1 The church

Article 2 The Mission of the church

Article 3 Office Bearers

Article 4 Training of ministers

Article 5 Elders and Deacons

Article 6 Organs of the church

Article 7 Congregations

Article 8 Proclamation of the Word of God

Article 9 The Priesthood of all the believers

Article 10 Relation with other churches

Article 11 Marriage, family and nurture

Article 12 Organs of Support

Article 13 Spiritual Nurturing of the Youth

Article 14 Church and State

Article 15 Church Order

Article 16 Church Property

Article 17 Discipline in the church

- Preamble-

We, the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ, in solemn realisation and appreciation of the greater mercy and love based on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary and his resurrection from the dead, issuing in salvation, sanctification, regeneration and eternal life, pledge ourselves to the service of the Almighty God with dedication and determination. We exalt Christ as Lord and Saviour and uphold the Holy Scripture as source and norm for faith and living. We believe that all Christians possess talents and divine gifts towards fulfilment of God's pre-ordained works and that the Holy Spirit regenerates the believers and spurs them towards the realisation of their prophetic, priestly and kingly calling. This calling entails the witness to the

gospel of salvation to believers and non-believers and the preservation and restoration of the universe. We recognise the important role that the Lord has assigned to His Church to preach the message of love, peace and justice and to free humankind from bondage. Therefore, we reiterate our pledge of loyalty and commit ourselves to the Christian cause and to uphold its values and ideals in accordance with the Word of God as attested in the Holy Scripture. In order to achieve this, we commit ourselves to provisions of this Church Order to uphold good order, governance and discipline. Motto-Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus! (1 Corinthians 16:22, Rev. 22:20).

- MRCC Identity

The MRCC is composed of all congregations which have been established in partnership and through the assistance of the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk as guardian, wards, preaching posts and mission fields bearing or purporting to exist under the name of the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ.

Table 7

MRCC Congregations	69
MRCC Mission Fields	13
MRCC Full Time Ministers	49
MRCC Part time Ministers	23
MRCC Circuits	11
MRCC Membership	11725

My focus will be on Ebenezer Circuit in the Tshwane Metro which is in Gauteng Province.

Table 8

Ebenezer Congregations	8
Ebenezer Mission Fields	6
Ebenezer Full Time Ministers	9
Ebenezer Part Time Ministers	8
Ebenezer Membership	1728

Table 8 MRCC Ebenezer Statistics

- MRCC Confession

The Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ (hereinafter referred to as the Church) is according to its statement of faith, a church of God whose teachings are based on the Holy Bible as the Word of God and its faith is expressed in the three formularies of unity, viz. the Belgic Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort of 1618 and 1619.

- MRCC Ecclesiology

The church is the congregation of those who have been called, and continue to be called, kept and cherished by Christ for himself, throughout all ages and places through his Word and Spirit. It is the body of Christ and the true Communion of the believers in which believers, who are members of Jesus Christ, share in Christ all he has, namely forgiveness of sin, the resurrection of the body and eternal life which are gifts obtained and received by faith alone (MRCC Church-order).

1.12 THE HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICA AS CONTEXT

In this chapter, I am going to explain South African History. Recent South African history can be divided into two phases, namely Apartheid South Africa from 1948 to 1994 and Post-Apartheid South Africa from 1994 up to date. In the Apartheid South Africa, there was no freedom of religion and only Christianity was recognised and promoted. The dominant role of Christian religion in the state of relationships among religions in South Africa was definitively influenced by the way in which Christianity was introduced to this country. Christian mission came to South Africa firmly entangled with western colonialism. During the time of Apartheid in South Africa, Christianity became more instrumental in the fight against apartheid which is all about White Supremacy.

The Christian faith gave a courageous witness during the struggle against apartheid. It became the source of inspiration to most South Africans of different races and some religious leaders. “Few courageous Christian leaders such as former Archbishop of

Cape Town Desmond Mpilo Tutu have made their voice heard in public against some of the social ills facing the country” (Makofane & Botha2019:89). The truth is, not only the black church, was responsible for the liberation of South Africa. “Some white English-medium churches, in partnership with the local community (such as traditional leaders), Politician’s and the whole nation played a crucial role in ending the apartheid system in South Africa and the results was the birth of a new democratic South Africa.

Bhiman (2014:50) and Masuku (2014:16) remind us that religious leaders and formations, including the Christian faith, were influential in challenging and exposing the evils of apartheid in all its manifestations.

In 1994 a new South Africa and the post-Apartheid South Africa was born, where all religions are recognised and promoted. A new ground for all religions to grow and to participate freely in South Africa. This means even the birth of new Christian formations. The competition of religious movements began. “Since the dawn of democracy, South Africa has become a secular state, which, according to the Constitution, gives recognition to all religions. This means that, unlike in the apartheid dispensation where Christian religion used to enjoy more recognition than other religions, under a democratic rule it has to co-exist with other religions on an equal footing, even though the majority of the population are Christians” (Makofane &Botha 2019:91).

1.12.1 Cultural context:

A new South Africa is called by some a “Rainbow Nation” because of its cultural diversity and its eleven languages (Tutu 2004: viii). “Rainbow Nation” is a term coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu to describe post-apartheid South Africa, after South Africa’s first fully democratic election in 1994. The rainbow in Tutu’s thinking is the sign of hope, prosperity and justice. After the apartheid storm, the rainbow is the multi-coloured people of South Africa: blacks, whites, coloured, Indians and others, who are the manifestations of peace, prosperity, justice and hope. However, Tutu is aware of the fact that justice, peace and hope are a rare commodity in the struggle for freedom and human dignity. Therefore, as far as he is concerned, the Rainbow Nation as a

concept offers hope in the world infected with wars, racial strife, hatred, suffering, death and destruction (Tutu 2004: viii).

The Black population of South Africa is separated into four major ethnic groups: namely, the Nguni groups which consist of Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele and Swazi peoples; the second group, Sesotho-Setswana groups, and the third Shangaan-Tsonga groups, and the Venda groups. The majority of the white population is Afrikaans speaking (about 60%), and the remaining 40% are English speakers. Three million people, designated as Coloureds, have a mixed lineage, which often consists of indigenous Khoisan people. There are eleven official languages in South Africa. These are English (9.6%), Afrikaans (13.5%), Ndebele (2.1%), Sepedi/Northern Sotho (9.1%), Xhosa (16%), Venda (2.4%), Tswana (8%), Southern Sotho (7.6%), Zulu (22.7%), Swazi or SiSwati (2.5%) and Tsonga (4.5%). Much of the country's regional media use the vernacular when possible. South Africa also recognises other non-official languages such as South African sign language, Khoe Khoe and the San. Many other languages from all over the world are spoken here too, including Portuguese, Greek, Italian, French, and Chinese (Census 2011, Statistics South Africa).

Table 9

Population group	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	% of total population	Number	% of total population	Number	% of total population
African	23 985 479	81,0	25 085 330	81,0	49 070 809	81,0
Coloured	2 601 932	8,8	2 737 987	8,8	5 339 919	8,8
Indian/Asian	794 882	2,7	760 114	2,5	1 554 996	2,6
White	2 242 589	7,6	2 396 679	7,7	4 639 268	7,7
Total	29 624 882	100,0	30 980 110	100,0	60 604 992	100,0
in thousands						

Table 9 South African Population statistics

1.12.2 Economical Context

After 1994 while people were celebrating freedom, the South African economy declined. Due to that we see unemployment increasing to undesired levels. “The weakness in particular of export-oriented manufacturing has deprived South Africa of growth opportunities as well as of job creation at the relatively low end of the skill distribution. Econometric analysis identifies the decline in the relative profitability of manufacturing in the 1990s as the most important contributor to the lack of vitality in that sector” (Rodrik 2008: 769). The problem is the high unemployment rate is experienced among the youth. The unemployment and low growth are both ultimately the result of the shrinkage of the non-mineral tradable sector since the early-1990s.

“South Africa's unemployment rate increased to 33.5% in 2021 due to the negative economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The IMF estimates that the rate will increase further in 2022 (34.4%) and 2023 (36.2%). Moreover, unemployment rates are much higher among the young population and the black majority of South Africans, further increasing inequality in a country considered one of the most unequal in the world, where nearly half the adult population lives in poverty: according to the Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice & Dignity group, approximately 30.4 million people live below the upper-bound poverty line of ZAR 1,268. The group estimates that 13.8 million people live below the food poverty line” ([radeclub.standardbank.com/portal/en/market-potential/south africa/economical-context?clears=y](https://radeclub.standardbank.com/portal/en/market-potential/south-africa/economical-context?clears=y)) 28 January 2023.

1.12.3 Political Context

After 1994 South Africa became a democratic state, with a Black Government in power. The political party, the African National Congress (ANC) took over the government from the National Party. Mandela became the first black President. Blacks started to enjoy democracy for the first time after so many years. New concepts were born like the African Renaissance. “In post-apartheid South Africa, the “African Renaissance” movement inaugurated by the president, Thabo Mbeki, exemplifies the prevailing celebration of all things local. The idea of a reborn “hopeless continent” first entered the official parlance of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) in 1997 and was followed, in quick succession, by an African Renaissance conference in 1998, the

establishment of the African Renaissance Institute in 1999, and the launch of the South African Chapter of the African Renaissance in 2000” (Maloka 2001:1).

After 30 years of democracy South Africa finds itself still trapped “in the ongoing demand for cultural “relevance” undermines, to some extent, the prospect of a non-racial society and perpetuates the same false consciousness propagated by “positive” apartheid theory. And third, to imagine the very existence of a “relevant” psychology” (Long 2013:30). Post 1994 South Africa faced many challenges to reconcile the former oppressor (whites) and the oppressed (blacks). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was formed to deal with the pain of segregation and apartheid. The most important domestic agency created during Mandela’s presidency was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which was established to review atrocities committed during the apartheid years. It was set up in 1995 under the leadership of Archbishop Tutu. It was given the power to grant amnesty to those found to have committed “gross violations of human rights” under extenuating circumstances. The TRC played an important role in reconciling the whites and blacks in South Africa.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION:

This chapter suggests some theoretical frameworks. A Literature Review describes and analyses previous research on the topic, a good literature review is comprehensive, critical and contextualised. That means it will provide the reader with a theory base, a survey of published works that pertain to your investigation, and an analysis of that work. It is a critical, factual overview of what has gone wrong before (Hofstee 2006:91) and what is left to be said. The literature review points out gaps in existing research. The literature review is an integral part of the research process and makes valuable contributions to almost every operational step (Kumar 1999:31).

2.2 PURPOSE OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review demonstrates the researcher's familiarity with the topic and scholarly context. "It provides and develops a theoretical framework in the study, in the initial stages of research it helps you to establish the theoretical roots of your study, clarify your ideas, and develop your research methodology" (Kumar 1999:31). It positions the scholar and researcher approach with other researchers. It shows how the research fits in the whole research world, as Kumar puts it: "It helps you integrate your research findings into the existing body of knowledge" (Kumar 1999:32).

2.3 THE PLACE OF THE MRCC AMONG REFORMED CHURCHES

The MRCC is a proud South African Reformed Church. The MRCC celebrates the rich history of the Protestant Reformation which happened in the 16th century and was the major event which was the result of many clergies who stood up against clergy abuse and scandalous lives of the clergy. The Protestant Era was known as a period of paradigm shift. "The Protestant Reformation was a period of intense religious, political, intellectual, and cultural chaos that fractured Catholic Europe; it officially began in 1517" (Romaniuk 2015:1). This period was characterized by division and breakdown

of religious unity, questioning of Catholic dogma and this led to violence and destruction. Martin Luther (1483-1546), an Augustinian monk and theological professor questioned the Catholic dogma. The MRCC believes in this dogma.

There were some such as Jan Hus (1369–1415), Peter Waldo (1140–1218), and John Wycliffe (1320–84) preceding Luther but he is widely credited with starting this monumental change. He posted a Ninety-five Thesis originally written in Latin form on All Saints church doors and later sent to Archbishop Mainz. This Thesis was his set of ideas trying to show what was wrong with the Catholic Church or Catholicism. During this era, there was an eruption of many different kinds of Christianity and churches. (Romaniuk 2015:1). The Reformation occurred in various places under different leaders.

The Reformation had also taken place in Switzerland, headed by Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531), John Calvin (1509–64), and Guillaume Farel (1489–1565). In Germany it was under Luther and in England, the Reformation took place with King Henry VIII (1491–1547) (Romaniuk 2015:1).

One reason for the Reformation to happen was to have freedom. The Reformation is about freedom. “The reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546) promised freedom. He promised freedom from the burden of the moral law, freedom from the fear of devil and damnation, freedom from obedience to the Pope and his church” (Woodhead 2004:159).

It was then necessary for the church of that time to have a way of identifying the true church since there were many churches. Luther was more on the idea of the pure church. “Three treatises came from Luther in 1520: an appeal to the German princes to reform the church if no one else would, a discussion of the sacraments, and On Christian Freedom (Hallinan 2017:22). This last was his setting out of the truth of justification by faith, the unique instrument of connection between Christ and the believer: sola fide” (Hallinan 2017:22). The champions of the Reformation never intended to leave or quit Catholicism, but unfortunately they were excommunicated by the Roman Catholic Church (Hallinan 2017:22). It is during this time of uncertainty that a new movement called the Reformation was born.

According to Luther it was more important for the people of his time to be able to identify the truth from heresy. There are three signs/marks of a pure church. The marks of the church are those things by which the true church of Christ may be recognized according to Calvin in Protestant theology. These three marks of the church are known as: (1) preaching of the Word, (2) the administration of the sacraments, and (3) Church discipline (Titus 2011:114).

Confession devotes a chapter (Article 29) to the “Marks of the True Church” and lists them as follows:

The church engages in the pure preaching of the gospel, uses pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them, and practices church discipline for correcting faults. In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and holding Jesus Christ as the only Head. By these marks one can be assured of recognizing the true church and no one ought to be separated from it

- The preaching of the Word.

Calvin believes the true visible and invisible church is found where the Word is preached and heard. He speaks of the visible and invisible church.

Holy Scripture speaks of the church in two ways. (1) Sometimes the term “church” it means that which is actually in God’s presence, into which no persons are received but those who are children of God by the grace of adoption and true members of Christ by the sanctification of the Holy Spirit. Then the church includes not only the saints presently living on earth, but all the elect from the beginning of the world. (2) Often, however, the name “church” designates the whole multitude of humanity spread over the earth who profess to worship one God and Christ (Institutes, 4.1.7) The visible church Calvin sees as all, including ‘many hypocrites who have nothing of Christ but the name and outward appearance’ (Institutes, 4.1.7).

All these church members are expected to maintain and are commanded to keep communion with the church, meaning the visible church. They should keep fellowship and communion with this visible church because within its borders is also contained the present invisible church which is tied to previous, past, present and future

generations of true believers in Christ. To belong to the MRCC (the visible church) requires commitment to the invisible church of Christ.

The visible church is witnessed that wheat and tare grow together as their roots may be intertwined, but they will be separated later during harvest. At harvest time, the reapers will collect weeds first, bind them into bundles, and burn them. Later the wheat will be collected, gathered, and brought into the barn (Matthew 13:24-30).

The invisible church according to Calvin is comprised of all the redeemed, is spiritual and heavenly, and not of this world. It is a purely spiritual organization bound together by God. Paul describes it clearly when he says, we thought many are one body. “So, in Christ, we who are many are one body and each member belongs to one another” (Romans 12:5).

The invisible church is the term for all believers in Jesus Christ. It is not identifiable by its religious trappings, church buildings calendars, or ceremonies. The invisible church is for all Christians called by God for God and to God. It is the “great cloud of witnesses” spoken of by the author of Hebrews (Hebrews 12:1), Which is the one church. The one, holy, catholic church includes not only those that have died but also true believers wherever they are presently found on the earth (Titus 2011:114).

The visible things of the world, including church denominations, church buildings, and prayer books will pass away one day because they are temporary. The invisible things of God will never pass away, because they are as eternal as heaven. “Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys” (Luke 12:33).

The Pure Preaching of the Word is the cornerstone of the true church of Christ. Pure Preaching also becomes the true mark of the church. This leads to what Calvin meant by pure preaching. “For Calvin, this took multiple things into account. First and foremost, it meant that the Word of God, and the Word of God alone, was to be expounded” (Titus 2011:115). Calvin would recoil at the number of sermons based primarily on pseudo-psychology, self-help doctrine, business principles, and countless other substitutes. In all honesty, these would all violate Calvin’s understanding of pure

preaching. This is perhaps one of the great lessons of Calvin that needs to be recovered, i.e., what it is to preach purely. This lesson cannot be stressed enough (Titus 2011:115). The MRCC needs to be self-critical of the way in which the word is preached. Is it pure preaching that will strengthen the faith of those listening to the sermon? Pure preaching of the Word will encourage commitment to the church.

Calvin understood and saw preaching as the very center of his ministry. If the word is not preached accordingly, then that means there is no church. Preaching becomes the very pillar and foundation which the church of Christ should be built upon. In his Sermons on Ephesians, Calvin states: It is certain that if we come to church we shall not hear only a mortal person speaking but we shall feel (even by God's secret power) that God is speaking to our souls, that God is the teacher. God touches us so that the human voice enters into us and profits us so that we are refreshed and nourished by it. God calls us to God's self as if God's mouth were open and we saw God in person (Sermons on Ephesians, 1998, 42).

- The administration of the Sacraments

The MRCC as a Reformed church has only two sacraments, the sacrament of baptism and The Holy Communion. The church is only true when the sacraments are served with good or good purposes. "The sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution" (Institutes, 4.1.9). This is the second mark of the church. When Calvin speaks of sacraments, he speaks of baptism and communion (Titus 2011:118).

- The sacrament of Baptism.

Baptism is the first sacrament instituted by Christ himself. Baptism is the Christian spiritual rite of sprinkling water on a person's forehead or immersing them in water; this act symbolizes purification or renewal and admission into the Christian Church. Baptism is a symbol of our commitment to God. 1 Peter 3:21 states, "And this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Calvin's understanding of Paul in Galatians is: That is, it is of no consequence to what nation or condition anyone may belong: nor is circumcision any more regarded than gender or civil rank. And why? Because Christ makes them all one. Whatever

have been their former differences, Christ alone is able to unite them all. “You are one: the distinction is now removed” (Commentary on Galatians, 1979: 112).

- Holy Communion.

The MRCC breaks the bread and shares it among the members and all who qualify to eat during the church service. Holy Communion is the breaking and sharing of bread and wine by Jesus Christ himself. “While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, take it, this is my body, then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drink from it. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many, he said to them. I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the Kingdom of God” (Mark 14:22-25).

Calvin’s reasoning behind the exclusion of infants (and others) is threefold: 1) they cannot “discern” whether or not they are worthy (according to 1 Cor. 11:2) They have to be able to exercise remembrance and proclamation, and 3) circumcision is the Old Testament correspondence to baptism as Passover is to communion (Titus 2011: 120). The Holy Communion remains the second most important sacrament after baptism which Jesus told us to remember Him always when it is shared among us. Holy Communion or “The Lord’s Supper” is a way to celebrate our intimate connection and ongoing relationship with Jesus. Jesus said: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (John 6:51).

- Church Discipline

Church Discipline is a third mark of the church. It is frequently given in Reformed-Presbyterian theology: that is the exercise of church discipline. The MRCC exercises discipline in the church. Article 17 of the MRCC church order puts it correctly, “Order and discipline in the Church are created through the proclamation of the Word, so that all members shall believe and live in accordance with the Word of God and that Jesus Christ shall be acknowledged as the only Head of the Church” (MRCC Church Order 2006:60).

It is not only about Jesus being the Head of the church but also about the unity and solidarity created by discipline. In that way, the unity and solidarity are preserved and

advanced (MRCC Church Order 2006:60). The church should exercise discipline in the church and among Christians and church members. This mark, however, is not given by Calvin, but articulated by later Reformed confessions such as the Belgic Confession (Titus 2011:118). Church discipline becomes so important to Calvin that he takes up church discipline in his treatment of the keys of the church (Titus 2011:118).

2.4 THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH.

In this section, we have to understand the difference between two entities: God and the church. Theology is the study of God. Doing theology is ultimately the interpretation of experience. I am more focused on Christian Theology, the contextual nature of the Christian theology. Theology is contextual by its nature. “To ask, then, about the nature of “contextual theology” is really to ask about the nature of theology itself. Doing theology contextually is to do theology in dialogue with two realities: the experience of the past recorded in Scripture and the church’s tradition(s) and the experience of the present or the context in which Christian theologians live. Contexts consist of at least four aspects: present human experience (a personal health crisis, a presidential election), social location (being a woman, being young), one’s cultural identity (sometimes closely connected with a particular religion, like Buddhism in Thailand), and change within a context (globalization, democratization)” (Bevans 2010:1).

Changes within a context have a major impact on the way we do theology. These are external and internal factors. The first external as Bevans puts it, is “the emerging nationalism at the end of the colonial era there has been a growing consciousness of the irrelevance and even the oppressive nature of theologies that claim universal validity” (Bevans 2010:1). The truth is culture has changed, culture is not static. Culture is universal and normative and culture is a set of values and meanings that inform the way of life. In addition, all cultures are equal and all cultures are good, even holy, and so can be valid sources for theology. There are three internal factors Bevans identifies Christianity is a radically incarnational reality, which calls for God’s continued incarnation at all times, in all cultures, and in all circumstances. Christianity acknowledges the sacramental nature of reality whereby any person, object, or event

can mediate God's saving presence. A third internal factor is a change in Christians' understanding of divine Revelation (Bevans 2010:2).

The Church is the people of God who are called for his purpose. "God called the church to proclaim the Gospel. A congregation is the local manifestation of the church in the society. Congregations are faith communities that endeavour to be faithful effective witnesses and God's servants in this world where they proclaim the Good news in word and deed" (Hendricks 2004:19).

How we understand the church will determine how we do things in the church. "The way we understand the church defines our church polity which in turn influences the congregational praxis and ministry. Even more, the way we understand God reflects in the way we understand the church and its calling in this world" (Dreyer 2013:4).

Hendricks gives eight ways to make it easy to understand the meaning of the word theology or how it should apply in the context of African Christian theology.

Theology is about the knowledge of God, is about knowing and understanding God. It is also to rely on God for his guidance. Hendricks (2004:25) states: "is to know God, discern his will and guidance for the way we should live and witness." We are created in God's image for a purpose. The purpose is to know God and to worship God.

Theology is about faith community. The Triune God has created us and called us to his church, which is the community of believers. We are called to serve within the community not as individuals. We are a community of believers. "Our basic presuppositions are that a person's personal identity, as well as the identity of the church, is derived from God's very being. He created us in his image, to his likeness" (Hendricks 2004:26).

Theology is about specific time and place. Theology is contextual. Different Bible books, events, and miracles were for various times. Today we understand that we should understand theology from our time and place, as Hendricks (2004:27) puts it, "in the wilderness, the manna was a meal for one day. In much the same way, theology has a contextual nature. In every situation, our faith seeks to comprehend what the living God requires of us" (Hendricks 2004:27). When the church in 2024 does practice theology we are reminded to be realistic about our situation and our location. Churches in urban areas may not necessarily do theology like churches in rural areas.

Theology is about Interpretation. We need to interpret the biblical text. I am always intrigued by how ministers can interpret one Bible text so differently. Theology is about interpreting and analyzing the situation. Theology must answer serious questions about life in general. “How should we react to what confronts us? Ethical questions abound in our ever-changing world: what is right? Christians must be able to contribute toward dealing with current vexing problems locally and contextually” (Hendricks 2004:28).

Theology is about Scripture and tradition. We can’t deny that God is known through the word, the scripture. The Bible speaks the word of God. From the Bible, we learn how to live according to the will of God. We know God through the scripture which is the Word. The scripture plays a normative role in theology. We must interpret the word accordingly. “Sola Scriptura” meaning the Bible is the sole infallible source for Christian faith and practice. The biblical disciplines of Old and New Testament Studies specialize in understanding the biblical text, Systematic Theology or Dogmatic have organized the content of scripture in various ways using different methods, philosophical and comparative religious studies play a role, ethical debates have taken place, and church history tells the ongoing story of the church in the world (Fowler 1995:5; Hendricks 2004:29).

In Genesis 1, the Bible tells us about God who created everything out of nothing and only through the word. “Once again, we contend that theology is hermeneutical by its very nature. It depends on interpretations that fallible people try to make of both their reality and normative sources, such as the Bible, creeds, and the Christian traditions in which they believe. This should be an ongoing process in faith communities, as they will always be confronted with new realities that beg for ethical decisions and, as such, confessions” (Hendricks 2004:29).

Theology is about the kingdom of God. “In the Lord’s Prayer we are taught, “Let thy kingdom come, calls for a missional praxis in faith communities” (Hendricks 2004:29). Theology is about God’s kingdom and nothing else. We are called to serve God, churches are instructed to serve God and God only. Congregations are called to make a contribution to their faith communities and society. The apostle Paul in the book of Romans 8:18, continues to teach us the pain we are going through is nothing

compared to the glory we are about to receive. Therefore, no matter the situations we face today, we should not give up because glory and victory are coming.

Theology is about transformative action. The word transformative is derived from transformation. The word transform can be translated as changing lives for a better course. Theology transforms by its nature. When we read the Bible, we will notice that it is about changing people's lives from the Old to the New Testament. During the prophets' times, prophets were sent to deliver messages that would transform the nation. The same applies to the New Testament. Jesus and the disciples transformed and changed people's situations and lives. When the people were hungry Jesus fed them. And when they were sick Jesus healed them. There are five levels of action: a personal level, an ecclesiastical level, a secular level, at scientific level, and finally at the ecological level (Hendricks 2004:33).

Theology is about discernment. "discernment is a process in which the faith community depends on the Holy Spirit's initiative to lead the community to discover God's will in order to participate in God's missional praxis" (Hendricks 2004:30). Faith and the trust in God play a major part in the discernment.

The MRCC agrees with the eight ways of Hendricks to understand theology. The MRCC sends theological students to train for five years at Theological training. During this period, students are trained to be ministers of the Word and interpret the Bible. (Article 4.6 Procedures for admission to the theological training (MRCC church order 2006:6).

In conclusion, I will summarise what the MRCC believes the church to be, "The church is the congregation of those who have been called, and continue to be called, kept and cherished by Christ for himself, throughout all ages and places through his Word and Spirit. It is the body of Christ and the true Communion of the believers in which believers, who are members of Jesus Christ, share in Christ all he has, namely forgiveness of sin, the resurrection of the body, and eternal life which are gifts obtained and received by faith alone.

2.5 ECCLESIOLOGY OF THE CHURCH

In this section, we will deal with Ecclesiology. How does ecclesiology differ between churches? Ecclesiology is the study of the church. The different churches and congregations do their Ecclesiology differently which will also affect their programs. Programs differ from church to church and congregation to congregation “Ecclesiology can be defined as the doctrine of the church (Karkkainen 2002:9).

The word *ecclesiology* was defined in the 19th century as the science of the building and decoration of church buildings and is still used in that sense in the context of architectural history. “It might come as a surprise to many students of theology that ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church did not gain its own established standing in systematic theology until the time of the Reformation, and even then many crucial topics, as they are discussed nowadays in systematic treatments of the church, received hardly any attention (Karkkainen 2002:9).

Ecclesiology can be explained as a systematic reflection on the similarities and differences in Ecumenical circles. There is different ecclesiology in different denominations. Denominations and churches differ in the way they do ecclesiology. “The discipline of comparative ecclesiology has for some years been practiced in ecumenical circles. The term usually signifies a systematic reflection on the points of similarities and differences in the Ecclesiologies of different denominations (Karkkainen 2002:9).

Attempting to account for the fundamental cleavages, ecumenical theologians have pointed to certain polarities, such as Protestant vs. Catholic, prophetic vs. priestly, vertical vs. horizontal, and institution vs. event. These categories, while illuminating up to a certain point, are in the end too dichotomous. To come flatly down on either side of these alternatives would be to content oneself with a half-truth. The categories are too crude to express even the leading insights of any sophisticated’s ecclesiology (Dulles 2002:2).

There are Seven (7) Ecclesiological Traditions according to Veli-Matti Karkkainen in his book *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*. I am now going to discuss the different types of ecclesiology and how some have impacted or related to my study.

Eastern Orthodox Ecclesiology. The Eastern Orthodox ecclesiology is drawn from the early sources, which is the experience and theological development of early centuries. The Eastern Orthodox believe in the Trinity of the church, Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. The church is an icon of the Trinity. We can say that there is more emphasis on the Holy Spirit. “Generally speaking it can be said that Eastern theology has been more Spirit sensitive than its Western counterparts” (Karkkainen 2002:17).

The church is more imbued by pneumatology. *The Eastern Orthodox can be understood as the church as the following: A lived Experience, Eucharistic ecclesiology – “At the heart of Eastern Orthodox stands the Eucharist* (Karkkainen 2002:20). The *Sobornost*-Russian word *soborny* has the double meaning of catholic and conciliar. “The principle of Sobornost also denotes the idea that church institutions are expressions of unity” (Karkkainen 2002:22). The church should always strive for unity because its unity follows the unity of the Trinitarian God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The pneumatological ecclesiology spirit in Eastern Orthodox is attributed to all diversity that can be attributed to grace. Ecclesiologies have traditionally been built on two classical rules, Ignatius of Antioch and Irenaeus.

The two common classic rules of the church are, that Christ is always present according to Ignatius, and the presence of the Holy Spirit according to Irenaeus. The presence of Jesus Christ marks the universal and true church of God. “Ignatius suggested that the ecclesiology of the church could be secured by reference to Christ’s presence: wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the universal church. According to Irenaeus, what is decisive is the presence of the Spirit of God; wherever the Spirit of God is, there is the church, and all grace” (Karkkainen 2002:23).

This suggestion was accepted and prevailed in the Eastern Orthodox, though they emphasize that the church is founded on the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. The Eastern Orthodox understands that the church is founded on a two-fold

divine economy; the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit (Karkkainen 2002:23).

The Roman Catholic Ecclesiology. The Roman Catholic Church is currently the world's largest Christian body, claiming the membership of about half of all the Christian theology represents, together with the Eastern Orthodox church, the growth of tradition over two millennia (Karkkainen 2002:26). The Roman Catholic understands the church as Communion. This is according to Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Emeritus, Benedict XVI. "According to Apostle Paul writes Ratzinger, ecclesiology is impossible without the rich Christology made concrete in the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist" (Hill 2012:5). Paul understands the church as the body of Christ. The church is the presence of Christ. "All Christians are one body of Christ. It is a living reality, being continually renewed and transforming the world" (Hill 2012:5).

In Lutheran Ecclesiology, Luther speaks of the community of Saints, the marks of the true church, The community of Saints and Sinners, The Priesthood of believers, The Spirit, word, and Sacraments, The Christian as Christ to the Neighbour, and finally the church as hospitals for the INCURABLY SICK (Karkkainen 2002:39-49). John Webster believes that evangelical ecclesiology must have the purpose of describing the relation between the gospel and the church. "A clear description of the church, which presents itself regularly in Webster's writing is that the church is the creature of the word of God or the creature of the divine word" (Hill:2012:104). The church should witness the word in the world in all circumstances.

The Reformed Ecclesiology. The Protestant Era was known as a period of paradigm shift. During the time of the Reformation, there was a breakdown of unity, as there was a questioning of Catholic dogma. This led to the formation of the Reformation since the Roman Catholic church expelled and excommunicated the pioneers. "The Protestant Reformation was a period of intense religious, political, intellectual, and cultural chaos that fractured Catholic Europe; it officially began in 1517" (Romaniuk 2015:1).

This period was characterized by division and breakdown of religious unity, questioning of Catholic dogma and this led to violence and destruction. Martin Luther (1483-1546), an Augustinian monk and theological professor questioned the Catholic dogma. Martin Luther, John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli are the pioneers of Reformation.

“As with Martin Luther, so as John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli – it took time before they came to the painful realization that the Reformation withdrawal from the Catholic Church was more than a temporary one” (Karkkainen 2002:50).

Karkkainen (2002:50) called it, the Church as Covenant. Calvin and Luther speak of the two marks of the church. Karkkainen (2002:50) puts it correctly when he says Calvin agreed with Luther that the marks of the true church were the preaching of the Word of God and the right administration of the sacraments

The other important aspect of the church which was very important to Calvin, was the church visible and invisible. For Calvin, the church is primarily a visible community (Karkkainen 2002:51). First, Calvin emphasizes the visible church, which he says is the public ministry, the mother of the faithful where one gets rebirth and obtains salvation and discipline. The invisible church is those elect only known to God, not humans. As early as 1536 Calvin had described these true believers as the mystical body of Christ and in the 1539 institutes Calvin extensively referred to them as those elected in Christ (Karkkainen 2002:52).

As Calvin explains, this notion of the visible and invisible church should be clearly understood. There are not two separate churches, but one church with two parts; visible and invisible. Thus, there are not two distinct churches side by side, but one church with two parts, one visible to God and the other invisible to humanity (Karkkainen 2002:52).

Karl Barth's Revisionary Reformed Ecclesiology. Karl Barth is understood to represent a modern Reformation. As Karkkainen (2002:56) puts that Karl Barth, the church father of the twentieth century is its ablest and most creative interpreter for modern times. Three aspects of Barth's doctrine are pneumatology, Christology, and the Word of God. The Holy Spirit, Christ, and the Word of God play a very important part in Karl Barth's ecclesiology. This is explained in the body of Christ. The main definition of the church for Barth is the body of Christ (Karkkainen 2002:56).

The Free Church Ecclesiology emphasizes the church as the fellowship of believers. There is an Ecclesiological transformation in the Free church where there is a radical ecclesiological shift happening today. This suggests that Protestant churches will have to abandon some of its traits and doctrine to be like the Free church. “Today's global developments seem to imply that Protestant Christendom of the future will exhibit

largely a Free Christian form” (Karkkainen 2002:66). The understanding of the church seems to be moving away from the traditional hierarchal model to the no longer quiet so new participative models of church configuration (Karkkainen 2002:59).

These are the same concerns that historical reformation is now losing the battle as they decline in numbers. There are essential facts to notice here. As Karkkainen (2002:66) puts it, the free churches have lived for and out of mission and evangelization mission. The mission has not been a task of the church, but rather the purpose of all church life. Mission is the heart of the Free church and they can’t survive without it. One of the pioneers, Menno Simons of the Free church went further to add the four marks of the church to the twofold Reformation view namely: holy living, brotherly love, unreserved testimony, and suffering (Karkkainen 2002:67).

The Pentecostal/Charismatic Ecclesiology, “The twentieth century witnessed dramatic developments in the Christian church with the emergence and rapid growth of Pentecostalism and later Charismatic movements which helped reshape the worldwide Christian church at the end of its second millennium” (Karkkainen 2002:69). It has now become the fastest growing movement all over. It presents a new spiritual movement rather than a novel theological construction. The Pentecostal phenomenon, dynamic charismatic spirituality at the center of church life, Pentecostal Ecclesiology, The church as a Charismatic Fellowship? Distinctive feature of Charismatic movements Ecclesiologies, Salient features of Pentecostal/charismatic Ecclesiologies.

The ecumenical movement ecclesiology. This refers to the church as one, it is about the unity of churches and Christians. “In other words, the unity of the church is not primarily a human effort but rather is given from God and such mandatory for all Christians (Karkkainen 2002:79).

Ecclesiology in Africa and the MRCC context:

African Ecclesiology is the search for abundant life, for peaceful and prosperous societies, has been at the center of African life and religious and social organizations as well as political and communal networks. Prior to the advent of Christianity and Western intervention in Africa, various African peoples have ordered their societies through a catena of religious frameworks (Ilo, Ogbonnaya, and Ojacor: 2011:XV).

Africans for many years before the arrival of Missionaries or Western Christianity had the belief in the Supreme Being. “God is acknowledged as creator” (Mbiti 1970:45; 1990:39, 91).

There are four main African Religious Frameworks or characteristics. Turaki (1999:69) lists the following main characteristics: belief in the Supreme Being, belief in spirits and divinities, the cult of ancestors, and the use of magic, charms, and spiritual forces.

Africans believe in the Supreme Being who is one God. This is the same God known to the Missionaries. Bediako puts it as follows, “in Africa, the bearers of the Christian faith encountered a well-rooted belief in one great God, Creator, and Moral Ruler of the universe and one not too distinguishable from the God of the Bible (Bediako1999:78-79). African traditional religions are monotheistic. African theologians like Mbiti believe God was in Africa before the missionaries came. Mbiti puts it correctly, “God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the same God who for thousands of years has been known and worshipped in various ways within the religious life of African peoples, and who, therefore, was not a stranger in Africa before the coming of the missionaries.

Missionaries did not bring God to Africa, God brought them” (Mbiti 1970:102). Bujo also agrees with Mbiti when he says, “Long before the arrival of any missionaries, most of the tribes of Africa worshipped one God and God alone. The novelty of Christianity for Africans did not consist in its proclamation of one God, but rather in the more complete and definitive proclamation of that one God whom Africa already knew, and who is also the God of Jesus Christ” (Bujo 1992:18).

African religion recognized God as the only source of all life. “All these witnesses testify that God sustains every living, but that human beings are the special object of the Life giver’s attention” (Bujo 1992:17). Life is at the center of African Theology. “Life is so central it must be characterized as sacred” (Bujo 1992:17). God is the creator of life. God is acknowledged as the creator (Mbiti 1970:45; 1990:39, 91).

Africans believe that life is in hierarchical order. “This hierarchy belongs both to the invisible and to the visible world. In the invisible world, the highest place is occupied by God, the source of life” (Bujo 1992:20).

Africans believe in Life as unity. Bujo says: “Life is to be understood in a mystical, or metaphysical, sense. Biological life is transmitted by God through the elders and ancestors” (Bujo 1992:21). Africans believe that African society is mystical since it is encompassing both the dead and the living. The unity includes the dead and the living.

Belief in spirits and divinities. Africans believe in the world of spirits and divinities. “An undying spirit cannot only inhabit humans but also inhabit inanimate objects. After death, the human spirit returns to its place of origin in the spiritual world. This conviction makes no distinction between the physical world and the spiritual world, creating a holistic worldview: everything and everyone is connected to everything and everyone else” (Wagenaar 2008:4).

Cult of the Ancestors. Africans believe in the cult of Ancestors. “It is above all in the ancestor cults of Africa that we see how people envisage life, for it is above all here that they seek an increase of that life force which flows through the mystical body to which both they and the ancestors belong” (Bujo 1992:20). Africans believe in harmony and peace, this connectedness of ancestors and the living provide that harmony. This will be discussed in full in section 2.13 Ancestor Worship.

Africans believe in the use of magic, charms, and spiritual forces. Pobee (1976:11) states that “Homo africanus is filled with a sense of hosts of spirit-beings, some good, some evil, which do influence the course of his life” (Pobee 1976:11). Africans live their life in fear of witchcraft since they believe that the enemy uses witchcraft to hurt others. Witchcraft has the power to hurt someone. “African society is even today oppressed by witchcraft. For African society attributes evil and misfortune to personal forces of evil, the major one of which is the witch” (Pobee 1976:13).

Things and objects like nails, hair, and the placenta are considered used by witches, which is why they should be protected. “Thus in Akan society, even today nail pairings and the hair are carefully buried in the ground or toilet so as to keep it out of the reach of an enemy who would then be able to harm him. For the same reason placenta are carefully buried lest the mother be harmed by an enemy” (Pobee 1976:13).

This overview of some tenets of belief of Traditional African Religions gives some insight into the context in which the MRCC members exist. There is constant tension between Christian and traditional African beliefs, sometimes leading to a mixture of the two. Since Traditional African Religions are viewed as culture it is difficult to

separate culture from religion. This results in many people in Africa to convert to Christianity but still maintain their traditional (cultural) beliefs. Many members of the MRCC have this dual religious affiliation.

2.6 MISSIOLOGY OF THE CHURCH

This section will deal with definitions and purpose of both Missiology and Mission. Missiology is the discipline that deals with the study of mission as subject matter. The Christian mission concerns obeying Christ's missional command of Matthew 28:19-20. Missiology's meaning is closely related to what is meant by mission. Whereas missiology has always paid keen attention to issues related to mission practice (missions), missiologists have also asked questions about the church's mission more generally.

The mission is "what God sends the church into the world to do and, mindful of the Great Commandment, have included various forms of service, others have limited missions to what Christians and churches can do that other agencies cannot. David J. Bosch succinctly observed, "The term mission presupposes a sender, a person sent by the sender, those to whom one is sent, and an assignment." It is all about being sent, going, and taking a message somewhere, usually in an official capacity (Bosch 1991:1-2).

Garcia (2009:95) suggests that the purpose of the mission is, "simply put, the mission is the redeeming action of the triune God toward people and the creation, the goal of which is to restore human relations with God in Christ and to bring every aspect of life under the lordship of Christ. The mission of the church as a partner of God is based on this mission of God; the *missio ecclesiarum* reflects the *missio Dei*." The purpose of the mission is to restore and save human relations from sin.

The mission is the activity of God. "Karl Barth was the first in the modern period "to articulate mission as an activity of God himself" in his paper at the Brandenburg Missionary Conference in 1932 (Bosch 1991:389). The term *Missio Dei* means the mission of God. "The important term *Missio Dei* (Mission of God) needs a biblical foundation. The sending of God by God is a foundational motive in the New Testament. Even at the very beginning of salvation history, shortly after creation, God became the

first missionary. In Jesus, God is the missionary par excellence, and in the Holy Spirit, God is the most successful missionary. The mission is part of the nature of God, and therefore mission can only be described holistically and in a manner that transforms human mission into the image of God's mission" (Schirrmacher 2017:1).

Who was the first missionary? In the Old Testament God is the First Missionary. Who was the first one sent to speak about the fact that God will execute judgment but to speak even more about God's grace? God himself was and is the first missionary. After the Fall, the history of humankind, which had just begun, seemed to be coming to an end (Schirrmacher 2017:33). God's Mission is about saving his people after the fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden. "This may appear somewhat abstract, but it is of decisive significance for *missio Dei*. It is as God in and for himself for and to all eternity transitions the gap between the above and the below. God's own life is the event of witness, and in making human witnesses God lives his own proper life" (Flett 2014:72).

God is the one who sends to save his people. *Missio Dei* means no less than recognizing that sending (Greek: *apostello* and *pempo* and related words; Latin: *missio*, etc.) for redemption is the essence and center of the Christian faith. It is directly anchored in God and his essence. Without the Trinity and without a God who sends himself, there would be no redemption (Schirrmacher 2017:20). God is our primary source of mission, without Him there is none.

In the New Testament, Jesus' sending of the disciples is viewed as the continuation of the sending of Jesus by his Father and the sending of the Spirit by the Father and the Son. The sending of Jesus by the Father (Matthew 10:40; Mark 9:37; Luke 9:48; 10:16; Acts 3:20, 26; approx. 50 times in the Gospel of John) and the sending of the Holy Spirit by the Father and Jesus (John 14:26; 15:26; Luke 24:29) is designated by the same words "to send," "sending," etc. (Greek: *apostello* and *pempo* and related words, Latin: *missio*, etc.) (Schirrmacher T 2017:21).

When we read the New Testament, we find Jesus at the center of our mission. The mission is a divine command to the followers of Jesus (cf. Matthew 28:16-19). It was Jesus himself who authorized the sending of the disciples to all the corners of the world to teach and baptize all who accept the Word of God: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20: 21). Jesus is the author of the mission. In Matthew 28:19 Jesus said, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the

name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” The sending of the disciples to all nations comes from God as an instruction to the church. The church is instructed, not asked to do mission. Mission in a true sense is the work of God partnering with the church. God is the one sending the church to the world to do missions.

“In dogmatic, the Latin expression *missio* (sending out or mission) originally meant the Inner-Trinitarian sending process. It was coined in the 4th century A.D. by St. Augustine to denote the sending of the Son by the Father and the sending of the Spirit by the Father and the Son, or the proceeding of the Son and the Spirit from the Father. The term also plays a role in Orthodox theology. After St. Augustine, it also became a technical term used by St. Thomas Aquinas for Trinitarian doctrine, having to do with the eternal procession of the Son and the Spirit” (Schirrmacher 2017:33). When we speak of mission there always comes four questions in our minds, we will be looking at the agents of mission (who?), and also at the place (the where?) and the methods (the How?) of mission.

The agents are known as missionaries. These people were sent to other places to deliver the good news of Jesus Christ. “The term missionary was first used in its current sense for envoys of the Pope and the royal families of Spain and Portugal who were sent to convert Native Americans and Asians to Catholicism and to bring them under the sway of the European nations. Over the last two hundred years, the evangelical concept of mission has tended to be defined by people such as William Carey and Hudson Taylor and has focussed on the “Great Commission” of Matthew 28 (Arthur 2009:1).

The mission is so important to God that the church should take the instruction seriously. Some critics indicate that the terms mission and missionary do not exist or are found in the scripture, but we know that the Great Command is real. “It is often said that the terms mission and missionary are not found in Scripture, though these are just Latin equivalents of the Greek verb *apostelo* and its cognates. Historically, the Latin term mission tended to be used to describe the activities of the Triune God as described in John 20:21” (Arthur 2009:1).

The implications of Mission. God is the sender and being sent. God is the one who sends. God gives instructions on mission and at the same time, God is sent to the world to save his people. All these will be understood in the Trinity-God the Father,

Son, and Holy Spirit. “The genitive in *missio Dei* can, viewed grammatically, be seen as God being sent as well as God sending. Both aspects of *Missio Dei* can be found in biblical texts, including those using terms for sending and those describing the relationship between the persons of the Trinity and the relationship between Jesus and his church. The church becomes part of God’s sending” (Schirrmacher T 2017:20).

“Mission is God’s work. The mission is first and foremost to be regarded as *Missio Dei*, God’s mission on earth. Mission as stated by the International Missionary Council (IMC) has a Trinitarian base; just as the Father sent the Son into the world, and as the Father and the Son together sent the Holy Spirit, so Father, Son, and Holy Spirit send the Church into the world” (Kritzinger, Meiring, Saayman 1994:41).

It is obvious and true that mission is God’s Great Commission. The mission was never the activity of human beings, men or women of faith but it was God’s mission from the beginning. “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these disciples to obey all the commands I have given you” (Matthew 18:19-20).

People and the church are involved as they respond to the calling. The Mission does not exclude the *missio ecclesiae*, the mission of the church. God is inviting the church to his mission. The church’s mission is to “participate in the reconciling love of the triune God who reaches out to a world in Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit brings strangers and enemies into God’s new and abiding community” (Guder 2004:3).

Mission is the action of the Triune God since we can’t separate the Father from the Son, and the Holy Spirit from either the Father or the Son. “The triune God, Father-Son-Spirit, invites the church, us, to be his co-workers on earth, The Senior Partner invites a host of junior partners to join him in his venture. The *Missio Dei* avails itself of the mission *ecclesiae*, the mission of the Church. Mission one might argue is the reason for the existence of the Church” (Kritzinger, Meiring, Saayman 1994:42).

The mission is understood to be threefold, according to Gisbertus Voetius. Voetius was a Dutch theologian belonging to the seventeenth century. The first is the conversion of the gentiles. God’s command is that gentiles should be visited and

taught the Gospel. The church was sent to convert gentiles to Christianity. “Conversion has however been understood in very different ways by different groups of missionaries and at different times” (Kritzinger, Meiring, Saayman 1994:11). It has been God’s mission from the beginning. It is still today to save insiders and outsiders.

After they are taught and converted, churches must be planted in those areas. This is the second mission goal, the planting of the church. “Voetius considered church planting to be the intermediate goal of the mission between the immediate goal of conversion, and the ultimate goal of the glory and manifestation of God’s grace. The planting of a mission church will of course be determined by the self-understanding of the sending church, in other words by its ecclesiology” (Kritzinger, Meiring, Saayman 1994:4). When the church understands its task and mission. it will plant churches in other areas. The church that understands the mission will grow to different places.

There are three primary important issues for Christian mission in South Africa: the sacramental/Eucharistic, kerygmatic, and Pentecostal understanding.” (Kritzinger, Meiring, Saayman 1994:4). The planting of church goal can be subdivided into three methods as explained by Kritzinger, Meiring, Saayman (1994:4)

- The sacramental/Eucharistic understanding of church planting. This understanding is found especially in the Orthodox Churches, the Roman Catholic Church, and in some circles within the Anglican Church (generally referred to as High Church Anglicans) (Kritzinger, Meiring, Saayman 1994:4). This church will have the same characteristics of the existing church. It may look like a copy or even be a branch of the existing one. “In terms of the sacramental/Eucharistic model, therefore, mission should be defined in ecclesiological terms. The mission has as its goal the planting of the Catholic Church, and mission takes place primarily through the liturgical life of the church (Kritzinger, Meiring, Saayman 1994:5).
- The kerygmatic understanding of church planting. The kerygma or proclamation of the word is regarded as the second and most important model for church planting. The Word should be proclaimed accordingly and once it is proclaimed people will become the followers of Christ. “Because the right proclamation of the Word is the guiding principle here, all questions around the issue of

missionary church planting are decided by asking: what will best serve the proclamation of the Word?" (Kritzinger, Meiring, Saayman 1994:7).

- The third and last method of church planting is the Pentecostal understanding of church planting. "For Pentecostals the essence of the Christian church is not to be found in the Pentecost experience, revealing itself in the charismata (spiritual gifts) given at Pentecost to equip the church for its task to be witnessed to the ends of the earth and the end of time (Acts 1:8) (Kritzinger, Meiring, Saayman 1994:11). The church should be the witness to the world, witnessing the good news to all nations till the end of time.

The mission's third and last goal is the glory and manifestation of God's grace. When the church, individuals, and mission organizations participate in mission it is their way of responding to God's love. That is how they glorify and honor God since mission is God's command to his church. It is very important to realize that our involvement, as churches, as mission organizations, or as individuals, in the *missio Dei* is a response "to the miracle of God's graceful love" (Kritzinger, Meiring, Saayman 1994:1).

This response is how we react to God's instruction, our obedience to God's instruction, which is known as the Great Commission. This is the direct response to the undying love of Christ on the cross. 'For God so love the world that he gave his only Son, so whoever believes in him should not perish but have internal love" (John 3:16). Recognising the glory and manifestation of God's grace as our deepest missionary commitment and highest missionary goal therefore has very specific consequences for our involvement in the world.

2.7 THE RELATION BETWEEN FAITH AND RELIGION.

In this section I will explain the relationship between faith and religion. The role faith plays in Christian religion and African theology, the impact of faith on mission, and the missiology, as I am writing about the commitment of church members as the understanding of the *missio Dei*.

The Bible defines faith as “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1). Faith refers to the personal conviction and relationship with God. This means faith becomes the hand we receive what we don’t see now but hope for. Jesus in many healing miracles assured the sick that their faith has healed them. In Luke 17 verse 19, after He healed the ten men who had leprosy, only one returned and He said to him, “Rise and go, your faith has made you well.” Faith plays an important role in the whole belief system. We can’t talk about faith without talking about religion. Religion refers to the system and structure of what we believe. Religion is given with our creation as Calvin says all men are “incurably religious” (Institutes 1:3). “Being human means being religious. Religion is this built-in relationship of responsibility to God” (Spykman 1985:11).

2.7.1 Christian Theology understanding of Faith

The whole concept of faith is rooted in believing and trusting in God. “The Christian faith, based on the Bible, is a framework of beliefs and guidance for life that addresses most of the situations that mankind encounters in the course of the journey from birth to death” (Baham 2020:4). A person’s whole life in relation with faith can be described or defined in three positions.

(1) A stranger is when a human is lost and has no relationship with God. “Estranged from God, man becomes a stranger to himself, and sometimes turns himself inside out through psychoanalysis in distraught attempts to regain his lost identity” (Spykman 1985:47). Without God and faith in God, a human will lose their identity. Our faith in God reconnects us to God always and gives us identity. Our identity comes from God. In Genesis God speaks of creating us in his image and likeness. Our identity is only guaranteed when we have faith in God. As I have mentioned that faith plays an important role as it identifies a person, a person without faith is a stranger and needs

to reconnect with God to have an identity. This identity matter plays an important part as Linda Woodhead (2012) in her research article, explains five concepts of religion in detail, religion as culture, religion as identity, religion as relationship, religion as practice, and religion as power. Let's observe religion as identity and its three subheadings.

Religion as community creating and boundary forming. Religion forms and develops communities. "Religion is the place where a society holds up an image of itself, reaffirms its bonds, renews its emotional ties, marks its boundaries, sets itself apart and so brings itself into being" (Woodhead 2012:128).

Religion as identity claim. Religion claims its identity and its visibility. "The concept of 'religious identity' is often used not just for descriptive but for explanatory purposes as, for example, when it is said that the increasing visibility of religion in even supposedly secular Europe has to do with a reassertion of religious identity" (Woodhead 2012:128).

Religion as organizational belonging. Being religious is a matter of belonging. Belonging plays an important part in religion. "This is most evident in the way in which scholars preoccupied with measuring religion have taken levels of church membership, attendance, adherence, and affiliation as their primary indicators. Each of these criteria is slightly different: membership has to do with formal belonging to a church, attendance with the presence at worship services, adherence and affiliation with self-designated identity and commitment" (Woodhead 2012:129).

(2) Being a servant is when a human has a relationship with God. God created Adam and Eve and put them in the Garden of Eden. God is the creator who creates human beings with the purpose of knowing and to serve him. We cannot serve him if we don't know him. "At the heart of this double knowledge is the confession of God as sovereign Lord, Creator and Redeemer, and ourselves his servants, made by his glory and remade by his grace. From beginning to end, therefore, the virtue that graces man's life best is humility" (Spykman 1985:47). In the Old Testament God created Adam and made him a servant in the garden. He gave him power over all that was in the garden. In reality He made him overseer of the garden. This position he has forfeited when he fell in sin and left the garden because of the sin he committed. "But the Lord God called

to the man, where are you? He answered, I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid” (Genesis 3:9-10).

(3) Humans became special creatures to God, right from the beginning, right from creation, as (Spykman1985:48) puts it, “Man appears on the stage of early history as the crown-prince of all creation” The Bible teaches us that God created everything by the spoken word, He spoke and it happened. But the difference comes when he created Adam. “All creation bears the imprint of God's mind, but only man is his image. A singular honor! What privilege! What responsibility!” (Spykman 1985:47).

He created Adam and Eve with his hands to mark their importance. He even commanded and blessed them. “God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Genesis 1:28). We learn from the beginning that God is multiplication. “The head of the human race appears on the scene only after the world of earth and heaven, land and sea, plants and animals are ready to accommodate his style of living. Just as a house becomes a home after people move in, the world comes to its own only after man is ushered in” (Spykman 1985:48).

Even after the fall of humans, God continues to love humans in such a way that He gave his only Son, He is the God of second chance and unfailing love. “For God so love the world that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Since we were not born in sin and separated from God from our origin, it is God himself who reconciles us to himself and all creation by giving us his only begotten Son Jesus Christ. “In the original order of things, we were not separated from God, or from our fellow men, or from the world. By reason of his privileged status and rich gifts, a man was appointed as the liturgical spokesman for all creation in worshiping its Maker” (Spykman 1985:48).

2.7.2 Christian Reformed (Protestant) paradigm understanding of faith

These doctrinal statements clarify what Christians really believe. Christians believe two things:

(1) That God really exists, has a certain nature, and has a set of ideas about various things that He has disclosed to us. (2) That the things claimed in the first premise can be known to be true and need not be accepted by a blind, arbitrary act of privatized faith” (Moreland 2012:12a). Faith responds positively to God. When faith responds positively it bears fruits. The people and the communities become like Christ (Christ-like people). “The Genesis account relates how mankind was created in the image of God and the Christian faithful see the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as the means that God has used to repair the relationship-destroying aspects of sin in the world” (Baham 2020:5). Christians believe in the Bible. “Christians believe in the truth claims that are contained in the Bible and that knowledge is a large part of what empowers the boldness that marks the committed Christian” (Baham 2020:5).

Moreland (2012:13) states that “the possession of knowledge is crucial for life; knowledge provides the truth about reality along with the skilful ability to interact with reality.” Christians are promised everlasting life no matter the obstacles and challenges they face. “The Christian is promised that with an adherence to the structure of life that is related in Scripture and a consciousness of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, they will be empowered to live a life that rises above the trials of the world. It will not be free of tribulation” (Baham 2020:5). Christians will face problems, bad situations, and even persecution and death. Still, Christian life will conquer all. This is what the Apostle Paul calls the “fruit of the Spirit. . .love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22).

2.7.3 African Theology understating of faith

When we deal with faith in African Theology we need to understand and to be able to separate African Theology from African Traditional Religion. The African Theology in this study means African Christian Theology and therefore this question becomes important. “What is the role of faith in African lived Christianity and what roles do faith

and religious experiences play in the ways that people understand and explain social realities in Africa?” (Vähäkangas & Lauterbach 2021:1).

For many years Africans had their own original African Traditional Religion (ATR). Religion is a set of morals, principles, beliefs, rules, and rituals that guide people. ATR like other religions including Christianity exists within some beliefs. Christians believe that God protects everyone, we need to remain in his love. The emphasis is on the relationship between God and his people. Unlike Africans who believe that ancestors are responsible for their well-being. Bujo (1992:22) states that “the forebears protected the tribe and the clan against the forces of disintegration by their careful observance of the law of custom. The living must do the same if their society is not to come to ruin” (Bujo 1992: 22). The living should always strive to conduct themselves according to the patterns established by their ancestors. Faith speaks of the future since Christians are more concerned about the future. In Revelation 5, we are promised a new earth and heaven where weeping will cease. Africans are concerned about now and here. Mbiti (1969:1) puts it correctly, African peoples have no belief in progress. Africans believe that there is no world to come, indeed they are not worried about the future.

Faith is internal and individual, while Africans believe in the community. Christians believe in Jesus Christ who came to save everyone. John 3:16 says that whoever believes should have eternal life. Africans emphasize the blood relative ancestors. Ancestors are confined within the blood circle. They limit these relationships to the blood circle while Christians speak for everyone, all nations will be saved as long as they believe in Christ. Faith becomes personnel.

2.8 THE INFLUENCE OF WESTERN CHRISTIANITY ON AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

In this section, I will deal with the positive and negative on how Western Christianity has influenced African Christianity. Western Christianity was planted on the African continent for several reasons. Even though it was meant to evangelize Africans and to bring good news of salvation, today we understand it had other intentions and effects on Africans. The gospel came in the context of colonialism and oppression. It became tough for Africans to separate the two and that made Christianity fail to some

extent. “My conceptual framework is that African Christianity, planted in Africa in the context of colonialism and oppression, has only managed to effect a social adjustment of sorts. At a deeper level, Christianity has failed to inspire, reshape, or transform African social history and basic identity. A glance through history may unravel why Christianity even though widely accepted and followed in Africa yet has remained a stranger within the phenomenal world of African religiosity” (Galgalo 2012:7). This long African Christian history can be explained in three parts.

2.8.1 First phase of Christianity in Africa.

Christ was in Africa from the very early times of Christianity. It is exciting to learn that though Christianity came to Africa from Western Europe, Jesus was in Africa since the very early times. The birthplace of Jesus is located in Africa. Jesus was born in Africa. The first time Christianity reached Africa: “The first part pertains to the classical period of church history in North Africa. The Gospel according to Matthew shows that Christ was in Africa long before Christianity was known or followed by anyone. The ancient church in Egypt cherished the tradition that the Savior of the world was at one time a refugee in their land. Historical and Biblical accounts testify to Christianity’s contact with Africa from very early times—perhaps as early as the beginning of Christianity itself. The book of Acts (2:9-11) mentions Egyptians, Libyans, and Cyreneans, among the crowd that heard the first Pentecost sermon” (Galgalo 2012:7).

This shows that Christianity was long in Africa even before it went to Europe. Even though Africa was evangelized long before Europe it was not the whole of Africa. “Indeed most of these parts were evangelized most likely long before Europe ever heard of the Gospel. John Parratt observes that in the early days of Christianity: Christian Africa looked across at pagan Europe and for centuries it was Africa that was the seedbed of Christian theology. Towards the end of the second century, the North African church entered the light of Christian history with thinkers such as Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine, while East Egypt produced its Origen, Clement, and Athanasius. Most of our Christian doctrines were formulated by these early African theologians, and, one might argue, most of the early heresies had their origins here too” (Galgalo 2012: 9). This never reach the whole of Africa since it only ended in North Africa. “Little was known of the rest of Africa at this time. The Christianity of Egypt and North Africa that flourished for over 600 years, reached its climax, waned

and died a gradual death under massive Arabization and Islamization of these regions, and not least due to internal Christian conflicts, schisms, and heresies, which greatly weakened the Church” (Galgalo 2012: 9).

2.8.2 Second Phase of Christianity in Africa

“The second phase of Christianity in Africa goes back to the 15th century. It is associated with the coming of the Portuguese who colonized parts of East Coast of Africa, West Coast and Central parts of Africa” (Galgalo 2012: 9). The Portuguese did mission work and planted the Gospel in the context of subjugation and inequality and it did not last long. “The resultant Portuguese African Christianity, which was planted in the context of subjugation and exploitation of the conquered peoples, lasted only for about 200 years” (Galgalo 2012:9). The Bakongo Christians in the Democratic Republic of Congo ended up losing all ties with Christianity. They also lost all the symbols of Christianity, including sacraments. “It is puzzling that the Bakongo Christians gradually abandoned all Christian practices including such key Christian rituals as baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and regular worship meetings” (Galgalo 2012:9).

2.8.3 Third phase of Christianity in Africa.

“The third phase, which is the present phase of African Christianity, is now about 200 years old. This phase of Christianity was mainly established from the 19th century onwards through the work of European and American missionaries” (Galgalo 2012:11). Africa is diverse when coming to religion. Today Africa is multicultural as Sanni (2016:3) puts it correctly, “Africa is multicultural, and many of the sites of that multiculturalism have been constructed by both imported and indigenous religions.” There are imported religions, these are those religions that infiltrated African societies through their interactions with other continents.

2.8.4 Christianity in South Africa

Christianity in South Africa can be dated to the arrival of Europeans in the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa in 1652. The Dutch settlers brought with them the Dutch Reformed faith to South Africa. The first South African church was named the Groote

Kerk (Great church) in Cape Town. Later on in history, Christianity became dominant in South Africa during the time of apartheid.

“In Southern Africa, there was a corresponding movement northwards, from the Cape over the high veld, beyond the great rivers, to the interior of Africa. The Great Trek the Cape towards the north is the classical illustration of this move, that exodus of sturdy Boers, supposedly a Chosen People, struggling along from the rich wheat, wine, and cattle farms in the south over the veld and the mountains, beyond the Orange and Drakensberg” (Sundkler & Steed 2000:323). The history of South African Christianity is so rich, and vast and is over 400 years old. The problem is that South African Christian History is intertwined with South African History. “The dominant role of the Christian religion in the state of relationships among religions in South Africa was definitively influenced by the way in which Christianity was introduced to this country. Christian mission came to South Africa firmly entangled with western colonialism” (Saayman 2015:38). It can be divided into two parts according to Gerald Pillay (1995). During the first 150 years, Pillay says “that despite the presence of other Christian denominations and, indeed, other religions, there existed a state church” (Pillay 1995:80).

Part 1:1652 -1994

There are three movements in South Africa which play an important role in the church history of South Africa. The Great Trek from the Cape towards the North. The second movement as Sundkler & Steed (2000:323) says, “movement north was less far-reaching but not less dramatic and demanding for the individuals and group concerns.” It is consisted of the “Coloured” population, sporadically withdrawing from the Cape towards the Vaal and the Orange rivers. It resulted in the formation of a Christian Griqua republic which provided a key to the process and patterns of Christianisation of some of the leading Bantu-speaking peoples (Sundkler & Steed 2000:323). The third was the cataclysmic refugee movement. It begins at Natal and ends just next to Lake Victoria. This was the beginning of Christianity in South Africa.

During this time two things happened: a) the refugee upheaval made Africans prone to look for security or a shield as the missionary presence may provide that security. b) Africans met the Christian message. “As corporate groups they became prepared to accept the missionaries’ leadership and the security of the mission stations in the

Eastern Cape, on the Orange Free State high veld, in Botswana, the Zambezi, and Lake Malawi. The Gospel was seen as help for the encounter on the frontiers of life and death” (Sundkler & Steed 2000:323).

During this time, the London Missionary Society (LMS) was important in evangelizing the Africans. “Throughout the early nineteenth century, the LMS shaped missionary endeavour by its independent policy which stimulated Indigenous responsibility and activity” (Sundkler & Steed 2000:334). In 1819 John Philip came to South Africa to work for the London Missionary Society in Cape Town. Sundkler & Steed (2000:334) state that “he represented par excellence the missionary statesman on the spot, and carried out his duties by informing the London headquarters of developments.” Most of these foreign churches worked with the LMS until they sent their missionaries to work for individual churches. Christianity was growing fast at that time.

The missionaries played a vital role in South Africa. Some brought schools, some brought hospitals. Missionaries played a significant role in African initiatives in the Christianization process. Pentecostals came only later to South Africa. In 1908, missionaries arrived in South Africa from William Seymour's Azusa Street mission. Some of these missionaries organized a group that would eventually grow to become a part of the Assemblies of God.

The church was hit by a terrible blow in 1948 when the National Party won elections and enforced its apartheid policies. This affected the church a lot. “In 1948 the Nationalist Party came into power and very soon started to enforce its policy of apartheid on the whole of the country, including the churches. It cannot be said that there was no tolerance of different faith convictions in the country, but all along the government was controlling the churches through its policies. In many cases Afrikaans speaking churches not only subscribed to the policies of the government but also encouraged them” (Coertzen 2008:354).

The National Party government introduced the policies of segregation. Mainline churches were the only churches recognized in South Africa. The white Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) had very good relations with the state right from 1652 in such a way that it became the state church. “In the years following 1948, the white DRC legitimized the policies of apartheid and articulated a civil religion. Separate development under the leadership of God's chosen instrument – the Afrikaner people

– was the divine plan of South Africa. The segregated nature of the Reformed Churches epitomized this mind-set. In addition to the white churches, there was the Sending Kerk (Mission Church) for "Coloureds," the Kerk van Afrika for Africans and the small Indian Reformed Church. These so-called "Daughter Churches" were essentially subservient to the "Mother Church," dominated by predikante (pastors) who were seconded by the major white church, the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK), and financially dependent" (Walshe 1987:300).

There was no freedom of religion and only mainline churches were recognized by the state. This development was instrumental to the formation and birth of both African Independent Churches and the introduction of Liberation theology in South Africa. This was the mechanism to deal with the problems or to fight against apartheid. Pillay (1995:86) says that, "By 1980 the African independent churches had overtaken all the established churches in size and growth rate."

Among the white English-speaking churches there was also not much support since there was much segregation from the state. Few ministers were outspoken against this monster called apartheid. "While the churches were essentially quiescent, it is important to recognize that there were a few outspoken white Christians who actively opposed apartheid and identified with the black struggle, the individuals of the calibre of Rev. Trevor Huddleston, Rev. Michael, and Archbishop Joost de Blank. In essence, they condemned apartheid for dividing the human community, legally segregating Christians and thus dismembering the Body of Christ" (Walshe 1987:301).

Liberation Theology was introduced to curb or fight the injustices of apartheid. Over a decade, the evolution of this theology can be seen in a variety of church statements, theological writings, and activist Christian leadership. This movement bore fruit in the fight against apartheid. One of the proponents of Liberation in South Africa is Rev. Allan Boesak. He was the Moderator of the Sendingkerk and President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WRC). "He continues to play a major role in ecumenical circles and within black Reformed churches. Inspired in part by his leadership, Churches have freed themselves from the psychological control of the NGK. The old terminology of "Mother" and "Daughter" churches was sloughed off and all three reformed black churches joined the SACC" (Walshe 1987:306).

In conclusion, it can be said that from 1652 until 1994, the state was predominantly controlled by the church. The church should be blamed for the relationship between church and state in South Africa since the church promoted and supported state-imposed segregation.

Part 2:1994 till now

1994 was the year of democratic elections in South Africa for the first time. All these years Blacks never got the chance to put their wish or desires on the ballot paper. After 1994 with the new Constitution, a new era about freedom of religion came into existence in South Africa.

Black South Africans were free at last. They were politically free and this included freedom of religion. Now they can choose who and how they want to worship. “Freedom of religion became a constitutionally guaranteed right. The question is what that means and how freedom of religion should be understood and managed in the new South Africa” (Coertzen 2008:358).

After 1994 the truth about the statistics of Christians in South Africa was unmasked. You will remember previously Christianity was the majority in South Africa and maybe it was that only Christianity was recognised by the state. Statistics show that there is a majority religion in South Africa – the Christian religion. However, within the Christian religion, there is no majority denomination – they are all minority denominations. At the same time, none of the other religions in South Africa can claim to be a majority religion – quite the contrary! With regard to religions and religious denominations, there are no majorities in South Africa – they are all minorities (*South African Christian Handbook* 2005-2006:28-34).

Today South Africa is multi-denominational. South Africa is free at last. There is a freedom of religion. Coertzen (2008:362) puts it, “For Christians, the deepest foundation for freedom is that God created man in His image with the capability to choose to serve God. Man lost this freedom when he chose to follow the way of evil instead of the way of God. In Jesus Christ, the freedom of those who believe in Him was restored. This is a freedom that is not dependent on any constitutional guarantee. This is one reason why Christianity was able to endure through many centuries and many regimes without having a constitutionally guaranteed right to freedom of religion. Where there is a constitutional guarantee for freedom of religion, it enhances the

freedom that Christians have in Christ and offers Christians the opportunity to publicly proclaim their faith identity in Christ without any fear of prosecution or discrimination.” Christianity is still the majority in South Africa according to Statistics South Africa.

Table 10

Religion	Total
Christianity	43423717
Islam	892685
Traditional African Religion (e.g. ancestral; tribal; animism, etc)	2454887
Hinduism	561268
Buddhism	24808
Baha'i	6881
Judaism	49470
Atheism	52598
Agnosticism	32944
No religious affiliation/belief	5964892
Other	1482210

Table 10: Religion Statistics in South Africa (Community Survey 2016)

2.9 THE RELATION BETWEEN CULTURE AND RELIGION

The relation between culture and religion is an old debate that still needs discussion and it shows that it is not an easy task since culture and religion is interwoven. Religion creates culture “Religion is, thus, expressed and clothed in cultural guise. Comprehending religion then implies studying human culture. The reciprocal interaction between culture and religion must be recognized: religion is determined by culture, but religion also influences culture. The fate of religion and culture is, thus, interwoven” (Beyers 2017:2).

Religion can be defined as the way people are living. “Religion is commonly understood in its purer sense— as a way of life” (Kakoma 2005:9). Religion is about how people or a nation live among themselves and how they relate to nature. Religion

is intertwined not only with everyday activities but also with ordinary places and things. It is about nature-human relationships. Taylor puts it correctly that, “there has been much debate about the origin, development, definition, and utility of the word religion. A primer follows on some major ways in which this term (and its adjectival and adverbial forms) has been understood and contested, accompanied by my conclusion that the term can bear value for our inquiry into nature-human relationships” (Taylor 2007:9).

It is not easy and simple to define religion. Woodhead states, “We may agree that ‘religion’ is a word like ‘economy’ or ‘society’ which does not capture the essence of some ‘thing’, and cannot be captured in a single definition. We may also agree that some definitions (for example, those that identify religion with a set of beliefs) are inadequate. But we also know that definitions of religion are regularly used in practice, for good and ill” (Woodhead 2009:7).

There is a very strong relationship between Culture and religion. Culture has multiple meanings as Platovnjak (2017:118) says that, in general, it signifies everything that people use to perfect and develop their diverse abilities of the spirit and the body. In the broadest sense, it is the way of human life. In the description of culture, the following aspects are fundamental: 1) Culture is a human creation and horizon, and it is the embodiment of its freedom and transcendence (spirituality). 2) Culture is inherited.

In her article: *5 Concepts of Religion*, Woodhead (2011) says that religion as culture as she says is “one of the most popular conceptions of religion today if one takes as evidence not only academic work but the discourse of politicians, legal professionals, journalists, and everyday talk is of religion as belief. On this account, being religious has to do with believing certain things, which amounts to subscribing to certain propositions and accepting certain doctrines. Sometimes the content of belief is further specified in definitions of religion: for example, belief in the existence of supernatural beings or forces” (Woodhead 2011:123).

Geertz also goes further than Berger in stressing the emotional as well as intellectual dimensions and impacts of culture. As he puts it in his famous definition of religion, it is: ‘(1) a system of symbols (2) which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men (3) by formulating conceptions of a general

order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic' (Geertz 1971:4). Alos compare Woodhead (2011: 124).

2.10 SPIRITUALITY

This section will deal with Christianity and African Christianity's understanding of Spirituality. "The word spirituality was first used within Christianity. Based on the Bible, especially the teachings of Paul (e.g. 1 Cor. 2: 14-15), spirituality means living in and through the Spirit of God" (Platovnjak 2017:118). Spirituality does not necessarily mean being Christian; it simply means saying what you believe. So, spirituality is a universal phenomenon outside Christianity. Today the word spirituality is no longer contained within Christianity. There are now new meanings and understandings of spirituality as Platovnjak (2017:118) says, "Many people understand "spirituality" or references to "spiritual" in a dualistic sense, where something contrary to the substance or material, physical or the world is considered something "immaterial"."

"Today many prefer to use the term "spirituality" rather than religion, as the former is broader, less concrete, and less linked to an institution. Others feel that spirituality and spirituality is the heart of religion, the real center, which is characterized, in particular, by religious and mystical experience" (Platovnjak 2017:118). Nolan (1982:7) shares an interesting concept of spirituality. He says: "The Spiritual life is the whole of one's life insofar as it is motivated and determined by the Holy Spirit, the spirit of Jesus". Nolan then defines Spirituality within the borders of Christianity. "The theme of Spirituality has become a common word in modern life. Current interest in spirituality is evident both at popular and scholarly levels. This theme is heard from radio and television. These days it is also shared in seminars, conferences, universities, classes, course work, and curricula" (Masango 2006:932).

2.10.1 Christian understanding of Spirituality

Waaajman (2007) identifies twelve disciplines related to spirituality., "Each of these disciplines define the phenomenon from its own perspective and develops specific research strategies" (Waaajman 2007:3).

The relationship between theology and spirituality has an eventful history. The Bible and spirituality were interconnected before the rise of theology as discipline, dogma, and morality. From the 12th century onwards, spirituality has been marginalized within the whole of theology, and has many times even been excluded (Waaijman 2007:5).

The study of religion has significantly contributed to helping spirituality and mysticism move away from the atmosphere of prejudice which shaped the climate of the late 19th century. The descriptive and comparative mentality which marks this discipline showed that spirituality and mysticism are a constant element in religion (Waaijman 2007:14).

Philosophy, in itself, is a network of disciplines (metaphysics, logic, epistemology, theory of knowledge, history of philosophy, ethics, practical philosophy, aesthetics, cosmology, etc.), and is intimately related to spirituality (Waaijman 2007:22).

All spiritualities have their traditions, whether transmitted orally or in writing: sacred scriptures, ritual texts, rules, spiritual biographies, mystical texts, spiritual writings, treatises, and so forth. As a rule, these texts are gathered in collections and in places treated with special care and respect (Waaijman 2007:31).

Spirituality is a historical phenomenon and as such object of historical research. Is about the history of spirituality. Entering this field of research, we are confronted by a lot of questions. “In whose interests is the history contracted?” (Waaijman 2007:40). Spirituality is not an island therefore it cannot be studied as a standalone. Waaijman (2007:40) says, “One of the most important insights in the history of spirituality was the growing awareness that the historical context itself belongs to lived spirituality. Spirituality does not exist on some ideal plane above and beyond history, as a pure form. Spirituality is dialectically interwoven with the cultural context, in tension between continuity and discontinuity.

The anthropological approach is the most recent development in the field (of academic spirituality) and is most clearly influenced by postmodernity, both cultural and educational. This approach is rooted in the recognition that spirituality is an anthropological constant, a constitutive dimension of the humanum (Waaijman 2007:48).

In many schools of psychology, cooperation and respect have become intense interest, and sometimes overwhelming love. “The current interest from the perspective of psychology is so intense that psychology may well become the authoritative discipline in the study of spirituality on the basis of the sheer quantity of studies and practitioners who are rapidly incorporating spirituality in their research and therapeutic work” (Waaijman, 2007:55).

Spirituality, sociology (of religion), and social sciences in general have naturally become companions. In the last half of the twentieth century, the awareness that spirituality is socio-culturally embedded and that community belongs to the heart of spirituality, has opened the minds for the sociology of spirituality (Waaijman 2007:64).

From the 1980s one may observe a worldwide scholarly interest in the field of spirituality and education, mainly propelled by the policymakers in the area of education, as can be illustrated by the Education Acts of 1944 and 1988 in the United Kingdom. In a sense, the field of research education and spirituality was the self-imposed compulsion to arrive at a universal definition of spirituality, avoiding every critic of religious and secularized groups (Waaijman 2007:7).

This was not a growing concept or phenomenon since 1930 but later developed to be known as workplace management. “Since Vatican II, the attention to this area is growing. But it is only in the last decades that from the realm of business and management itself a heightened attention for workplace spirituality can be observed. This growth has been explained from different perspectives: social and business changes causing turmoil, which spurs individuals to seek spiritual solutions to the consequent tensions; profound changes in values globally; and spiritual changes in connection with growing interest in world spirituality” (Waaijman 2007:80).

In the last decades, physicians, nurses, and other healthcare professionals explored the spiritual aspects of care. They reflected the theoretical implications of the interdisciplinarity of spirituality and health care (medicine). The effects of spirituality on patients are empirically investigated (Waaijman 2007:88).

Christian Spirituality should be taken or understood as part of the holistic, including natural science. “Spirituality and science are connected by the structure of the search process, based on the refusal to be bound by images or models, propelled solely by a passion for truth” (Waaijman 2007:95).

2.10.2 African understanding of Spirituality

“African spirituality is defined as breath that which animates you, is drawn from the ancient ancestors and the Kemites from Egypt who called spirit that which lived before you” (Marumo, Chakale 2019:11698). “There is a paradox at the heart of African Christianity. It is vibrant and growing but at the same time shallow and superficial. It struggles with nominalism, syncretism, increasing secularism, and the ever-changing social and political realities and the challenges of relevance that come with such changes” (Galgalo 2012:5).

Spirituality cannot be an island or stand on its own, it always stands on a certain culture. “Spirituality is always culturally formed and informed. The formation of spirituality is always cultural-contextual. African spirituality involves deeper human values, attitudes, beliefs, and practices, based on various African worldviews” (Marumo, Chakale 2019:11697).

Africans believe that there are two realms of the universe and these realms are interconnected to each other, whatever happens to this realm will affect the other realm either positively or negatively. The physical is connected to the spiritual. They cannot be separated. “There are two aspects to the created universe; the physical and spiritual. The spiritual realm is also stratified into various spaces or abodes those of departed ancestors, spirits (deities) and that of the penultimate source of Creation of all things in existence” (Marumo, Chakale 2019:11697). African spirituality connects one person to the physical life where things are visible and the other to the higher sphere where things are not visible (spiritual). In African spirituality, according to Adofo (2016:1), there are six components that one needs to take into consideration, which include:

Nature of existence. Africans believe that the universe or the world is two aspects of the physical and the spiritual realms. These two aspects of the realms include the living and the dead spirits — those we can see with our eyes and the invisible spirits of the departed. The dead still play an important role in their lives even though invisible. The dead are still active and have an impact on their lives. “These spaces include those of departed ancestors, spirits (deities), and that of the penultimate source of creation of all things in existence” (Adofo 2016:2).

Order and balance. Africans believe that there is order and balance between evil and good. They believe there cannot be good without evil, according to Adofo, Africans believe that “There can be no ‘good’ without ‘bad’, and the ‘bad’ is not to be dispelled entirely per se, but rather managed and utilized as a source of learning to inform future actions and attitudes” (Adofo 2016:2). The bad will come for people to learn, from this experience of pain and loss human beings will learn something and improve their lives. As an example, we can think of Covid-19. During this period many people died and left many orphans, but it has improved our way of doing things, such as social distancing which shows that we need it not only now but forever. Social distance should become a way of life to prevent the spread of future deceases.

The interconnectedness of things. Africans believe all things are connected and therefore have an impact on each other. “There are cause and effect relationships to be found in all experiences, acts and thoughts, and as such what we will in the mind is manifested in the flesh” (Adofo 2016:3). These explain the reason why Africans believe in the veneration of the ancestors and performing rituals. They think that will bring harmony to individuals, communities, and the cosmos. The concept is also evident in Ubuntu; I am because of you. That is how deep the understanding of connect-ness is: no human is an island.

Social and Spiritual Hierarchy. Africans believe in Hierarchy. Hierarchy keeps order and harmony. Where there is no order there is no peace. Africans believe in peace. Africans believe in respect. “The concept of hierarchy and authority come into play whenever they feel the person to be higher in position. For example, when one connects the above process with the concept of induna (spokesperson) or spiritual mediator; one will begin to understand the world of communication among African people” (Masango 2006:935).

Hierarchy commands respect and discipline. “It is held that the structure of the social organization is a reflection of the same hierarchical organization in the spiritual realm. The king is thus, the symbolic representation of the Creator/ ‘God’ and the officials in court are the various spirits (of nature, cosmic, universal) that act as the ‘intermediaries’ who officiate matters between the masses and the king, while upholding particular responsibilities according to the duties of their office or powers imbued” (Adofo 2016:3).

Africans believe in individual responsibilities, and though they believe in unity they always emphasize that individuals have responsibilities. “So, for example, whilst there is an official responsible for overseeing crop growth, another for maintaining discipline within the standing army, and so on, in a similar manner there are different deities with various abilities or powers; for healing, agricultural work, fishing and the like (Adofo 2016:4). This understanding further explains why Africans cannot go straight to the Creator because this will be disrespectful and chaotic in the Hierarchy. They will go through ancestors who will contact the creator on their behalf.

Cyclical Existence: Africans believe in cyclical existence and nothing is ever lost. When people die they are never lost. They are only lost in our eyes but now in that realm where they will greatly influence us and the cosmos. “Instead, it is transformed into another form or function such that existence continuously replenishes itself” (Adofo 2016:5).

2.10.3 Africans' understanding of Reincarnation?

“It is derived from Latin and literally means “to take on the flesh again,” in other words, “to take on the fleshy (physical) body” (Nagaraj, Nanjegowda, Purushothama (2013: 55-171). This is an old discussion that still exists today. The subject was discussed in India and Greece from the 6th century BC. “Discussion of the subject appears in the philosophical traditions of India and Greece from about the 6th century BC. What exactly is reincarnation? It simply means that we leave one life and go into another; it is all for the sole purpose of soul development and spiritual growth” (Nagaraj, Nanjegowda, Purushothama 2013:55).

“Africans believe in reincarnation, but the African idea is not based on a written text; it is based on the belief that human beings live in a cycle, that things go around and come around” (Adofo 2016:5). They believe that humans live in a cycle. People will go back to the another form. Though they are dead according to Africans, they are still alive and very active in such a way that they will still have power and control over our lives. “The notion is that one is provided with as many opportunities as necessary until they can attain their divine purpose for the benefit of self and all” (Adofo 2016:5). The notion of hell and sin is absent from an African understanding, the Creator operates without judgement and condemnation.

Africans believe that the Creator's spirit is in every creation. Rocks, trees, rivers, and mountains have this 'quintessential essence' (soul) of the Creator contained within it. "In the African worldview, all things in creation have the quintessential essence (spirit) of the Creator contained within it, whether animate or inanimate; an extension of the aforementioned notion of the 'interconnectedness of things' (Adofo 2016:6). This explains why some trees or rocks are deemed worthy of veneration by Africans because it is a sign of respect towards that spirit of the Supreme Being within it.

"Therefore, communication with the Creator can be virtually through all things" (Adofo 2016:6). In that Social and Spiritual Hierarchy human lives play a vital role. The human life is appreciated and respected because, as Adofo puts it, "The human body is a holding vessel for the spirit (and consciousness) of the Creator, and the ultimate aim is to seek reunification with it, which is achieved by living an exemplary life that affords one the status of 'Ancestor' upon death" (Adofo 2016:6).

Not everyone becomes an ancestor. Only those who had lived well and lived exemplary lives qualify to be ancestors. The notion is likely to Christianity that those who believe in Christ and live according to the word will have eternal life and those who did reject the word will forever be condemned. "Generally speaking, not everybody becomes an ancestor in the true African life. For example, those who live bad lives can never be considered ancestors when they die. In Africa, (as mentioned before) death does not represent the end of human existence, but rather a change in its status. The notion of death creates a solution of continuity between the living and the dead – a solution marked by the differences on the scale between the "creditors" (the dead) and those "debtors" (their heirs)" (Masango 2006: 935).

2.10.4 The Influence of African Traditional Religion on African Christianity

African Christians are first and foremost Africans and then they become Christians. African Christianity is deeply rooted in the African religion. Even African Christians themselves sometimes can't draw the line between African Religion and African Christianity. They still operate within African Religion. This means sometimes African Christianity will find its fulfilment in African religious interpretation. "A simple observation reveals that the African person lives in a world referenced at every point by religious meaning, where every happening finds a spiritual explanation. It is

puzzling that although Christianity is widely followed, yet it often comes a poor second to the African Traditional Religion — at least with regard to being a source for providing such explanations even spiritual anchor or solid reference point” (Galgalo 2012:6).

African Christianity is still stuck in African traditional religious beliefs in such a way that Christians’ beliefs are embedded in African spiritual beliefs. I can say they understand the Bible through African traditional beliefs, which is like seeing something through the lens of something. African Christians still largely operate in the African traditional religious mind-set. It is only when conflicts or competition of sorts arise, that we can tell with certainty where true loyalty of the African adherent lies. In Africa, Christianity is for most part a religion of convenience, social identity, a way to be, and not necessarily a spiritual home and certainly not the only spiritual home for most professing Christians (Galgalo 2012:6).

African traditional religion has had a significant effect on African Christianity. And that is why there are so many rituals for African Christians. This includes mourning, cleansing, burial rites, and many more rituals. I am tempted to say these rituals are now converted and are now part and parcel of African Christianity, as they also form part of the rituals performed by members of the MRCC. They derived from the African traditional religion. “. It is true that most African Christians would, as Benezet Bujo observes, “Return to the traditional practices for comfort in times of crisis,” and we may add, that they do so to find spiritual security and meaning in traditional religious beliefs and practices” (Bujo 1992:31).

To look at the origins of African theology I see it fit that we should first identify African theology. What is African theology? What does it stand for? “Identity” is a popular term at present, but not always clearly used; at the same time, its prominence may indicate a growing interest in and concern about the topic. Yet how identity is construed is crucial: is it defined in ways that lead to separation, isolation, radicalism, or violence, or is it defined in ways that welcome others and treat the “outsider” with respect? From a Christian theological perspective too, identity is an important concept (Tarus & Lowery 2017:305).

Identifying someone means knowing the individual and personal traits of someone and the community he or she comes from. Africans believe in Ubuntu, “I am because we are”. Africans believe in a community not individualistic. This relates to the actions of

human beings to other human beings, and it has to do with how they regard other people and how they see themselves within their intimate relationships within the broader community (Tutu 2007:3). No person is an island, to know the person you have to know those that are close, related and associates.

It also includes to know the traits of the group one is from. “Several words capture the importance of community in Africa. The most prominent is the word “ubuntu,” which designates human beings as individuals-in-community. The term ubuntu is a Bantu, or more specifically, Nguni noun describing the essence of being human. Other synonyms of ubuntu include *botho* in Setswana and Sesotho, *utu* in Swahili, and *unhu* in Shona” (Tarus & Lowery 2017: 306).

2.10.5 African Theologian's views

John Samuel Mbiti (1931-2019) is known and hailed as “the father of modern African Theology”. He was the most productive leading and respected African scholar of our time. “Mbiti’s understanding of African identity and community is derived from and rooted in Africa’s heritage” (Tarus & Lowery 2017:306). Mbiti believed that African theology originated in African heritage, culture, and religiosity. He never separated or divorced African theology from African culture and heritage. “Mbiti is a strong proponent of African theology, deeply established in African heritage, culture, and religiosity. His major aim, throughout his varied publications, is to assert a form of Christianity that is “indigenous,” “traditional,” and “African,” for it is that form of Christianity, according to him, that “holds the greatest potentialities of meeting the dilemmas and challenges of modern Africa” (Tarus & Lowery 2017: 311).

Mbiti rejects other ideological proposals, “In *The Search for New Values, Identity, and Security*, Mbiti critiques and rejects several ideological proposals such as Négritude, African Personality, African Unity, and Pan-Africanism as all insufficient to meet the needs of indigenous Africans (Tarus & Lowery 2017: 311). Négritude: the affirmation or consciousness of the value of black or African culture and identity African Personalities are a holistic way to evaluate human behaviour from an African worldview. African Unity and Pan-African is the idea that people of African descent have common interests and should be unified Mbiti argues that Africans value the corporate identity more than the individual identity. “Mbiti also argues that although

Africans value individual identity, the corporate (communal) identity surpasses the individual identity” (Tarus & Lowery 2017:311).

The community is the sole custodian of traditional beliefs not the individual. The individual will accept this role of beliefs and assert to them by the virtue of being a member of community. “In this view, there is no purely private faith” (Tarus & Lowery 2017:311). Everyone through participation in the beliefs of that community becomes a bona fide member. This belief is not written but handed over to the next generations and they exist in the hearts of individuals. The problem here is, why does the sense of community in the MRCC not contribute to the continuation of membership from one generation to the next. I suspect that due to the loss of a sense of community, people no longer feel they belong within the MRCC. This is not a loss of faith, but a loss of the sense of belonging.

“Mbiti also argues that African life is centred on community” (Tarus & Lowery 2017:311). There is no individualism but togetherness. Africans value togetherness. The motion, “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.” Is the true expression of who Africans are? For Mbiti, community manifests itself with reference to blood and marital kinship, land, tribal affiliation, clan roots, ritual celebrations, rites of passage and death, and shared oppression and suffering (Tarus & Lowery 2017: 311). The community has both the vertical and horizontal dimensions. The vertical is the community relationship with the Supreme Being and spirit world, while the horizontal is for relationships between individuals, including the departed and the unborn.

Mbiti believes that African Traditional Religion and Christianity do not contradict at all and sing from the same hymn book. Mbiti also contends that “the two religions [ATR and Christianity] speak a largely common language and undergird each other” and Jesus’s message “does not contravene the efforts of [African] traditional religion” (Tarus & Lowery 2017:313).

Mbiti believes Christianity is much like an African religion. “He urges that Christianity is not foreign to the African soil. Then he substantiates this argument by citing many martyrs on the continent who voluntarily sacrificed for their faith (Mbaya & Cezula 2019:425). According to Mbiti ATR is preparatory to Christianity. Mbiti’s choice for the *praeparatio evangelica* model in a selective manner is by discriminating between

elements in ATR that are affirmed in the Christian religion and others that are not (Mbaya & Cezula 2019:425). As much as Oduyoye pays attention to the African religio-culture heritage, she uses the African religio-cultural elements to root Christianity in the African context and maintains that Christ should become domesticated in Africa (Oduyoye 1986a:64). Oduyoye rejects the notion of *praeparatio evangelica* to have a negative view of African culture. This notion as the outcome of the Christocentric tendency of Christianity, ignores the revelation of a God outside Christianity and reduces ATR to idolatry (Oduyoye 1986a:164). Compare in this regard Maluleke (1996a:16).

Mbiti sees African Traditional Religion as one integrated unit. African life, cultures, and beliefs exist as an integrated system. In contrast to the Western worldview, where life is dissected and compartmentalised, Mbiti shows the holistic character of African cultures: the unity between religion and life rather than the partitioning of the two (Mbaya & Cezula 2019:425).

In this regard, for Mbiti, the rise of the African Indigenous Churches seemed to hold promise for the African missionary churches, which would engage with African cultures much the same way as these churches (Mbaya & Cezula 2019:426). Mbiti is not an advocate of indigenization or inculturation. In his view, "To speak of indigenization of Christianity is to give the impression that Christianity is already a commodity which has to be planted in a local area. Of course, this has been the assumption by many missionaries and local theologians. I do not accept any more." (Mbaya & Cezula 2019:427). Mbiti's conception of salvation in African Christianity is that salvation is wholeness. "Man is created as a physical and spiritual being. He needs to be saved both physically and Spiritually" (Adelakun 2011:28). He understands that all religions agree with salvation as they all promise the restoration of humans.

Mbiti believes the missionaries did not preach salvation's true or whole meaning, but the Africans discovered that. Mbiti makes it clear that Africans discovered for themselves from the Bible the true meaning of salvation which their white missionaries never told them (Adelakun 2011:29). Mbiti thinks that two worlds informed theology. Mbiti accepts Jesus as the saviour. Mbiti sees Jesus as the Healer. In addition to the belief that Jesus can save people from their sins, African Christians see Jesus' healing and other miracles as part of his salvation works (Adelakun 2011:31).

Mbiti sees sin as a disruption of a good order. Mbiti (1991:200) argues that African people recognize social order and peace as essential and sacred. Any disruption of these would therefore be regarded as sin, and would thereby be punishable. Sin is the result of the contamination of evil. Again, this description may be too simplistic. Individual human guilt is usually acknowledged in African worldviews and moral philosophy.

Kwame Bediako (1945-2008) grew up in Accra, Ghana. “He did graduate studies in France where he completed masters and doctoral degrees at the University of Bordeaux, and during this time experienced a radical conversion from atheism to Christianity” (Tarus & Lowery 2017:311). In his work *Theology and Identity* Bediako wrestled with the question of whether when accepting Christianity Africans should renounce their own culture and tradition. “He contends that for second-century theologians and modern theologians in Africa, identity is a theological issue that touches on fundamental aspects of Christianity” (Tarus & Lowery 2017:313).

Bediako believes that African cultures are identical to those of the Christian gospel regarding the communal or community element. “Bediako was continually exploring the relationship of African cultural identities with the Christian gospel and Christian identity” (Tarus & Lowery 2017:313). “Bediako defended the need for Christians to thoroughly contextualize their faith, and insisted that the Gospel was by its very nature both universal and particular: it was intended to be “translated” into each context in which it found itself, hence Bediako’s choice of an indigenization approach in his theology” (Tarus & Lowery 2017:313).

Bediako believes that Christian identity addresses a cultural and religious aspect of the person. “More specifically, this requires that the Christian identity address cultural and religious aspects of a person’s background (their community of origin): Christianity meets people in their context and communities, and transforms them within and from that setting” (Tarus & Lowery 2017:313).

He believes that cultural identities that are opposed to Christ should be rejected but those in support of Christ should be allowed. When discussing Christian communal identity, he believes that irrespective of being Africans, African Christians are a new creation in Christ. “For Bediako, Christians are a new creation, a people group which move beyond old categories and divisions” (Tarus & Lowery 2017:313).

He was aware on many differences and divisions among African Theologies but he decided to treat them as one. “Given the gospel message and the ultimate, transcendent nature of Christian identity, the Christian identity must welcome those who are “other”: the social identities they bear must not divide those who are a new people, carrying a Christian identity” (Tarus & Lowery 2017:313). He is the champion of unity and always works towards one African Theology. “He tends to speak of “African identity” in a broad way, in the singular, without much acknowledgement of all the diversity on the continent” (Tarus & Lowery 2017:313).

Bediako understands that whatever is not rooted in Christ is a sin. “Bediako’s life and works are a powerful reminder to Christians that their identity, rooted in Christ and the new creation, should incorporate and take precedence over other identities: it is indeed a gospel issue and one which affects the church’s witness and mission” (Tarus & Lowery 2017:314). Bediako accepts Jesus though he introduced the concept known as the ancestral incarnational Christological concept in deforeignising Christ in African Christianity. His concern is that Christ is the fulfilment of the religious aspirations in traditional African religion; since God’s general revelation is within pre-Christian religions and is a preparation for the gospel. This requires a Christian conversion for Bediako (2000:21).

Bediako like Mbiti believes that Christianity is not foreign to African religion, though he struggles with how the abiding Gospel of Jesus Christ relates to the inescapable issues and questions which arise from the Christian’s cultural existence in the world. To him, Jesus was transforming or restoring culture. From his discussion of these African theologians, we note that Bediako’s interest is focused on the relationship between traditional African religion, culture, and worldviews and the acceptance of Christianity (Helleman 2005:4). Bediako understands that there is a great difference between African Theology and Christianity.

Bediako underlines the importance of the identity question for the African church. While he focuses on the comparison between African theology and that of the early church, it is clear that in his view the issues are not identical; there is a contrast as well (Ferdinando 2007:122). According to Bediako, Christianity in Africa should be seen as continuity. “In seeing a significant degree of continuity between the pre-Christian and Christian experience of African believers his argument suggests that conversion

should be understood more in terms of Fulfilment than of antithesis (Ferdinando 2007:131).

Bediako explicitly states that the Christian identity is, at its foundation, religious; this foundation will affect all aspects of a person and their other identities (Tarus & Lowery 2017:314). According to Bediako, the church in Africa has the function to create African Christian Identity and cultural aspects of the person. For Bediako, Christians are a new creation (Tarus & Lowery 2017: 314).

Jesse N. K. Mugambi (born 6 February 1947) is an Anglican theologian and a professor of philosophy and religious studies at the University of Nairobi. He is the Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Nairobi from which he attained his BA in Education, MA in Philosophy and Religious Studies and PhD in Philosophy and Religion. Mugambi proposed four levels of reconstruction. His African Theology of Reconstruction was influenced by the biblical narrative of Nehemiah's reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem. "The basic thesis of Mugambi's reconstruction theology is that of the biblical narrative of Nehemiah's reconstruction of the wall of Jerusalem provides the theological paradigm for the reconstruction and the social transformation of Africa after colonialism, apartheid, and the end of the Cold War" (Tarus & Lowery 2017:315).

Let us look at his arguments.

The first is personal reconstruction. According to Mugambi, a person must "continually reconstruct oneself in readiness for the tasks and challenges ahead." He argues that according to Jesus' teachings, change must first occur in peoples' motives and intentions (Taurus & Lowery 2017:316). He references several New Testament writings, which include Luke 18:9–14, Matthew 23:1–13 and Luke 12–13.9.

Culture is the second element of reconstruction. He defines culture as "the cumulative product of people's activities in all aspects of life, in their endeavour to cope with their social and natural environment" (Tarus & Lowery 2017:315). Mugambi argues that cultural reconstruction must touch on ways people are evangelized. Evangelism and missions, he argues, is not about uprooting people from their cultural and religious heritage, but about embedding the Gospel into their cultural and religious identity.

The third component is ecclesial reconstruction. Religion is “that pillar of culture, which provides the presupposed world-view and the basic principles for the organization of society” (Tarus & Lowery 2017:315). Since Africans are “notoriously religious,” Mugambi argues, the way forward is not to remove them from their religiosity but to ground them in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to allow them to express their faith in their own religious and cultural ways (Tarus & Lowery 2017:315).

Socio-economic reconstruction is the fourth component of reconstruction. “Mugambi’s reconstruction theology gained support from several African theologians such as Brigalia Bam, Charles Villa-Vicencio, and Kä Mana. Bam, a South African, notes that the collapse of apartheid in South Africa and the move to democracy in the early 1990s when Mugambi called for a paradigm shift, necessitated a re-evaluation of African Christian engagement as well as African Christian theology” (Tarus & Lowery 2017:315).

Mugambi is well known for his African Theology of Reconstruction (Tarus & Lowery 2017:315). Mugambi proposed four levels of reconstruction: Personal, Cultural, Ecclesial, and Socio-economic Reconstruction. According to Mugambi, a person must “continually reconstruct oneself in readiness for the tasks and challenges ahead.” When a person accepts Jesus, his teachings change this person.

Vincent Mulago gwa Cikala Musharhamina (1924-2012). Vincent Mulago is the first to be labelled an African theologian. “The first African who can be called theologian was Vincent Mulago, a Catholic priest from Belgian Congo who graduated from the Urban University in Rome in 1955” (Bujo 1992:58). Mulago contributed a lot to the birth of African Theology and he was the first to publish his research. “Vincent is one of the first published modern African theologians, but it is more than his place in a chronology that makes him important (Tarus & Lowery 2017:308). Bénézet Bujo (1992:58) considers Mulago a “prerequisite” in African theology, “one of the precursors comparable to the Apostolic Fathers” (Bujo 1992:58).

His most representative work, *Un Visage africain du christianisme* contains themes that Mulago returned to repeatedly throughout his career: the need to deeply root Christianity in Africa, to validate African Christian identity, and to identify “stepping stones” in Bantu culture, which were fulfilled by Christian doctrine and sacraments” (Tarus & Lowery 2017:308).

Mulago suggests one of the most important elements in African Christians is their identity. The theme of identity for Christians in Africa, particularly communal Christian identity (ecclesiology) is their mark. Tarus and Lowery (2017:308) put it correctly that, Mulago explores the Bantu concept of “vital participation” in the life of the clan’s founder. An African Christian belongs to his or her community wholly. According to Mulago, this is a central and unifying principle of Bantu culture. It is a “stepping stone” to him. The stone that God has placed in Bantu culture to point people to Christ and the Christian community. Bantu culture should be accepted as the stepping stone and the foundation that points to Christ.

Mulago like Mbiti, believes that these types of “stepping stones” are present in all religions and in all cultures and therefore should be adopted by Christianity. “Mulago’s notion of God-given “stepping stones” from which to adapt and “graft on” the Christian message is important” (Tarus & Lowery 2017:308). Mulago wanted Christian missionaries or evangelists to understand that God has planted a seed in all other cultures and traditions and it will not be correct to undermine other traditions and religions. In every religion and culture there are these types of stepping stones and what needs to be done is to be respected. “By extension, to despise the cultural identity of another person would be to despise how God has made them and how he has revealed himself in that person’s location” (Tarus & Lowery 2017:308).

Mulago argues that universality and particularity are mutual dependent in Christianity and the church. He argues that theology should be understood and translated in the context of the local culture and religion. The church should be home to the people of that locality. “He never wavers on this point: theology must be both universal and particular, both transcendent and rooted in one’s own context. It cannot be limited to one culture” (Tarus & Lowery 2017:308). It can be asked whether the MRCC has had their theology completely contextualised? The theology of the MRCC might still contain some “foreign” elements which do not attract people to the church.

“Mulago specifically applies universality and particularity, which are part of God’s plan, to theology and the church” (Tarus & Lowery 2017:308). He speaks of a dual Christian Identity. He emphasizes the Christian notion that Christians have two citizenships, we are citizens of our country of birth and citizens of heaven which makes us Ambassadors of Christ in our own respective country of birth. He emphasizes the new

nature which is the place of healing and place of love. He puts it correctly by saying, “that, unlike ethnic clans, this new Christian “clan” is a place of reconciliation, where divisions are healed” (Tarus & Lowery 2017:308).

Mulago accepts that “The metaphor of “clan” or “family” for the ecclesial identity aids in explaining the tight bond between God’s people and their dependence on their founder, Christ, but it falls far short of God’s plan when it becomes insular, represses or rejects differences, or in any way encourages ill-treatment of those deemed “outsiders,” whether because of ethnicity, denomination, gender, etc.” (Tarus & Lowery 2017:310). Sin is when the church encourages the ill-treatment of those deemed outsiders.

Mulago specifically applies universality and particularity, which are part of God’s plan, to theology and the church. In other words, to reflect Christian identity, Christians must embody an identity that truly mirrors both particularity and universality. This dual nature of Christian identity is the main reason why Mulago’s likening of the church to a clan needs further clarification (Tarus & Lowery 2017:309). Mulago believes that since Jesus came for everyone, Jesus is universal and it is wrong of the African church not to include everyone. “Mulago emphasizes that if African Christians do not embrace all persons, regardless of their background, then they fail to represent Christ on earth” (Tarus & Lowery 2017:308). The MRCC has to take note of this inclusivity as a principle of how to do mission work.

African Religion according to Mulago is not contrary to Christianity. He brings up a very valid point that, African culture and tradition is a stepping stone to Christianity, meaning Christianity should be built upon African Religion. He builds his argument on the principle of Ubuntu. Mulago believes that African culture and tradition is a stepping stone to Christianity. This stepping stone is in all cultures, places, and times. It is not foreign to Christianity. “Mulago explores the Bantu concept of “vital participation” in the life of the clan’s founder. Mulago sees this central and unifying principle of Bantu thought as a “stepping stone” that God has placed in Bantu culture in order to point people to Christ and the Christian community” (Tarus & Lowery 2017:308).

The church is a place of healing. Mulago understands the church to be the new clan. “Mulago is correct to emphasize that unlike ethnic clans, this new Christian “clan” is a place of reconciliation, where divisions are healed” (Tarus & Lowery 2017:309). The

Christians are the ambassadors of Reconciliation. Mulago's works are consistently concerned with Contextualizing Christian theology so that the church in each setting would have a local "face" (Tarus & Lowery 2017:309).

He never wavers on this point: theology must be both universal and particular, both transcendent and rooted in one's own context. It cannot be limited to one culture. This means that if the church is not at home among each people group, it is not demonstrating the universality it claims (Tarus & Lowery 2017:309).

2.11 ANCESTRAL WORSHIP

This section will deal with ancestral belief and worship, impacting African Christians. Ancestor worship is not only practiced or found in Africa but is practiced in other countries too. "In Japanese, Korean, and African cultures, the dead are believed to interact and communicate with the living members of the family (Bae & Van der Merwe 2008:1300).

What is ancestral worship? Ancestral worship is when people worship the dead. "... ancestor worship in a narrow sense refers to the specific actions performed during the rites relating to the propitiation of deceased relatives and/or ministration to their needs. Ancestor worship here is understood to refer to an attempt to preserve good relations with the departed kin" (Bae & Van der Merwe: 2008:1299).

There are two elements to Ancestor worship. Nyamiti (1984:15) says, "Roughly speaking one can distinguish two elements which characterize the African conception of ancestorship. This latter comprises: a) a natural relationship between the ancestor and his earthly relatives, b) supernatural or sacred status acquired by the ancestor through death (Nyamiti 1984:15). Christians also hold the dead in high regard, but they don't worship the dead. The dead are regarded as the Saints. Christians believe that such a relationship has God for its origin, and death does not put an end to it. (Nyamiti 1984:128). Christians believe the dead are powerless, they don't have those supernatural or sacred powers like Africans are saying, but only those who died in the Lord will have everlasting love. Nyamiti (1984:128) puts it correctly, "as to the sacred status after dead, let it be first to be remembered that according to Christian belief,

only those who die in the state of habitual grace can enjoy special intimacy and nearness to God” (Nyamiti 1984:128).

The living must keep and maintain relationships between the departed kin and the living people. The departed are divided into two categories. 1. The dead are ordinary dead people, the people who died long ago or recently. 2. Ancestors, these are the respected dead people who are the founders of that community or family. “An important clarification needs to be made here, that is the distinction between ancestors and the dead. Although at times the line of division between the two may not be so strict, it follows logically that the category of “the dead” is larger than that of “the ancestors” (Bae & Van der Merwe 2008:1300).

The ancestors influence the living. Ancestral worship is still common and still active in Africa today. African Christians still believe in this phenomenon; they believe that there is nothing wrong with worshiping ancestors. “The subject of ancestors in the African setting requires us to look at the African community. This is because ancestors are considered part of the African community. They have a say on what the living can and cannot do” (Mtukwa 2012:3). African Christians have even combined Ancestral worship in their Christian worship. It is a synergy. “Ancestors also fulfil the function of being the intermediaries between humans and God. They are considered to be closer to God and also related to the people who are their children” (Mtukwa 2012:3).

According to Nurnberger, “We need first to know the distinction between ancestor veneration and ancestor worship” (Nurnberger 2019:299). Veneration means great respect for someone and worship means submission to human beings or God. In this context, I am trying to show that Africans do venerate and worship ancestors.

“Family ancestors are not worshipped in traditional cultures. They are neither divine nor blameless. They maintain the characteristics and attitudes they had when alive. They can be scolded when they fail in their duties. They depend on the recognition of their descendants for their survival. Neglect of appropriate rituals make them homeless and dangerous roaming spirits. On the other hand, they are not merely honoured. In a patriarchal culture the previous generation has authority over the subsequent generation while still alive. “This authority is acknowledged and enhanced when the deceased are re-integrated into their rightful position in the lineage.” This usually

happens a year after their deaths. The most relevant ancestor is always the most proximate, the one that one knew and obeyed while alive" (Nurnberger 2019:300).

This is how African Christians understand and react to their ancestors. The question remains if it is right or wrong to venerate ancestors. When one looks at the Old and New Testaments one will realise that there was no ancestor veneration then. "So there is no ancestor veneration in the Old Testament. This does not imply, of course, that the deceased had turned into demons. This unfortunate conclusion of some missionaries was based on a decontextualized reading of 1 Corinthians 10:20. It only means that (a) they were sinful and mortal human beings like everybody else, (b) that death had taken them out of action, and (c) that they were not to be in the way of the direct and immediate relationship that God wanted to enjoy with his people. Israel was to relate with the "living God", not with dead people or lifeless idols" (Nurnberger 2019:302).

In the New Testament, it is also clear that "The genealogy does not channel the life force of the clan from forebears to descendants as in African traditionalism. The genealogies of Jesus found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke have a theological agenda, namely to establish the credentials of Jesus as the expected Messiah. He was indeed the "son of David", who was the "son of Abraham", who again was the "son of God" (Nurnberger: 2019:303).

2.11.1 The African concept of God.

Do Africans have a different understanding of God? "People from outside asked questions such as; Is there any awareness of God in Africa? If so, what idea of him have they formed? To put the questions more accurately; Is there an African concept of God? If Africans know God, what God or which God do they know? Is it their own god or the real God? (Kenan 1997:19). To answer the question, does Africans have a different understanding of God? The answer is no, according to Mbiti the Christian God is similar to the God of Africa. Mbiti says it is the same God, Africans did not know they worshipped the Christian God until Christians told them so. There is a piece of very strong evidence in these four Mbiti categories of the African concept of God.

Mbiti categorizes the African concept of God into four general groups: (1) What God does? (2) Human pictures of God (3). The nature of God, (4.) People's relationship

with God (Mbiti 1975:43). I will only explain the two: What God does and The nature of God.

According to Mbiti God is the creator of all things (Mbiti 1975:44). Africans know God as the Creator of heaven and earth as mentioned in Genesis and this is a common belief everywhere in Africa. They don't know God as only the Creator but they believe he is sustaining his creation. "God also sustains, keeps and upholds the things he has created" (Mbiti 1975:44). God looks after his creation, he takes care of it and always protects it. Nothing is left to chance, God is in control and will continue to be in control. He preserves the universe. "God provides for what he has created" (Mbiti 1975:46). Africans know that whatever they need they must pray and God will provide for their needs. He is the God of Providence. God rules over the universe. After creating it, He continues to sustain, provide, and rule over it. "For them, God ruled the universe just as their chief or king ruled their country" (Mbiti 1975:46).

In this paragraph, I will look at The nature of God. Questions like who is God will be answered. "African peoples agreed that nobody has seen God. Therefore, nobody can really describe him. Yet, through their religious insights, they have formulated certain ideas about the nature of God" (Mbiti 1975:46). Africans describe God as being good. He is good to his creation. "He is not only the Maker of all things, but he is good towards all people and all things (Mbiti 1975:46). To Africans God is merciful. God is holy. God is all-powerful. God is all-knowing. God is present everywhere (Mbiti 1975:49-50). Though Africans believe and know that even though they have not seen God, they know God through experience. "God is experienced as the soul creator and sustainer of all things, who expects human beings to be to God as children and to each other siblings, and to respect the earth and natural phenomena (Oduyoye 1972:198). All these ideas formulated give witness to this God of Africans to be the same God of Christians.

These concepts of God can also be seen in the names given to God by Africans. The names have meaning and are rooted in their understanding of who God is and what He does. "The names given to God help to show his attributes. Some names refer to him as creator, maker of souls, founder of the universe, controller of nature and giver of rain and so on" (Kenan 1997:21). Africans believe God is self-sustainable and the source of life. Africans believe in God who provides since they believe He is the

provider of everything. “They believe that it is God who provides sunshine, moonshine, rain, fertility, health and plenty. God is not only a provider, he also protects, guards, controls, and saves his people. In short, Africans see God as king, ruler, lord, and master of the world” (Kenan 1997:21).

2.11.2 African Worship.

The use of the word worship in Africa may result in different meanings since the word itself does not exist in many African languages. Mbiti (1970:178), suggests that worship means man’s act or acts of turning to God. These acts may be formal or informal, regular or ex tempore, communal or individual, ritual or ceremonial, through word or deed. There are two important African perspectives: To live is to worship and to worship is to live. As we know the coin has two sides. “The two sides of the African perspective of worship are, 1. A perspective of holism. “When one speaks of worship with regard to Lutheran churches in Africa, it is essential to consider the holistic shape of religion in many African societies. Religion is commonly understood in its purer sense — as a way of life” (Kakoma 2005:9).

In African understanding, there cannot be any separation between the sacred and the profane. Africa's religion is about everything and anything. Religion is about someone’s way of life. It is inclusive and the totality of how Africans live. “Understanding Christianity as a way of life has considerable implications for liturgical expressions ecumenically. Within African contexts, religion as a way of life is far from individualistic” (Kakoma 2005:10). Religion is not individualistic as Africans believe in Ubuntu.

In Africa, communion is rooted and lived among communities. This communion is also extended to various rites of passage. “Having expanded the notion of communion to various rites of passage, Kakoma suggests that the very recognition of an individual’s existence is subject to or rooted in communion, i.e., in, with, and among “... the ones who are being” (Kakoma 2005:10). African worship is necessarily dynamic, incorporating the entirety of creation’s experience. As human beings our expressions of worship are informed and shaped by our environments — including that which is ecological, cultural, socio-political, historical and contemporary (Kakoma 2005:10).

African worship is a combination and totality of whole environments including death and life, past and present time and all creation.

2.12. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I indicated that many factors must be considered to comprehend the context within which the MRCC exists. All those aspects of belief, faith, and the role of African Theology must be considered. Most important is how ATR has affected African Christianity. These factors have also determined the way the MRCC functions and expresses itself. This reflection on the context provides valuable information to construct the theoretical framework in which this research is conducted.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I will explain how the research will be done. Schwardt (2007:195) defines research methodology as a theory of how an inquiry should proceed. It involves analysis of the assumptions, principles, and procedures in a particular approach to inquiry. According to Schwardt (2007), Creswell and Tashakkori (2007), and Teddlie and Tashakkori (2007), methodologies explicate and define the kinds of problems that are worth investigating; what constitutes a researchable problem; testable hypotheses; how to frame a problem in such a way that it can be investigated using particular designs and procedures; and how to select and develop appropriate means of collecting data.

The method is how to do something. Methodology suggests how research or inquiries will be done (The research Plan or Research design) and indicates what is worth investigating. "In short, as has been said elsewhere, method is about "how to" and methodology is about "why to" collect data a certain way" (Jackson, Drummond & Camara, 1997:21). According to the study done by Creswell (2003), a researcher needs to focus on three methods when carrying out business research: Quantitative, Qualitative and mixed method approaches. (Sharma 2018:3). "The structured approach to inquiry is usually classified as quantitative research and unstructured as qualitative research" (Kumar, 2011:13).

3.1.1 Qualitative Research Method

This refers to research about the nature, characteristics, or standard of something and its quantity. Shank (2002:5) defines qualitative research as "a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning" It is non-numerical and descriptive in nature. It is systematic empirical research. It is planned according to the rules formed by members of the qualitative research community. It is used to research phenomena that are difficult to quantify by numbers. In simple terms, it is a method of observation that is focused on gathering non-numerical data. These may include concepts, feelings, opinions, interpretations and meanings. It is used also to research behaviour, thinking

and understanding, because this differs from generation to generation and place to place. The other reason is that human behaviour can change through different stages of life, since it is not static. This study will be in the form of an empirical research through which people are interviewed in order to collect qualitative information regarding their views.

Limitations of Qualitative Research method: Due to the volume of data it makes analysis and interpretation time consuming. The researcher's presence during data gathering, which is often unavoidable in qualitative research, can affect the subjects' responses. The respondent may not feel comfortable to answer some questions face to face.

Weaknesses of Qualitative Research method: It's difficult to investigate causality. Qualitative research is not statistically representative. There is a possible small sample size, potential bias in answers, self-selection bias, and potentially poor questions from researchers.

3.1.2 Quantitative Research Methodology

This approach is about relating to or measuring by the quantity not necessarily the quality. It is used to quantify the problem by way of generating numerical data. It is statistical, and it has numbers attached to it. It is a social science research that collects and works with numerical data and seeks to interpret meaning from data that helps understand social life through study. It is used to see how people understand their social realities and its consequences. Data can be transformed into usable statistics.

Limitations of Quantitative Research Method: Quantitative research is difficult, expensive, and requires a lot of time to perform the analysis. This type of research is planned carefully in order to ensure complete randomization and correct designation of control groups.

Weaknesses of Quantitative Research Method: It is difficult to understand the context of a phenomenon when using the Qualitative method. Data may not be robust enough to explain complex issues. It has a false focus when coming to numbers.

3.1.3 Mixed Methods:

This refers to the simultaneous use of qualitative and quantitative methods within a single investigation. It originated from the social sciences but has now expanded to other disciplines like health and medicine. “The basic assumption is that the uses of both quantitative and qualitative methods in combination, provide a better understanding of the research problem and question than either method by itself” (Creswell 2012:535).

Although Qualitative research is often described in opposition to Quantitative research, my understanding is that both Qualitative and Quantitative approaches are complementary to each other, and many researchers use mixed methods in their projects, combining the strength of both approaches. John W. Creswell an American academic is one researcher well known for his work on mixed methods (Multimethodology).

I will use a Mixed Methods approach in my research for the following reasons: The material I am studying will be best highlighted if both methods are used in this research. Frechtling (2002:47) suggests, “Combining the two methods pays off in improved instrumentation for all data collection approaches and in sharpening the evaluator’s understanding of findings.”.

I have already started with a quantitative method where a literature review was done and statistics of church membership were presented. Different books and other written materials were consulted. The other reason is that my study needs research on the social aspect which requires a qualitative approach. It is beneficial to use both methods and assist the researcher and the evaluation team in coming to the right conclusion of the research. “By using different sources and methods at various points in the evaluation process, the evaluation team can build on the strength of each type of data collection and minimize the weaknesses of any single approach” (Frechtling 2002:47).

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Design is commonly understood as a plan for how the task will be done. Leedy (1997:195) defines research design as a plan for a study, providing the overall framework for collecting data. MacMillan and Schumacher (2001:166) define it as a plan for selecting subjects, research sites, and data collection procedures to answer the research question(s). Qualitative /Quantitative can be defined as a research design as “a blueprint for conducting a study with maximum control over factors that may interfere with the validity of the findings” (Burns & Grove 2003:195). It is a plan that describes how, when, and where data will be collected. Burns and Grove (2003:195) define a research design as “a blueprint for conducting a study with maximum control over factors that may interfere with the validity of the findings.” Parahoo (1997:142) describes a research design as “a plan that describes how, when, and where data are to be collected and analyzed.” Polit et al (2001:167) define a research design as “the researcher’s overall for answering the research question or testing the research hypothesis.”

My research design will consist of five phases:

Phase 1: Data will be collected from all participants through Questionnaires in four congregations of the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ.

Phase 2: Data will be analyzed immediately after it has been collected.

Phase 3: Data will be Interpreted accordingly after been analyzed.

Phase 4: During this period the results collected from the respondents will be compared and decisions made as how to categorise the findings.

Phase 5: The results will be released and documented. The report will be written accordingly.

3.2.1 Non-Experimental Research

According to Polit et al (2001:178), non-experimental research is used in studies whose purpose is a description and where it is unethical to manipulate the independent variable. Non-experimental research is suitable for the study of people or behavior of people in the church for several reasons.

First, due to ethical considerations manipulation of the human variable is not acceptable because of the potential for physical or mental harm to the participants. Secondly, human characteristics are inherently not subject to experimental manipulation, such as health beliefs and opinions. Thirdly, research constraints such as time, personnel, and the type of participants, make non-experimental research more feasible. Lastly, qualitative studies do not interfere with the natural behavior of the participants being studied; the type of research question would not be appropriate for experimental research (Polit et al 2001:178). In this study, data were collected without introducing any treatment. The research structure is as follows:

Problem statement: The need for this study comes from the observation I have made at the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ (MRCC) in Mamelodi, where I have been a minister for 11 years. My observations and concerns are the decline in membership and decrease in concern for mission in the mainline churches of which the MRCC is an example.

Methodology: I have used a mix methods approach. I investigated a sample of four congregations of the MRCC with a total of thirty-six participants. I conducted face to face interviews with these participants. The participants were randomly selected and represented male, females across different age groups. No participant was under the age of 18 years.

Results: I have interpreted and analysed the data provided by the participants.

Conclusions were drawn and recommendations made based on the results gathered.

3.2.2 Qualitative Research

Burns and Grove (2003:19) describe a qualitative approach as “a systematic subjective approach used to describe life experiences and situations to give them meaning”. Parahoo (1997:59) states that qualitative research focuses on the experiences of people as well as stressing uniqueness of the individual. Holloway and Wheeler (2002:30) refer to qualitative research as “a form of social enquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experience and the world in which they live.” Researchers use the qualitative approach to explore the behavior, perspectives, experiences and feelings of people and emphasize the understanding of these elements. Researchers who use this approach adopt a person-centered holistic and humanistic perspective to understand human lived experiences without focusing on specific concepts (Field & Morse 1996:8).

The researcher focused on the experiences from the participant’s perspective. To achieve the emic perspective, the researcher became involved and immersed in the study. The researcher’s participation in the study added to the uniqueness of data collection and analysis (Streubert & Carpenter 1999:17). Complete objectivity is impossible and qualitative methodology is not completely precise because human beings do not always act logically or predictably (Holloway & Wheeler 2002:3). The rationale for using a qualitative approach in this research was to explore and describe the opinion of members of the church. A qualitative approach was appropriate to capture the opinions of the church members.

- Conceptual phase

In the conceptual phase the research questions what is the perception of the church members for the purpose of the study The research question evolved due to the researcher’s involvement in the phenomenon under investigation. A literature review was conducted to familiarize the researcher with the concept and content. It was necessary for the researcher to do bracketing to lay aside any preconceived ideas about the phenomena under study.

- Narrative phase

The narrative phase involved planning the research design. I am the researcher, I am the main data collection instrument. A pilot study was not conducted. Nonprobability sampling was used.

- Interpretative phase

The empirical research phase involved data collection, analysis and interpretation. Data collection included qualitative information that was collected during a focus group interview. The researcher also researched articles to understand the context of the topic under study, for the purpose of providing a view of reality that is important to participants.

3.2.3 Exploratory Research

According to Polit et al (2001:19), explorative studies are undertaken when a new area is being investigated or when little is known about an area of interest. It is used to investigate the full nature of the phenomenon and other factors related to it. In this study, it will investigate the opinions of church members regarding the decline of church membership and the possible reasons for it.

Although research has been conducted on the commitment of members, little is known about member's opinions of the subject or topic studied. The research is about, "Commitment of church members as an expression of the understanding of the *Missio Dei*: a case study."

3.2.4 Descriptive Research

According to Burns and Grove (2003:201), descriptive research "is designed to provide a picture of a situation as it naturally happens." It may be used to justify current practices and make judgments and also to develop theories. For this study, descriptive research was used to obtain a picture of church members' opinions of how the church

runs and their experiences in improving the standard of church service and church commitment for this group of members.

3.2.5 Context

The context is significant in qualitative research. According to Holloway and Wheeler (2002:34), context includes the “environment and conditions in which the study takes place as well as the culture of the participants and location.” The participants in this study are confirmed (registered) members of the church (MRCC) who are attending worship services regularly in their home congregation.

The setting was four (4) congregations of the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ: Mabopane, Mamelodi, Saulsville, and Soshanguve, all within the Tshwane Metropolitan in Gauteng Province in South Africa.

3.2.6 Limitations:

The above-mentioned congregations are different and unique to each other. These congregations were established in different time periods; some are very old congregations and some are young. They were established by different leaders (ministers) with different personalities and different ages. The opinions of members of the church cannot be studied outside their context and are, therefore, dependent on the context and the time. Their context will be explained in more detail during analyses and interpreting processes.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION

“Data collection is a methodical process of gathering and analyzing specific information to proffer solutions to relevant questions and evaluate the results. It focuses on finding out all there is to a particular subject matter. Data is collected to be further subjected to hypothesis testing which seeks to explain a phenomenon” (Formplus builder-Online 01 April 2023).

The most important reason why data should be collected is to capture quality evidence to seek answers to the posed questions. If there is no specific question, then there is no need to answer and therefore there is no need to do data collection. Through data collection, quality data is needed for businesses, government departments, and individuals to make informed decisions. “Data collection as a main stage in research can overshadow the quality of achieving results by decreasing the possible errors which may occur during a research project” (Taherdoost 2022:11).

It is general knowledge that we have two types of data collection methods. Literature has shown that “data collection methods are divided into two main categories of Primary Data Collection Methods and Secondary Data Collection Methods” (Taherdoost 2022:12). The Data collection method plays a very important role in the whole process of data collection. The success and the failures of data collection depend on the right or wrong processes of data collection. Data collected data must be interpreted.

3.3.1 Types of Data Collection

Data are organized into two categories namely, quantitative and qualitative. The researcher should choose or select correctly the collection method even before collection, proper planning is needed. “Before selecting a data collection method, the type of data that is required for the study should be determined” (Kabir 2016). Data can be categorized using different ways including quantitative and qualitative approaches.

3.3.1.1 Qualitative data

“This type of data answers to "how and why" questions in a research study and mostly covers data regarding feelings, perceptions, and emotions using unstructured approaches such as interviews for data collection. Researchers use different methods such as using audiotapes, sketches, notes, and photographs to gather these data” (Taherdoost 2022:11). Qualitative methods encompass three main categories: observations, document reviews, and in-depth interviews.

3.3.1.2 Quantitative data

“Numerical data which is mathematically generated and computed is recognized as quantitative data” (Taherdoost 2022:11). “A qualitative method addresses the “what” question type in a study. These approaches employ structured data collection methods and are based on random sampling. In comparison to the qualitative methods, these methods are regarded to be cheaper, and the findings can be standardized to achieve other results based on some criteria such as size” (Taherdoost 2022:12).

3.3.2 Data Collection Method

There are two data collection methods. “It is pertinent to note that data collection in itself falls under two broad categories; Primary data collection and secondary data collection” (Formplus 2023.1).

“The data collection steps include setting the boundaries for the study, collecting information through unstructured or semi structured observations and interviews, documents, and visual materials, as well as establishing the protocol for recording information” (Creswell 2009).

3.3.2.1 The first data collection method is called Secondary Data.

It is the data collected from published sources, which means it was gathered for one reason or another by someone for a specific reason. It was gathered for different purposes including research purposes. This includes journals, Census data, published

books, etc. “Although they are not valid as much as primary data sources, these sources are still important for scientific studies as primary data collection is sometimes hard or impossible to obtain” (Taherdoost 2022:13). Here are the types or list of examples of Secondary Data.

- Books
- Published Printed Source
- Journals
- E-Journals
- Magazines/Newspapers
- General Websites
- Census Data
- Population Statistics
- Government records
- Public Sector records
- Letters
- Diaries
- Published Electronic source

Written material. (includes electronic sources).

3.3.2.2 Primary Data is the second data collection method.

This refers to raw data; that has never been used before or not published before. “Data that is not published yet and is the first-hand information which is not changed by any individual is known as primary data” (Taherdoost 2022:13). “Primary data collection is based on the processes by which you gather data yourself for your purpose of study and no one has access to use this data until it is published and both qualitative and quantitative approaches are used for this purpose” (Taherdoost 2022:13).

This method includes data collection through questionnaires, interviews, and observations. “There are many types of qualitative research tools; however, the one you choose must go according to your research objectives” (Trigueros 2017:1). The researcher needs to ask himself or herself this question, what am I planning or intending to find out? The need will then point out or identify the most relevant instruments to use. “Among the most used tools are the observation, the survey, and the interview” (Eladio 2006:196).

3.3.3 Data Collection Research Instruments.

Accurate and systematic data collection is critical to conducting scientific research. Data collection allows us to collect information that we want to collect about our study objects. Depending on the research type, methods of data collection include document review, observation, questioning, measuring, or a combination of different methods.

I will only deal with a selection of the following research data collection techniques or tools.

- Questionnaires
- Interviews
- Focus Groups
- Observational
- Survey Methods
- Case Study
- Experimental
- Diaries
- Activity Sampling Technique
- Memo Motion Study
- Process Analysis

- Link Analysis
- Time and Motion Study
- Statistical Method

I will deal with three methods only: Questionnaires, Interviews, Observational method, and Survey method.

3.3.3.1 Questionnaires

These are the most frequently used and popular methods for data collection and are also very cheap and affordable tools. “A questionnaire is utilized for different purposes, although it is commonly used to gather statistical data. It can be designed for measuring separate variables such as behaviours, preferences, and facts” (Kabir 2016: 208).

When using questionnaires, the interviewer or researcher is sure and confident that there is no bias and that the respondent's anonymity is certain. “These forms are suitable to gather both qualitative and quantitative data. Although they are not the most common methods used in qualitative research, they are useful in case of facing a large sample in a study” (Taherdoost 2022:14). I will use structured interviews (Questionnaires) where predetermined questions will be asked. I will draw up a list of relevant questions to explore the attitudes and responses of a sole participant.

Constructing Questionnaires:

When constructing a Questionnaire, I will only use simple and short questions as much as possible. I will navigate respondents clearly to avoid any difficulty and motivate participants by answering questions (see Olsen 2012:201). I will use understandable, simple, and clear statements for all respondents from different educational levels. I will utilize positive sentences. It is best not to use more than one question (double-barreled) in one item. I will add an open-answer possibility after providing the listed answers and where possible. I will avoid making assumptions for the respondents (Kabir 2016: 210).

Administering Questionnaires:

Administering the Questionnaire can be implemented in different ways. A face-to-face questionnaire mode can be used which provides the chance of presenting the questions orally. The paper-and-pencil types can be utilized with the items presented in the paper. Finally, computerized questionnaires can also be used for data collection (Kabir 2016: 210).

Types of Questions:

Questions can be designed to measure variables for example in a survey. On the other hand, questions can be based on aggregating into indexes or scales, for instance in tests. Question types can be categorized into closed-ended and open-ended questions. In close-ended questions, the respondents face a specific range of answers to choose from, but the respondent is asked to provide formulated answers using open-ended questions. Qualitative questions are open-ended (Taherdoost 2022:16). In this type, then, the answers should be coded into a response scale. Therefore, in comparison to the open-ended questions, close-ended ones are pre-coded to make the work quickly implemented (Olsen 2012:204).

Close-ended questions have four types of options to respond to the questions: You can have a two-option response possibility which is known as a dichotomous scale. If you add more than two options for the respondents, the scale is known as nominal-polychromous. In ordinal-polytomous scales, you prepare more than two options which are also ordinal. Open-ended questions are questions that participants answer in their own way. Close-ended questions are mostly based on yes/no or true /false answers. Multiple choices provide the opportunity to choose a favorite topic by participants (Kabir 2016:209).

There are 17 Questions in my Questionnaires

The study will now deal with the advantages of Questionnaires. Questionnaires can collect a large amount of data from a large sample size. Questionnaires are time saving. Questionnaires are cost effective. Finally, Questionnaires are highly structured; and have the possibility of gaining high accurate data.

Disadvantages of Questionnaires: Questionnaires are hard or inadequate to perceive gathered data in some cases such as emotional, feelings, and behavioural changes.

Human errors can happen, for example if the respondent is forgetful and cannot consider the whole concept truly. When using the Questionnaire determining the reliability of answers is not possible. The possibility of misunderstanding the questions which can overshadow the answers do exist.

3.3.3.2 Interviews

Interviews can be with one person at a time (individual Interviews) or a group of people. They can be administered formally or informally. Interviews may be structured, semi-structured, or open-ended. Structured interviews are based on a core set of questions that are always asked in the same order. Semi-structured interviews also contain a core set of questions, but allow the interviewer to ask supplementary questions, or change the order in which questions are asked.

Different types of interviews: An in-depth interview takes place when you interview the studied population (individually or in groups) so that it freely expresses any idea, feelings, and motivations about the topic being studied (Oxman 1998:9). In-depth interviews are less formal and the least structured, in which the wording and questions are not predetermined.

Face-to-face interview: “A face-to-face interview is a version of an in-depth interview. It is used in an English oral exam, in a market, custom research or in a qualitative research” (Trigueros 2017:1). I chose face-to-face interviews since the respondents are living within my vicinity. The face-to-face interviews are going to be conducted with individuals from four (4) different congregations of the MRCC. A total of 40 individual participants have been selected. I, the researcher, will conduct face-to-face interviews with all 40 individual participants. The interviews (face to face) will be done and if not possible it will be done through Phone, Video calls, Email interviews, and Chat/Messaging interviews.

Semi-structured interview: I will do only structured interviews and will bring a recording device for the interviews. “In these kinds of interviews, interviewees face the same set of standardized questions which are pre-prepared before the interview session” (Taherdoost 2021:18).

History, stories and life-tells and Discussion group will not be used and discussed since it is out of my scope. The Focus group: This data collection method focuses more on qualitative research. It falls under the primary category for data based on the feelings and opinions of the respondents. This research involves asking open-ended questions to a group of individuals usually ranging from 6-10 people, to provide feedback.

When using Interviews there is a complete collection of information with greater understanding. It is more personal, as compared to questionnaires, allowing us to have a higher response rate. It allows more control over the order and flow of questions. We can introduce necessary changes in the interview schedule based on initial results (which is not possible in the case of a questionnaire study/survey).

The disadvantages of Interviews: Data analysis, especially when there is a lot of qualitative data is tiresome. Interviewing can be tiresome for large numbers of participants. The risk of bias is high due to fatigue and becoming too involved with interviewees.

3.3.3.3 Observational method of data collection

There are different types of observation. The direct observation method is called so because it is done directly and at the very same moment, “direct observation because you write down the information of a phenomenon or event that is taking place at that very moment (Trigueros 2017:1). It is divided into structured and unstructured types.

Structured observation “is carried out with an observation guide and it is nonparticipant” (Trigueros 2017:1).

Unstructured observation does not need an observation guide and can be participant or nonparticipant (Trigueros 2017:1).

Participant observer is when observers conduct their observations “from the inside”; being part of that research. It also means that the researcher is an integral part of the environment being observed.

Nonparticipant observers conduct their observations “from the outside”; the researcher does not interact with those being observed.

Advantages of Observational techniques for data collection:

There is direct information gathering. The participation of evaluators in the natural setting is flexible with a natural atmosphere. It is free from biases. It can be generalized as large samples can be covered in the studies. High reliable and precise data can be achieved through observational methods.

Disadvantages of the Observational method: I will now deal with the disadvantages of the Observational method. They can be time-consuming and not economical. The training of observers must be effective. Observers can be selective during the process and distort data. It can sometimes be unreliable due to the misrepresentation of the qualitative data measurement. It does not consider processes and the changes during them and cannot be appropriate for fresh concepts (Frechtling 2002:53; Kabir 2016: 245).

3.3.3.4 Survey Method

The method simply refers to the “how” part. “There are several types of surveys as telephone surveys, online surveys, in-person surveys, and mobile surveys. These surveys are administered by interviewers who have experience in research” (Trigueros 2017:13). “A survey simply is an appropriate method to determine feelings, opinions, and thoughts” (Taherdoost 2022:24). The method can be used globally or specifically. Data can be collected by self-completion survey or by an interviewer. A self-completion survey in Statistics survey and Census is called “self-enumeration”. This is when the Questionnaire is sent to the respondent and the respondent handles the questions on its own. In this research I will not use self-completion but face-to-face interviews.

3.3.3.5 There are four different types of survey methods to collect data

There is telephone survey, online survey, personal survey (face to face), and finally mobile survey. I will do a face-to-face survey since I will visit all the respondents from their different congregations.

3.3.3.6 Sampling:

Polit et al (2001:234) define a sample as “a proportion of a population.” “Sampling is the process of selecting a few (a sample) from a bigger group to become the basis for estimating or predicting the prevalence of a subgroup of the population you are interested in” (Kumar 2011:193). A very simple example used is when someone is cooking meat, will not eat the whole pot of meat to taste salt or if the meat is ready to be consumed but will take a spoon, the small amount of soup in the spoon and a small piece of meat will represent the taste of the whole pot.

That piece of meat will have the same characteristics as all the meat in the pot. “In a survey, a set of questions is provided to give a sample that is chosen from a specific target population. This sample presents the characteristics and behaviours of the population. Surveys are conducted to explore the populations' attitudes, the differences between different populations' behavior and discover the possible changes over time by repeating surveys in regular time intervals” (Taherdoost 2022:24).

Sampling Methods: There are two main kinds of sampling techniques, viz, probability and non-probability sampling. **Probability Sampling:** In probability sampling each element of the population has a definite, non-zero probability of being used in the sample. This method guarantees that the entire population is represented in that selection. There are several types of probability sampling methods, including Simple random, Systematic, Stratified, Cluster, and Multistage.

Non-Probability: With non-probability sampling techniques, the sample is collected based on specific criteria, so not every member of the population has a chance of being selected. These sampling methods are often used for online surveys. The different types of non-probability sampling include Convenience, Quota, and Judgement/Purposive. With judgment or purposive sampling, the researcher selects

individuals for a specific quality relevant to the study. For example, if you want to study what it takes to graduate summa cum laude, you would survey individuals who graduated with that distinction.

Purposeful sampling: Parahoo (1997:232) describes purposive sampling as “a method of sampling where the researcher deliberately chooses who to include in the study based on their ability to provide necessary data.” Purposive sampling will be used in this study. The rationale for choosing this approach was that the researcher was seeking knowledge about the church members’ opinion of how they feel about the church which the participants would provide by their experience. In this study, only eligible church members were purposively chosen to participate. “The research term used for qualitative sampling is *purposeful sampling*. In purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon” (Creswell 2012:206). I will use purposeful sampling since I intentionally select individuals and sites (churches) where to conduct my research.

Snowball is a non-probability sampling method where new units are recruited by other units to form part of the sample. This method is out of my scope.

Voluntary sampling occurs when researchers seek volunteers to participate in studies. I will seek church members to volunteer in this research.

Sampling Steps:

Start by defining the target population such as the number of individuals that are living in the country. Selecting a frame for sampling as the actual cases that we select a sample from them. Choosing the method of sampling which can be either a random or non-random technique.

Measuring the appropriate sample size to avoid biases and sampling errors using the related formula (Taherdoost 2016:23). Burns and Grove (2003:31) refer to sampling as a process of selecting a group of people, events, or behaviour with which to conduct a study. Polit et al (2001:234) confirm that in sampling a portion that represents the whole population is selected. Sampling is closely related to the generalizability of the findings. In this study, the sampling was non-probable and purposive. According to Parahoo (1997:223), in non-probability sampling, researchers use their judgment to

select the subjects to be included in the study based on their knowledge of the phenomenon.

Sample size:

Holloway and Wheeler (2002:128) assert that sample size does not influence the importance or quality of the study and note that there are no guidelines for determining sample size in qualitative research. Qualitative researchers do not normally know the number of people in the research beforehand; the sample may change in size and type during research. Sampling goes on until saturation has been achieved, namely no new information is generated (Holloway 1997:142). A total of forty people will participate in this research particular research.

Profiles of the participants:

The research includes church members, members of the organ of support, elders, and deacons in the church between the ages of 18 to 60 years. Pastors are excluded since it will be as if the researcher is researching their ability or work in general. A total of ten people from each congregation will participate. Each group will have three adult males, aged from 36-60 years. Each group will have three adult females, aged from 36-60 years. Each group will have four youths aged 18-35, two males and two females. Ethnic groups will not be considered because the topic under study will not be influenced in any way. To objectively deal with research I need different views from males, females, and young people who make up the church.

Sampling:

I will use purposeful sampling, also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective. This method is used for researchers to rely on their judgment when choosing members of the population to participate in their studies.

Four participating Congregations of the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ will participate: MRCC Mabopane, MRCC Mamelodi, MRCC Saulsville, and MRCC Soshanguve.

3.3.3.7 Survey Process Step;

The first step is formulating the survey by considering the overall substantive and analytical needs. Define the aim and the purpose of the study. Define the problem you want to examine. Identify the population that will be surveyed. Determine what kinds of variables that you want to measure. What questions do you want to have answered? And what's the best way to go about getting those answers?

The second step is to determine and design the methods or mode of data collection that will be used. The mode includes Personal interviews, Telephone surveys, Mailed questionnaires/drop-off surveys, Web-based surveys, and email-based surveys.

Develop or Design the test Questionnaire:

When designing a Questionnaire each question should fit into the overall plan of research. Each question should be suitable for the mode you have chosen to conduct the survey and for the population that has been sampled.

Pilot Test and Analyze the test. When you test the Questionnaire you need to conduct an early pre-test of the survey. Use these results to refine the instrument and work out any bugs in the survey procedures.

Determine a Sampling Frame:

The following questions need to be asked when determining the frame. What is the sampling frame? What do I use to select elements of the sample? Draw a list of names (e.g., class roster). How many interviews need to be completed? (sample size, sampling fraction). What response rate is required? Who should be included in the sample? How can the sample be made representative of the population?

Training of Interviewers:

The researcher is going to do interviews himself. There will be no training for interviewers since it will be face-to-face interviews. If you are using telephone or personal interviews, be sure the interviewers are carefully trained. Interviewer effects (bias) can wreck otherwise well-designed surveys.

Conducting the survey in the field:

When surveying the field, the following challenges are expected: The length of the instrument can pose a challenge as it is tiresome. Some items may be unnecessary and those questions or others may have been omitted (missing data). Some items may turn out to be incompatible with the format you have chosen to carry out the survey. Some respondents may not have been able to respond to the items as they were presented. People have different degrees of receptiveness to being surveyed and this may affect how they answer the questions. Surveys may be filled out only partially or not at all. Some respondents may not be accessible. Interviewers may have different levels of skill and integrity.

Edit and process the data: When processing and editing the data the following should be observed: Code responses in a reasonable and useable way. Make data machine-readable and minimize errors.

3.3.3.8 Common Issues and Errors

One of the issues or errors is inappropriate planning due to the lack of understanding of the study concept. Further, a selection of inappropriate survey methods may be a mistake. Common errors include the inappropriate questionnaire design and interviewer issues such as misunderstanding the answers, biases, etc. Sample selection issues such as biased selection, and small size can affect the results. Finally, human errors, like problems with the respondents, for example, memorial mistakes.

If you want to minimize the errors the following should be considered: Gaining a comprehensive definition of all concepts. Using sample selection methods. Testing of the surveys using suitable methods. One should consider the points when designing a questionnaire.

Training of the interviewers. The use of introductions and guides for the interviewees is very important. Always use trained staff for data analysis. It is advisable to use professional statisticians for the estimation processes of the survey.

Advantages of training of the interviewers. When using trained interviewers, assist in covering a wide range of subjects or topics. It is not an expensive method. It is easy to analyze utilizing different available software.

One of the disadvantages of this method is the possibility of a biased report. Lack of in-depth and comprehensive data can contribute to this. The possibility of different sources of error such as sampling errors and interviewers' errors increases the level.

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is a process of collecting, transforming, cleaning and modelling data. The main reason being to be able to discover useful information from the same data, and to be able to reach conclusions. The derived knowledge can be used to make informed decisions.

Proposed data analysis technique(s): Analysing the data collected from the individual respondents from four (4) different congregations of the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ. There are five (5) important Methods for Statistical Data Analysis:

Mean also known as Average. The first method that's used to perform the statistical analysis is a mean, which is more commonly referred to as the average. When you are looking to calculate the mean, you add up a list of numbers and then divide that number by the items on the list.

Standard Deviation. Standard deviation is a method of statistical analysis that measures the spread of data around the mean.

Regression. When it comes to statistics regression, it is the relationship between a dependent variable (the data you're looking to measure) and an independent variable (the data used to predict the dependent variable).

Sample size Determination. Sample size determination is the process of choosing the right number of observations or people from a larger group to use in a sample.

Hypothesis Testing. In statistical analysis, hypothesis testing, also known as "T Testing", it is key to testing the two sets of random variables within the data set. This method is all about testing if a certain argument or conclusion is true for the data set.

3.5 LIMITATIONS

The researcher is fully aware of the limitations or shortfalls of this research project. By choosing a limited area to be covered during the research, it simply means that the desired results of finding out whether church members commit, “will not be sufficiently representative. The results will reflect the views of only members in the Ebenezer Circuit, (Mabopane, Mamelodi, Saulsville and Soshanguve congregations) in Pretoria area. There is also the danger that the results might be only relevant to the areas to be covered, resulting in them being not hundred percent reliable. The reasons given by someone in an urban area might not reflect what might have been the results in a rural area. My observations are that since I am not a resident minister, three congregation participants were reluctant to attend and I feel some were not honest with their answers.

3.6 RESEARCH ETHICS

The University of Pretoria Ethics has granted me approval to do the research after I have applied for it at the Faculty Research Ethics Committee. Their letter dated 18 August 2018, is the proof that I am granted permission to do the research.

3.6.1 Respect for people:

Ethics of Research are based on three (3) principles: The participation is voluntary; participants should feel free to answer the questions as it should not be compulsory. No one will be forced to participate in the research. Respondents will not be paid or have any kind of remuneration and this is explained very clearly in the individual letters which will be sent to institutions and individuals. No identification like names identity documents or ID numbers and the physical address of the respondent will be collected. They will remain anonymous. “Sharing information about the respondent with others for purposes of other than research is unethical” (Kumar 2011:246). They will be treated as autonomous, they will be allowed to make their own decisions about what to do and to agree about without fear and favour.

This principle means that prospective participants should not be coerced into taking part in the study. Participants have the right to decide whether to participate without incurring any penalty (Polit et al 2001:78). Participants were approached and the purpose of the study was explained. No remuneration was offered and they were informed of the opportunity to withdraw at any stage of the research. Verbal and written consent were obtained. Individuals who refused to participate were not forced.

3.6.2 Beneficence:

The principle means, above all do no harm. The purpose is not to harm but to discover new information that will be useful to the community and society. It is not to hurt or find information at the expense of other people. The respondents are made aware that this information is needed for the purpose of research and gaining new insight not for discriminating or prejudice. The confidentiality of the data is adamant.

Freedom from harm:

In this study physical harm was not to be considered, however, the researcher bore in mind that the psychological consequences needed a sensitive approach. The researcher was sensitive to the participants' emotions when probing questions that could psychologically harm the participants. The researcher told the participants that if they felt that some parts of the interview were too much for them they were free to withdraw from the study or choose not to answer the questions.

Freedom from exploitation:

Participants in a study should be protected from adverse situations. They should be assured that the information that they provide to the researcher or their participation will not be used against them. The researcher-participant relationship should not be exploited (Polit et al 2001:76). Questionnaires will be stored safely and destroyed after the completion of the study. Robson puts it correctly, "The tapes and written narratives were safely stored and were destroyed after the study" (Robson 1997:472).

Risk/benefit ratio:

The researcher considered the risk-benefit ratio and kept risk to the minimum. The participants benefited by sharing their ideas with their peers as well as improving their

knowledge regarding what is happening with their church. The participants were also satisfied that the information that they provided would help in improving the standard of worship and increase the number of members in the church.

3.6.3 Justice:

This simply means there should be fairness in terms of recruitment of participants and the choice of location to conduct research. It is just and fair to conduct interviews or to meet respondents where they will not use their own money for transportation to the venue where the interviews are conducted. I have developed an informed consent form for participants to sign before they engage in the research. This form acknowledges that participants' rights will be protected during and after the data collection. No respondent's life will be put at risk.

The right to fair treatment:

Fair treatment includes that the selected participants' inclusion was based on the requirements of the research. There is non-prejudicial treatment of participants who refused to take part or those who withdrew. The participants had access to the researcher at any point in the study to clarify information. Sensitivity to and respect for the participants' beliefs, habits, lifestyles, culture, and emotions are guaranteed. Participants should be treated fairly all the time. Courteous treatment at all times is imperative (Polit et al 2001:81). The sampling method was purposeful to select participants with experience.

The right to privacy:

This means that the information provided by participants will not be shared without their consent (Burns & Grove 2003:172). As the study was conducted in the participants' natural setting; there was no intrusion of privacy about the information provided. Anonymity was therefore upheld. Anonymity is the inability to link information to participants. This was achieved by tape-recording the interviews conducted. The participants were assured of confidentiality verbally and in the written consent form. The following precautions were used to ensure confidentiality: The list of names, transcriptions, and notes were kept in a locked safe. The list of names was kept

separate from recordings, transcription, and notes. No names were attached to the Questionnaires, tapes or transcription, or notes (Polit et al 2001:82).

3.7 CONCLUSION

Data collection will commence as follows:

- Designing of Questionnaires
- Set Clear Measurement Priorities: decide what to measure and how to measure it.
- Collection of data: With questions clearly defined data collection starts and ends
- After collection data then Analysis begins
- Interpretation of data: Does your data answer the original question and help you defend against any objections?

This will be accomplished by approaching ministers and church councils through a formal letter to request permission to conduct interviews from their members and using their premises. If permission to conduct an interview is given, then I will start to request interviews with the 10 members of each congregation for interviews as mentioned in the data collection processes. The process will depend on the approval of the Church council of each congregation but in reality it took three months (May to July 2023) to complete the process of data collection.

CHAPTER 4 DATA COLLECTION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the researcher presents the results, the findings and the critical analyses of the results of the empirical research. This research investigates how the commitment of church members is an expression of the understanding of the *Missio Dei*. Congregations of the MRCC are used as case studies. The research was conducted in Ebenezer Circuit and from four congregations of the MRCC, namely Mabopane, Mamelodi, Saulsville, and Soshanguve. The research request was sent and delivered to the different congregations and different participants beforehand.

The study followed an empirical research approach through which people were interviewed to collect qualitative information regarding their views on commitment to the church. The researcher used the mixed methods approach. The researcher prefers qualitative and quantitative methods because combining the perspectives enriches the understanding of the research problem. Since the MRCC as a church, and other scholars are expected to benefit from the results of the research, and for that to happen, there must be acceptance of the method used by the researcher. It will also be proper to briefly examine the objectives of this research that have been

stated as:

- a. the purpose of the study is to assist in evaluating what caused the church to no longer be addressing the needs of the people.
- b. why is the membership of mainline churches declining?
- c. what happened to the mainline church vision and mission?
- d. the study will also confirm whether the assumptions of the researcher are true or not, that the mainline churches have lost direction with regard to mission. It will also contribute to the conversation that seeks to find solutions on this topic.

4.2 IDENTIFICATION OF PARTICIPANTS

The research includes ordinary church members, members of organs of support, elders, and deacons in the church between the ages of 18 to 75 years. Pastors are excluded because I feel like they will not be comfortable since they may think they are under investigation. A total of ten people from each congregation will participate in the interviews. Each group will have three adult males, aged from 36-75 years. Each group will have three adult females, aged from 36-75 years. Each group will have four youths, aged from 18-35, two males and two females. The choice of participants was informed by the fact that the researcher wanted to get the views of confirmed members of the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ since the MRCC membership can be obtained only when a member is sixteen years of age.

Since it was the duty of the researcher to ensure that the respondents' rights were protected, it was indeed protected. Ethical clearance to conduct this research was obtained from the Postgraduate Committee of the University of Pretoria. Permission was also obtained from the church leadership to continue with this research. It was explained that participation is voluntary; participants should feel free to answer the questions as it should not be compulsory.

As Dreyer (2004:6) says, "The first guideline for ethically responsible research is that the *dignity* of participants should not be violated in any way." The respondents were treated with respect and dignity during the research process. They will remain anonymous and their views will be respected. This research is guided by the principle that "sharing information about the respondent with others for the purpose of other than research is unethical" (Kumar 2011:246).

There were challenges during the process. Not everyone was willing to share the information. Most members were reluctant to participate. It is not clear what the reasons are but it seems people do not see the need to participate in surveys or research. Another challenge was poor attendance. Attendance is not yet satisfactory

to most congregations after the Covid-19 pandemic. Most congregations are not even at 50% capacity attendance. Nevertheless, the researcher is confident that the research will yield good results regardless of the challenges and limitations mentioned. The research is still relevant and important in the MRCC.

4.3 INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

An interview schedule with sixteen (16) main questions was drafted. The questions were relevant to the situation in the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ and on the topic of the commitment of church members as an expression of the understanding of the *Missio Dei*. See Addendum A.

4.4 RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH AS PER RESEARCH SCHEDULE

The research schedule's results will be analyzed per congregation: Mabopane, Mamelodi, Saulsville, and Soshanguve. The researcher will first copy and write down the responses per research schedules received from respondents. The answers/responses will be reported *verbatim*, i.e., how the respondents put them.

Sample size, 40 participants were sampled but only 36 participated in the survey. 4 could not because they did not want to participate due to different reasons known to them.

Table 11

Congregations	Adult/Male	Adult/Female	Youth/Male	Youth/Female	Total
Mabopane	4	2	0	3	9
Mamelodi	2	3	2	2	9
Saulsville	2	4	1	3	10
Soshanguve	2	4	1	1	8
Total	10	13	4	9	36

Table 11: The total number of participants from the Sample

4.5 VERBATIM RESPONSES

4.5.1 Mabopane Congregation

In this section, the researcher tries to put the responses from each participant per question, and also make the responses more logical, but still as per the interview schedule inputs. Similar types of responses are also grouped.

Nine (9) respondents took part in the research: Four elders (4), one (1) deacon, and four (4) ordinary members. They all indicated that they were members of the MRCC. Their responses will be analyzed based on their status in the congregation: elder, deacon, and the four ordinary members.

- Theme 1

1. Are you a member of MRCC? Yes, all 9 are members of MRCC
2. Are you an ordinary member of the church or an official? - *4 elders, 1 deacon, and 4 ordinary members*

- Theme 2

3. Are you attending church regularly? -All respond YES. *Four elders yes, 1 deacon yes and 4 ordinary members yes*
4. Do you attend church Funerals? -*4 Four elders Yes,1 deacon Yes, 3 ordinary members Yes,1 ordinary member No, the reason being lack of transport money*
5. What is your role in the church? -*4 elders,1 deacon,3 members*
6. Are you a member of any Organ of Support? -*3 elders Yes,1 Elder No, the reason being not yet spiritually ready to join the organ of support,1 deacon Yes, 3 Ordinary members Yes*
7. MRCC Mabopane only has one church service per week on Sundays. Do you think there is a need for extra church services? -*3 elders say No, 1 deacon says No, 3 ordinary members say no, 1 ordinary member Yes, 1 elder Yes, reason to do Bible studies and Hymn practices*

- Theme 3

8. Do you participate with Bereavement family support? -*4 elders yes, 1 deacon yes, 2 ordinary members Yes and 2 ordinary members say no, the reason being lack of money for transport*

9. Do you participate in visiting the sick? -4 elders yes, 1 deacon yes, 2 ordinary yes and ordinary no, reason lack of money for transport
10. Do you participate with the Cleaning of the church? -4 elders yes, 1 deacon yes, 2 ordinary yes, and 2 ordinary say no, the reason being, people are being paid to clean the church, due to the work schedule
- Theme 4
11. Do you ever Volunteer in the church? -4 elders say yes, 1 deacon yes, 3 ordinary members say yes, 1 ordinary member says no, the reason being church activities often clutch with my personal life
- Theme 5
12. Do you contribute your dues regularly?? -4 elders say yes, 1 deacon says yes, 3 ordinary say yes, 1 ordinary member no, the reason being I do after a long time, due to lack of money
13. Do you contribute to Lekgetho/monthly tickets? - 4 elders say yes, 1 deacon says yes, 3 ordinary members say Yes, 1 ordinary member no, lack of money
14. Do you contribute to the Sunday Collection? -4 elders say yes, 1 deacon says Yes, and 4 ordinary members say yes
15. Do you contribute to Puno/Thanksgiving? -4 elders say yes, 1 deacon says Yes, and 4 ordinary members say yes
16. Do you contribute Building funds? -4 elders yes, 1 deacon Yes, and 3 ordinary members said yes 1 ordinary member said no, due to lack of income, I am not able to contribute towards building funds
- Theme 6
17. Do you have any recommendations that can improve church activities in your church? 3 Elders say No, 1 Elder says yes, the church needs weekly ward/cell group prayer services. 1 deacon said yes; MRCC should be established in the Suburbs since people are now staying in the suburbs. It becomes difficult for them to travel to townships to attend church services, 3 ordinary members say no. 1 ordinary member says yes, the church should do Bible study sessions, fundraising activities, and audience attraction activities.

4.5.2 Mamelodi Congregation

Nine (9) respondents took part in the research: no elder (0), one (1) deacon, and eight (8) ordinary members. They all indicated that they were members of the MRCC. Their responses will be analyzed based on their status in the congregation: the deacon, and the eight ordinary members.

- Theme 1
 1. Are you a member of MRCC? Yes, all 9 are members of the MRCC
 2. Are you an ordinary member of the church or an official? -1 *Church official*, 8 *ordinary members*
- Theme 2
 3. Are you attending church regularly? -1 *deacon says yes*, 3 *ordinary members say yes*, 5 *ordinary members say no*,
 - Ordinary member 1 response, the reason being the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 I have been afraid of a big group.
 - Ordinary member 2- I am cycling sport and it demands much of my time
 - Ordinary member 3- I attend twice a month due to work commitments, I work Saturday nights and knock off in the early hours of Sunday
 - Ordinary member 4-Once a month due to work and studies, I am a full-time Masters student
 - Ordinary member 5- the reason being he is working on weekends and public holidays
 4. Do you attend church Funerals? -1 *deacon attends and says yes*, 1 *Ordinary member says yes*, 7 *ordinary members say NO*,
 - Ordinary member 1, NO, since the outbreak of Covid in 2020 I am afraid of big group
 - Ordinary member 2, NO, I am in cycling sport and it demands much of my time
 - Ordinary member 3, NO, I attend twice a month due to work commitments,
 - Ordinary member 4, I work Saturday nights and knock off in the early hours of Sunday
 - Ordinary member 5, NO, once a month due to work and studies, I am a full time Masters student
 - Ordinary member 6, NO, I am working on weekends and public holidays

- Ordinary member 7, NO, I am self-employed most of my clients come on Saturday morning

5. What is your role in the church? -1 Deacon and 8 church members

6. Are you a member of any Organ of Support? -1 deacon say yes, 2 ordinary members say yes, 5 ordinary members say no (4 ordinary members did not give reasons)

-1 ordinary member said, I don't need more pressure, school and cycling are already taking all my time

7. MRCC Mamelodi only has one church service per week on Sundays. Do you think there is a need for extra church service? 1 deacon says no, 3 ordinary members saying no, 5 ordinary say yes:

- Ordinary member 1, another service in the afternoon to accommodate those who work in the morning

- Ordinary member 2, I think a midweek church service is needed

- Ordinary member 3, at least twice a week service is a need for from 17h00 to 19h00. It will assist those who are working on Sunday mornings

- Ordinary member 4, I suggest one service during the week

- Ordinary member 5, during the week

- Theme 3

8. Do you participate in Bereavement family support? -1 deacon says yes, and 5 ordinary members say yes. 3 ordinary members say no

-Ordinary member 1, due to the fear of big groups after Covid-19 2019

-Ordinary member 2, due to my sport schedule

-Ordinary member 3, due to the nature of my work

9. Do you participate in visiting the sick? -1 deacon say yes, 3 ordinary members say yes. 5 ordinary members say no:

-Ordinary member 1, I am running small business in Limpopo

-Ordinary member 2, due to my sport schedule

-Ordinary member 3, I have not given myself the time

-Ordinary member 4, Since Covid 2019 I am afraid to visit the sick and again because of my work schedule

-Ordinary member 5, due to the nature of my work

10. Do you participate with the Cleaning of the church? *-1 deacon yes, 3 ordinary members say yes, 5 ordinary members no, Ordinary member 1, no reason given*

-Ordinary member 2, I am very busy at my business

-Ordinary member 3, due to my sport schedule

-Ordinary member 4, I always pay someone to do that on my behalf

-Ordinary member 5, due to the nature of my work

- Theme 4

11. Do you ever Volunteer in the church? *-1 deacon says yes, 4 ordinary members say yes, 4 ordinary members say no*

-Ordinary members 1, I am very busy with my business

-Ordinary member 2, due to my sport schedule

-Ordinary member 3, due to the nature of my work

-Ordinary member 4, due to the nature of my work

- Theme 5

12. Do you contribute your dues regularly? *-1 deacon says yes, 7 ordinary members say yes, 1 ordinary member say no since I don't attend church regular*

13. Do you contribute to Lekgetho/monthly tickets? *-1 deacon says yes, 8 ordinary members say yes,*

14. Do you contribute to the Sunday Collection? *-1 deacon says yes, 8 ordinary members say yes*

15. Do you contribute Puno/Thanks giving? *-1 deacon says yes, 7 ordinary members say yes, 1 ordinary member says no, lack of income since I am not working*

16. Do you contribute Building funds? *-1 deacon says yes, 7 ordinary members say yes, 1 ordinary member says no, lack of income since I am not working*

- Theme 6

17. Do you have any recommendations that can improve church activities in your church? *-1 deacon said no, 1 ordinary member said no, 7 ordinary members said yes,*

-Ordinary member 1, we need a second service on Sunday afternoon for those who work on Sunday mornings

-Ordinary member 2, we need a midweek service in the church, it can assist members to deal with problems. Bible study is needed on this second service for church members to learn and understand the word of God. The midweek serve will serve as the therapy session for members

-Ordinary member 3, we need a second church service during the week for our spiritual growth.

-Ordinary member 4, we need another church service during the week.

-Ordinary member 5, we need another church service during the week

-Ordinary member 6, to have a choir in the church

-Ordinary member 7, the church should adapt to new situations and change with time.

4.5.3 Saulsville Congregation

Ten (10) respondents took part in the research: one elder (1), no (0) deacon, and nine (9) ordinary members. They all indicated that they were members of the MRCC. Their responses will be analyzed based on their status in the congregation: the deacon, and the eight ordinary members.

- Theme 1

1. Are you a member of MRCC? Yes, all 10 are members of MRCC

2. Are you an ordinary member of the church or an official?

-1 elder,

-9 ordinary members

- Theme 2

3. Are you attending church regularly?

- 1 elder said yes,
- 7 ordinary members say yes,
- 2 ordinary members say no

-Ordinary member 1, only twice a month due to work commitment

-Ordinary member 2, petrol is expensive, and sometimes I am not around

4. Do you attend church Funerals?

- 1 Elder says yes,
- 6 ordinary members say yes,
- 3 ordinary members say no

5. What is your role in the church?

- 1 elder
- 9 church ordinary members

6. Are you a member of any Organ of Support?

- 1 elder say yes,
- 4 ordinary members say yes,
- 5 ordinary members say no

-Ordinary member 1, I am still new at the church just enjoying being a member

-Ordinary member 2, not interested in organ of support

-Ordinary member 3, still in process

-Ordinary member 4, no reason was provided

-Ordinary member 5, no reason was provided

7. MRCC Saulsville only has one church service per week on Sundays. Do you think there is a need for extra church service?

- 1 Elder say no,
- 6 ordinary members say no,
- 3 ordinary members say yes

-Ordinary member 1, during the week, if possible different organs of support can have a praise and prayer session

-Ordinary member 2, during weekdays for Bible studies

-Ordinary member 3, Bible study session and to teach members how to preach the word

- Theme 3

8. Do you participate in Bereavement family support? *-1 elder said yes, 4 ordinary members say yes, 5 ordinary members say no*

-Ordinary member 1, lack of money since staying far from the church

-Ordinary member 2, due to my work schedule

-Ordinary member 3, due to time limitations

-Ordinary member 4, I am attending on Saturdays

-Ordinary member 5.no reason provided

9. Do you participate in visiting the sick? *-1 elder says yes, 3 ordinary members say yes, 6 ordinary members say no*

-Ordinary member 1, lack of money since staying far from the church

-Ordinary member 2, sometimes I don't get the message on time

-Ordinary member 3, due to work commitment

-Ordinary member 4, because most of the time when they visit I am at work

-Ordinary member 5, I am attending classes on Saturdays

-Ordinary member 6, no reason was provided

10. Do you participate with the Cleaning of the church? *-1 elder said yes, 3 ordinary members yes, 6 ordinary members say no*

-Ordinary member 1, some people are employed to clean the church

-Ordinary member 2, someone is being paid to clean the church

-Ordinary member 3, some people are cleaning the church

-Ordinary member 4, I have no information

-Ordinary member 5, because I have no time at all

-Ordinary member 6, because I knock off late at work

- Theme 4

11. Do you ever Volunteer in the church? *-1 elder said yes, no further answer was provided, 7 Ordinary members say yes.*

-4 Ordinary members say Yes, no further answer

-3 Ordinary members say yes:

-Ordinary member 1, assists by cooking during church functions and contributions to help one less fortunate.

-Ordinary member 2, do reading and translation in the church

-Ordinary member 3, playing the drum and collection Sunday collection during church service.

-2 ordinary members say no:

-Ordinary member 1, most of the time I am not available

-Ordinary member 2, I have stage fright

- Theme 5

12. Do you contribute your dues regularly? *-1 elder said yes, 9 ordinary members said yes*

13. Do you contribute to Lekgetho/monthly tickets? *-1 elder said yes, 7 ordinary members said yes, 2 ordinary members said no:*

-Ordinary member 1, I am still a new member of the church I have little knowledge about that

-Ordinary member 2, I am still in debt, sometimes I pay the whole amount at the beginning of the year

14. Do you contribute Sunday Collection? *-1 elder says yes, 9 ordinary members say yes*

15. Do you contribute to Puno/Thanksgiving? *-1 elder said yes, 8 ordinary members say yes, 1 ordinary member says no*

-Ordinary member 1, I haven't heard about it

16. Do you contribute Building funds? *-1 elder said yes, 8 ordinary members said yes, 1 ordinary member said no:*

-Ordinary member 1, I don't have money

- Theme 6

17. Do you have any recommendations that can improve church activities in your church? *-1 elder says no, 1 ordinary member says no, 8 ordinary members say yes:*

-Ordinary member 1, regular praise and worship to attract more youth members. Allow the members to celebrate their birthdays at the end of every month.

-Ordinary member 2, the church should adapt to new situations and change with time.

-Ordinary member 3, we need church choir, Bible studies, outings, sports day, and wellness events organized at the church.

-Ordinary member 4, the church should create community projects. Doing donations for the community. Do Bible studies

-Ordinary member 5, to have a choir in the church

-Ordinary member 6, the church needs to prioritize the members. Have good communication in the church. Consider church members' feelings.

-Ordinary member 7, we must have more fun activities in the church. E.g. camps and awareness programs

-Ordinary member 8, we need house visits and more youth activities in the church

4.5.4 Soshanguve Congregation

Eight (8) respondents took part in the research: one elder (1), no (0) deacon, and seven (7) ordinary members. They all indicated that they were members of the MRCC. Their responses will be analyzed based on their status in the congregation: the elder, and the seven ordinary members.

- Theme 1

1. Are you a member of MRCC? Yes, all 8 are members of MRCC

2. Are you an ordinary member of the church or an official?

- 1 *Elder official,*

- 7 *Ordinary members*

- Theme 2

3. Are you attending church regularly?

- 1 *elder said yes,*

- 7 *ordinary members say yes*

4. Do you attend church Funerals?

- 1 *elder says yes,*

- 7 *ordinary members say yes,*

5. What is your role in the church?

- 1 elder

- 7 ordinary members of the church

6. Are you a member of any Organ of Support?

- 1 *Elder yes, for 15 years,*

- 7 *members yes, all no further information was provided*

7. MRCC Soshanguve only has one church service per week on Sundays. Do you think there is a need for extra church service?

- 1 *elder says no,*

- 3 *ordinary members say no ,*

- 4 *ordinary members say yes:*

- Ordinary member 1, a church service during the week*

-Ordinary member 2, during the week so they can teach Bible study not only through preaching

-Ordinary member 3 Yes, during the week

-Ordinary member 4, during the week for those who are unable to attend on Sundays

- Theme 3

8. Do you participate in Bereavement family support?

-1 elder says yes,

-7 ordinary members say, yes

9. Do you participate in visiting the sick?

-1 elder says yes,

-5 ordinary members say yes,

-2 ordinary members say no

-Ordinary member 1, due to my work schedule, I work shifts

-Ordinary member 2, their time clashes with my time

10. Do you participate in the Cleaning of the church?

-1 elder said yes, 6 ordinary members said yes,

-1 ordinary member says no

-Ordinary member 1, most of the time I am not available

11. Do you ever Volunteer in the church?

- Theme 4

-1 elder said yes, but did not give further information,

-7 ordinary members say yes:

-5 did not mention how and when they volunteer in the church

-Ordinary member 1-by cooking at the church when there are events

-Ordinary member 2-by cooking and cleaning the church

- Theme 5

12. Do you contribute your dues regularly??

-1 elder says yes, 7 ordinary members say yes

13. Do you contribute to Lekgetho/monthly tickets?

-1 elder said yes

-6 ordinary members say yes

-1 ordinary member said no, and no further information was provided

14. Do you contribute to the Sunday Collection?

-1 elder said yes

-7 ordinary members say yes

15. Do you contribute to Puno/Thanksgiving?

-1 elder says yes

-7 ordinary members say yes

16. Do you contribute Building funds?

-1 elder says yes

-6 ordinary members say yes

-1 ordinary member said no and no reason was given.

- Theme 6

17. Do you have any recommendations that can improve church activities in your church?

-1 elder says yes, church building should be maintained

-7 ordinary members say yes

-Ordinary member 1, a rotation of ministers in the church

-Ordinary member 2, the church members need house visits. Contributing food for those in need. Buying Bibles for the ones who don't have

-Ordinary member 3, I feel like the church is forcing people to be members of the organ of support.

-Ordinary member 4, to have house visits, visit street kids, give them food, and pray for them.

-Ordinary member 5, do house visits, visiting street kids

-Ordinary member 6, I recommend the church council to visit members once a month. Pray for the families that are no longer coming to church.

-Ordinary member 7, I think our church needs to have Bible studies for the youth. The youth should participate more in church services. It will help in youth's spiritual growth.

4.6 INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS PER CONGREGATION

4.6.1 Mabopane

Topic	Similarities	Differences
Church attendance	All attend church regularly	
Funeral attendance	Eight	One
Organ of support	Eight	One
Extra service need	Seven don't need	Two
Bereavement support	Seven	Two
Visiting the sick	Seven	Two
Cleaning church	Seven	Two
Volunteering	Eight	One
Contribution dues	Eight	One
Contributing lekgeth	Eight	One
Sunday collection	Nine	
Puno/thanks giving	Nine	
Building funds	Eight	One

4.6.2 Mamelodi

Topic	Similarities	Differences
Church attendance	Four	Five
Funeral attendance	Two	Seven
Organ of support	Three	Six
Extra service need	Four	Five
Bereavement support	Six	Three
Visiting the sick	Four	Five
Cleaning church	Four	Five
Volunteering	Five	Four
Contribution dues	Eight	One
Contributing lekgetho	Nine	
Sunday collection	Nine	
Puno/thanksgiving	Nine	
Building funds	Eight	One

4.6.3 Saulsville

Topic	Similarities	Differences
Church attendance	Eight	Two
Funeral attendance	Seven	Three
Organ of support	Five	Five
Extra service need	Seven	Three
Bereavement support	Seven	Three
Visiting the sick	Four	Six
Cleaning church	Four	Six
Volunteering	Eight	Two
Contribution dues	Ten	
Contributing lekgetho	Eight	Two
Sunday collection	Ten	
Puno/thanks giving	Nine	One
Building funds	Nine	One

4.6.4 Soshanguve

Topic	Similarities	Differences
Church attendance	Eight	
Funeral attendance	Eight	
Organ of support	Eight	
Extra service need	Four	Four
Bereavement support	Eight	
Visiting the sick	Six	Two
Cleaning church	Seven	One
Volunteering	Eight	
Contribution dues	Eight	
Contributing lekgetho	Seven	One
Sunday collection	Eight	
Puno/thanksgiving	Eight	
Building funds	Seven	One

4.7 IDENTIFICATION OF PRINCIPLES THAT INDICATE IF PEOPLE ARE COMMITTED AND UNDERSTAND THE MISSIO DEI

4.7.1 Church attendance:

Of the number of people interviewed, a total of 29 members attend the church regularly while 7 members do not attend regularly

Researcher's comment: Church attendance plays an important role in the Christian life. The MRCC Church Order enforces the following entitlements. Refer to Article 7.6 Entitlements:

Article 7.6.1 To be present in the church service to receive the Word of God;

Article 7.6.2 To be taught the Word of God with a view to understand the Bible in order to live in conformity and according to the Lord's commands;

The majority of the MRCC members interviewed do attend church services according to the results and this is positive since the church has the right platform to create programs in the services that will appeal to all the members to attend church regularly. Attending church on Sunday is how Christians respond in faith to the Missio Dei.

4.7.2 Funeral Attendance:

Of the number of people interviewed a total of 25 members attend funerals while 11 members do not.

Researcher's Comment: Attending the funerals of the members of the church is another way of showing empathy. Empathy is only derived from love. The greatest command is to love God and love your neighbour. It is therefore a positive element from the results that most members of the church understand that they need to support each other during catastrophes and sad times.

Article 7.6.12 states that to receive prayers and to be comforted and consoled during bereavement, illness, and other catastrophes. It is one of the entitlements and promises that MRCC members will receive and this will only happen if members understand the part that they should play

4.7.3 Bereavement:

Of the total number of people interviewed a total of 27 members attend bereavement while 9 do not.

Researcher's comment: The MRCC, like other churches, is built on the concept that the church is a family. The question was intended to capture how the MRCC is operating in terms of family units. This question was to see if members are taking part during bereavement and are supporting each other. The majority are taking part though the concern is the number that are not participating.

Article 7.7 The Obligations state clearly: "The rights to which a member is entitled are dependent on the extent to which the member fulfills the corresponding obligations towards the church. A member has the following responsibilities:

Article 7.7.9 Be helpful and courteous to others including the less fortunate people,

Article 7.7.13 Have empathy to others,

The following will be the results of a church that encourages its members to live as a family and in unity.

- Expression of love and care
- Inspiration for hope to members
- Prayerful occasion
- Provides an opportunity for discussion of members' private matters
- Revival.

4.7.4 Organ of Support:

Of the number of people interviewed a total of 24 members belong to the organ of support while 12 do not.

The MRCC Church Order encourages members to belong to the organs of support. Article 12 states clearly the reasons and its functions:

- a) Organs of support come into existence after an established biblical, constitutional or experiential need;
- b) The functionality of an organ of support shall be drafted into a constitution which shall be approved by its constituency and then its supervisory structures.

Researcher's comment: The number proves that many members enjoy being members of an Organ of Support. There is also a serious concern raised by some members from those who are not members of an Organ of Support. The church needs to be cautious about the role of the Organ of Support and the impact they make in the church. Organs of Support are structured and formed to enhance members. The Church Order puts it correctly, "Organs of support have no independent legal status of their own, but operate as autonomous entities within the framework of the structures in which they are established." Refer to Article 12.2 on the Autonomy of Organs of Support.

The moment the Organs of Support become more important than the church, it loses its meaning. One member says, "the reason not to be a member of an Organ of Support is to have my freedom." The view and the experience of the member is not encouraging therefore the church should relook and review the role of the Organs of Support in the church.

4.7.5 Visiting the sick:

Of the number of people interviewed, a total of 21 members visit the sick while 15 do not.

Researcher's comment: The numbers show that the majority of members understand that visiting the sick is their duty and not only the minister's duty. Though the number is promising there is still a challenge that members don't understand the need for it. Article 7.7.9 states "Be helpful and courteous to others including the less fortunate people." It remains a challenge that the church still needs to teach more on the topic. Matthew 25:42-45, ...42 "For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not take me in, I was naked and you did not clothe me. I was sick and in prison and you did not visit me. And they too will reply, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty

or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you? He will reply, I tell the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.”

4.7.6 Cleaning of the church:

Of the number of people interviewed, a total of 22 help to clean the church while 14 do not.

Researcher’s comment: Cleaning of the church is work that requires people to do it physically. Most people think of cleaning the church as not important work and is associated with work for uneducated people. The question was intended to see how members understand how important this task is. Even though it is encouraging that the majority of the participants in the survey do help to clean the church, it is still discouraging to hear reasons for those not doing it. Some respondents say because they are busy either at work or business. They think someone else will do it. There is a lack of commitment to ownership and stewardship.

4.7.7 Volunteering in the church:

Of the number of people interviewed a total of 29 volunteered while 7 do not volunteer in the church.

Researcher’s comment: Many participants agreed that they do volunteer work in the church. Though, it is not clear for what they volunteer in the church since they did not answer the questionnaire completely, but most volunteer work is during church events. Volunteering for many means cooking or cleaning the church when there are church events. My understanding here is that they volunteer because the church has requested them to assist. The word volunteer suggests they respond to a request, like they volunteer because there is a request. What I miss is the understanding by the respondents or participants to approach the church and volunteer without being asked.

4.7.8 Contributing dues:

Of the number of people interviewed a total of 34 contribute dues while 2 do not.

Researcher's Comment: This question was a general question to check if members are willing to give or are cheerful givers. The MRCC like other mainline churches is struggling financially. We have a serious problem due to the exodus of ministers leaving the church and those working for other departments or other work (Tent making). It is not a secret that the MRCC is one of the poorest churches with many congregants being unemployed. The results, however, prove otherwise since most are contributing their dues.

4.7.9 Contributing Lekgetho:

Of the number of people interviewed a total of 32 contribute Lekgetho while 4 do not.

Researcher's comment: The results prove that most members contribute to Lekgetho. The question was intended to find out how the MRCC members understand Lekgetho. The results demonstrate that they know that they need to contribute to Lekgetho. Lekgetho is a monthly contribution done by members individually. Previously it was contributed by the family until the members understood that this is every Christian's duty. In other churches Lekgetho is tithing. In the MRCC a certain amount is required monthly not necessarily ten percent of the salary of the member.

4.7.10 Contributing Sunday collection:

All participants recorded they contributed to the Sunday collection.

Researcher's comment: In the MRCC members are called forward in church to give the money at the table in front of everyone. During this time all members and visitors are expected to give their Sunday collection. Members are called through the Organs of Support where they belong. A group of people will go at a time. I think this method encourages everyone to go to the table since all will be looking at those who are not going to the table. I think psychologically it may also blackmail those who are not going

to the table. It is encouraging to see that all participants recorded that they do contribute to the Sunday collection, hopefully, they are giving from the heart, not because of fear or being victimized.

4.7.11 Contributing Puno:

All participants recorded they contributed puno.

Researchers comment: Puno in the MRCC is collected from wards by deacons. It is a once-off contribution done once a year by members of families. The church council may have a target or allow wards to contribute as far as they can. Sometimes elders and deacons can have targets in their wards. Members from wards will contribute and are encouraged to contribute more. It is like a sort of competition among ward elders and deacons to see which ward can contribute the most. It is also encouraging to see elders encouraging their members to be the best wards through giving.

4.7.12 Contributing Building Funds:

Of all the people interviewed a total of 32 contribute building funds while 4 do not.

Researcher's comment: Contributing can be defined or likened to giving, and it is very encouraging to see that most members or participants say they contribute their dues. They give to the church what is due to the church. Contribution is not just a word nor confession but commitment is action. The numbers or stats on this topic of giving say that giving is not a problem in the MRCC. Members appear to be committed to giving to the church.

4.8 CONCLUSION

Commitment seems not to be a problem in the MRCC as per the results of this research. The results may reflect only the commitment of those who participated in the survey or research. Only time will truly determine the genuine outcome. The questionnaire/interview approach to evaluating this program certainly indicates considerably more positive than negative convictions in the lives of the participants.

COVID-19 did affect the church negatively with respect to all levels of commitment: Church attendance, church participation, and church contribution all declined. The research may have failed to capture the impact of Covid-19 but the results prove that participants did mention how they have stopped some of the things they used to do because of Covid-19. Attendance dropped drastically since Covid-19 and this shows how destructive Covid-19 was to the church. The truth is most of the MRCC congregations have not yet regained their members lost since COVID-19.

The conclusions drawn from the interviews were more positive than I had anticipated. The church needs to create an environment where members will want to commit more. The respondents should give or contribute their dues not because of fear, guilt or being forced. They should contribute as a response to and awareness of the *missio Dei*. The respondents revealed a very important aspect. It appears to me that the majority of church members still live with a church concept derived from consumerism. The church must present “products” for consumption, for example, Bible study, more services, etc. There is not yet an awareness that all members are the sent ones into the world to witness the gospel according to the *missio Dei*. The MRCC must work on creating an awareness among congregants of the *missio Dei* and the role of ordinary church members in the *missio Dei*.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

5.1 SUMMARY OF THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

The problem statement clarifies what is the research question to be addressed in this research. The focus of this study was to look at the history of a particular mainline church (the MRCC) existing in Southern Africa and the impact it had before in society and community versus where we are right now. In the past, the church used to contribute not only to the spiritual needs of society but also to address needs holistically. Schools and hospitals serviced by the church made the church to be there for the people. In Matthew 25:34-36 Jesus taught that the mission of the church is to take care of the prisoners, the sick, the weak, the thirsty, and strangers. Currently, the church has become a Sunday event only. The church is only active and available for the people on Sunday during worship services. Even if there are any other activities they do not have the impact like in the past. As one example can be mentioned there was a crèche in the Mamelodi MRCC congregation in the past, but no longer so.

5.2 MIXED METHOD: QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE

By using the mixed method, gave the advantage of understanding the statistics, numbers, and feelings of the members on the researched subject. The following can be said about developing a method to increase Commitment: the biblical or Theological foundation of commitment is found in John 16:12. The two most important words for not being ready by the disciples can be translated as not yet committed or not yet matured. Paul emphasized that when he was a boy he acted somehow like a boy but now because he is a man he will think and act like a man (1 Cor 13:11). Paul emphasised the importance of spiritual maturity which also speaks volumes on the level of commitment. Jesus spoke of four responses in the parable of a sower and the soil in Matthew 13: 3-23.

- a) Those who reject the word when they hear it, do so due to the main reason being they did not understand the word (Matthew 13:9).
- b) Those who initially are open to the word to commit but later on are hindered by different pressures of the world. The rocky soil by the path represents shallow hearts or superficial commitments.
- c) Then some accept the word or message but later allow pains and worries to choke their new life of faith. The seeds among the weeds represent distracted hearts or a self-centered commitment that cannot embrace maturity and be able to assist the self or others.
- d) The good soil represents receptive hearts committed to the word regardless of the situation.

“The church exists to communicate God’s word” (Warren 1995:104). The church of Christ is task to communicate the word to those who did not receive or learnt it. Only through evangelism, by hearing the good news, people will be converted and repent. It is only possible for them to preach the word of God when they are sent to preach. Someone should be sent to deliver the messenger (Romans 10:14-15). The awareness of this responsibility expected from each church member will increase the commitment levels.

5.3 CHURCH COMMITMENT

As explained in the section on the missio Dei, it is clear that the church is sent to the world to preach the good news and to bring people into God’s eternal family. “This focus is further evident by the fact that He came to seek and to save all the lost (Luke 19:10) and by the fact that He eventually sent his followers to all groups of people around the world (Matt 28:18-20)” (Fanning 2001:29). The MRCC should develop a strategy on how to do mission work, how to accomplish this mission of making disciples. Malphurs (1996:45) puts it that, “the mission or primary goal of the church ultimately is the Savior’s Great Commission. It is to evangelize the lost and disciple the saved.”

The next step after hearing the word and accepting Jesus as the Lord and Saviour is to be baptized (Level 1). Baptism brings them into the eternal family. Through baptism,

we are integrated into a new family. Baptismal symbolizes identification with Christ. Warren (1995:105) says, “Why is baptismal so important to warrant inclusion in Christ’s Great Commission? I believe it is because it symbolizes one of the purposes of the church; fellowship-identification with the body of Christ.” Through baptism they are no longer a community or crowd but now a congregation. There is a change of status, from community to congregation.

Baptizing them in the name of the Father of the Son and the Holy Spirit is important. Baptismal is communion with the Lord. Baptismal is communion with the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Through baptism, we are consecrated to God and anointed by the Holy Spirit. We are now joined to Christ and share in his threefold mission as prophet, priest and king. Jesus is explicitly called a prophet (Luke 13:33, Acts 3:22–23), priest (Heb. 3:1), and king (Rev. 17:14).

Jesus commands his disciples to teach the people to obey (compare Matt. 28:19). This step comes after renewal through the teaching of the word and baptismal of water and the blood of Christ. Since they are now members of the family, no longer strangers and foreigners. They are a new creation and the old has passed; now they must be taught to obey. Teaching someone to obey means developing someone’s spiritual maturity. “It is the church’s responsibility to develop people to spiritual maturity” (Warren 1995:106). They are now instrumental to discipleship. Very interesting that when going through these levels, one observes that the instruction from John to love God plays an important role.

Level 2 is about conversion. This level is the reality in which many church members are stuck in nominal Christianity. Yes, they are converted but it seems they do not understand the mission of God. The problem on this level is that if they stay here long enough they might backslide and fall back in the pre-conversion state. The major problem here is that people are underperforming in comparison to themselves. These are people in the parable of the sower. In Mark 4:3-20, we find four types of ground (the path, the rocky, the weeded, and the good ground), and all types are present in the farmer’s field. The sower therefore sowed every patch of earth, regardless of whether he deemed it worth the effort or capable of receiving what he sowed.

The path, rocks, and weeds are a common occurrence in soil though they are not what the farmer wants to plant on. This tells us that there are and will be unpleasant moments in

doing mission work. First, these three types represent the soil that has been regularly trampled to the extent that it has become hardened and barren, unable to accept any seeds, and very resistant to being softened by rain. The paths are people who have been hurt, broken, and misused, their hearts are hardened from the pain of being so wounded. The rocky ground are people who receive the word but because there are many rocks around them – rocks are representative of the trials and cares of the world, and temptations – and because they cannot grow their roots deeper, the word dies out. They are not stable and wavering about everything. They are not in a good state of mind to grow and become spiritually mature. We will understand that, it is often not a quick process to restore a path into the fertile soil it once was.

Diego Boquer (2020:6-9) speaks of the slacker on Level 2. These are people who are not doing what is expected of them: “A slacker is someone who is not doing what he or she is supposed to do”. He says the slacker always produces mediocrity. Paul helps us see this issue from a different perspective (Col. 3:23-24). The results here are that when we under deliver, we dishonour God’s name, and his kingdom suffers a great loss. What is important during this entire process is to make sure that the soil is protected. It is therefore important for the church to have programs and strategies that will assist members not to die spiritually on this level, but grow to Level 3. No one wants to labour in vain. All the efforts at Level 2 will be in vain if the church allows mediocrity. It is imperative to correct those who want to live in sin and yet they know that Jesus died for our sins. The church should correct those who refuse to change their behaviour. It is the task of the church to encourage spiritual growth among the members. Lastly, the good soil represents good people who will be able to move to Level 3.

In Level 3 we find the committed. The committed are the responsible ones. They are the ones who moved from Level 2 to Level 3. “It is a process of moving people from spiritual pre-birth to Christianity maturity” (Malphurs 1996:45). On this third level of commitment, we find responsible members. People on this level are reliable, trustworthy, and dependent. They are always on time to complete their tasks no matter what and thus do exactly what they are supposed to do. Responsible members encourage faithfulness around the church. Who are these committed and responsible people? They are the good soil. The good soil are the sons and daughters of God who have hearts that are soft to receive the word of God.

What does it mean to love God (John 13:34)? People on level 2 can bear the fruits of love which is first to love God. They can love God (John 13:34). The love of God to us is the foundation and the well full of love. We love because He first loved us. It is not possible to love God unless you are loved. To love God is an instruction to the followers of Christ. In John 13:34 the command is very clear. We are commanded to love God with all our hearts minds and souls. Secondly, people on this level bear the fruit of love to love others (John 13:35).

On this level who love others, we find the generous and kind members of the church. These are the members who no longer live for themselves but they live for Christ. They understand that Christ died for all of us, not only for a certain group or nation but for all of us (compare 2 Corinthians 5:15). These usually comprise the core of church leaders who always want to lead no matter the circumstances. They know the Gospel comes first in their lives. They prioritize Jesus in their lives. On this level, people live by commitment. On this level it is no longer about blaming the pastor or the church council, every time things do not go as planned. Everyone is committed to seeing the gospel being preached to all other people not only in their church. Every Christian should live up to this level.

All these five commitment levels become possible when you love God and others. The love of God becomes the glue that attaches us to God and one another. The love of God becomes the motivation to preach, baptize, and teach others to obey. It motivates us to worship God with the crowd (unbelievers) because God loved us first. Worshipping is only possible when we love God. "The transition from one group to another requires a specific commitment to fulfil Christ's purpose in one's life at each level. Thus, the term "Commitment Level" (Fanning 2001:8).

5.3.1 Church Attendance

This research focuses on the lack of commitment of church members, in particular the MRCC members. The question was whether the lack of commitment was the reason for the decline of church attendance. The decline of attendance is a reality in many churches. The number of members is declining in many churches including the MRCC. The study is not necessary on church attendance as per se, it is about determining if church commitment of members is not one of the reasons among many that the church attendance is declining. The study was conducting before, during and after Covid19.

Therefore, I should not allow myself to believe that Covid-19 was the main cause of church attendance decline. Yes, during Covid-19 the decline was at the highest, and we have all seen and bear the hardship of financial remittance. Chukwuma correctly puts it, “undoubtedly, the outbreak of COVID-19 heralded obvious changes in the traditions and practices of churches. Some long-standing traditions of the church such as Holy Communion, baptism and sharing of peace have either been suspended or modified. The joy and unity shared by Christians in various churches have been tampered with as a result of the need to maintain social distancing and other preventive measures” (Chukwuma 2021:9).

The decline of MRCC membership however started before Covid-19. I told the congregation I serve that COVID-19 came to expose us as Christians. The most important two questions the church needs to answer today are: how far has church attendance recovered from Covid19? The second question is how attendance growth can be encouraged further?

I will now discuss attendance. Attendance does not mean physical attendance, but in many churches and congregations before COVID-19 they only knew church attendance as being physical present at the church events. Today due to technology and lessons learned from Covid-19, there are online and TV channel churches. Attendance and commitment are the act of the heart. Attendance affects many spheres of the church including finances. “Another consequence of the poor attendance to services is poor financial remittances” (Chukwuma 2021:9). The church became poorer since the decline in attendance directly affects the church's income and finances. Many churches, including MRCC congregations, survive and execute projects mainly through tithes, offerings, and member donations.

Since I mentioned that the decline existed before Covid-19, I will look at different factors associated with the decline in church attendance. In his study *Understanding declining church attendance and strategies for growth*, Lawton mentions five factors associated with church attendance decline. "Analysis of the survey and interview data revealed five factors pastors associate with the decline in church attendance: (a) Evangelism practices across participating churches lead to decline, (b) Pastors suggest social media contributes to a decline of in-person attendance for younger generations, (c) Data suggest that aging congregations correlate with decline, (d) Pastors suggest that competing activities contribute to decline, and (e) Pastors suggest that entertainment as a form of worship should be balanced with equipping parishioners with the gospel" (Lawton 2021:47).

Here follows the discussion for consideration for church attendance as a contributor to the commitment of church members. Rick Warren (1995:134-136) uses the different natures of Jesus' invitations to follow Him to support the use of progressive commitment levels.

5.3.1.1 Come and See (John 1:39 Invitation).

Jesus invited those who did not know the light and salvation of God. When they honor the invitation they will learn that He is the light and should see the light. They will now learn that He brings salvation and they must accept salvation. Church attendance starts when people are invited to the church. The moment they are in contact with other members of the church, immediately fellowship begins. The invitation was made to John and Andrew by Jesus himself. He invited them so that He could create interest and desire in them. He invited them so that they could experience a new life in his life. He wanted to motivate their commitment (John 1:14). Mills (1998:68) shows that commitment is the result of being drawn to it, rather than responding to demands. "He had created a desire in their hearts to commit and now their imagination was exploding with the possibilities of what they could become by following Him" (Mills 1998:168).

When someone honors the invitation, commitment begins. Fanning puts it as follows, "The most basic commitment begins with a visit to the church, which should lead to a personal commitment to Christ and His church, then the believer should be led to a

commitment to follow Christ in discipleship, followed by a commitment to a specific ministry and ultimately a commitment to one's mission for life" (Fanning 2001:1).

Jesus made disciples to serve the kingdom. The mission of the Christian church is not only to attract crowds to worship events but to make disciples and serve the Kingdom. This is the reason why church attendance numbers matter. The numbers show if there is progress and growth in the church. But how do we know we are fulfilling our mission effectively? Counting attendance is an important indicator of the numerical size of the body of Christ. It helps monitor our success in holding and making disciples. It shows us where we are making and losing ground. It challenges and informs us about how we should go about our mission. And most of us would agree that encouraging the worship of the Living God is integral to that mission. Church attendance numbers do not tell us everything, but they do tell us quite a lot. They show if there is growth or stagnation.

I have learned that the way the church attracts its visitors is the way it will grow, the more people visit the church the more possibility of them becoming members and the church will grow. Are we saved by only attending church? The answer is no because church attendance does not guarantee salvation. We are only promised salvation when we repent from our deeds of darkness and accept the light of Jesus which is salvation. Attendance is the act of gratitude, we attend the church to show our gratitude to the Lord and to be part of the body of Christ. By attending the church, we confirm that we are part of one body of Christ and we abide with him.

Jesus shared his experience and joy with other people. When we invite others to church we want to share our experience and joy with other people. Our joy is the agreement and confirmation that faith in Christ Jesus is the most important part of our lives. We are putting our feelings to what we believe. Inviting people to church we are being able to play a role in someone's life transformation. Being used by God to introduce someone to forgiveness, peace, and ultimate purpose. There's nothing more rewarding or energizing. To put it in athletic language – is sitting on the bench really what you want to do for the rest of your life? You show up for practices (church attendance). You suit up day in and day out and you still want to sit on the bench. Inviting people is what the coach wants you to do. The coach wants you in the game, the game of saving people's lives, and the game of changing people's lives.

Jesus gave the people more opportunities to make informed decisions. When you invite them, it will give the people you invite the opportunity to make a more *informed* decision about church Jesus and eternity. Always remember before your invitation, they are making assessments based on what they've heard, in the media, and other portrayals of religion. When you invite them, you allow them to rethink things from personal experience and trust God with the process.

Consider what C.S. Lewis (1970:51-52) said about his own experience: "I thought that I could do it on my own, by retiring to my rooms and reading theology, and I wouldn't go to the churches. . . . But as I went on I saw the great merit of it. I came up against different people of quite different outlooks and different education, and then gradually my conceit just began peeling off. I realized that the hymns (just sixth-rate music) were, nevertheless, being sung with devotion and benefit by an old saint in elastic-side boots in the opposite pew, and then you realize that you aren't fit to clean those boots. It gets you out of your solitary conceit." We must invite people to church and work with them since we cannot do it alone.

The decline in attendance is more visible when there are no invitations and members see no need to invite other people to their church. There are several reasons why the members don't ask people to church. One reason is that church members believe such work is the pastor's or leadership's work. It is not their responsibility but the pastor's responsibility.

There are two primary ways churches can increase church growth: through invitation. The first is to target the already converted from the nearby congregation. This method is ineffective because they are already converted, like stealing them from another home. I favour the second method which is hunting the unconverted or those not attending the church at all. "Churches grow their attendance in two primary ways. The first approach is to contact parishioners attending a nearby church and persuade them to relocate to your church. The second approach is to grow by finding those who do not currently attend any church and convince them to attend your church. Sometimes, those not attending churches may be those who consider themselves to be non-Christian or Christian but choose not to attend (Lawton 2021:48). The truth is many churches have taken a passive approach to do mission. The results are visible since the churches are empty.

5.3.1.2 Come and Follow (Matthew 14:9)

We now look at how Jesus started his ministry. We are invited to come and do something, to follow Jesus. No one can be invited just to come and do nothing. By following Jesus, I mean we are invited to be disciples and make disciples. Even at the wedding, we are invited to do something, to be witnesses of that marriage. Jesus invited his disciples to be his followers. Fanning (2001:27) puts it correctly by saying, “Now there is a specific invitation to become an imitator or disciple, a follower of Jesus.”. To follow Jesus will be a decision that every individual will have to make, but it comes after people are invited to the church or Christ. Invitation plays an important role in the disciple-making business. Discipleship is the greatest invitation in the Bible. Discipleship is about seeking communities and making fellowship, which is *koinonia*. Followers of Jesus seek the presence of God and other followers.

Koinonia is a Greek word used in the New Testament since the early church to describe the relationship between Christian community members. This relationship is called Christian fellowship (within the Body of Christ). *Koinonia* derives from the root adjective *koinos*, meaning ‘common’. The noun *koinonia* means sharing, participating in something, and fellowship. It expresses the New Testament concept of brotherliness/sisterhood and is close to the Greek word *Philadelphia* (Deist 1984:137). *Koinonia* is sometimes translated as communion or togetherness. In this chapter *koinonia* is translated as “fellowship”.

Fellowship is one of the fundamental expressions of divine love in the Christian community. “Koinonia is both a gift and a calling” (Greville 2002:25). The early Christians intuitively lived and worked so that those outside the Church discerned *koinonia*. It also became one of the early Church’s strongest draw cards. They had an extraordinary relationship among themselves that has kept them together.

According to Seeseman (as cited in McDermott 1975:64-77), *Koinonia* has three principal meanings: generosity, sharing/participation and community. As the apostles shared the gospel, they also had participated in the gospel itself. “It has been recognised that the primary meaning of words in the “*koinon*” group is participation” (Suggs 1994:351). They have shared the common good news, which is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The next phase after sharing and participating is the association or community. The fellowship of the church derived from the fellowship of Jesus and his disciples. The fellowship was inclusive of all people, Christians and non-Christians. The apostles did mix with other people, the Gentiles or those who were not the followers of Christ in the community. They were with them in times of crisis and in times of laughter. The apostles and the early Christians did represent the kingdom of God in this world and made a difference in the world.

5.3.1.3 Come and be (Mark 3:3):

Jesus was followed by multitudes. Some were healed through his healing ministries and left. Some were fed during his feeding ministries and also left. The twelve were called to “be with him” (Mark 3:13). “Now they would discover and develop their God-given gifts and leadership abilities” (Fanning 2001:27). They were called to make a difference in the world. He healed the man with a shriveled hand in front of everyone so that they could learn that Jesus was calling us to restore and heal.

Jesus told his disciples they were called the world's salt and light. “You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt loses its flavour, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matthew 15:13-16 NKJV). The church is called to have a relationship with the world. Jesus taught his disciples that they should add value to the world since salt adds value to the food.

The metaphor was applied to the disciples and all fellow Christians and believers. In John 8:12 Christ declared, “I am the light of the world. The one who follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” Jesus is the light and we are called to reflect the same light to others in darkness. We need to carry the light to the world, we need to carry the gospel to all nations. Psalm 119:105 says, “Your word is a lamp to walk by and a light to illumine my path.” The light here refers to the intellectual truth seen in God’s Word. In Romans 13:12-14 a lamp or light refers to the moral deeds, “let us walk honestly as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness” and darkness to the immoral deeds of the “flesh and to fulfil the lust thereof.”

We are called to be present in the world (John 17:11,14-15). Christians are constantly being reminded that even though they are in the world, they should not be of the world.

Chapter 17 of this gospel seems to be the origin of our expression “in the world, but not of the world.” Verse 11 reads: “And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you.” Verse 16 reads: “They do not belong to the world, as I do not belong to the world.” But is this the whole picture? The ‘I’ in both verses is crucial; Jesus is the model or trailblazer for the disciples: they are in the world, as He was, they do not belong to the world, as He did not. But if we are to do justice to John’s Christology, and John’s gospel as a whole, we need to go back to the Prologue (1:1-18).

It seems, then, that there are two “patterns” of Christian living in the world according to the New Testament: a Christological and missiological one, (“not of the world, but sent into it”) and what we might call a “survival” mode” (“in the world, but not of it”). These two modes of Christian existence are not necessarily in conflict with each other, nor can one always say that the missiological mode is superior to the survival mode.

The church needs to understand that though we live in the world, we are not of the world. We are here to represent the gospel and another home which is heaven and that is where we belong. We are here to make sure the world is saved through the gospel. We must be committed to the well-being of the world and the church. We cannot prioritize one over the other. Many Christians across the world are so committed. Others are more committed to the well-being of the church, or their church, over against, or in preference to the world.

5.3.1.4 Come and act (Matthew 28:19-20)

Very interesting to learn that after they have been with him for three years Jesus sends them out to do his mission. “You go and make disciples.” They were sent with a specific task to make disciples and to commit to this life of making disciples. “He called them to commit to a life of mission. Now He left the future of the church in their hands” (Fanning 2001:28).

The church in its totality is about its ecclesiology, which can be defined as doctrines. “Ecclesiology can be defined as the doctrine of the church” (Karkkainen 2002:9). The different churches and congregations do their Ecclesiology differently, which will also

affect their programs. Programs differ from church to church and congregation to congregation (Refer to 2,7 Ecclesiology).

The task of the church clarified in Matthew 28:19-20 or the Great Commission appears to be the cornerstone and the main task of the church. Garcia (2009:95) correctly suggests the purpose or task of mission as, “simply put, mission is the redeeming action of the triune God toward people and the creation, the goal of which is to restore human relations with God in Christ and to bring every aspect of life under the lordship of Christ. The mission of the church as a partner of God is based on this mission of God; the *missio ecclesiarum* reflects the *missio Dei*.”

The church consists of followers who must act in a certain way that befits their calling. They should strive to do good to the people of God and God himself. Matthew emphasizes not words but actions. “I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in jail and you came to visit me. Then the righteous will answer him, Lord when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?”

The king will reply, Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:36-40). In these verses, we learn that the church needs to be more practical than theoretical. We need to practice what we believe. Since we believe in doing good deeds we should do them and trust that we are doing it for God. The Scripture gives us clear directives that can be shaped in a very real and practical way.

5.3.2 Church Participatory

In the research, I am trying to find out how often church members participate and what drives them to participate in church activities. Participation was divided into three categories: Participation with bereavement in family support, visiting the sick, and participating with the cleaning of the church. In general, the majority of the church members in all churches participated in the research are participating in all three these areas . Rahman (1993:150) defines participation as "an active process in which the

participant takes initiative and takes action that is stimulated by their own thinking and deliberation and over which they can exert effective control."

5.3.2.1 Body of Christ.

Being a member of the body of Christ is not an option, but a must, and always being active in the body. In the New Testament book of 1 Corinthians (12:12- 31), the Apostle Paul teaches us about one body and many parts of Christ Jesus. There are threefold meanings of the body of Christ.

First, it refers to the church as the Body of Christ. The apostle Paul the great church planter uses this metaphor of the human body. He emphasized that the various parts -eyes, ears, nose, hands, feet, and others – have individual jobs. Christians belong to one body, a church, though they have different things to do in it. The church is the only place where all types of people can gather under one roof irrespective of their colour and creeds. Jesus treated people equally and with respect.

He made sure they felt comfortable and loved. "We belong together. We need each other. We are connected, joined together as parts of one body. We are family." (Warren 1995:328). People in the church are like people of the same family. They are treated equally, and although they may differ in positions like parents and children, they still belong to one family which is the one body. The eye in the body is not more important than the ear. These body parts need each other to have a healthy and functional body.

The second is the church the physical body of Christ. This definition states that Jesus came to dwell in the world as a human being, born of a woman but conceived by the Holy Spirit. Jesus became the sacrifice to fulfil God's plan of salvation. Only a human being could be the sacrifice for human sin, and Christ, the Sinless One, was the sole One qualified as a spotless offering.

Third and final is the body of Christ in Communion. This is taken from the words at the last supper. "And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). The bread is the symbolic memorial of the body of Jesus Christ. We belong together because we

want to and because the blood of Christ binds us together. There is an organic and spiritual bond binding people to the church and to one another. Awareness of this nature of the church should bring commitment. During this time of the sharing of bread, is the most sacred worship of the service.

The church is not a worldly institution where members renew their membership through exchange: I pay and receive several benefits in return. Rather, the church is organic. Membership into the Body of Christ is through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Baptismal in the Holy Spirit is the doorway to the gifts and the supernatural in our lives. It is only through baptism that one can reach the utmost power of Christianity. The power that is mentioned in the book of Acts. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

There is only one body of Christ and all of us are referred to as many parts of one body. We all belong to Christ and we must function together to his glory. The relationship between the body of Christ and the church is observed in its fullness in the maturity reached by the church through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. His life, miracles, and parables are the foundation of the gospel. “The greatest ‘assimilator’ of all was Jesus Himself. For three years He dedicated Himself to the twelve” (Everett. 1985:161).

Every member of the church should participate wholly in the church activities. Jesus became the relevant example of how members should participate in church activities. Members’ full participation in church activities becomes the core business of being Christian and a member of the church which is the body of Christ. We are one body, individually members one of another (Romans 12:4-4).

5.3.2.2 Teaching Participatory

Jesus intended to call all nations. “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). Jesus was here to close the prevailing gap between God and us. He was here to embrace the whole creation, the whole humanity. He came for the sick, the thirsty

and the hungry. “If one is thirsty, let him come to me and drink” (John 7:37). Jesus did not only come for the thirsty but he came for the sick too.

He was very aware that the world is full of the sick who need healing, and for that reason, he stayed focused on his mission to save the sick. “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick” (Matthew 9:12). He was here for the weak and the oppressed. He came not to break the bruised reed, but he brought justice to the world and all humanity. His body became the first and last sacrifice. We don’t need any sacrifices, the blood of animals. Jesus’ blood is sufficient to heal our sicknesses and bring us together, vertically and horizontally. In the body mutual support was offered.

The disciples had this willingness to carry one another’s burden. “This willingness to bear one another’s burdens is seen in their care of members with physical needs” (Coleman 1988:20). We are convinced that in the book of Acts 2: 42-47 all had one thing in common, which was to share to provide for those without the necessities of life. They shared because Jesus also shared his life with them. Whatever they were doing they did it for Jesus Christ. The best way for him to teach participatory was to participate wholly in the process himself.

Christ taught his disciples by leading by example. He washed their feet to teach them that they should do the same (John 13:14-15). I believe washing someone’s feet is not an honourable work. Jesus washing his disciples’ feet has a significant meaning and great lesson to us. There was much more to Jesus washing His disciples’ feet than merely their physical cleansing. There are two lessons to learn, first Jesus was illustrating the spiritual cleansing of our sins. He was demonstrating that He has the power to forgive sins. As the master, He lived by example and taught through humbleness.

He taught his disciples through serving. If I, then your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. (John 13:14). He came to serve not to be served. Jesus wants us to be servants of God physically and spiritually. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

The process of guiding others into a continually deeper and growing commitment is best developed in stages. Jesus led His disciples into progressively higher commitment levels. He served us even to the death. He was crucified that we should

have eternal life. This is the outmost love that we need and should learn from God. To die for someone. It is a sacrifice that we must recognize and never take it light. It is a privilege that one should hold on it.

Jesus gave his disciples authority to participate in his ministry (Luke 9:1-2). The word authority will be translated as power. He gave them power when He sent them. They were empowered by Jesus himself. He gave them authority over all the evils. He gave them power to dispossess them and cast them out. He gave them authority with responsibilities. Shabayang (2022:4068) says, “Authority is the entrustment of responsibility to lead, direct, govern or rule over people, subjects, congregations or group of persons with common aspiration.”

Jesus taught participation through being humble. Jesus became flesh, like one of us, and He dwelt with us. He came with the glory of being the one and only Son of God. “Jesus Christ called upon humanity to a participatory role of leadership by a humble service-act of love – a service that exercises authority by love.” (Shabayang 2022:4068). The church needed to humble itself so that the world could learn.

We should learn to be as humble as him. “As the spirit of the lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more” (2 Corinthians 3:18). We can teach people to participate in the Lord by becoming like Christ in gentleness and respect. The MRCC should teach the members to be always gentle and respectful. “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to answer everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15).

Jesus taught participation for the glory of God (see the discussion of Voetius’ threefold goal of mission earlier in this dissertation). For him to be humiliated on the cross and embarrassed in the grave is a serious lesson of sacrifice. Jesus was crucified for the glory of God. Christ’s perfect submission to God the Father was the permanent sacrifice. “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). We are living in the world where people are getting more and more selfish and want to be gloried. Whatever they do, they want to benefit in one way or another. If they do something they want something in return. God is pleased when people do things for his glory like worship him.

Warren (2002:64) states, “anything you do that brings pleasure to God is an act of worship. Like a diamond, worship is multifaceted. It would take volumes to cover all there is to understand about worship” (Warren 2002: 64). Christians have the great opportunity in worship to teach others how to participate in church activities. “Worshiping is far more than praising, singing, and praying to God. Worship is a lifestyle of enjoying God, living with him, and ourselves to be used for his purposes. When you use your life for God’s glory, everything you do can become an act of worship” (Warren 2002: 56). God does not want his love kept secret. God wants us to share his truth and love with others. For everything comes from the Lord. “For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen” (Romans 11:36).

Jesus taught his disciples through encouragement. The truth is church members are very much discouraged just like all other people. The state of the economy, the unemployment rate, and all other social ills we are facing do not do good to the church. The church needs encouragement. “All people experience crises from time to time. We reach an edge, an emergency, a moment when we must make a decision, solve a problem, deal with a significant issue, confront a terrifying or agonizing situation” (Stone, Cross, Purvis, Young 2004: 405). The church is the hope to the hopeless and the home to the homeless.

5.3.2.3 Inviting Participation

After all, this is what participation is partly about: creating spaces in which everyone is not only welcome but whose contributions are necessary. One of the important tasks of the church is to create opportunities to build relationships. The church needs to help members develop friendships in the church. “The importance of helping members develop friendships within your church cannot be overemphasized. Relationships are the glue that holds the church together. Friendships are the key to retaining members” (Warren 1995:324). Members should be encouraged to meet even through meetings, sports, picnics and other events. These events can be used as tools to build relationships. Members should be encouraged to join small groups like cell groups. “Develop a network of small groups built around different purposes, interests, age groups, geography, or anything else” (Warren 1995:325).

Relational groups are very important in the church. “One key, one possibility, for a strong, healthy congregation is significant relational groupings. A strong healthy congregation: Has groupings that are open, inclusive, warm, and welcoming. Has a healthy balance of one-time, seasonal, short-term, long-term, and weekly, monthly, year-round groupings. Encourages many new groupings. Has groupings through which people discover a depth of sharing and caring” (Callahan 2010:107).

Congregation members need relationships to grow among themselves. “If relationships with other believers are this important, why don’t churches put more emphasis on them? The quality of your relationship to Christ can be seen in the quality of your relationship to other believers” (Warren 1995:325).

In the MRCC we have organs of Support which are recognized and approved by the Church Order (Article 12 Organs of Support) (MRCC Church Order 2006). Organs of support are groups of Christian members within the congregation with the purpose of spiritual growth. We have four organs of support.

The Maranatha Reformed Mother’s Union: It is the oldest organ of support in the church and caters to mothers in the church. The MRMU worked so well in the church in such a way that members of the church believe it is the engine of the church. It has different programs from prayer support and financial support in the church. These are mothers of prayer known for supporting its members and other mothers outside the church. They have a good relationship with mothers from other churches and the community at large. They are the real pioneers in the church and community at large.

The Maranatha Reformed Women’s League: The MRWL caters to women in the church who do not want to be part of the MRMU. They have the same objective as the MRMU. This is still a young organ of support in the church. It was born out of concern that many young mothers and young women in the church do not have a place to belong. Women’s league members are following in the footsteps of the Mothers Union. Since most of them are young in age and still active, they are changing the mode of the church. They are bringing new energy into the church.

The Maranatha Reformed Fathers Union: The MRFU is an organ of support who caters for fathers and men in the church. It was born to help keeping men and fathers in the church together and to share common goals in the church. In many churches men are few in numbers compared to women and have little participation in church

matters in general. Because of this outcry, MRFU was born to help the church to keep the men in the church and to look for men outside the church. It is indeed a good drive, since the establishment of the MRFU we have seen the increase of male membership and active participation of men in the church.

Lastly, we have the organ of support for the youth in the church. The name is the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ Youth Movement. It was formerly known as the MBB which stands for Mokgahlo wa Bacha Bakereke. The MRYM caters for young people from the age of 16 to 35. Like the Mothers Union, the MRYM is an old organ of support in the church. It is supported by Article 13 Spiritual Nurturing of the Youth (MRCC Church Order 2006).

It caters to the spiritual growth of the youth in the church. It is clearly stated by the Church Order: "Unto the Church of Christ is entrusted the responsibility of nurturing and developing the spiritual life of the youth, to equip them with the knowledge and expertise necessary to enable them to take their rightful place in the church and the community and is also co-responsible for their education in the family and school" (MRCC Church Order 2006).

It is important for the church as a body to keep communication lines open at all times. There is nothing as bad as going to church and finding that you have missed some information. You look like an outsider. "It is vital that clear lines of communication are established within your church. People tend to be down on what they aren't up on. Informed members, regardless of talent, can't do much. Build redundancy into your communication system by developing several channels for disseminating congregational information" (Warren 1995:325).

In the MRCC we read the announcement to the congregation after the church service. So far it has proven not to be effective since some members may be absent from the Sunday worship service. In addition to this method, some congregations have added SMS/WhatsApp methods to spread the message during the week. Emergency messages like announcements of bereavement or sicknesses are sent by SMS/WhatsApp. The messages will be sent by the scribe of the church council to the elders and deacons of wards. The elders and deacons of the ward will then send the messages to their members within their wards. The method is that the church uses bulk SMS. The SMS is sent from the scribe to all members of the congregation. This

method proves to be more effective. The national church and the Circuit Commission use emails to spread messages to the congregations and it is very effective.

5.3.2.4 Sustaining Participation

There is a strong belief that participation is declining in the MRCC and the evidence came out of this research as well. In all four congregations that participated in the research, it has been proven that member participation declined. In the MRCC Mabopane out of nine participants in the survey, only seven participated in church activities while two did not participate. In the MRCC Mamelodi out of nine participants, only five participated. In the MRCC Saulsville out of ten, only six participated and four did not. In the MRCC Soshanguve out of eight, only seven participated and one did not.

It is not only in the MRCC where participation of members has declined but many other churches too. The million-dollar question is how do we improve participation and sustain it throughout the challenges.

The church needs to grow in faith. Growing in faith is part of the plan that God has for his church and congregation. The church can only grow when people are developed. Jesus empowered people by developing them. Through his miracles, people were empowered and developed. He healed the sick, raised the dead, and fed the hungry throughout his ministry. Liebenberg puts it correctly, "According to Christian doctrine, based on these verses, (Philippians 4:19, Ephesians 3:20, Psalm 23:1, Deuteronomy 11:18, Psalm 72:13, Psalm 113:7 and John 10:10) followers of Jesus Christ are bound by God's all-encompassing dedication and commitment to the poor and to addressing their needs, by virtue of their identification with God" (Liebenberg 1997:14). Jesus by all these miracles planted a seed and not only planting it but making sure it grows.

Jesus preached and evangelized people. Jesus did not only do miracles. He preached and evangelized which made people to flock to him. Jesus attracted many people who gather around him to listen to his preaching. Preaching and evangelising, He commanded authority through his preaching and created interest from the multitude to come and listen to his message. "And great multitudes were gathered together unto

him, so that he went into a ship, and sat, and the whole multitude stood on the shore” (Matthew 13:2).

The church needs to preach and evangelize the people. The church should preach the relevant message of the gospel to the people. The only way to sustain participation is when the message addresses people’s needs and solves their problems. The people who heard him teach were astonished, “for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Mark 1:1). Jesus attracted crowds by loving unbelievers. Jesus did enjoy being with the multitudes and was even called friends of sinners (Luke 7:34). Warren (1995:208) formulates it as follows, “People could feel that Jesus loved being with them. Even little children wanted to be around him, which speaks volumes about what kind of person He was. Children instinctively seem to gravitate toward loving and accepting people” (Warren 1995:208). The truth is, that the world is filled with lonely people who are starving to be loved.

Jesus taught with authority. The biblical definition of the word authority is understood and used to describe the power or ability to do something, given by, conferred upon, or derived from a higher authority (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; 4:31). It is the Holy Spirit who is the agent or part of the totality of God’s personhood through whom power is expressed and created things to come into being (Genesis 1:1-3). While God’s power is manifested through the Holy Spirit, it is the authority of Christ that is the ability and authorization to use it. According to the Scriptures, we have the same power living in us that raised Christ from the dead. We have been given the authority to preach the word of God to the world.

Jesus served by training a group of disciples. Jesus started by having a small group of disciples. These men, we can say, are his inner circle. He started with a small group. We see Jesus training them to equip and to prepare them for the task ahead. Training equips the church members with the knowledge, skills, and experience to serve in their roles and encourages members to contribute their unique talents and skills to further the church's mission. Through training, leaders learn how to set a clear vision for the future of the church. The disciples were trained and empowered to share the message of the gospel with the world. They were sent to share the gift of grace. Callahan (2010:54) states, “Mission outreach is a gift of grace in people’s lives and destinies. It

is a gift freely given. We share mission outreach because God invites us to share a gift of grace.”

Jesus serves the people in the community through training disciples. The disciples were trained to serve people in the community. This was their focus, to serve people who are hurting, who need hope, and who have concerns in general. “One key, one possibility, for a strong congregation is one mission outreach. A strong healthy congregation: Shares one major outreach in the community. Helps directly with one of these; a life stage, a human hurt and hope, a common interest, or a common concern. Delivers concrete, effective help with persons and groupings in the community. Is well known and well respected as a legend in the community” (Callahan 2010:54).

5.3.3 Church Voluntarism

In this research, the research question was intended to check members’ voluntarism in the church. The question posed to participants in the interview was: Do you ever volunteer in the church? Subsequently, reasons were needed for those who indicated that they did volunteer and those who did not. A total of 29 members do volunteer, while 7 members indicated that they never volunteered in the church. Many participants agreed that they do volunteer in the church. However, it is not clear how they volunteer in the church since they did not answer the questionnaire but most are participating during church events. The majority did volunteer. They volunteer to cook and clean at the church especially when there are events at the church. The purpose of volunteering service is to help the community. “It is evident from the historical narrative that volunteering service is intended to help and add value to the immediate community’s well-being and galvanise, promote, and improve the human quality and state of life” (Olabamiji 2022:1).

5.3.3.1 Membership is voluntary.

Being a church member is voluntary, and not about receiving a salary. “A volunteer worker is someone who performs his or her duties voluntarily and committedly without being paid for such service or the services rendered either to God or humanity”

(Olabamiji 2022:2). We are living in the world where people are motivated by incentives. Voluntarism in this paper is used to distinguish between salaried and workers without being paid. “However, the word “volunteer” is used in this document to distinguish between salaried workers and workers who offer their time and receive no pay. Because it is a term that is easily understood by most people, we will use the term “volunteer” to describe the work of unsalaried church workers” (Henderson 2008:3).

Volunteering is service to the Lord and to others. Many Christians see the work they offer in congregations or church as a service to the Lord and do not mind doing it without being paid. In this research, the word volunteer is considered in the light of Christian stewardship and servanthood. People volunteer when their needs are met. Members will only volunteer in the church when they are happy and understand their purpose and place in the church. “Volunteering feeds a deep part of the soul and gives meaning to life” (Henderson 2008:4). They will volunteer when they feel they are part of and belong to the movement.

Volunteering is about the desire to provide excellent or improved service. In the case of the MRCC, it is clear that those volunteering did so to provide excellent and improved service. They do this when there are events at the church meaning there will be a lot of people so more hands and more energy are required. The church should encourage and motivate members to participate.

Volunteering is for sharing skills. The other reason for volunteering is the need for specific skills (gifts from the Spirit) and when people are happy to share. “These volunteers have specific skills that they are willing to contribute, and they are happy and willing to share them” (Henderson 2008:4). In the MRCC it is the norm to encourage members with different skills and gifts to volunteer in the church. In the portfolio of for example the treasurer it is encouraged that it should be filled by people who have knowledge of finances and have an acute sense of stewardship, who will be able to manage the finances of the church.

Volunteering is about developing friendship. It is evident that when people volunteer they wish to belong and have a social relationship with others. “Other volunteers have a desire for social affiliation” (Henderson 2008:5). The truth is, volunteering is possible

where the climate is pleasant and positive. Volunteering will only be possible where the soil is prepared for the seed, where volunteering is encouraged.

Volunteering is encouraged in the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ through making the opportunities known to serve through the service groups (The MRRC Church Order 2006, Article 9.2 Service Groups), which states: “The church institutes service groups in which members join hands in the provision of spiritual, social, political, psychological and other services” (MRCC Church Order 2006). The MRCC has a task to volunteer at schools to render Christian programs since there are no more religious programs at the school. The MRCC has a task to volunteer in the community. Due to the failures of the municipalities, rubble and refuse are not removed and litter the street. It is the task of the church to volunteer to clean the streets or community institutions. It is the function of the church to establish friendship and good working relationships with the community and bodies of local government. This will create opportunities for church members to volunteer and commit to service.

5.3.3.2 Is all about Faith.

Volunteering is about faith. We agreed that volunteering is not about a salary or being paid money, but it is about the full incentives which are heavenly rewards. The rewards are eternal life. Christians are encouraged and motivated by the Bible. “The Bible clearly states regarding the spiritual and heavenly rewards” (Boya 2022:6). Faith is the most powerful motivator of voluntarism. Hebrew 11:1 says “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” When we volunteer, we do it based on our faith.

In the Old Testament, Nehemiah 6 is a good example of a volunteer serving his people. He volunteered to be used by God in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. “Other volunteers have a desire to give of themselves as a form of ministry, as a way of learning better how to be a disciple of Christ” (Henderson 2008:5).

The most important thing about Nehemiah to volunteer was because of his faith in the Lord. “Nehemiah shared Ezra's faith and trust in God, he knew about the hard and deplorable realities of the situation in Jerusalem, yet his faith helped him to see a vision of the new Jerusalem as she might be with God's help, it is a special thing to have

dreams and visions and ideas” (Olabamiji 2022:3). Faith gives one hope to invest in the future even when no one knows what the future holds for us. The other element is the sharing of work. The church should encourage teamwork in the church.

Volunteering is about the sharing of work. It takes mature people to understand that we need to share the work with other people. This is not only about sharing but it is about teamwork. The sharing of work (Nehemiah 3) reveals an extraordinary volunteer team spirit (Maxwell 2001:4). Volunteering needs team spirit. Where there is teamwork there is progress. It also affirms that one cannot do anything of real value alone. For the church to succeed in teaching and encouraging volunteering, the church should know that its success depends on every member’s ability and willingness. The success of volunteer workers depends on each member’s ability (Blacklock 2007: 63). The MRCC should consider training members in how to become aware of their spiritual gifts that can assist members in volunteering to serve the community. Members may perhaps be not aware of their own gifts and skills.

5.3.3.3 Is about commitment/Devotion.

Volunteering is about commitment. According to Meyer & Allen (1991; 1993), there are three levels of commitment: Affective commitment, Continuance commitment, and Normative commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990:3-4):

Affective commitment is referred to as the individual’s emotional attachment to and involvement and identification with the organization. Affective commitment takes into account three main aspects namely: (1) the development of psychological affinity to a firm; (2) association with the organization; and (3) the wish to remain as a member of the organization. Individuals, by developing emotional affinity toward a firm, tend to associate themselves with the objectives of the firm and support the firm in achieving these objectives. Affective commitment, is the desire to stay in a specific church because one likes the church. Most leaders would agree that effective church commitment is a good thing and that it makes fulfilling Jesus’ command to love one another and be his witness easier (John 13:34-35).”

This happens when one is involved with church activities when one feels to be part of the church. Involvement plays an important part in volunteering. Allen & Meyer (1990:3) put it correctly that, “the positive feelings that one associates with one’s church, the degree to which one sees oneself as part of the church, and the positive feelings that one experiences when serving in the church are all elements of affective commitment. It is a sign that one believes that involvement in this church is beneficial.” The character of the pastor or leader plays an important role in this type of commitment. “The pastor is often strongly associated with a church’s identity” (Dunaetz, Cullum, Barron 2018:132). Volunteering should be encouraged on the base of commitment.

Continuance commitment is the degree to which one needs to stay in an organization because of the losses that leaving would entail or because of the lack of alternatives (Allen & Meyer 1990:5). In summary continuance commitment is about loyalty. The member or members may need to leave the church but they are still loyal to the church. The risk of leaving or the benefit of staying is calculated and weighed (Dunaetz, Cullum, Barron 2018:134).

Continuance commitment would be associated with the costs that are involved with leaving a church: loss of relationships, loss of ministry, and/or loss of status. For some people, these losses may be very important, for others, less so. Much depends on how much the person has invested in the church. People who have invested much in the church will do much more volunteering than those who did not invest.

Normative commitment (Allen & Meyer 1990:6) is the third construct of organizational commitment. It is all about obligation. It is when the person or member of the church feels s/he is obliged towards the church. “The degree to which one believes one has a moral or God-led duty to attend a church underlies the concept of normative commitment. Family and cultural norms (depending on one’s ethnicity and local culture) may be the driving force for some people’s normative commitment. But the convictions that a Christian develops from studying the Bible or the teaching received in the church and other Christian organizations may make an even greater contribution to a Christian’s normative commitment” (Dunaetz, Cullum, Barron 2018:127).

Church members feel they should continue to volunteer to the church when they believe that the church has done and is still doing so much for them. In return, they

repay the church by volunteering. This also depends on the credibility of leaders. The more the leader is credible there is a good chance of normative commitment to grow or to rise in the church. “If a church’s leaders teach that loyalty and commitment to the church should be high, people’s normative commitment is likely to rise if they like the leaders and find them credible” (Dunaetz, Cullum, Barron 2018:128).

The MRCC should teach members through the good example of their leaders. The character and the behaviour of leaders and ministers in the church play an important role in the commitment of members. The lifestyle of leaders should be beyond approach and leaders should have disciples. When leaders are credible there are more chances of followers to commit to the cause, either in church or in politics. The MRCC can consider creating and implementing continuous training for their pastors in order to ensure knowledgeable and trustworthy leaders guiding the church.

5.3.3.4 Conviction from the heart / strong belief.

A true believer in Christ has personally trusted Christ alone for deliverance from sin, has become born again Spiritually, has an intimate relationship with God, has a new pattern of living, and has the assurance of eternal life with God in heaven.

Volunteering is all about living according to our calling. People will volunteer the moment they understand their calling. Paul emphasizes that accepting God is like being a prisoner of God. Prisoners don’t have choices, and it is no longer about their choices but their conviction that they must work for the Lord. Like Nehemiah who built the wall because his heart was burdened by a just cause to glorify God. “No sincere heart will ever doubt that God was at work in the heart of Nehemiah. The burden in his heart was a holy burden for a just cause because that would glorify the name of God and fulfill His plan” (Olabamiji 2022:3).

Warren emphasizes the importance of individual life missions. Christians are called to continue Jesus’s mission on earth. “As his followers, we are to continue what Jesus started, Jesus calls us not only to come to him but to go for him” (Warren 2002:282). Volunteering is about handing over the baton, like in the relay where the baton is exchanged. Church members will volunteer to continue what Jesus started. “Jesus passed on the baton to the disciples” (Mills 1993:70). They have an understanding

that this is not the work of Jesus, missionaries or pastors only but all who had a conviction from their heart.

The mission is a wonderful privilege. I believe that to be a witness is a privilege with responsibilities. When you are given this opportunity to be a witness to the unconverted you are given the task with great responsibilities because your witness can free or enslave. God's mission gives us the privilege to witness to the believers and non-believers. It gives us the honor of working with God and representing him. "Your mission involves two great privileges; working with God and presenting him" (Warren 2002:283).

Doing mission through volunteering gives one's life meaning. The meaning of our lives is to share the word of God. We should remember that everything else will vanish but the kingdom of God will remain. Our lives should be purpose driven and be committed to fulfilling our mission on earth. Our mission is to live according to the word of God. "That is why we must live purpose-driven lives- committed to worship, fellowship, spiritual growth, ministry, and fulfilling our mission on earth. The results of these activities will last forever" (Warren 2002:285).

The MRCC should teach and encourage members to live the life of worship. The life of worship is the life of offering to God. Warren (2002:285) puts it as follows, "offering yourself to God is what worship is all about". Worship is about surrendering everything to him. God wants all of us, not some part of but your whole life.

The MRCC should encourage members to fellowship. The shared participation of members should be the priority of the church. This sharing should be the lifestyle of congregation members. Sharing promotes teamwork since we realize that we cannot live as individuals but we need to live in communion with other people and God. We must share with those who do not have. We must share the word, and material things, including fellowship meals and prayers in the house of the Lord (Acts 2:44-46).

What is fulfilling our mission all about? What is our mission on earth? God wants people to be a member of his family. To be a member of the family means there are responsibilities to fulfil and privileges to enjoy. In a nutshell, God wants people to be a model of his character. "God wants every believer to grow up to become like Christ in character" (Warren 1995:115). This is what is meant by spiritual growth. God expects

every family member to grow from our sinful nature to spiritual maturity. This is the process God expects all of us to finish while we are in the world. This is the task the MRCC should do without fear and favour.

5.3.4 Church Contribution

In the research, church contribution is used as a measurement of commitment of members of the church. The state of the MRCC and other churches prove that there is lack of money and resources in the church due to a lack of contributions in the church. In this section I will attempt to find out why people do not contribute or give as they should. I will also give more reasons why Christians should give.

It is divided into four Questions:

Q 4.7.8 Contributing dues, this is a general question intended to check or find out if the MRCC members do contribute their dues to the church. A total of 34 of those interviewed contribute dues while 2 do not.

Q 4.7.9 Contributing Lekgetho. Lekgetho refers to monthly contributions by individual confirmed members. In the MRCC this is a flat rate to all members of the church irrespective of their different situations like different salaries or source of income. A total of 32 of those interviewed contribute Lekgetho while 4 do not.

Q 4.7.10 Contributing Sunday collection. Sunday collection refers to the money contributed to Sunday services by members present at the church. It is normally contributed after the sermon. All participants in the interview recorded they contributed Sunday collection. In the MRCC members are expected to go to the offering table in the front. It will be difficult for a member to stay behind since during the time of giving members will be singing and chanting while moving towards and back from the table in front of the church where the offering is placed.

Q 4.7.11 Contributing Puno. Puno is the money that is contributed once per annum. It is contributed by members of the church through their wards and the deacon. The ward may announce the amount of money determined by the church council to reach the target set in the budget. Members will contribute to their deacons and one Sunday

or two or more Sundays will be dedicated for Puno. On those dedicated Sundays, the members will take the envelopes filled with their contributions to the table. In the questionnaire conducted with some MRCC members, all participants recorded they contributed Puno. The research shows that members are contributing their dues to the church.

Part of being a member of the body of Christ is to contribute towards the body of Christ. Contributions play an important part because churches are sustained by the money members are contributing. "Churches are sustained by the good works and generosity of their members. Without this giving, there would be no resources for ministries, no volunteers to get things done, and no funds for heat and light. Indeed, at the very heart of a church's existence is its members' resources that sustain it" (Christian Giving 1985:2).

The word "church contribution" is most of the time referred or limited to money given by the members to the church. There are many scriptures supporting giving in the church. Giving is the way of life according to the scripture. The scripture teaches us that God himself gave us so much and in return, we should give back to the church and to those who do not have. Giving is one way we remember that what we have belongs to God and is entrusted to our care.

Each time we give, we remember that what we keep and all we have is a gift from God. Callahan (2010:223) formulates it as follows, "The way they live life is the way they give. They do not protect and preserve, conserve, and hold their meagre financial resources. They know God has not done that with them. They know God's generous grace with them. They are generous givers because God is the generous giver with them."

Christians are called to be cheerful givers. They must give out of their good heart. "Let each one give [thoughtfully and with purpose] just as he has decided in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver [and delights in the one whose heart is in his gift]" (2 Cor 9:7 Amplified Bible). Giving is not just a command but it is the way of Christian life.

Christians give because they were given first. They acknowledge that God gave to them only through grace. "We are generous because God is generous with us. Being generous is not, finally, something we do out of our own doing. Being generous is

God's gift to us" (Callahan 2010:223). In Matthew 10:8 Jesus told his disciples to heal the sick and to give as they have received freely.

Giving is also about storing or investing for ourselves. When we invest we expect returns. In Luke 6:38 we are told to give as this is a good investment. We should give to support the gospel ministry of our local church. "Supporting the gospel ministry of the local church is an eternal investment in God's kingdom. Jesus taught in the "Parable of the Talents/Minas" (Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:12-27) that He will someday return to receive a kingdom for himself and He will require an accounting of believers, all of whom have stewardship over the resources he provides (Immanuel Bible Church 2015:40).

Giving is about Stewardship. When we give we acknowledge that all that we have, comes and belongs to the Lord, we are just taking care of them as caretakers, managers or stewards. God entrusted us with his resources for us to conduct, supervise, or manage. "As stewards, how should we regard the resources God gives, particularly the money we earn? Jesus teaches in the "Parable of the Rich Fool" that it is foolish and presumptuous to regard wealth as ours, or even absolutely within our control (Luke 12:16-21)" (Immanuel Bible Church 2015:2).

The reality is some church members do not contribute the way they should. Some church members do not give in the church or life in general. Let u's look at some of the reasons. There are several reasons why church members may not give or contribute accordingly.

Some members do not give because of apathy. These members might have no emotional attachment or interest in the church and related activities. They are not just interested in giving. "Certainly, apathy affects giving in a church. If people are not excited about the mission and ministry of their church, they will not support it financially to the fullest extent possible" (Christian Giving 1985:2).

Another reason might be misinformation or the lack of information. When the communication line is closed people keep wondering without clear and simple communication in the church. People may not give if they are not happy about the way things are done in the church. The state of the MRCC and other churches prove that there is a lack of money and resources in the church due to a lack of contributions in

the church. In this section, I will attempt to find out why people do not contribute or give as they should. I will also give more reasons why Christians should give.

Members might not have sufficient information. This leads to mistrust and speculation about how the money or resources are used in the church. “People like to know what is going on in their church. They like to be informed concerning the needs and how funds are being used. Some would go so far as to contend that members of a congregation have a “need to know” about the financial picture of their church. If the church does not share its financial picture with the members, or if it does so only when there is a crisis, then financial support may be lacking” (Christian Giving 1985:2).

Members do not give because of their ignorance. Congregants are very much ignorant. I once heard a member saying why should they give because nobody has ever taught them to give. It is clear in the Bible that people cannot sin and claim that they did not know. “The offense committed in ignorance or in wilful ignorance is just as abominable as one with knowledge” (Romans 5:14).

Many members who do not give claim they were never taught to give. “As a rule, most people have never been informed as to what the Word of God says concerning their material possessions. They are woefully ignorant of the truths of Scripture concerning their talents and money. They do not know what God says about giving. And Scripture has much to say on this subject” (Christian Giving 1985:3).

Some members experience the failure to believe in God. Many people go to church and still do not believe in the Word of God. They do not give not because they do not know but because they do not believe the word of God. “The number one reason why people do not give as they should be that they really do not believe what God says” (Christian Giving 1985:3).

Many people are unemployed and without any income. This is the reality since the unemployment rate in South Africa is very high (estimated at between 30-35%), many congregants are not working. They may wish to give but it is very difficult if people have no income. “Some people say they cannot give because of their employment situation. Perhaps they are unemployed. Granted, it is tough to give without any income whatsoever. But according to Psalm 75:6, promotion and jobs come from God. Perhaps the best approach is to do all one can to obtain a job, but to look to God for his provision; and when that provision comes, then to honor God with what God has

provided” (Christian Giving 1985:4). Part of the method of contribution is tithing. I will now deal with this matter.

5.3.4.1 Tithing

In the MRCC there is no strict rule on tithing. The congregation still follows the ticket system, with a monthly flat rate for all confirmed members. When someone preaches of tithing, the congregation frowns as this is foreign to the tradition of the MRCC. Some individual ministers preach about it, yet it is not a practice in the church. I have mentioned and explained three sources of income in the MRCC: Lekgetho, Sunday collection, and Puno, of which I will deal with Lekgetho as I explain tithing.

There are several Bible verses speaking of Tithe in the church. The Bible is very clear in Leviticus 27:30 where it says “A tenth of the produce of the land, whether grain or fruit, is the Lord's, and is holy.” And Proverbs 3:9 (NIV) says, “Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops.” It's critical to recognize that tithing was central to God's law. Tithing is the law and the instruction that God commands us to do. The main purpose of tithing, is to honor the Lord with a certain amount of your wealth. Tithing has caused so much confusion among the Christians and different denominations.

When one thinks of tithing, one first thinks of sacrifice. Giving is about sacrifices. The confusion here is caused by the question of the value. We rely on Leviticus 27:30, where the amount of “tenth” is given. There must be a value and we must remember tithe can't be the leftovers. Tithing is not leftovers where people will only give at the church what they have left over after paying all their debts. Today we see that there is also abuse of members by churches who preach that tithing will make you rich. Members are manipulated to give a lot of money to the churches because they are promised financial breakthroughs. They are not only promising breakthroughs if they contribute, they are threatening them that they will never prosper unless they give their tithe.

I will attempt to clarify what is tithing and its importance in the church according to the Bible. Tithing is the method and scale to give back to the Lord after one has received or reap after sowing. In the Bible more emphasise is put on grains and animals since

they were farmers. “A tenth of the produce of the land, whether grain or fruit, is the Lord's, and is holy” (Leviticus 27:30). Today tithing is considered as 10% of the personal income of the person.

Tithe is 10% of personal income, which is defined in III-A. Notes: These guidelines are based on the premise that tithe should be calculated on the total “personal income” instead of one’s “increase.” Some might feel that it is more appropriate to use the Biblical “increase” instead of the term, “personal income.” The decision to use “income” is based on a careful study of the meaning of the word “increase” as used in Scripture. For example: “Thou shalt truly Tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field brings. Giving is about sacrifices” (Ellen G White Estate 2018:16).

Lekgetho is the monthly contribution by members of the MRCC. Though there is a flat rate, the principle fits that of the tithing. Tithing is from the income and members contribute monthly just like Lekgetho. We are contributing monthly per individual members. The problem with Lekgetho is that the church council agrees on a certain amount while tithing according to the Bible means 10 percent of the income. The problem with Lekgetho is that all members will contribute a certain amount irrespective of their financial status like how much they earn at their different workplaces. Professionals and non-professionals are treated the same. Lekgetho practically is cheating God as per the Bible since we give not according to God’s scale but because of church council decisions.

Tithing Principles:

Tithing is about acknowledging that God is our Creator and Sustainer. The moment we understand and accept that we are created by God it becomes easy to understand tithing. For by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him and for him: And He is before all things, and by him all things exist (Colossians 1:16, 17). We need to tithe because by tithing we acknowledge his Lordship upon us. We accept that everything was created by him. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will obey what I command” (John 14:15). In 1 Corinthians 16:2 we read, “On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income.” God’s Word is clear that we are

expected to give regularly by our blessings. Through faith, God strengthens us so we can give generously.

Tithing is about giving or returning to the house of the Lord. This is how we share our generosity. “God is generous with us so we can learn to be generous with one another. God encourages us to be generous with one another with the same richness of generosity with which God is generous with us” (Callahan 2010:225). Tithe should be returned as first fruits when the personal income is received. In cases where the actual income is determined only at the end of an accounting period, although it has been received continuously, the tithe should be returned systematically based on projections and adjusted at the end of the period.

God instructs us to bring our tithe to the storeroom. The prophet Malachi (3:10) says “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.” When we tithe we make a provision that in the house of the Lord should be bread. The congregants should supply the needs of the house of the Lord. The tithe is sacred and reserved by God for himself. Tithing is also about depending on the Lord, those who are in the house of the Lord should get food from the house of the Lord. This is the providence of God. Tithing is about developing character and testing our loyalty to God.

In Malachi God promises us that when we test him with our tithes he will open the heaven gates and give us so much that we will lack a place to store. In tithing our character is tested if we will cheat God or will be loyal to God. In tithing church leaders, members, and parents are called to practice tithe faithfulness as one of God’s requirements. Our character will become more unselfish, as we follow Christ’s example of giving.

Tithing is another form of worship. Deuteronomy 26:10-11 says “And now I bring the first fruits of the soil that you, Lord, have given me. Place the basket before the Lord your God and bow down before him. Then you and the Levites and the foreigners residing among you shall rejoice in all the good things the Lord your God has given to you and your household.”

Tithing is another form of obedience. We obey God when we give our tithes in the church. Sometimes we may not even understand the whole meaning of tithe, but every time we trust God's instruction and obey we deepen our friendship with God. When we offer our tithes we worship the Lord. God is glorified when we faithfully give him our first and best. Proverbs 3:9 reads, "Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops." When we make giving a priority, we honor God. If we give God our leftovers, we dishonour him.

The truth is, in the MRCC we do not tithe. The method of tickets where members contribute a flat rate is not working at all. The MRCC is in a financial crisis because of the ticket system. In the MRCC the tithe is not honoured in the church. The MRCC should teach members the principles of tithing even though it is much criticized in our church. The more we teach the more members will know that this is not for the pastor but a sacrifice to the Lord. It should start with leadership to lead by example and the rest will follow.

5.3.4.2 Other ways of contributing.

Too often in society, and maybe especially in the church, we measure giving as monetary or financial giving. Gifts of money through the offering or special donations are significant and certainly are necessary to help a community of faith to live God's call upon their lives, but a community of faith relies on many forms of giving to support the greater good. There are many ways church members can contribute to the church. Sadly, many congregations and pastors have limited the ways of giving to the form of money. The emphasis is on money while giving can be made in different ways. 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 speaks of different spiritual gifts.

There are spiritual gifts like giving Love and Compassion. Paul says among all the gifts; love is the greatest of them all (1 Cor 13:13). Love is the greatest gift because love is being like God. God calls himself love in 1 John 4:16. We know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. Love is another form of giving because love is a gift, when we love we give love which is a gift. When we give love in response to God's generosity, our giving becomes a spiritual practice.

Each offering reflects our trust in God and expresses our love for our neighbours. We encourage congregation members to take care of both the needs of those within the church and outside the church. We encourage members to love. “If anyone has material possessions and sees their brother or sister in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:17-18).

Seek equality and justice for all. We encourage members to seek equality and justice for all. Justice and equality are at the center of Jesus’ ministry. Paul emphasizes that Christians should strive for equality. “Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At present your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, as it is written: “He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little” (2 Corinthians 8:13-15).

Give Your Time and Energy. If you give someone your time, then you are giving them a gift that will last forever. A gift of time is the most valuable gift among all the gifts. I have learned that sick people appreciate the time spent with them when they are visited. They value and cherish the time for the rest of their time. Visiting the sick shows that you care.

Time is one of those things that is always in short supply. Finding time to do anything, let alone make time for someone else, can be difficult sometimes but it is worth it. We are expected to dedicate our lives and our resources towards the things of God, not the things of our pleasing. Time is the most precious commodity. No one can take your time away from you. You cannot be forced to spend it on something you do not want to do (Ephesians 5:16). Loving the Lord and loving each other is a full-time requirement and that is what the church should teach its members (Romans 13:10).

Spending your time with or for the congregants and their loved ones is the best expression of love. Laziness will never be blessed by the Lord. Many churches are suffering low attendance and empty chairs. This became more evident after Covid-19. People do not have time to be in churches and give their time to the Lord but they have time for other things. Time is very cheap. Time does not cost anything. Spending time with loved ones does not cost anything, and it can be a wonderful gift. Quality time spent together with family will create memories to last a lifetime. Paul in 1 Timothy 5:8

encourages us to spend time with our family and loved ones who might also be part of the church.

We can encourage the congregation members to give of their time in working at outreach projects, feeding the homeless, or providing clothes and furniture to those formerly unhoused. We teach them to offer their time in fundraising activities or donate items to the church. The MRCC has several Support Groups where members can become involved with and spend time with those who are in need.

We can encourage church members to share their skills in reading scripture, teaching Sunday school, leading study groups, or maintaining the building and property and assist in cleaning the church facilities. All of these gifts of service, talent, and support are ways to give to the church.

Church members can be encouraged to give grace. Grace is a gift that keeps going. It is the dimension of God being active within us, doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Grace is not static, but dynamic. Grace is ongoing. Grace is what we receive and yet we do not deserve it. Simply put – grace is the unmerited, unearned love and favour of God. “Be still (cease striving) and know (recognize, understand) that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations! I will be exalted in the earth” (Psalm 46:10).

When we share grace we exalt the Lord. The greatest gift of all is forgiveness of our sins through salvation in Jesus Christ. Because of the grace God gives us, we can then show grace to others as we seek to follow Jesus. Callahan puts it correctly, “To claim our strength is to claim the grace of God. To deny our strength is to deny the grace of God” (Callahan 2010:9). We should encourage church members to claim their strength by giving grace as they have received grace.

Church members should be encouraged to pray. We commune with our Creator and grow closer to Him in dedicated prayer, where we learn about Him (Jeremiah 9:23-24) and ourselves. We have a direct line to God and God has a direct line to the person our gift is intended for. When we pray for someone, they know that we have given them our time. They know that we had them in our thoughts. Praying regularly means having constant conversations with God which enriches our faith. Church members must establish a habit of daily conversation with God. “You will never grow a close relationship with God by just attending church once a week or even having a daily

quiet time. Friendship is built by sharing all your life experiences with him” (Warren 2002:87). Can we say to ourselves that we truly love God (Matt 22:37) if we do not desire to, and make time to be alone with Him every day (James 4:8, Lamentations 3:57)?

5.3.4.3 Contribution is gratitude rather than intimidation

The Bible teaches us that giving should be from the heart. Giving is motivated by gratitude and not intimidation. All giving decisions should be personal decisions that are made after much serious thought and prayer. No one should give up because of pressure or intimidation. “Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Many churches use giving to intimidate members. During church service they make members feel uncomfortable and guilty when they have nothing to give. Paul encourages us to know that we must give out of the heart not because someone is intimidating us.

Giving is God’s command and no one should be threatened to give in the church. It is frustrating for pastors when members do not give because pastors do not whether they don’t want to or they are unable to give due to some reasons. We should remember that God himself does not threaten members to give to the church. Giving is a heart matter. Our giving ought to be voluntary and spring from a cheerful attitude. It should come from the heart. Paul is speaking about financial giving, but voluntary and cheerful giving goes beyond the scope of monetary giving. Serving our brothers and sisters is another form of giving.

Summary: Giving is only possible when someone is willing to receive. In my congregation, Mamelodi we once had a project of giving old clothes to our members who may need them. I remember no one came forward until we decided to give to people at the shopping complex. Yes, we did a good thing by giving away at the mall, but there were still questions about whether those who took them needed them. Let the congregation encourage both givers and receivers to appreciate the moment and work together for the glory of the Lord.

It is important to ensure that everyone professing to walk that journey has opportunities to exercise the spiritual practice of giving. Practising being generous in small ways regularly helps develop and prepare disciples to be generous in larger ways when those opportunities ultimately present themselves. “When we encourage persons to be generous givers, we invite them to confirm God’s generosity in their lives. We are generous because God is generous with us” (Callahan 2010 223).

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

It remains a good question why one research or do a study on church member’s commitment. There are many reasons though my greatest concern was declining church membership and attendance. For most theologians, the main purpose of studying is to enable other scholars, church members, and congregations to have more information and knowledge on the subject matter. The result of this study can assist other worrying pastors and struggling congregations to consider actions that might help in stopping the decline in membership and attendance. I want to recommend three methods, that can enhance the church members to have full commitment to the Lord as an expression of the understanding of the *missio Dei*. To live according to the Word of God, subsequently, that will make the church of Christ grow and become healthy congregations.

5.4.1 The need for a new vision in the church shared by all congregants.

The first step is to be honest about the situation of our churches. We should be honest about our context, situation, and ourselves. In the MRCC church members are very reluctant to take the lead. They believe that the pastor and the church council are responsible for the key and important work of the church. “The model presently used in the MRCC where church members become objects of ministry, where they are targeted for service by church office bearers only and are not given a platform to be actively involved in servicing others, creates a lazy church which does not function properly” (Motloba 2016:154).

The vision and mission of the church is to invite people to Christ. The motto of the MRCC is Maranatha: Come, Lord Jesus. We cannot invite Jesus to come back before we respond to his instruction to make disciples. The church is the congregation of those who have been called, and continue to be called. Since they are called now the opportunity is rife for them to call others. Our obedience to his call is our expression of gratitude.

The MRCC should become a true community of believers. Manala (1996:1) puts it correctly when he says, “The church needed all role players in its mission of proclaiming the Gospel, making disciples, and building a morally healthy society.” The MRCC should teach and encourage all members to participate in the mission of the church. Article 9 of the MRCC Church Order (2006) clearly states: “All members are called to participate in the apostolate, spiritual nurturing of the youth, catechesis, service of mercy and other tasks ... The church institutes service groups in which members join hands in the provision of spiritual, social, political, psychological, and other services.”

The MRCC needs a new approach to building members' commitment to the Lord. The mission of the church is to make every member committed to Christ. Malphurs (1996:158) sums up the mission of the church in four specific goals: 1. To lead people to Christ and active involvement in the church (to be interested in becoming a disciple), 2. To grow people to spiritual maturity (to become a growing disciple), 3. To equip for and involve people in ministry both within and outside the body of believers (to grow in serving disciples), 4. To enlist disciples for leadership locally and in the world (to serve and discipline others). The MRCC should by all means lead all members to be involved in ministry and become disciples. The MRCC should stop only working within and be a church that works within and outside. The MRCC should train its members to work both within and outside the church.

5.4.2 The renewal of day-to-day Christians and not only on Sunday

The MRCC has deteriorated into a “Sunday church” only. There are no activities in congregations except for the Sunday service. Dreyer (2009:40) also raised this issue by indicating that the MRCC focuses on the Sunday service. The problem is that all

church activities are connected to church building and primarily on Sundays. Motloba (2016:153) lamented that because of this tendency people who work on Sundays are excluded from attending service due to their work commitment. It is a fact that today many members of our church are working on Saturdays and Sundays and do not have the opportunity to participate in the worship services.

From all the congregations who participated in this research, it shows that the majority of the members are not ready to have another service except the one Sunday service. The MRCC does not see the need for another church service or additional church activities except Sunday service (compare the Research results in Chapter 4). During Covid-19 it was evident that even giving could not happen since people were not able to attend church because of restrictions on movement.

First, the MRCC should create more opportunities for more services. It is therefore important for the MRCC to create opportunities for more than one church service. This will assist those members who are unable to attend church services on Sundays. Just as attendance decline follows on from fewer services, so growth comes from planting new ones. The MRCC and other churches that are serious about good attendance and church growth need to plant more services during the week. We cannot be a church that meets only on Sundays.

Secondly, the MRCC must encourage members to be Christians every day not only on Sunday. Members should live their lives full of expression daily. This is only possible when we are transformed. Paul speaks of the transformation of the old body to the new body. "And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18). The MRCC members should live a new life of faith every day. This is the life full of glory.

5.4.3 MRCC should focus more on community

The MRCC should grow and enlarge its territory through mission work. There are several places where there is a need for the church to do mission work. I will only name a few: schools, hospitals, old age homes, and prisons. In Chapter 2 of this research ecclesiology of the church is discussed. I will now deal with how to do

missions in the above-mentioned institutions. The church is an institution defined by people inside and outside of the church. Emedi (2010:98) rightly asks, “Is it possible to define the church as an institution whose definition is informed by both the people inside and outside the church; both the world of saved and unsaved; both the church and the world; Bible and society?” (Emedi 2010:98).

How can the MRCC reach the schools through mission work? The church should give educational support to local schools through feeding and mentoring programs. Church members can get involved in the support structures on different levels: Sourcing donations and contributions to food parcels, preparing and distributing food parcels at schools, and forming prayer and youth support groups at school.

In hospitals and frail care facilities, church members can assist by forming prayer and visitation groups visiting the sick and elderly.

In prisons and holding cells church members can offer holistic support in terms of visiting, praying, and encouraging inmates and also form Bible study groups for prisoners.

There is a cry and a need in the communities. The MRCC should be involved and assist in alleviating the pains and agonies of the communities. Mpanza (1996:967) says “Many people in South Africa show signs of having lost the meaning of life. As a result, some have to an extent gone back to their forefathers' religions. An investigation into this behavior indicates that, among others, poverty is cited as a reason, and perhaps the major reason.” Poverty in communities is so rife that people are losing hope. The church should not focus mainly on preaching the Word but on fighting the injustices in the communities. “I hereby mean that it is the role of the church not only to preach in word but also in deed, so as to wholly develop and empower its people. I will keep on repeating that programmes and projects must aim at transforming people and getting them out of a syndrome of dependence towards self-reliance. That is empowerment” (Mpanza 1996: 969).

The MRCC should focus on the poor. Liebenberg (1997:14) puts it correctly, “The Christian injunction to serve the poor stems from a biblical view of God's total concern and provision for the needs of humanity, as illustrated in Philippians 4:19, Ephesians 3:20, Psalm 23:1, Deuteronomy 11:18, Psalm. 72:13, Psalm 113:7, and John 10:10. According to Christian doctrine, based on these verses, followers of Jesus Christ are

bound by God's all-encompassing dedication and commitment to the poor and to addressing their needs, by their identification with God.” The poor become the center of the gospel because Jesus instructed us to take care of them.

The MRCC should focus on one mission outreach in the community. Some churches have many mission outreaches, some have few and some do not have at all. It is good to have one major mission outreach as Callahan puts it, “One major mission outreach is sufficient in the hearts and minds of a community. Community persons are grateful to discover a congregation with a major mission outreach. In the community. The result of this one mission outreach is that the congregation teaches the community it is a congregation of grace, compassion, community, and hope. It is a mission congregation” (Callahan 2010:56). The MRCC should become a missionary in its nature, is not a choice but its nature.

5.5. RECOMMEND FURTHER RESEARCH

During this research, there were several areas where more intense research was required. As these areas did not fall within the scope of this research, it is recommended that further research be considered in the following three areas:

- (a) The role and need for a new vision in the church shared by all congregants. How can some new vision bind congregants together and enhance the commitment levels of congregants?
- (b) The renewal of day-to-day Christians and not only on Sunday. Researching the priesthood of believers and how this can contribute to encouraging Christians to live their faith every day.
- (c) The MRCC should focus more on community engagement. Ways of doing missions are important to expand the membership of the church as well as enhance the commitment levels of congregants.

5.6 CONCLUSION

The MRCC and other churches need to reform and acquire new strategies. Dreyer (2010:32) writes: “Churches in Southern Africa will need to find forms and ways of being church in the 21st century in Africa. ... It will require theologians who are not afraid to pose critical questions and who are prepared to navigate uncharted and rough seas ... Even more so, it will require a fundamental reformation of the church, true to the old adage that a reformed Church should always reform again.” The church (the MRCC especially) should be self-critical in investigating its strategies for being a church in the 21st century.

There are problems observed and found based on this research. The truth is that the MRCC needs to reform and change its perception of how things are done. It is time for a new strategy where every member of the church will have full commitment to the church. Relationships are sustained by commitment. Every member will be able to have a good relationship with God and others, this will happen only when members commit. Commitment to the church starts with faith in Christ. “The same commitment must define our relationship with the Lord. We must graduate from the point where we praise and worship God only for what He does for us. We must praise Him for who He is. Our worship must transcend a superficial expression that is dependent on our feelings alone. We must develop a relationship that is consistent even in the midst of trials. The trials should deepen our relationship with the Lord, not weaken it” (Jakes 2012:64).

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APPENDICES A

RESEARCH SCHEDULE

Questionnaire

TOPIC: COMMITMENT OF CHURCH MEMBERS AS AN EXPRESSION OF THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE MISSIO DEI: A CASE STUDY.

INTERVIEWS WILL BE CONDUCTED WITH RETIRED ELDERS, DEACONS, AND CHURCH MEMBERS BETWEEN 35 AND 70 YEARS OF AGE IN THE EBENEZER CIRCUIT (PRETORIA)

A QUALITATIVE DESIGN

You are humbly requested to answer the following questions. Please give honest answers and answer all the questions

General Information

Date: _____ Time: _____

Province: Gauteng

Municipality: City of Tshwane

Name of the Church: _____

Method of Questionnaire completion: Face-to-face interview

Demographic

Are you male or female?

Male		Female	
------	--	--------	--

Are you an Adult (36-75 years) or Youth (18-35 years)?

Adult		Youth	
-------	--	-------	--

Theme 1 Church MEMBERSHIP

1-01. Are you a member of MRCC?

Yes		No	
-----	--	----	--

If Yes, for how many years have you been a member of MRCC? (_____)

1-02. Are you an ordinary member of the church or official?

Church member		Official	
---------------	--	----------	--

Theme 2 Church ATTENDANCE

2-01. Are you attending church regularly?

Yes		No	
-----	--	----	--

If No, state how many times in a month (_____)

If you are not attending church regularly what are your reasons

.....

.....

2-02. Do you attend church Funerals?

Yes		No	
-----	--	----	--

If not, please state your reason for not attending the funeral

.....

.....

2-03. What is your role in the church?

Ordinary member		Elder		Deacon	
-----------------	--	-------	--	--------	--

2-04. Are you a member of any Organ of Support?

Ordinary member		Member of Organ of Support	
-----------------	--	----------------------------	--

If you are a member of the Organ of support for how many years? (_____)

If you are not a member of Organ of Support, can you please state why you are not a member of Organ of Support?

.....

.....

2-05. MRCC Mamelodi only has one church service per week on Sundays. Do you think there is a need for extra church service?

Yes		No	
-----	--	----	--

If yes, please state what type of service we need. I.e. during the week or the second service on Sunday

Theme 3 Church PARTICIPATION

3-01. Do you participate in Bereavement family support?

Yes		No		
-----	--	----	--	--

If no, please state the reason not to support the bereaved family

.....

.....

3-02 Do you participate in visiting the sick?

YES		NO	
-----	--	----	--

If no, state reason not to participate in visiting the sick

.....

.....

3-03 Do you participate in the Cleaning of the church?

Yes		No	
-----	--	----	--

If not, please state why you are not part of those cleaning the church.

.....

.....

Theme 4 Church VOLUNTARISM

4-01 Do you ever Volunteering in the church

Yes		No	
-----	--	----	--

If not, please state why not volunteering in church activities.

.....

If Yes, please which church activities you volunteer

.....

Theme 5: Church Contribution

5-01. Do you contribute your dues regularly??

Yes		No	
-----	--	----	--

If Not, state how often

.....

.....

5-02. Do you contribute to Lekgetho/monthly tickets?

Yes		No	
-----	--	----	--

If Not, state why you are not contributing

.....

.....

5-03. Do you contribute to Sunday Collection?

Yes		No	
-----	--	----	--

If Not, state why you are not contributing

.....

.....

5-04. Do you contribute to Puno/Thanksgiving?

Yes		No	
-----	--	----	--

If Not, state why you are not contributing

.....

.....

APPENDICES B

13 Shigugu Street
Ext 4 Mamelodi East
0122
21 April 2023

The Research Participant

I am presently doing research with the University of Pretoria. The title of my thesis is,
**COMMITMENT OF CHURCH MEMBERS AS AN EXPRESSION OF THE
UNDERSTANDING OF THE MISSIO DEI: A CASE STUDY.**

The aims of the Research are:

- **To determine** if church members understand Commitment in MRCC
- **To establish** the reasons why Commitment has declined in mainline churches (MRCC).
- **To highlight** the importance of Commitment to congregation health and well-being of MRCC.
- **To establish** methods and new ways that can assist in ensuring that members' commitment receives appropriate attention.

May you kindly assist by completing the attached questionnaire and returning it to me as soon as possible?

Thank you in advance

Yours faithfully

Rev S J Montja

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA PhD CANDIDATE

APPENDICES C

CONSENT FORM

CONFIDENTIAL

COMMITMENT OF CHURCH MEMBERS AS AN EXPRESSION OF THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE MISSIO DEI: A CASE STUDY.

SEALA JACK MONTJA

1. I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, without giving any reason, without my legal rights being affected.
2. I understand that my participation in this study will in no way affect my Church membership.
3. I understand that data collected may be looked at by responsible representatives from the University of Pretoria for monitoring and ensuring that the study is being conducted properly. I permit for these individuals to have access to the relevant information
4. If I need to see the final analysis of the data collected may be made available to me upon request.
5. I agree to be contacted in the future about further studies relating to church commitment in MRCC.
6. I understand that I will not benefit financially or get some favours in this study

Name of Participant Signature of Participant Date

Name of Researcher Signature of Researcher Date
