WHAT ARE THE FACTORS MILITATING AGAINST THE CONCEPT OF THE SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN THE ZIMBABWEAN ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH WITHIN THE TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK ?

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ABSTRACT

The main focus of this research was to investigate the factors which militate against the concept of the Small Christian Community (SCC) in the Zimbabwean Roman Catholic Church within the Total Quality Management paradigm as attempts are sought to implement Vatican 11's aspirations. A study of a qualitative nature utilising a grounded theory design was employed. Data was gathered from eight interviewees and eighteen respondents on biographic data, the concept of the SCC and parishioner participation in the SCC and Parish, thereafter solutions were sought for non-compliance. The research revealed that the some parishioners, the youth included did not attend prayer meetings with the latter being invisible in some church activities. Although non-attendance was due to work commitments, and educational engagements; the language policy and lackluster homilies and sermons factored in. Significantly were pledges which parishioners made and dishonoured. Suggestions proffered included awareness workshops and engagement in empowerment self-reliant projects.

Keywords: Attendance. Clergy. Homilies. Laity. Pledges. Parishioners. Participation. Pastoral visits. Sermons. Vatican 11.

INTRODUCTION

The major focus of the Church is "to share God's message and gifts of the spirit with the people," not a place of worshipping "Mammon", although paradoxically it needs money

(Wermter, 2015, p. 1). In that view, balancing the two aspects for spiritual and financial survival is pertinent. People for time immemorial regardless of religious, political, social or economic status during the time of need find solace in the Church. The homeless have been sheltered, the hungry fed, the naked clothed, the sick have sought both physical and spiritual healing and the terminally ill look forward to resting in peace in the church when sent to perpetual peace by the Creator (The New Community Bible, 2008). These are the lived experiences of the Universal Church which need to be manifested and concretised within the SCC influenced by the local conditions and culture (Pikiti, Healey & Musimba, 2015). In Africa, charitable endeavours have never been a bone of contention since resources were in abundance by then as the Church heavily relied on donations from distant well-wishers whose economies were flourishing, although in the end it cultivated a dependency syndrome (Wermter, 2015). The Vatican augmented the African church coffers from its property investments abroad. During that era, many African states were colonised and downtrodden, so it was therefore, easier for donors to give handouts to whoever was dangling a begging bowl on behalf of the plight of Black people. Of late, all are decolonised and emancipated. It is in that light that the Second Vatican Council of the Church through Pope Paul VI has tried to implement the concept of the SCC as mooted by the earlier Godfathers as a way of decentralising some of its spiritual and parish functions to the communities they belong to (Pikiti, Healey & Musimba, 2015) in an attempt to wean them off from the donor syndrome which has dominated the traditional African Catholic Church for a millennium. Christians through this devolution of power are being called upon to embrace the Total Quality Management (TQM) paradigm in their spiritual interaction with the Church. This thrust is meant to grow SCCs so that with time they become firmly rooted in the life and culture of the people, led by the local people, meets and answers local needs and problems and finds within itself the resources for its life and mission (Pikiti, Healey & Musimba, 2015). In that view, it is within the jurisdiction of the clergy and laity to create a self-reliant Catholic Church which is self ministering, self-propagating and self-supporting (Pope Paul V1, 1963) amid the economic hardships parishioners are experiencing, not to mention the drought which has ravaged most of the African economies ever since independence, hence this study as a revolutionary thinking is dawning through Vatican II.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Vatican 11's attempt to transform the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) by democratising it is on the assumption that evangelisation is not the work for the clergy only, but the laity too as they are endowed with different gifts (Pikiti, Healey & Musimba, 2015). In the past, the Parish Priest dominated the liturgical activities and functions of the church as the system was centralised. During that era, there were few Black Priests. Early missionaries were from Europe whose major mission was evangelisation which was achieved in their pursuit of education. The latter function

was meant to enable the Black Christians to read the Word of God, study it, understand and then proclaim it (Kang, 2009). Similarly, during that era, the funding of the church activities was based on a common fund which was sourced and controlled by the Vatican. Besides reliance on donations as alluded to above, some Priests who where professionally trained were galvanised into action by the motto of *Ora et Labora* (Pray and work) (Wermter, 2015), to earn their living through different work engagements. Those with farming skills were deployed to missionary establishments which were located on farms and became productive in several ways there. This approach weaned off such Priests from over reliance on the common fund as they were empowered with skills which enabled them to fend for themselves (Wermter, 2015), instead of relying on alms donated by the poor parishioners.

However, within that scenario, parishioners were persuaded to give humble offertory so as to inculcate the spirit of giving in them in line with the Biblical thinking which claims that "There is more happiness in giving than in receiving" (Act 20:35) obeying this command increases one's happiness (1 Corinthians 1:2) since the Lord loves the cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7). This principle escalated at the time when some White Priests retreated to their mother countries because of a bitter and protracted guerilla war which was waged by patriotic Zimbabweans which decimated their population as many of them were caught up in the cross fire. Others were relegated to the RCC old peoples' homes built for this purpose, as Zimbabwe had become their second home. This retreat by White Priests either to their mother countries or old peoples' homes somehow killed the goose which laid the golden egg. The donations which were from aboard began to diminish and it was at the same time when a new breed of young African Priests was ordained who most of them were from impoverished economic backgrounds. This perhaps was a rude awakening to the Vatican as new ways of citizen participation were sought to sustain the financial standing of the church (Pikiti, Healey & Musimba, 2015). Through Vatican 11, some radical changes were instituted, more so, that African Priests and parishioners were beginning to outnumber Whites in most communities. Some renewed religious philosophy had to be put in place through Vatican 11 to liberalise the functions of the church as parishioner participation was sought. This declaration is portrayed in Pope Paul's speech when he challenged the African hierarchy, religious and laity by saying: "By now you Africans are missionaries to yourself. The Church of Christ is well and truly planted in this soil in Africa. You must continue building the Church in the Blessed Continent" (Pastoral Policy of the Archdiocese of Bulawayo, n.d., p.1).

In that fashion, local Christians were being called upon to minister in the Church as they proclaimed the Word of God and tithe for the general upkeep of their Parishes as they moved towards being self-reliant (Wermter, 2015). It is against this background of events that the study intends to investigate the factors which militate against the concept of the SCC in the RCC as

financial participation is sought within the TQM framework amid the economic meltdown in Zimbabwe which has resulted in many retrenchments and redundancies.

THE CONCEPT OF THE SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY (SCC)

As mooted by Pope John XX111 in the 1960s, the philosophical assumption was that the early church existed as a congregation gathering in the households of cities and towns (Kang, 2009). Even Jesus and His community of disciples in their mission, gallivanted from one place to another., since, they did not have a special place for evangelisation (Wermter, 2015). They gathered and sojourned in the houses of early Christians at the behest of Jesus Christ for evangelisation and this gave birth to the fundamental unit of primitive Christianity (Kang, 2009). This approach to early Christians is what crystallised the family hierarchy into brotherhood and sisterhood as equal partners (Kang, 2009). The assumption was to build Church life based on communities in which every day life and work took place at grassroot level (Pikiti, Healey & Musimba, 2015).

The descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost which culminated in the proclamation of the Word of God in several native languages, while the disciples were barricaded in a house of one of the Christians in fear (Act 2:1-11) is a clear testimony on which the concept of a SCC was founded. The Last Supper (Matt 26: 17-35), Jesus' first Eucharist celebrated in a Christian house with his disciples is a collaboration of this feat. Most significantly, are the five thousand followers Jesus fed spiritually and physically in their respective intimate groups. This action symbolised the "Eucharist" as epitomised by its modality of "the distribution of bread", which no doubt underlies the essentiality of a SCC in the development of Christian faith in the early church (Kang, 2009), where the Word of God was consumed by the converted ones.

Besides those multitudes who consumed the Word of God, advocates of SCCs believe that these should be small enough for the people to know each other on a personal level and to experience community fellowship with one another (Pikiti, Healey & Musimba, 2015). This view is in consonance with the findings of the Mamfe Diocese (2015) which established that SCCs are more adapted to the people's life situation of hospitality, fraternity and community. Above all, members of SCCs are supposed to be caring, loving, welcoming and supportive, especially to those with special problems: the divorced, the poor and the marginalised (Mamfe Diocese, 2015). In such a scenario, according to the Mamfe Diocese (2015, par 3):

> members have this experience of intimacy with the Lord through the Word of God, which
> forms the core of their existence where each person knows the other by name, a metaphor
> used by the sects. In such ways, they make the experience of Jesus' first disciples their

own: 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the Word of eternal life. We have believed, and we have come to know, that you are the Holy one of God'.

It is in that light that the concept of a SCC is derived from the life history of the Holy Family, which makes it its patron when one considers the trials and tribulations it underwent while in Africa, Israel and Palestine (Pikiti, Healey & Musimba, 2015). Propelled by such actions, Vatican 11 sought to remodel the Church based on community participation as portrayed in the following four major constitutions of the Church (Kang, 2009).

THE CONSTITUTION ON THE SACRED LITURGY

This territory in the past was the preserve of the Priest. He conducted sacrificial rites and prayers while the parishioners were spectators (Kang, 2009). This document therefore, calls for community participation in the expression of grace and salvation of God through their local languages, music and cultural heritage (Pope Paul V1, 1963). Along this new philosophy of the Church, the major readings and common prayers should be conducted in the dominant native language (s) of the parishioners and the homily preached in the same vein (Pope Paul V1, 1963). This kind of approach is alive to Paul's thinking which advocates that preachers speak in the language of parishioners to avoid being foreigners to them and them foreigners to preachers (1Corinthians 3:11). In that light, traditional musical instruments have been adopted as well to give the celebration a cultural flavour as attempts are being made to indigenise the liturgy of the Church in a communal manner as opposed to the individual approach which was employed in the past (Kang, 2009). Similarly, sacramental rituals have undergone some revision as well depending upon the Church's local needs (Pope Paul V1, 1963).

Most importantly, Christians pray together in communion with the Universal Church: while the majority of Christians find it quite difficult to pray individually in their ordinary lives, the SCC helps people grow together in their spiritual life praying together regularly and following the liturgical calendar of the Universal Church (Kang, 2009). In SCCs the members are deeply influenced in their spiritual life by others in the community through the sharing of experiences lived in daily life (Kang). In that light, therefore, SCCs present the milieu for communitarian spirituality. This is what *Sacrosanctum Concilium* also tells us to achieve (Pope Paul V1, 1963).

THE DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION OF THE CHURCH

For many centuries the Church stressed too much of its celestial and sacred character using a mystical language, like the body of Christ as the mystical body which included the communion of saints with Christ as the head (Pope Paul V1, 1964). God did not invite some righteous individuals but the whole people of God to be the witnesses of salvation for all humankind (Pope

Paul V1, 1964). Therefore, the Church needs to give testimony and to live the communion of the saved community (Kang, 2009). This feat may be accomplished by the canonisation of local Christians such as the Martyrs of Uganda if Churches are to have relevance to their communities.

The implication of the above thought is that Christians meet in small community building groups (Kang, 2009). In the Parish setting of the RCC, it is actually not possible to develop personal relationships with the other faithful, hence the SCC in which Christians have close contacts with a limited number of members and feel the bond of community life, thus, having a new sense of belonging and solidarity based on a common faith (Kang). This is what *Lumen Gentium* teaches and wishes Christians to realise (Pope Paul V1, 1964).

THE CONSTITUTION ON DIVINE REVELATION

In the past the Church mainly focused on the importance of the Sacraments and Canon Law at the expense of the Word of God. There is now a paradigm shift as more attention is being given to the latter which is the real basis of Christian faith. Emphasis is being put first of all on reading, praying, studying and proclaiming it, hence the concept of the SCC (Kang, 2009).

In that respect, Christians meet together controlled by the power of the Word of God. In SCCs, it is always at the centre. Christ is the Word of God incarnated into the world. Therefore, wherever Christians congregate, it should take first and central place. Listening to it, sharing their experiences, the people of God mature as children of God and they develop an evangelical perspective to see, discern and judge the complex realities of our world (Kang, 2009). This realises the teaching of *Dei Verbum* (Pope Paul V1, 1963).

THE PASTORAL CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD

Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnated in the world who transforms the world reigned by all kinds of injustice and evil into the kingdom of God (Kang, 2009). Jesus lived in this world and offered his whole life totally to liberate people from sins and evils of this world. Therefore, the Church recognising the world only as wicked and secular did not make any effort to change the world. The document encourages Christians to fight against evil and to transform the world into the Kingdom of God realising justice and peace in their daily life. Put in another way, the Pastoral constitution, can only be achieved through the SCC, that is, Christians after sharing the Word of God try to emulate Jesus Christ in their evangelisation and daily lives in the manner early Christians like Paul and others did (Kang).

In that light, Christians realise the Gospel in their lives. The SCC tries to put into practice the Word of God in their concrete daily lives. There are several methods of sharing the Gospels but

they all aim not only to meditate on the Word of God but also to live out in their daily life the knowledge they received from the Gospel so that they could contribute towards realising the Kingdom of God in this world. The SCC puts Christians within a powerful context in order to challenge unjust realities in modern society so that they could transform the world into the Kingdom of God which Jesus wished to accomplish. This thrust, realises the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* (Pope Paul V1, 1965).

The four constitutions constitute the blueprint of the renewal of the Church on which the SCC must be designed. However, implementation and the nature of SCCs depends on what that particular church intends to do and this approach has militated against the progress towards that direction. The issue of SCCs is not confined to the African continent alone but the world over. Latin America, North America and Asia have made remarkable progress towards incorporating the four elements of the constitutions (Kang, 2009). SCCs presently exist in several variations depending upon the native culture of the nation and communities they are located. While in most parts of Africa and Asia, they are referred to as SCCs, in Latin America they are referred to as Basic Christian Communities (Kang). It is therefore, the four constitutions as described above which the RCC aims to achieve through the concept of SCCs in Zimbabwe amid dissenting voices here and there from different parishioners dotted throughout the country, hence, this study.

THE TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT (TQM) FRAMEWORK

The TQM paradigm according to Sallis (1996, p. 27) is "a philosophy of continuous improvement which can provide any institution with a set of practical tools for meeting and exceeding present and future needs, wants and expectations." Similarly, Kurtus (2007, p. 1) views it as:

> a management system for a customer focused organization that involves all employees in continual improvement of all aspects of the organization. TQM uses strategy, data, and effective communication to integrate the quality principles into the culture and activities of the organization.

Implied in both definitions is that TQM commences with an audit of individual needs, wants and expectations in its attempt to get right things first time and all the time as endeavours are made to approximate them (Stoner, Freeman & Gilbert, 1995). Such data may be collected or generated by employing a survey, an interview schedule, observation, document analysis (Denscombe, 2007) or brainstorming tools (Sallis, 1996). When the aspirations of clients are known, they can be translated into broad goals (vision) and operational objectives (mission). To deal with dissent

at operational level, the force field analysis may be used to dismantle equilibrium or in dealing with disequilibrium as attempts are being made to change the status quo. After that all the stakeholders may be brought on board so that they are managers of their responsibilities which they would be tasked by management in an attempt to put the quality improvement crusade in motion.

It is in the above enumerated manner that TQM is viewed as "a philosophy and a methodology that assists institutions to manage change and to set their own agendas for dealing with a plethora of new external pressures" (Sallis, 1996, p. 8). It demands a collaboration of minds in the players as they embrace a change culture that sets continuous improvement at the very heart of a quality process (Sallis). Never-ending improvement requires constant reflection, correcting and reworking by both management and subordinates in their quality circles or teams over and above training or staff development so as to equip both parties with appropriate skills and knowledge (Stoner et al.). In that regard, successful change must commence from top management as they provide support services and resources, as it cascades to the various departments of an organisation via an established efficient and effective communication network channel with feedback loops which would serve as safety valves as the quality process is lubricated (Stoner et al.). Devolution of power in the process would empower subordinates not only to enhance their commitment and ownership of goals but to be autonomous and creative as well (Sallis). The ultimate aim of a quality revolutionary organisation is to improve its service delivery and products to the satisfaction of its clients if it is to survive in this competitive era (Stoner et al.). By the same token, for any organisation to be successful, it must benchmark its services or products against the very best in the world (Stoner et al.)

APPLYING THE TQM PARADIGM IN THE CHURCH

Since TQM is a philosophical assumption which emanated from the industry as the gurus of change sought to continuously improve either the quality of service or product in a competitive environment (Sallis, 1996), it can equally be used in a non-profit making organisation such as a Church so that it remains financially viable (Kurtus, 2007). Judging by the definition of TQM as alluded to above, the goal of the clergy, perhaps, would be to satisfy the parishioners under his jurisdiction with a high quality religious service which satisfies their spiritual needs (Kurtus, 2007). In that respect the assumption would be that a satisfied parishioner would not only come to Church regularly but would entice other Christians as well. In that way the church would grow in numbers and the TQM initiative is needed to sustain such a status qou. The growth is associated with a multiplier effect; more numbers might lead to more money donations to the Church as their gesture of satisfaction (Kurtus, 2007). A clergy with a TQM orientation will endeavour at all cost either through dialogue or a survey, to ascertain why parishioners keep on

coming to Church and why others do not return at all (Kurtus, 2007). Parishioners, over and above spiritual reasons come to church for different reasons which need to be identified through a needs audit if religious services on offer are to approximate their aspirations (Sallis, 1996). Such involvements of parishioners as required by Vatican 11 are tenets of the TQM paradigm. Parishioners engaged in this manner would not only commit themselves to the ethos and demands of the Church but would feel bonded its establishment. By the same margin, the proclamation of the Word of God becomes the collective responsibility of both the clergy and laity. It is such debates which culminated in the investigation of factors which militate against the concept of the SCC in the Zimbabwean RCC within the TQM Framework as frantic attempts are being made to engage parishioners.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach utilising a grounded theory design to establish the factors which militate against the formation of a SCC in Africa in general and in Zimbabwe in particular as the RCC adopts the aspirations of Vatican II was employed. This entailed engaging parishioners in a sustained and intensive experience through a semi-structured interview and an observational protocol to ascertain their opinions on the subject (Creswell, 2014). It involved a face-to-face interview with the participants and recording any behaviours depicted by the participants in the process (Creswell). A qualitative approach was found to be appropriate for this study as it sought to secure fuller, more and richer descriptions than could have been done using a quantitative approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). A qualitative approach of a transformative design contains an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of participants, the institutions in which individuals work and live and the researcher's life (Creswell). Above all, it provides a voice for marginalised participants, raising their consciousness or advancing the agenda for change to improve their lives (Creswell). The adoption of a qualitative study is supported by Jansen and Davis (1998, p. 291) who assert that: "Researching sensitive topics may be better achieved by a qualitative approach, which offers more personal and interactive communication and has the potential to diminish the typical power relationships present in conventional research." For these reasons a more qualitative, rather than quantitative, research design was chosen for the current study.

The grounded theory was used to generate a theory based on the action or interaction grounded in the views of participants (Creswell, 2014). Such an approach is corroborated by Strauss and Corbin (1998) who propose that because grounded theory is drawn from the data, it may therefore "offer insight, enhance understanding and provide a meaningful guide to action" (p. 12).

Eight participants were chosen using a combination of snowball and theoretical non-probability sampling technique (Denscombe, 2007). One case was identified and thereafter, the participant was requested to choose somebody s/he thought had valuable data in the new voyage of discovery based on the development of a theory which was 'grounded' in evidence (Denscombe). This procedure was used until the data collected was considered to be oversaturated (Strauss & Corbin). A category is considered to be oversaturated if no new additional information emerges from the coded data of the most recent interview (Strauss & Corbin). As soon as the interviews were completed data was transcribed and segmented according to the codes derived from the utterances given by the participants (Creswell, 2014). Large chunks of data were labelled according to content by way of open coding, then relationships and associations were scrutinised and categorised to give the data a major focus (axial coding) so that the selected themes or categories were vigorously pursued based on the phenomenon under investigation (selective coding) with the ultimate aim of developing concepts (Denscombe). The coding resulted in five and ten major categories of themes emerging respectively, each having many subtopics, or nodes (Korb, 2010). In keeping with the grounded theory, "one is not interested in how many individuals exhibit this concept, but rather in how often this concept emerges" (Strauss & Corbin, p. 95).

The major themes which emerged where cross verified with the results of the eighteen respondents who responded to an open and closed questionnaire. Triangulation was meant to compare and contrast the results of the two gathering tools employed. Either response was member checked against the responses of the Parish Priest. The information gathered in this manner, was considered credible, reliable and valid more so that the parishioners under investigation have been worshipping at the Parish under study for a period ranging from 4 years to 42 years giving a mean of 19 years, a period which cannot be ignored. Over and above that, of the 25 participants, all were baptised and confirmed practising Christians except five.

DISCUSSION

The concept of the SCC

The parishioners portrayed a great deal of knowledge on this phenomenon. They concurred that it is in the SCC that the church is founded. In that view, a SCC:

> is a small group of people who meet to fellowship, to share the Word of God and it
> further serves as the foundation on which the church is built on. It is also regarded as the
> nerve centre for information sharing on social interactions, bereavement, the Parish and

its activities, hence the need for all parishioners to attend. It is within this parameter that the spirit of humanity, unity, harmony and cooperation are fostered.

Disappointing though, were the animosities emanating from the SCC. These brewed permanent hatred fuelled by gossip with some parishioners having silent peace orders against each other, let alone, witchcraft which was suspected. The African society by its nature is superstitious, such allegations should be taken seriously and it may be through the intervention of the Priest that such issues may be resolved, hence, the need for his visibility in the SCC as advocated by most interviewees.

Participation of parishioners in the SCC

Despite the rich knowledge parishioners possess on what entails the SCC as alluded to above, they indicated that the following challenges militated against its viability and feasibility as depicted in Table 1. One represents the (*most common*) and five is the (*least common*) one in the rank order.

Table 1: Factors which militate against the concept of the SCC in Zimbabwe

Challenge	Rank
Non-participation/attendance of youth and some members in the SCC and the Church's activities	1
Chairpersons always leading prayers and same members sharing the Word	2
Parishioners make pledges although in serious arrears	2
Attendance to prayer meetings is determined by who is hosting	2
Same people contributing financially	5

Top on the agenda is the absence of the youth and some members at SCC prayer meetings and the Church as well. Most youth seem to be invisible when it comes to their expected participation in the activities of the Parish yet they are regarded as the backbone and future leaders of any viable organisation. This phenomenon was found to be nurtured by protective parents who prohibited their children from intermingling with members of the Catholic Youth Association (CYA) whom they believed were contaminated in the wake of nudity parties which

have hit Bulawayo of late. An observation which was positively confirmed by some youth leaders when they were interrogated on the issue as they claimed to be working towards sprucing up their battered image implying that a lot used to happen in the past, let alone, with the leadership crisis they were currently experiencing. Such revelations become a cause of concern to any parent, since, statistically, 48% of teenagers in Bulawayo seem to have experienced premarital sex through such functions as revealed by the Active Youth of Zimbabwe study (Teenagers indulge in Sex, 2015). Further to that, parents bemoaned the lack of proper guidance and counselling in the CYA, which in their opinion culminated in their children's wayward behaviour and getting married outside the Church, a situation which does not augur well for its growth (See Table 2).

Similarly the youth claimed that their non-participation in the activities of the RCC, despite Vatican 11's aspirations was due to work and educational commitments. Weighed against this view was the RCC tradition which they considered rigid, conservative and marginalising them to the peripheral functions of the Church. They further bemoaned the absence of outreach progammes meant to evangelise the Word of God which would broaden their perspective about the Bible in the long run. Instead the ritualistic nature of the Eucharist which seems to confine them to their seats and compels them to listen to the Priest who usually would be preaching the same sermon year in and out on Biblical stories they too have studied at both elementary and tertiary institutions was questioned. These were found to be 'monotonous', 'purely academic', 'lacklustre' and 'non-pragmatic', a scenario which was confirmed by the parishioners who were interviewed. They further pointed out that: 'homilies and sermons do not touch our hearts at all,' hence, their migration to Pentecostal Churches.

On the issue of SCC Chairpersons always being on the forefront of events, it was noted that the development was due to lack of commitment and enthusiasm among members, while that of the same people sharing the Word of God, it demonstrated how ill-prepared some parishioners were. Little wonder that some suggested that active participation might be achieved if the hosting family took the lead. Sadly to note though, was that the attendance to such prayer meetings was determined by the host, implying that some element of discrimination by race or tribe or class (See Table 2) is alive. Factored in was that some Church activities seemed to be done according to class. Snobs were seen to be engaging themselves in classy duties while the despised ones were left to do most of the donkey work, an issue which needs to be addressed before it breaks the moral fabric on which Christian values are founded on.

Most controversially was the issue of the same members contributing financially be it pledges, association subscriptions, offertory or financial obligations the SCC would have been tasked

with during that month. Parishioners advanced an assortment of reasons on this development. Some argued that their SCC was made up of pensioners and the underprivileged who were struggling to make ends meet. One pensioner argued thus: 'How can I be asked to pledge or contribute financially when I am failing to put food on the table. Our meals have been reduced to once a day.' A situation which the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) needs to look into, more so, that God is for the poor not the rich as demonstrated in the parable of the rich man (Luke 16:19-31). What this boils down to is that parishioners in a catch-22 situation such as this one are in a quagmire. They confused whether to honour their financial obligation first or settle utility bills against a background of fees. Their plight is aggravated by a bereavement or sickness which may befall the family.

When the issue of the Diaspora was raised as their rescue package, parishioners claimed that: 'doing so would be overburdening our children abroad as they too have their own life to live.' One aged parishioner who claimed that during the dollarisation era they were asked to pledge at the cost of a loaf of bread ($1), has a story to tell. Poverty studies conducted by the UN have revealed that many Zimbabweans are living below a dollar, hence, the serious arrears they are in yet the Church on the other hand needs funds for its survival. Such poverty as experienced by some senior Christians has a crippling effect on the Church coffers, more so, when the high employment rate is factored in against the background of drought.

Participation of parishioners in the Parish

Using the ranking scale below where one represents the *(most common)* and ten the *(least common)* one, parishioners were asked to rank the following factors which militate against parishioner participation in the Parish as depicted in Table 2

Table 2: Challenges faced by Parishes as they try to implement Vatican 11

Challenge	Rank
The number of parishioners is not growing	1
Non participation of parishioners in the Church choir	2
Discrimination by race, tribe and social status	3
Lack of proper public financial management procedures	3
Non-participation of some priests and sisters in the activities of the church	5
The needs of the aged, poor, unemployed and pensioners not being catered for	5

Language problem	5
Most youths do not attend mass and do not participate in the Church's activities	8
Pastoral visits done hurriedly	9
Church financial demands too much for the poor, unemployed, aged and pensioners	9

The non-growth of parishioners is a main bone of contention against a background of several Churches mushrooming here and there with their attractive packages which lure the youth away from the RCC as alluded to earlier on. Part of this departure is by the illiterate parishioners who seem to claim that the use of English in delivering sermons and homilies does not satisfy them spiritually. Where parishioners feel their linguistic needs are not met they usually vote with their feet. Parishioners are spiritually satisfied if gospelled in their indigenous language, let alone, during bereavement, a challenge Zimbabwean Priests are faced with in the wake of the sixteen official languages (The Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013). Contradicting the opinions of the illiterates, are those who suggested that either a trilingual approach (English, Ndebele and Shona) be adopted in celebrating the Eucharist so as to cater for the diverse linguistic cultures of the congregation. Those in consonance, proposed a bilingual one (Ndebele and Shona). In the latter, a language survey could be conducted to establish a lingua franca to be adopted depending on which ethnic group is dominant as those of mixed race were comfortable with either language. Related to this phenomenon, is the element of discrimination which seems to be prevalent in the Church, if not checked may decimate the population of parishioners or tear it asunder as well.

Further to that, parishioners claimed that funds for the upkeep of the church were meagre because the financial accounting procedures employed were suspect, thus putting them in doubt. They also intimated that the post of treasurer needed thorougher scrutiny before such an appointment was made. The fact that public funds were at the mercy of the 'safe key holder' and expenditure at his/her qualms raised a storm as well. In that light, they advocated for a transparent and accountable financial management procedure which would motivate the bulk of parishioners to contribute financially for the general upkeep of the Church. One parishioner infuriated by the accounting procedures in place, echoed the following sentiment: 'Empowering the Parish financially is like investing in a bottomless pit.' When quizzed further the interviewee could not elaborate, more so, that Church announcements of late are punctuated with monthly financial statements. All the same, when the TQM tenet of putting the customer first is put into consideration, such sentiments need to be an eye-opener to custodians of public funds as it is a safety valve for checks and balances.

However, despite the odds, one faithful suggested that instead of always soliciting alms from impoverished parishioners; 'the Parish should initiate self-reliant projects such as rearing chickens or fundraising activities either at SCC level or Parish Level.' Such ventures in the long run would mitigate the financial burden of the underprivileged group. At the worst, those who are financially incapacitated would pay through their labour. Such a feat would-be feasible as long as it was superintended and monitored by the Priest. By the same token, parishioners suggested that, funds permitting, the Parish should sponsor some youth to engage in entrepreneurship developmental programmes which would empower them with prerequisite skills for future utilisation by the Church. Such empowered youths would form brigades which would hire their skills to either parishioners or outsiders. Simultaneously, they would remain afloat in this economic crisis bedevilling Zimbabwe at the moment and augment the finances of the Parish in the process as well.

On the choir issue, parishioners asserted that not all people are gifted with melodious voices. They believed that those who are talented in that area should constitute the choir. During Eucharist celebration, the choir should lead while others follow. However, whenever they wanted to introduce a new song, parishioners proposed that they should be encouraged to go to Church early so that the new song would be practised before Mass or after depending on which time was convenient. In that way, all would sing in unison with those with hoarse voices being lubricated by the talented ones. Consequently, parishioners should be persuaded to purchase hymn books to facilitate the exercise.

When it comes to pastoral visits, those in existence were considered to be done on a hit and run basis. Parishioners demanded that these be systematic and regularised so as to solve disputes and antagonistic feelings which emerge in SCC due to such social interactions which go with the demands of group dynamics. They also suggested that such visits should not be confined to the infirm ones only, as families needed them too. As a way of marketing the Church in the advent of adversaries and global competition, parishioners felt that it was pertinent for the Priest to visit members who would have fallen on the way, reminiscent of the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:1-8). Most importantly, they even pleaded with the Priest to shun the ill-advised tradition of the Church not partaking in the requiem mass of the non-pledging Catholic; as such a stance was viewed as worshipping Mammon instead of God. They further queried why even those who pledged were requested to pay a token of appreciation thereafter, more so, that the Priest is given a stipend from Church coffers and the bereaved needed more funds for the burial. However, one thing they appeared to forget was that, the Church Minister's travels needed funding.

All things being equal, where the clergy exist within the proximity of the Church, these were discouraged from behaving as if they were 'holier than thou' and encouraged to join the various

associations of their flock and shepherd them. These would not only be pacesetters and regulators in such groupings, but guiders and counsellors in sustaining the social cohesion of the association. In the same vein, the isolation of the clergy for whatever reasons was viewed as anathema to the spirit of togetherness which the Church always preaches about. Little wonder that parishioners are usually reluctant to attend functions involving such religious leaders. At the best, religious leaders should be assigned to SCCs with the ultimate aim of enhancing parishioner participation and attendance as some groups are not physically in existence.

CONCLUSION

The general view derived from this empirical research is that attendance to the SCC and Church by some parishioners and youth in particular is invisible for whatever reasons. This is aggravated by the fact that attendance to SCCs is determined by the host, suggesting that some form of discrimination exists. It appears for the financial survival of the Church, the sharing of the Word of God in prayer groups and participation in Church activities, the SCC and Parish relies on the same parishioners a situation which should not be condoned. Surprising though, parishioners make pledges but do not honour them although some prefer to pay as low as a dollar, hence, the financial crisis most RCCs are confronted with. The dominant language of the congregation should reign at all costs regardless of what the language policy dictates. In a similar fashion, homilies and sermons should be pragmatic and of a high quality service if attendances at all levels by parishioners or the youth in particular are to grow. The attraction of the latter group is of paramount importance to the Church as it is its growth barometer. Youths need to be engaged at all levels of the Church, more so, that they are the backbone of any organisation, instead of being relegated to peripheral activities. Besides that, there is need for the clergy to take a hegemonic role in the activities of the Church for the purpose of gelling and reciprocity, since the concept of the SCC is still at its infancy. Such an approach would enhance laity participation and boost attendance at all levels. As a way of instilling confidence in the hearts of parishioners, financial management should be in the hands of the financially literate and pastoral visits which many yearn for should be systematic and intensified so as to cater for all not a chosen few. Paradoxically, discrimination of whatever complexion seems to be prevalent and needs scrutiny. Finally, self reliant projects meant to empower the youth and the underprivileged should be initiated for the financial upkeep of individuals and the Church instead of relying on alms given by the poor.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The growth of the Christian faith in the RCC and the fact that the concept of the SCC is still at its infancy, makes the adoption of TQM paradigm in running Churches inevitable. To achieve this,

a re-educative strategy for change should be employed. Workshops, seminars, staff development programmes and debates should be manned periodically at both micro or macro level were the concept of the SCC as mooted by Vatican 11 would be discussed so that parishioners would be made aware of their extent of involvement. Resource persons at such forums should be those with flourishing SCCs in their Parishes. Parishioners assigned to perform specific functions as desired by the Church should first of all be inducted before delegation. The power structures of the Church and its communication networks in the event of grievances need to be delineated candidly at such forums. Similarly, since it is common knowledge that groupings of this nature are bound to be infested by hostilities and conflicts, a Council of renowned Church elders should be established to arbitrate such cases involving either the clergy or laity with appeal procedures factored in as well.

As demanded by the dictates of the Church, the Priest as the Chief Accounting officer (CAO) in the management of Parish funds should be schooled in the discipline of Financial Management. Armed with this software, he should put in place efficient, effective, transparent and accountable accounting procedures which would instill the confidence of parishioners and boost the Church coffers in the process. Gone are the days that parishioners cannot question the 'Man of God' on financial issues as the TQM paradigm is adopted, more so, that he too is not immune to human frailty. By the same token, a well constituted Parish Finance Committee (PFC) should be commissioned for budgetary purposes and instituting financial controls in the management of Parish funds.

All funds attributable to the Parish must be banked with a reputable Commercial Bank of its choice. Withdrawals must be by cheque and signatories to such an account must be the Priest (CAO) and any one of the PPC members excluding the treasurer as a way of checks and balances. The PFC becomes the authorising body for all activities meant to generate or utilise funds in the Parish. To avoid thefts occurring through break-ins, all monies attributable to the Parish must be banked within a period of 48 hours or 72 hours depending upon the geographical location of the church. Whoever is tasked with the banking of the money, deposit slips must be availed to the CAO at the earliest possible time as evidence for such transactions? However, as a contingent measure, a petty cash account may be maintained.

To curb the drifting away of the youth and some of its faithful to Pentecostal Churches which are mushrooming as of late, an aggressive marketing strategy should be adopted in the proclamation of the Word of God so as to retain them. The luring of parishioners in their multitudes results in financial benefits which accrue to the Church. Likewise, sermons and homilies should be inspiring and pragmatic while the academic ones should be confined to the seminary. Most

importantly, deliberate parishioner involvement must be intensified with more focus on the youth, who happen to be a volatile group in this case. All young Catholics must be encouraged to join the CYA where they will be groomed in leadership positions through motivational talks. Above all, cultural exchange and outreach programmes meant for them to gel and grow in wisdom should be put in place.

All things being equal, parishioners should be encouraged to engage in a number of fund raising activities to boost their coffers. Such functions if done at a macro level, there must be one cash point where monies would be collected and participants be issued with coupons for use in respective stalls for easy accountability.

The 10% tithe as pronounced by the primitive Church is unsustainable and outdated in this contemporary economy and therefore demands rethinking. Parishioners are currently overwhelmed by bread and butter issues. In that view, all gainfully employed parishioners should be encouraged to pledge whatever they can afford within reasonable limits and should equally be persuaded to honour their pledges as these serve as a life line to the church. However, on compassionate grounds, the aged, pensioners and underprivileged ones should be exempted. At the worst, economically disempowered Parishes should be identified for adoption by the economically empowered ones either locally or abroad.

Besides, Church responsibilities need to be rotated if the best of every individual is to be utilised. Over-reliance on an individual is dangerous as when such a person departs due to death or transfer or joins another Church, it causes an irreplaceable vacuum. To build up a back up force, the PPC should identify talented parishioners in respective areas and persuade them to take up such responsibilities. Relying on voluntarism sometimes is not the best option.

To avoid alienation and isolation, the clergy must be attached to a SCC where they would be able to gel with their flock, boost attendances and participation as well, although they too have church tasks to accomplish. When parishioners are then called upon to attend functions to do with the clergy, it becomes spontaneous.

The Church also should initiate different self-reliant projects so as to create employment for the youth and engage the underprivileged in one way or another. The youth can further be sponsored by the Church, funds permitting, to engage in entrepreneurial skills with the hope of forming brigades which would create employment and generate money for the Church in the distant future as attempts are being made to move away from the donor-dependency syndrome. Investments in properties, fixed deposits or shares could be a feather in the Parish's cap.

Finally, it is recommended that a similar study be replicated at a macro level either using the same methodology or different one to either authenticate these findings or refute them. Above all, the concept of a SCC needs continuous improvement more so that it is at its infancy.

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