

Managing church financial stability in the wake of COVID-19 vis-à-vis impact on church's mission: A case study of parishes in Masaka Diocese, Uganda

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on church financial stability and its impact on church apostolate using a case study of catholic parishes in Masaka Diocese. The study employed three objectives: i) to understand the impact of COVID-19 on catholic parish apostolate and its eventual impact on the contribution from Christians as a major source of finances; ii) to examine the existing alternative sources of finance and their role in supporting a catholic parish apostolate, and iii) to determine the role of financial management skills towards achieving financial stability in the wake of COVID-19. In-depth interviews were used with the aid of a semi-structured interview guide which targeted key parish leaders, i.e., parish priest and laity leaders in 26 parishes. Lockdown adversely affected the collection of financial contributions from Christians, which is a major source of finances for many catholic parishes. The study also found out that many parishes have projects as alternative sources of finances, however, there is lack of focus which leads to low project returns. For parishes that are focused on a few projects which they can do well, they reported the importance of projects during the lockdown because they acted as a substitute for contributions. Almost all parish leaders knew what to do, but the existing personal ideologies prohibited some of these church leaders to practice some financial management skills. Practical implication: All catholic parish churches, need to confront the reality of achieving financial stability if they are to achieve success in their apostolate. If they are unable to obtain the financial resources they need for their apostolate, their ability to fulfill that apostolate is likely to be compromised.

Keywords: Apostolate, financial stability, financial management skills.

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Introduction

The Church instituted by her divine Redeemer with the apostles and their successors as the foundation with the Vicar of Christ, the Pope, as the head in the seat of St Peter, is constituted as a visible society but with a mystical structure and a supernatural end (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* no.8; *Gaudium et Spes* no.1). As such the Church is both human and divine, spiritual but also sociological in nature and mission. The mission of the Church is to call humanity bound by her earthly conditions such as the economy, health, and finance. The Church thus relates to the concrete material conditions in which it finds itself and it pays attention to them in as much as these affect her mission. (CCC). When COVID-19 struck the world's economy and socio-life, the church also suffered those consequences.

A Roman Catholic Parish is a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a particular church; whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor (*parochus*) as its proper pastor under the authority of the diocesan bishop (Can. 515 §1). The pastor is the proper minister of the parish entrusted to him, exercising the pastoral care of the community committed to him under the authority of the diocesan bishop in whose ministry of Christ he has been called to share, so that for that same community he carries out the functions of teaching, sanctifying, and governing, also with the cooperation of other presbyters or deacons and with the assistance of lay members of the Christian faithful, according to the norm of law (Can. 519). As such, a parish is the most basic unit of the full apostolic mission of the Church, with the ultimate dynamics of Church life springing from and yielding fruit in it.

Masaka Diocese found in the Kampala ecclesiastical province in Uganda has 56 operational Parishes, and another two in the making, as of 2020. The financial system of Parishes in Masaka diocese as per existing Church regulations is managed by the Parish (Financial) council as an advisory body to the Parish Priest, (Canon,537; *Masaka Diocesan Synod V* 2003, pg.118ff). Parishes follow also the universal financial systems and standard accounting procedures.

Today's financial obligations in a parish fall into three categories: i) Capital fund - this is money designated for building maintenance and making new constructions; ii) Church program fund – this is money needed for church ministers' upkeep and salary payment for other church employees; iii) Evangelization fund – dedicated for the spread of the gospel within a designated area of the local church and new areas. This fund is also used for the social

ministry of parishes such as feeding the hungry and extending aid in times of emergency.

With the occurrence of COVID-19 pandemic and eventual lockdown by the government as a measure to contain its spread, church activities were closed with no public services which adversely affected their spiritual and social mission as they could not reach out to people. As a result, their financial sources were also adversely affected given the fact that Christians could not congregate for Mass and bring offerings and other forms of financial contributions. Indeed, this affected the parish's financial stability to carry out its mission. Financial stability is among the most crucial key aspect to achieving mission success at any time. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to assess the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on church financial stability vis-a-vis Parish Church mission, taking the case of Parishes in Masaka Diocese, Uganda.

Background to the study

History of church finances

The Christian church descends directly from Judaism and the sources of finance in today's church can be traced from the Old Testament. The Old Testament laws acknowledged God as the owner of everything in their practices of offering the first fruits (Exodus 22:28-30). Tithing in the Old Testament was in this regard intended to honour God as the owner of the land and the giver of its produce. Tithing was also prescribed to support the temple services, the priesthood, and a variety of charitable causes. The Bible thus mentions three major different tithes in this regard: i) the Levitical or sacred tithe (Num. 18: 21-24, Neh 12:44-47), used to support the Levites and priests for their service to the temple. This is approximately the kind of tithe continued today. It is the tithe consecrated to God and intended to spread the gospel. ii) The tithe of the feasts (Deut. 14:22-27): this tithe was apparently set aside to pay for a family's attendance at the various feast days (especially the Feast of Tabernacles). iii) The tithe for the poor (Deut. 14:28-29): this was intended for charitable causes to support the poor among the Israelites. It is these three types of tithe that supported the spiritual and social ministry of the believers during the Old Testament period.

The practice of biblical tithing is modified in the New Testament. It is mainly an act of the heart and not of a legally imposed externalist toll system like in the Old Testament, and much less for show of wealth than devotion to God.

Jesus thus praised the widow who though poor and had put the least of offerings showed more deep-seated devotion to God (Mk.12:41ff). Renee (n.d), also refers to the Apostle Paul's teaching in the New Testament (2 Cor. 9:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 8: 1-5) where giving is a Spirit-led voluntary act. Throughout his letters the apostle Paul also never commands Christians to give money nor is there a command to give specific amounts of money. Believers are encouraged to give voluntarily, according to the spirit, and within their means. This means giving is of the Spirit and tithing is of the Law.

For centuries the major sources of income for parish churches have been contributions from Christians in form of tithes, offertory, and donations as discussed above. However, the New Testament emphasizes free giving. Today's church blends the New and Old Testament attitude towards giving whereby Christians are still required to pay a tenth of their income or produce [tithing] as well as making voluntary giving in form of offerings and donations based on one's ability and level of conviction.

It should be noted also that as the Church grew, the tithe failed to cater for all church needs. The church formally introduced 'Offertory' to be given during Mass celebration before consecration time, to be given to the Presider to supplement the mission of evangelization. And the tithe was to remain for the church maintenance, renovations and building activities as may necessitate (Justin Martyr, 'First Apology' No. 67, 155-157; Prot et al, 2012). Since parishes differ in financial capabilities, growth and needs, these two contributions failed to cater for their needs. This led to the introduction of the 3rd contribution known as Second (2nd) Sunday Collections to meet the unfulfilled needs of the church that are not met by the first two collections (Prot et al, 2012). In fact, due to the increasing needs, as part of the solution, many catholic parishes in Africa, as well as Uganda, have three standard collections: the tithe, first collection, and second collections in form of pledges and donations

Study motive

The imposition of the COVID-19 lockdown meant that the economy slowed down, thereby affecting the profitability of economic activities in which most people were engaged. In addition, people who held salaried jobs also were negatively affected as most were laid off or had huge salary cuts. Consequently, Christians' incomes and their ability to contribute financially to the Church were negatively affected. These adverse financial effects of the pandemic on the Church lead one

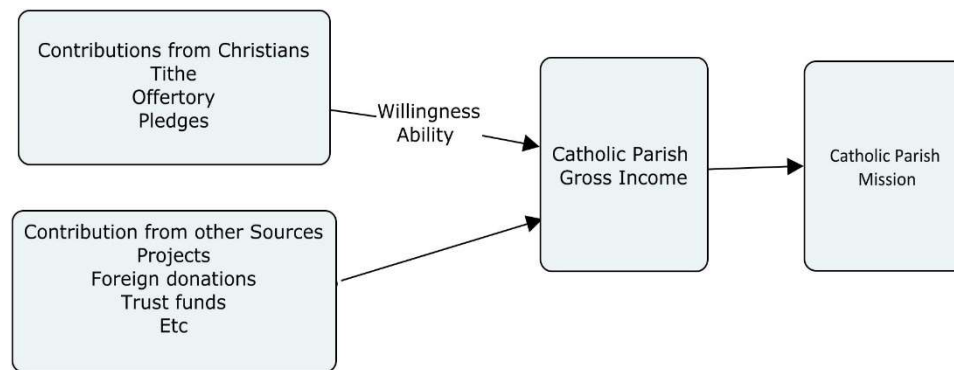
to question whether the parish as the key unit of evangelization can continue to rely in a substantial way on Christians' contributions stably.

The COVID-19 as a general public health menace meant also that Christians' interaction was not possible as there were no gatherings for Mass and other communal pastoral activities, which probably left God's people with little or no opportunity to bring in their offerings. Another question thus could then be: are Christians well-disposed to bring in contributions to the Church without pastoral-liturgical interaction?

These questions call for answers and in order to find a solution, the study focused on three objectives: i) To assess the impact of COVID-19 on church mission vis-à-vis its impact on financial contributions from Christians as a major source of Parish income; ii) To examine the existing alternative sources of finance and their role in supporting a Parish's mission; iii) To determine the role of financial management skills towards achieving financial stability in the wake of COVID-19.

Conceptualization

Figure 1: Parish Financial Sources



Source: Authors (2020)

The framework above shows the relationship between the gross income of a Catholic Parish Church and the contributions from Christians and other sources of finance. If the Parish's gross income is to depend on the Christians' contribution, then their willingness and ability to pay should be high. If this assumption is not true, then a big part of the total income will have come from other sources. This

means the gross income of a Parish Church on the part of contributions is a result of Christian's willingness and ability to pay, together with contributions from other sources of income for the parish.

Therefore, for the Parish that depends on contributions from Christians, its members should have willingness and ability to pay their contributions, otherwise, the parish will face financial difficulties and will not be able to support its mission. Similarly, when the members of the church have the ability and willingness to pay, the parish will collect sufficient income to support its missions.

Literature

Many scholars (Woolever, 2011; Prot et al, 2012; Budiselić, 2014; Anderson, 2018; Renee, n.d), portray contributions from Christians as a major source of church finances to support its mission. Contributions from the Christians are mainly categorized to be the tithes and offerings, pledges, and individual donations (Prot et al, 2012). *Encyclopedia Britannica* says that Tithing is a custom dating back to Old Testament times and adopted by the Christian church whereby lay people contributed a 10th of their income for religious purposes, often under ecclesiastical or legal obligation. The money (or its equivalent in crops, farm stock, etc.) was used to support the clergy, maintain churches, and assist the poor. Tithing was also an important source of funding for the construction of many magnificent Cathedrals. As Christianity spread through Europe, tithing became an obligation for every believer, however, it did not happen without resistance. Tithing was ordered through ecclesiastical law from the 6th century and enforced in Europe by secular law from the 8th century. In England, payment was made obligatory under ecclesiastical penalties by Edmund I and temporal penalties by Edgar. Even, in the present time, it is still enforced in some European countries. In Germany, for example, citizens must pay a church tax unless they formally renounce membership in a church ("*Encyclopedia Britannica*", 2020).

Woolever (2011) carried out a study on how churches are financed across denominations and faith traditions, the most reported major source of income is what individuals contribute through their offerings, pledges, donations, and dues. According to the leaders that were surveyed from each participating congregation the three largest sources of income for the congregation were contributions from Christians, charges for use of facilities, and investments. The second most common major source of income for catholic parishes was found to be charges for the use of church facilities.

Renee (n.d) commented on tithing and giving as means of Christians contributions. He noted that while the word tithe means a tenth or a 10 percent this amount does not refer to money. The biblical tithe never consisted of money. The tithe was a 10 percent of agricultural produce and cattle. According to Renee, God only commanded tithes to be paid according to the Law of Moses, and only ancient Israel was commanded to tithe. The practice of biblical tithing ceased when the New Testament was established after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Giving in the New Testament does consist of money, but is not limited to money. Renee (n.d), refers to Apostle Paul in the New Testament teaching on giving (2 Cor. 9:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 8: 1-5) where giving is Spirit-led and always involves free-will offerings. Free will offerings are always voluntary. Throughout his letters, the apostle Paul never commands the Christian to give money nor is there a command to give specific amounts of money. Christian believers are encouraged to give voluntarily, according to the spirit, and within their means (ability to give). This means Giving is of the Spirit and Tithing is of the Law.

Contrary to Renee, although Anderson (2018) is not against a 10% contribution he calls it a minimum of what a believer should pay. He states that "the tithe of 10% is required, and anything above and beyond that is a free-will offering. God is our creator and owns everything, we are only stewards of what he has given us. He has purchased us through his death on the cross and in order to be faithful stewards, we must follow his word and give at a minimum of 10%. Giving is a question of faith, of gratitude to our creator for his saving grace, and love towards Him. Not only that, however, it is how the church is able to function, with God's help. God blesses us in our obedience to the tithe, and uses our faithfulness to proclaim God's word."

Budiselić (2014), in her study, analyzed the Old Testament practice of tithing in the context of the principle of Christian giving. The Old Testament emphasizes the concepts of "inheritance" and "land" as a basis for Israelites tithing. "Biblical definition", according to which the tithe was the command given in the Mosaic Law for the benefit of the people of Israel at the time of the Old covenant. Regardless, the absence of the concepts of inheritance and land today, Budiselic (2014) concluded that the New Testament teaches that Christians do have an obligation to give (e.g., supporting church ministers, supporting the work of the church, helping the needy, helping poor churches), and as far as giving a tenth of one's financial income based on the Old Testament practice of tithing is

concerned, this can be good and blessed practice and only one of the ways in which Christians today can practice giving, but it is not an exclusive commandment as it was in Mosaic Law. It is important to note that, the New Testament teaching on giving sets an even higher standard of giving for Christians since it does not state the amount (percentage) to be given but from one's free will and ability.

The notion of Christian giving in present-day church is supported by the Code of Canon Law of 1983. The Canon Law laid down a principle that the faithful are obliged to assist the Church by providing what is necessary for divine worship, apostolic and charitable works, and the decent sustenance of its ministers (Can. 222). While the Church has the right to require this support (Can. 1260), it is more fitting that such offerings be made freely, as in regular Sunday collections or in response to authorized appeals for special purposes (Can. 1261-62)

Vatican Council II (Ad Gentes, 21), emphasizes the role of lay faithful in the mission of the parish church. It states that "...unless there is a laity worthy of the name working along with the hierarchy. For the Gospel cannot be deeply grounded in the abilities, life, and work of any people without the active presence of laymen." Therefore, even at the very founding of a Church, great attention is to be paid to establishing a mature, Christian laity. "As sharers in the role of Christ as priest, prophet, and king, the laity have their work cut out for them in the life and activity of the Church. Their activity is so necessary within the Church communities that without it the apostolate of the pastors is often unable to achieve its full effectiveness. In the manner of the men and women who helped Paul in spreading the Gospel (cf. Acts 18:18, 26; Rom. 16:3) the laity with the right apostolic attitude supply what is lacking to their brethren and refresh the spirit of pastors and of the rest of the faithful (cf. 1 Cor. 16:17-18). Strengthened by active participation in the liturgical life of their community, they are eager to do their share of the apostolic works of that community" (Vatican Council II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 10)

What is missing?

The Literature talks about contributions from Christians as a major source of income in the ordinary course of events. It however does not put into critical consideration how this source is affected where there are unexpected disruptions as has been the case with COVID-19 today.

The literature review indicated the obligation of Christians to freely give contributions to support the church mission. However, there is an apparent gap as

regards ascertaining whether Christians can continue making financial contributions without active Pastoral work going on in the Parish. Therefore, the research set out to find out whether there is a correlation between the full and active participation in church apostolate and financial performance and stability in a Parish, taking the case of Masaka Diocese, Uganda. The critical questions thus are: Can a parish still attract financial contributions if it is not actively engaged in pastoral work? Parish life still requires financial resources to run even when active apostolate with the faithful is halted as has been the case with COVID-19 times, then what should be done? What alternatives can be available in such a scenario of revenue handicaps? What gaps in the Parish financial system need serious attention and how could the Church best handle them?

Methodology

In order to satisfy the objectives of the study, a qualitative approach was employed, so as to gain a complete description and analysis of a research subject. For this research in-depth interviews were used in order to understand respondents' emotions, feelings, and opinions regarding this research subject. The conduct of the interview was aided by the use of a semi-structured interview guide. Due to restricted movement in the effort of containing the spread of the disease during the period the interviews were conducted, the researcher used phone calls to carry out interviews. Interviews were recorded and were later transcribed. Out of 56 parishes in Masaka Diocese, a sample of 26 parishes were selected based on their localities and economic activities. 13 parishes were chosen from town areas and 13 parishes from village areas with low economic activities. Therefore, a total of 54 respondents were selected using purposive sampling. These included 26 parish priests and 26 lay faithful leaders in 26 parishes. The lay faithful leaders interviewed were either a head of the laity or a parish treasurer because they know what is going on in their parishes. Content Analysis along with Nvivo version 12, a software for qualitative data analysis was used to code and organize data in their themes. The use of Nvivo 12 along with excel aided data visualization which assisted in the interpretation of the data collected.

The study covered a period of 6 months, from April to October 2020, during which Uganda was under lockdown. Prior to conducting this research, permission was obtained from the Bishop of Masaka Diocese. During data collection process, the researcher explained the nature and scope of the study to participants and they freely accepted to participate in the study.

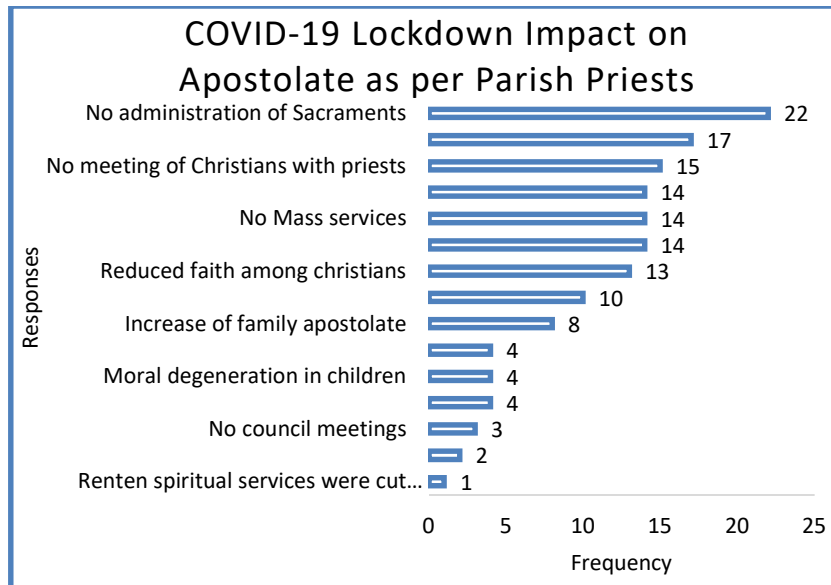
Results and discussion of findings

Through the field survey, the research has achieved its objectives as stated: To understand the impact of COVID-19 on catholic parish mission and its eventual impact on the contribution from Christians as a major source of finances; to examine the existing alternative sources of finance and their role in supporting a catholic parish apostolate; and to determine the role of financial management skills towards achieving financial stability in the wake of COVID-19.

Objective one: Impact of COVID-19 on Catholic Parish mission and its eventual impact on contribution from Christians as a major source of finances

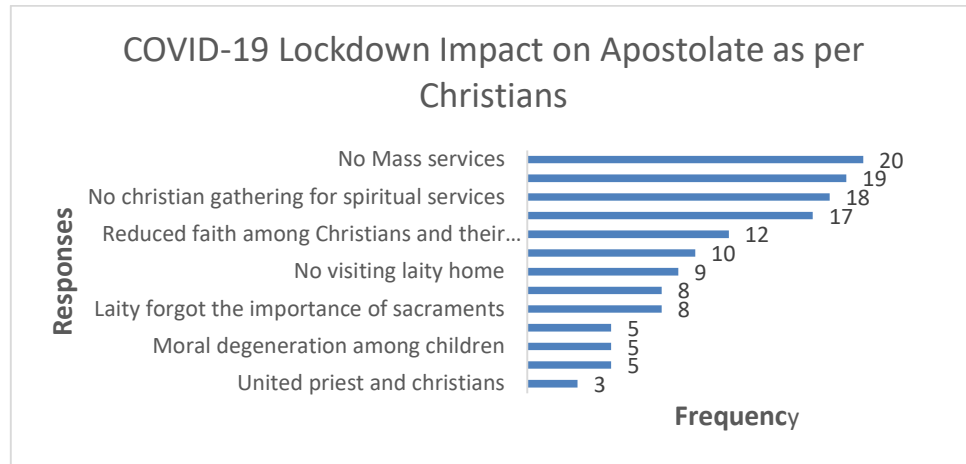
As regards this objective, first the research sought to know the impact of COVID-19 lockdown on pastoral services of the Catholic Parishes. Below are the responses as per Parish priests and laity leaders visualized in the figures below.

Figure 2



Source: Field Survey (2020)

Figure 3



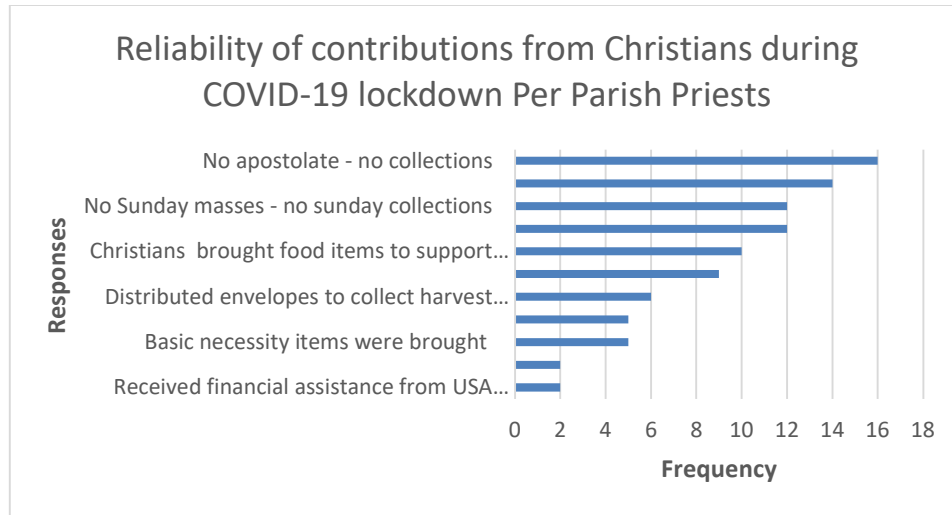
Source: Field Survey (2020)

Figures 1 and 2, indicate the responses of both priests and the laity leaders as being both positive and negative. However, the negatives outweigh the positives. The respondents repeatedly mentioned that during the lockdown there was no administration of sacraments, no mass services, no gathering for spiritual services, and no meeting of Christians with priests. The absence of these services led to reduced faith among Christians, which might have led to the abuse of Sunday obligation as frequently mentioned above. However, when the lockdown fear and intimidation subsided, respondents noted that other ways of evangelizing as well as offering spiritual services to laity were devised whereby priests and catechists began visiting Christians from house to house giving them a word of encouragement, Catechists led services in their basic communities, and priests begun celebrating Mass in basic Christian communities, priests used radio stations to give an encouraging word to Christians especially on Sunday, family gathering for prayers was also revived as in the time of Apostles. Evangelization was also done through Caritas (charity), whereby a good number of parishes in Masaka diocese joined hands to give food relief to the affected people especially sellers at the road tolls, those affected by Lake Victoria floods. Some parishes supplied masks, sanitizer to people in need. Besides, the Bishop of Masaka Diocese supplied food items and other necessities to elderly people in different parishes. Evangelization through charity manifested how the church of Masaka Diocese is

in solidarity with all kinds of people in difficult times. Indeed, through charity faith was translated into actions.

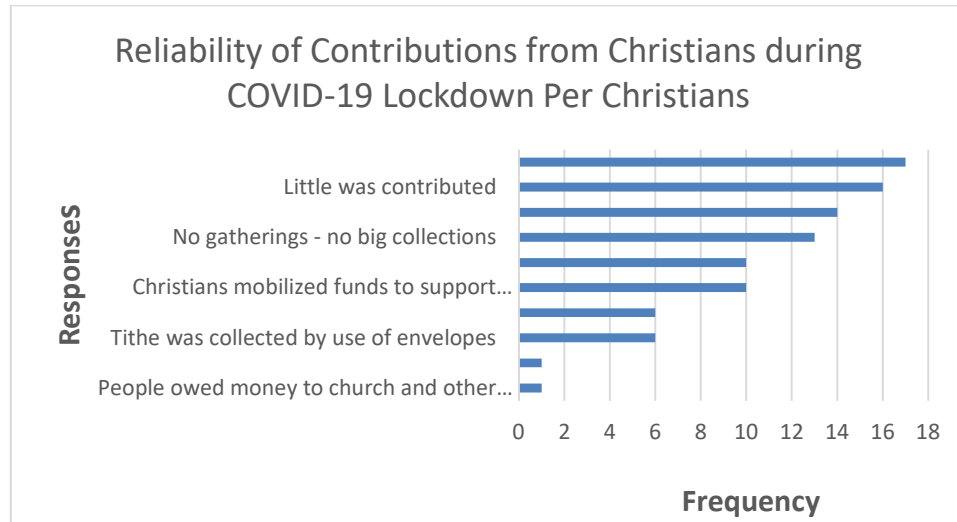
Under the same objective, the research sought to understand how the absence of big gatherings as well as active pastoral work during the lockdown affected parish financial inflows so as to determine whether parishes were able to depend on this source of income. Below are the responses we received from respondents.

Figure 4



Source: Field Survey (2020)

Figure 5



Source: Field Survey (2020)

Figures 3 and 4, show that during COVID-19 lockdown parishes could not fully rely on contributions from Christians as most of the respondents both priests and laity mentioned that little was collected from Christians and was mostly limited to the individual level. The lack of Sunday Masses affected big collections in terms of offertory and second collections. The point of apostolate was also repeatedly mentioned meaning that since there was no active pastoral work going on, it implied little money could be collected. For example, it was mentioned above that there was no administration of sacraments, yet when sacraments are administered the parish receives tolls from those receiving a particular sacrament. It should be noted that due to the lockdown there were no Baptisms, Matrimony was limited, and Catechumens could not receive first communion as well as Confirmation. However, some parishes devised other ways of collecting some contributions by distributing envelopes, by the use of mobile money, and laity supported priests and religious with food and basic necessity items. Respondents mentioned that even these devised ways could not fill in the gap of contributions received when pastoral work is in full operation. This implies that as pastoral work was halted during the lockdown, parishes could not collect enough contributions from Christians which affected their financial stability. This is supported by Franklin

and Niemandt (2015) where it was stated that ministry precedes fundraising and fundraising is a form of ministry which offers others an opportunity to participate in that mission. In addition, from the interviews, only 4 parishes mentioned having received outside donations, although it was not enough to run parish activities. This means the church in Africa can no longer depend on foreign donations, it has to be self-sustaining.

The research also sought to know how the reduction of Christian contribution during the lockdown affected parish responsibilities. The responses ranged from not being able to meet maintenance costs to halting parish developments, as many budgeted activities could not be carried out. Respondents stressed the importance of laity presence and their role in church apostolic life as the church cannot carry out its mission without them. It has always been a religious duty of the people of God to commit resources in various ways for the service of the kingdom of God, (Mal. 3.10, Gal.6:6, Phil.4:14-16, Lk 8:2-3). The Church thus teaches that it is upon the faithful as a matter of religious duty to make available their various gifts and talents to contribute to the furthering of apostolic activity (Vat. II, Apostolicam Actuositatem, no.10. Ad Gentes, no.21, Lumen Gentium no. 33, Canon 222, 1260-1263). This indeed includes making financial contributions for the promotion of the apostolate in various ways. There is thus a correlation between the level of involvement of the faithful in apostolic activity in the Church and the degree of the resourcefulness of her ministry. Moreover, the Church in Africa and Uganda, in particular, is just beginning to grow from a missionary/dependent organization to self-reliance (Paul VI, Speech in Kampala, 1969; Benedict Ssettuuma Jnr: in 'The Waliggo', June 2020, 102-119). When COVID-19 struck and negatively impacted Church activities, there was thus an inevitable decline in the capacity and capabilities of the Church to mobilize resources, especially finance.

To understand the impact of reduced contributions from Christians on parish responsibility, we asked for the contributions' percentage coverage of the parish annual budget. The responses are summarized in the table below.

Table 1: Contributions' Percentage Coverage of the Annual Budget

| % of Contributions, Reliance | Parish Priests Responses | Christians' Responses |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 100% | 3 | 3 |
| 70% ≤85% | 16 | 15 |
| 60% | 3 | 6 |
| 40% | 2 | 2 |
| 20% | 2 | 0 |

Source: Field Survey (2020)

By comparing the responses of both priests and laity, the difference is minimal. Responses indicate that 16 parishes out of 26 interviewed rely 85% on contributions from Christians. And 3 parishes rely on this source 100%. Respondents from these parishes emphasized that during the lockdown the lack of funds impact was deeply felt due to reduced contributions from Christians whereby maintenance costs could not be met, priests' upkeep was not possible. This is in agreement with Woolever (2011) study findings on how churches are financed across denominations and faith traditions, it was concluded that the most reported major source of income is what individuals contribute through their offerings, pledges, donations, and dues. Besides, Prot et al (2012), in their study on the reliability of contributions from Christians to support the diocesan mission, it was found that parishes may use this source as their reliable source of finance since it covers 78% to 99.8% of the annual budgets.

Christians' ability to contribute and attitude towards free giving

As most parish churches depend on what Christians contribute, the study sought to determine whether Christians have the ability and are freely willing to pay church dues. In this regard, respondents were asked to assess the ability of Christians to make contributions. The majority said that Christians have the ability to pay, followed by those who said that they have limited ability, and a few said that it is hard to measure their ability. Regarding how COVID-19 has affected this ability to pay, all respondents agreed that Christians' ability to pay has reduced due to COVID-19 lockdown socio-economic impact, which has led to the loss of jobs, low economic activities, closure of schools and other institutions. It was also mentioned that some laity are hesitant to give much due to uncertainty about the

future brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. This means the occurrence of COVID-19 has necessitated parishes than before to establish alternative sources of finance.

In addition, the study also sought to know whether Christians freely give. The majority said, they freely give and a few said, they have mixed feelings of not knowing how their money is utilized. The reasons for this kind of attitude as explained by the respondents included: Religious conviction of their moral obligation to support their parish churches for those who freely give. The impact of charity organizations was mentioned, as some people are used to receive rather than giving. The dependency syndrome that stems from the missionary era, whereby it was the church to give to Christians still influences some laity's perception on free giving. Lack of transparency on parish expenditures was also mentioned as a cause for mixed feelings. In relation to Apostle Paul's teaching on giving (2 Cor. 9:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 8: 1-5) where giving is Spirit-led and always involves free-will offerings. Free will offerings are always voluntary. Apostle Paul never commands the Christian to give money nor is there a command to give specific amounts of money. Christian believers are encouraged to give voluntarily, according to the spirit, and within their ability.

Objective two: Existence of alternative source of income

In this objective, the research thought to examine the existing alternative sources of finances and their role to support the parish mission. Out of the 26 parishes interviewed, 21 parishes claimed to have alternative sources of income. We also noted that very few respondents mentioned schools and hospitals/health centers as sources of income for the parish. It might be because of the lockdown effect since these institutions were adversely affected by compulsory closure and reduced patients in fear of contracting the virus respectively.

However, 3 parishes said that they have no other sources of income, they completely depend on contributions from Christians. One parish said they don't have enough land and another claimed not having productive land. Below are the existing projects in parishes as well as the proposed projects to be established.

Table 2: Existing and Suggested Parish Projects

| Existing projects in different Parishes | Suggested Projects |
|--|------------------------------|
| Coffee Nursery gardens | Expanding Eucalyptus project |
| Gardens for parties | Maize mill |
| Maize Mill | Banana Plantation |
| Poultry incubator | Secondary School |
| Goat rearing | Farming project |
| Poultry farm | Expanding coffee farm |
| Eucalyptus tree | Rental buildings |
| Piggery | |
| Cattle Keeping | |
| Growing seasonal crops, e.g., maize, beans, etc. | |
| Rental houses | |
| Coffee | |
| Banana Plantation | |
| Schools and hospitals/health centers | |

In objective one, it was noted that 16 out of the 26 parish priests interviewed stated that contributions from Christians cover up 85% of their annual budget. This implies that although most parishes claimed to have projects, they still depend more on contributions from Christians, which implies that as much as these projects exist, they may not be productive enough to make a significant financial contribution to the parish treasury.

The study sought to understand whether parishes that have projects were better off during the lockdown. The responses varied based on the type of projects possessed by a particular parish. Some respondents said that little was collected from projects due to reduced prices of agricultural products since products could not move beyond their locality. For parishes that owned rental houses, they said there were no returns as many tenants deferred payments and others refused completely to pay since they were not earning. For parishes that own grown-up eucalyptus forests, they claimed to have earned money by selling poles and firewood, at the same time they themselves did not suffer from lack of firewood. Those that owned coffee which is at the harvest stage claim to have not suffered from the financial problem since it was a period for coffee harvest. Lastly, those parishes that own banana plantations and other food items, said the food was

available in plenty – there was no need to buy food, instead, the little money that came in was used to cater for other needs. It is high time for each parish to establish an alternative source of income to back up contributions from Christians. The declining ability of Christians to make contributions due to different socio-economic factors such as the current COVID-19 implies that a parish can no longer fully rely on Christians' contribution if it is to achieve financial stability. This is supported by Woolever (2011) findings on church financial sources, she states that the second most common major source of income for Catholic parishes in the USA is charges for use of congregational facilities which is 41%.

Objective three: Financial management skills

After looking at sources of finances, the study sought to know how finances are managed in parishes. In this regard, we focused on three areas of financial management, i.e., budgeting, saving, and financial statements (book keeping).

i) Budgeting

Budgeting is the first step in good church financial management. A budget provides a way to track income and expenses, giving the information necessary to make strategic financial decisions. As regards budgeting, the study sought to know whether parishes call for meetings to carry out the budgeting process. Among the two categories of respondents, i.e., priests and laity, their responses slightly varied as shown below.

Table 3: Responses as to whether Parish Meetings are called for Budgeting

| Responses | Priests | Laity |
|---|----------------|--------------|
| Yes | 24 | 21 |
| Parish priest is key | 2 | |
| Meetings are called but the budget is not given enough time | | 5 |

Looking at these responses it shows that a big number of parishes carry out the budget process except the few where the parish priest is the key, meaning that the budget process rotates around him. And a few respondents from the laity

mentioned that meetings are called for but the budget process is not given enough time, which leaves people with no chance to participate in the budget process.

In this part of budgeting, we also sought to know the month in which the budget is carried out, the majority of the respondents said that the budget process begins in October, followed by November and December, and a few said it begins in January and September. However, it is important to note that the financial year for Masaka Catholic Diocese begins from 1st October to the end of September. If a big number of parishes carry out the budgeting process after September, then the budget along with its action plan, guide parish activities after the first quarter has ended, which affects parish financial plans

Since the budget and its action plan guide parish activities, a question was also posed on how often it is reviewed so that the parish does not lose track of it. The majority of the respondents both priests and laity said, they review their budget quarterly. A few said monthly, and a few respondents from the laity said usually laity are not involved in spending and review process, instead, they just receive a report on how money was spent. Parish leaders should make it a necessity of involving laity leaders in planning expenditure just like they involve them in collecting finances. If the review process is done well it helps all parish leaders to know the financial status, stay focused on the purpose of the budget, devise ways of raising more funds and more importantly it brings the aspect of transparency which encourages further contributions from the laity. Good budgeting and accounting practices lay the foundation for the long-term financial stability and sustainability of your church, allowing you to keep your focus on ministry AGFS (n.d).

ii) Saving

As far as saving is concerned, the study concentrated on the responses from Parish priests because they are key in handling parish finances. Regarding saving the study sought to determine whether parish budgets produce a positive cash flow to enable saving. The responses we got showed that the habit of saving liquid cash is not an appealing practice to many respondents. Money is expended as it comes in. Only five respondents agreed that they save liquid cash in the bank to cater for uncertainties. Others claimed that money raised is just enough to run parish activities while others said that money raised is not even enough to run parish activities. The study also sought to determine whether parishes invest in money-producing financial products to ensure continuous cash inflow. Out of the 26

respondents, only 11 said they do save in parish projects. One parish mentioned to have registered a parish in SACCO and they own a Mobile money business, others said that money is just enough to run parish activities, and others said they invest when there are surplus funds. However, it is important to note that very few organizations both profit and non-profit have surplus funds to be able to save and also invest in money-producing projects, so saving is a habit one develops after knowing its importance. The notion of saving and investment is supported by Brigham & Ehrhardt (2017) and AGFS (n.d) that saving is crucial to ministry protection and growth because the cash reserve protects against unexpected expenses, declines in giving, building maintenance and repairs, and periods of transition. Cash reserve also aids plans for new ministry initiatives, large purchases, and Building renovations and expansion. Once cash reserves are built, they can be grown further through investment strategies as each parish see it fitting. Once, this is done, a parish can begin to enjoy financial stability.

iii) Financial statements

In an effort to determine how church financial stability can be achieved, the research sought to establish whether parishes prepare monthly income and expenditure statements to practice transparency while expensing parish financial resources statement. All the 26 parish priests interviewed agreed that these statements are prepared every month, however, among the laity leaders 23 respondents agreed that income and expenditure statements are prepared every month, and 3 respondents were not certain. This implies that at a certain level, the laity are not involved in parish financial expenditure, yet are the backbone of the parish. Indeed, laity leaders play a role in motivating fellow members of the laity to bring contributions provided they are convinced that their finances are utilized well. Prot et al (2012), emphasize that transparency to Christians is important, so that they may know how their voluntary contributions are used. This brings a collaboration of all leaders at all stages to support the church since the church must be supported by its domestic members. Parishioners are stakeholders; therefore, they require a financial report which includes financial statements to show the parish financial stand (Brigham & Houston, 2009).

Conclusion and way forward

All organizations, including churches, need to confront the reality of achieving financial stability if they are to attain success. If they are unable to obtain the financial resources they need for their mission, their ability to fulfill that mission is likely to be compromised. This study of COVID-19 impact on the catholic parish mission and its eventual impact on church financial stability has focused on the correlation between pastoral work and church financial sources. The study concludes that in the absence of pastoral work, Christians don't see the need of bringing contributions, and more so, they are not given the opportunity to contribute due to lack of church gatherings. It is important to note that when the church does not carry out pastoral work (mission), it cannot raise enough financial resources, and when it does not have enough financial resources, its mission will be negatively affected. Therefore, a parish that depends on Christians' contributions as its major source of finance, as is a case with many parishes, should actively carry out pastoral activities. Even in the absence of big gatherings, the parish church should devise other ways to offer pastoral services to its people. Besides financial resources needed to support pastoral activities, Christians should be sensitized about the other uses of church funds such as maintenance and support to church ministers. Although during the lockdown pastoral activities were halted, these other financial obligations had to be fulfilled.

It was found that majority of Christians freely make contributions to support their parish churches. Except for the few who have mixed feelings about the use of their contributions. Indeed, this calls for transparency among church ministers. Willingness to contribute comes from the conviction that money contributed is utilized well. Therefore, transparency can be practiced by involving the laity in budgeting and the spending process; and by issuing financial statements to show the income and expenditure monthly. When there is transparency, the laity are willing to contribute freely. Besides, it is the duty of church ministers to remind the laity of their biblical obligation to support their parish church mission.

From the Literature, we noted that there has always been a decline in Christian's ability to make contributions which has passed on to our present time. Because of this many parishes claim to have established projects as alternative sources of income. However, there is a lack of focus. Some parishes have many projects yet their returns are low. Each parish should focus on two or three projects they can run well to increase project returns leading to financial stability.

A few parishes did not have any alternative source of income, depending 100% on Christian's contributions. If this has been possible in the previous years, these parishes should be forward-looking and make it a necessity to establish alternative sources of income. Given the declining Christian's ability to contribute due to socio-economic factors such as COVID-19, parish financial stability may not be realized. And anything that prevents Christian gathering negatively affects directly parish income. Besides, some parishes claimed to have no land, and others mentioned not having productive land. For land not being productive is relative because a piece of land may not be productive for farming but maybe productive for other projects. This requires thinking widely open before zeroing on one or two projects. It should also be at the heart of the diocesan committee to establish a parish where there is enough land or to make sure that each parish owns land even if it is in another location.

In our study, we found out that all parishes that had investment were all agricultural-based. It is time for parishes to diversify their investments to include financial products such as trust funds, SACCOs, buying shares, etc. Diversification of investments increases returns and reduces risks in case one sector is affected, thus leading to financial stability.

For a good number of parishes, saving is not part of their financial practices. In fact, many of the respondents did not see the importance of saving liquid cash, others claimed that funds raised are not enough to run parish activities. Much as these claims are true, but each parish can save based on their level of income. It begins by designating a percentage that has to be saved either of each Sunday collection or another source of income as each parish wishes. Having a cash reserve acts as a buffer during times of uncertainty and decline in contributions leading to financial stability as well as parish mission continuity.

However, one should be able to agree with Pope Francis that the problem at stake is multi-faceted, and so it will require a multi-sectoral approach that calls for integration, collaboration, solidarity where finances, ecology, public and personal health, spirituality, politics, etc all need to be re-examined in some way if each and any of them is to recover the after-life of COVID-19. (Pope Francis, UN Address, 25th September 2020). The task at hand must thus arguably be broad-based, and the entire spectrum of the related issues needs to be re-examined. Finance in our case of investigation will be shown how it will depend on other relative sectors, stating underlying factors that will all have to come into play to enable Church resourcefulness to be rejuvenated after COVID-19.

Furthermore, the Catholicity of the creed (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 830ff) also demands that the local and the universal are always in tandem, and so Francis' approach as Supreme Pastor emphasizing human solidarity during these times takes pride of place everywhere. The Pope, following the gospel as well as the rampant wretched condition of the times, is succinctly very much concerned about a Post-COVID Church that engineers her resourcefulness for the cause of the poor and the marginalized in the Church, for there are obviously more severely hit by the pandemic. (Lk.4:18ff, Mt 25:31ff). Pope Francis' aspirations for solidarity, brotherhood, and social friendship as the practical remedies available to modern society to counter many of its afflictions has been fully formed into his papal teachings and is now especially proposed in the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*.

Any reflection on the Post-COVID Church renewal also drives its point home if there is focus on how to mitigate the effects of the present pandemic, as well as future ones, vis-à-vis the poor. The financial effects of the Covid19 pandemic in the Church will be most acute in as much her most vulnerable members, the poor are left unattended to. (1Cor 12:22-24, James 2:1ff, Paul VI *Populorum Progressio* no 43ff). There must thus be striving to create a society where both Lazarus and the Dives can dine together, on the same table, sharing the world's commonwealth of resources (Lk 16:19ff). Special recognition must therefore be accorded to those Parishes, Church-based organizations, and everyone that cared about organizing relief resources for the poor during this COVID-19 pandemic.

Suggestion for further research

The world has been faced with a humanitarian crisis, and today, just as when the UN was created in the aftermath of World War II, it is required that there be more investigation into the special benefits the resource of human solidarity can fetch, re-affirming joint commitment through multi-literalism (Ibid). As A Church, Vatican II in her constitution on the Church in the Modern World already stated that the joy and affliction of every man of our times are the lot of every Christian (Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no.1). Any research on a Post-COVID Church will thus inevitably require and will be fortified by estimable input from the 'Other' Faiths, sociologists, economists, political sciences, the financial systems, and all the other areas in a dialectic with what the Church has always enshrined in her

methods. This commonwealth of ideas will help better to arrive at viable solutions to tackle the common enemy, the pandemic that COVID-19 is.

Acknowledgment

The authors are grateful to Bishop Serverus Jjumba for permitting them to carry out this research in Masaka Diocese. They are also grateful to the Chancery office, Pastoral Coordinator's office, parish priests, and laity leaders for their collaboration during data collection. Appreciation also goes to Dr. George Mutalemwa for his encouragement throughout the research process.

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