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A CONSTRUCTIVIST GROUNDED THEORY OF
SELF-DISCLOSURE IN HYBRID PASTORAL CARE

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the University of Westminster
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, July 2024

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the transformative dynamics of computer-mediated communication (CMC) to self-disclosure in pastoral care, a field traditionally dominated by face-to-face interactions. While digital platforms are rapidly proliferating, this research seeks to address a critical gap in the literature at the intersection of instant messaging, self-disclosure, and pastoral care. Considering Joinson's (2001) finding that people self-disclose more through instant messaging platforms than face-to-face, this study will focus on the Seventh-day Adventist Church to explore how pastoral care providers perceive the impact of instant messaging platforms on self-disclosure and the ethical implications inherent in using commercial, data-driven platforms for such intimate communication.

Employing Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT), the research conducted 30 semi-structured interviews with Adventist district and digital pastors from around the world. The methodology facilitated the development of a CGT of self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care, a model that integrates both face-to-face and online interactions. This CGT suggests the most effective approach to encourage self-disclosure in pastoral care hinges on the alignment of 26 core factors specific to the pastoral care provider, the recipient, and the context within which pastoral care occurs. The original contribution to knowledge of this research is a conceptual framework which defines the relationship between key factors that directly influence self-disclosure in Seventh-day Adventist hybrid pastoral care, incorporating both digital and face-to-face interactions.

Keywords: Pastoral Care, Instant Messaging, Self-Disclosure, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Ethical Considerations, Computer-Mediated Communication, Constructivist Grounded Theory, Hybrid Pastoral Care.

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DECLARATION

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For the first 11 years of my ministry, I served as a local church pastor in Seventh-day Adventist churches in London, UK. In 2015, I was called to serve at the world headquarters of the denomination in Silver Spring, MD, USA, where my main responsibilities have been overseeing the brand and digital strategy of the Adventist Church globally. Considering there are four Adventist congregations for every McDonalds in the world (McDonald's restaurant count 2022, Statista, 2022), encouraging the digital transformation of 170,000 congregations in 215 countries where 22 million members receive pastoral care is a daunting task (Seventh-day Adventist World Church Statistics - Adventist.org, 2022).

My first public interview in this new position was conducted by Novo Tempo, a large television network in Brazil. I shared on national television my belief that digital pastoral care was implausible because people wouldn't share details about their lives with pastors online without first building the necessary trust for deeper levels of self-disclosure. This conviction was challenged when Roberto Roberti, a layperson who watched my interview, reached out to share his experiences of providing digital pastoral care through the Facebook Messenger channel of the official Adventist Church's page in Brazil.

Roberto shared many stories from individuals who didn't belong to his church but willingly disclosed private information. One interaction struck me: after only three weeks of digital interaction, a man shared he had AIDS and didn't know how to tell his father. I had thought this level of self-disclosure online was impossible to achieve, especially in a short space of time without any prior face-to-face encounter.

I had heard of the practice of digital pastoral care through a pioneer of digital visitation, Kirsten Øster-Lundqvist, while she served as a youth pastor at Newbold Seventh-day Adventist Church, in Bracknell, UK. However, I did not investigate this new form of pastoral care at the time because I dismissed it as an impractical and unsustainable novelty. Now that Roberto brought me a steady stream of stories of online self-disclosure, this paradigm shift ignited a curiosity about the dynamics of online self-disclosure in pastoral care. How do Adventist pastors perceive and navigate this digital landscape? Can the essence of pastoral care truly transcend the boundaries of traditional face-to-face interactions? This research is born from that curiosity as I have tried to understand and bridge the impact of the evolving landscape of digital communication to the age-old practice of pastoral care.

Development of Pastoral Care

The advent of CMC platforms has significantly altered the landscape of pastoral care, introducing several advantages to this historically face-to-face vocation. One primary benefit is the increased accessibility that these digital tools offer. Digital pastoral care provides unparalleled access to spiritual guidance and community, transcending geographical limitations and potentially including many more individuals in what Campbell (2012) addresses as *networked religion*. This is particularly beneficial for those who might not otherwise have access to pastoral care, including individuals in remote areas or with mobility constraints.

Another significant advantage is the immediacy that digital platforms offer. The use of digital technology in pastoral care, such as email communication, has been shown to allow caregivers to provide timely, thoughtful, and compassionate responses to those in need (Elias, 2006; Mills, 2011). Furthermore, the rise of social media platforms has opened new channels for pastoral care, highlighting the potential of these platforms in providing spiritual care and

fostering a sense of belonging among faith communities, especially during challenging times such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Gorrell, 2018a; Hathaway, 2020).

Anonymity and pseudonymity in online spaces may reduce barriers to vulnerability, facilitating more honest and open communication (Heidi A. Campbell, 2012). These are key components of effective pastoral care and essential in addressing sensitive issues that congregants might be hesitant to discuss face-to-face. The integration of online tools into traditional pastoral methods also provides new avenues for individuals to access support and resources, as seen in the use of CMC in providing pastoral care to youth and the role of lay leaders in using digital platforms (Waters, 2005; Peterson, 2006; Ramer, 2008a). However, the digital medium introduces complexities related to the immediacy and permanence of online interactions; pastoral advice or conversations can be revisited and reflected upon due to their digital permanence, which can be both a benefit and a challenge in terms of privacy and the long-term impact of pastoral guidance.

Research Description

In chapter 2, I will undertake a comprehensive review of the literature in three key areas: CMC, self-disclosure, and pastoral care. This review includes examining the intersections between CMC and self-disclosure, CMC and pastoral care, and self-disclosure and pastoral care. Each intersection offers unique insights into the dynamics of digital communication and its impact on personal and spiritual interactions. However, there is a noticeable gap in the literature at the intersection of all three research fields. My research aims to fill this gap, providing an integrated analysis of CMC, self-disclosure, and pastoral care, and exploring their collective influence in self-disclosure in digital pastoral care.

My primary objective is to investigate the perceptions Seventh-day Adventist Church pastors hold regarding the impact of instant messaging on self-disclosure within the context of digital pastoral care as well as their ethical perceptions regarding online self-disclosure through commercial, data-driven platforms. This inquiry recognises the crucial role of self-disclosure in pastoral care and seeks to understand how the digital medium of instant messaging influences this dynamic. By examining the subjective experiences and perspectives of these pastors, the research aims to uncover insights into the effectiveness and challenges of digital pastoral care.

To achieve these objectives, I have employed a qualitative research approach, focusing on generating rich, contextual data. Grounded Theory (GT), specifically Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT), has been selected as the most suitable methodology for this exploration. CGT allows for an in-depth analysis of the subjective experiences and perceptions of pastors, offering a nuanced understanding of the interplay between instant messaging, self-disclosure, and pastoral care. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews, providing flexibility to explore the participants' perspectives and experiences. The choice of CGT as a methodology also facilitates a heightened degree of reflexivity, allowing researchers to use their perspectives and worldviews constructively in shaping the analysis.

I anticipate this research will identify how Seventh-day Adventist pastors perceive and engage with the complex dynamics of CMC in their practice of pastoral care. I will explore how pastors navigate the fusion of technology, relationship dynamics, and ecclesiastical responsibilities, including examining how key properties like personality, ethical perceptions, and access to technology impact hybrid methods of pastoral care.

A significant portion of this research's value will be in the development of a GT that delineates these factors, enhancing the understanding of how pastoral care is adapting to embrace

digital advancements while maintaining the essence of pastoral relationships. I also hope my methodology (CGT) will produce a theory that offers original insights into the transformative properties influencing hybrid pastoral care modalities in a technologically integrated environment. Through this, I hope to augment the theoretical discourse by contributing a sophisticated understanding of how various factors interact and influence the pastoral care landscape.

Another goal of this research will be to advance the CGT methodology itself. By applying it to explore the phenomenological realities within pastoral care, I aspire to demonstrate the dynamism of CGT and its relevance for studies that intersect digital communication, religion, and psychology in the digital age. I also hope my research can provide pastoral care providers and organisational leaders with applicable insights into how caregiver and member characteristics, as well as environmental contexts, can guide the selection of care modalities best suited for an increasingly digitalised world. Thus, I hope my research makes a meaningful contribution to the discourse at the intersection of digital communication, religion, and psychology.

The structure of my thesis is designed to guide the reader through the thought process, from literature review to a conclusion of my CGT of self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care. Following this introduction, the "Literature Review" chapter will analyse existing research in the core areas of CMC, self-disclosure, and pastoral care, and their intersections. "Methodology" the subsequent chapter, details the qualitative research approach and CGT usage. "Applied Research" then explores the research process, including data collection and analysis. The following chapters, "The Pastoral Care Provider" "The Pastoral Care Receiver" and "The Pastoral Care Context" explore different aspects of the research, each focusing on a main

category of the GT. The final chapter, “Conclusion”, will provide a multi-category analysis of my CGT. It discusses all three categories – the pastor, the member, and the pastoral care context – and examines how the identified factors might interplay to maximise or minimise online self-disclosure in pastoral care settings. This final chapter will also provide a critical reflection on my research’s original contribution to knowledge as a conceptual framework which defines the relationship between key factors that directly influence self-disclosure in Seventh-day Adventist hybrid pastoral care, incorporating both digital and face-to-face interactions.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The potential for communication in the 21st century is unprecedented in the history of humanity as the internet affords individuals the privilege of communicating both privately and publicly with people from around the world. More recently, social media networks have absorbed the technical complexity of this communication, allowing individuals of all ages and social backgrounds to be heard far beyond the spatial constraints of their locale. This has accelerated considerably through the COVID-19 pandemic (Nabity-Grover, T., Cheung, C. & Thatcher, 2020). The social impact of digital communication has been the subject of extensive research for many years which has generated a large body of literature. In this chapter I will analyse the research at the intersections of CMC, self-disclosure, and pastoral care. Through this literature review I hope to explore the current body of research about each of these areas and identify potential gaps my own research could address. The following diagram demonstrates the structure of this review.

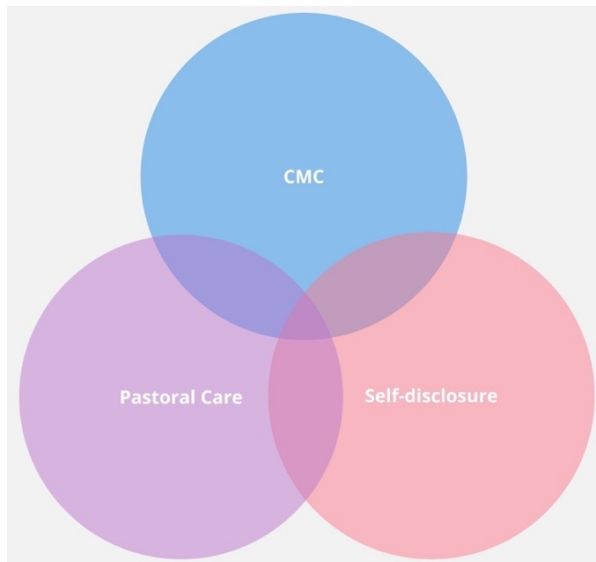


Figure 1. Diagram of literature review structure

Computer-Mediated Communication

The body of literature on CMC is extensive, having evolved over more than half a century. I will concentrate my literature analysis on facets of CMC that intersect with pastoral care. While public facets of pastoral care predominantly manifest on social media, private interactions usually take place via instant messaging platforms, often owned by larger social media corporations. After establishing the broader context of social media's role in CMC, I will explore how instant messaging influences both self-disclosure and pastoral care interactions.

Social Media

Social media research represents an intersection of many fields, such as cultural studies, information technology, political science, anthropology, economics, psychology, health, communication, and religion. Research has been consistently published that approaches social media from multiple perspectives. It is both the study of people, which calls for ethnography and qualitative methodologies, as well as the study of rich data, which lends itself to quantitative research methodologies (Hinton and Hjorth, 2013).

The roots of social media extend far beyond its contemporary manifestations, with research into online social interactions predating modern platforms by several decades. In the late 1980s, scholars like Wellman, Berkowitz, and Granovetter (1988) were already examining social structures in computer-mediated communication (CMC). Rheingold's (2000) exploration of virtual communities, originally published in 1993, further laid the groundwork for understanding online social interactions.

The evolution of social media can be traced through several key technological developments. Hinton and Hjorth (2013) identify UNIX, USENET, and Bulletin Board Systems as precursors to modern social media, emerging in the 1970s and 1980s. These text-based

networks provided early forms of status updates and group communication, shaping the foundation for future internet-based social interactions.

The 1980s also saw significant political changes in the United States and United Kingdom that facilitated private access to publicly funded network infrastructure (US National Science Foundation, 2013). Reagan and Thatcher's economic policies encouraged the privatization of telecommunication networks, setting the stage for the internet's development in Western countries. This led to the dot-com boom and subsequent crash at the turn of the 21st century, marking a pivotal moment in internet history (Hinton and Hjorth, 2013).

The emergence of Web 2.0, a term coined by O'Reilly (2005), signalled a shift towards more collaborative and participatory online platforms. O'Reilly defined Web 2.0 as a network platform that harnesses collective intelligence, delivering continually updated services that improve with increased usage.

“Web 2.0 is the network as platform, spanning all connected devices; Web 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the intrinsic advantages of that platform: delivering software as a continually-updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through an “architecture of participation” and going beyond the page metaphor of Web 1.0 to deliver rich user experiences” (O’Reilly, 2005:2).

This concept underpins the development of modern social media platforms. Fuchs and Hofkirchner (2005) provide a theoretical framework for understanding the internet's evolution, drawing parallels with sociological concepts from Durkheim, Weber, Marx, and Tönnies. Fuchs (2017) further delineates this evolution, describing Web 1.0 as a system of cognition, Web 2.0 as human communication, and Web 3.0 as human cooperation.

The rapid growth of social media platforms in the 21st century is striking. Facebook, launched in 2004, has reached 3 billion active users by 2024. Twitter (now X), YouTube, and TikTok have similarly experienced exponential growth, cementing social media's position as the most prolific form of CMC (Biggest social media platforms 2024 | Statista, 2024; One year in, the future of X is bright, 2024; YouTube for Press, 2024; TikTok Revenue and Usage Statistics, 2024).

Understanding the nature of social media requires looking beyond the marketing rhetoric of major platforms. While companies like Facebook and Twitter emphasize community building and information sharing in their mission statements (Facebook Inc., 2021; Twitter, 2021), the reality is more complex. Meikle (2024) defines social media as "networked data platforms that combine public with personal communication" (p.12), highlighting their dual nature as both public and private spaces. Boyd and Ellison's (2007) include social media's role in allowing users to create profiles, connect with others, and navigate these connections within a bounded system. Byam (2009) goes further to explore the impact of social media in human connection throughout the ages as she understands all mediated communication between humans as social media. However, the business model underpinning social media reveals its true nature as a data-driven, advertising-focused industry.

The social media business model differs from traditional media in three primary ways. First, as noted by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social platforms don't need to invest in content creation, relying instead on user-generated content. Fuchs (2017) argues that this amounts to exploitation of unpaid digital labour. Second, the self-service nature of social media advertising allows small businesses to reach targeted audiences with minimal budgets, democratizing advertising in unprecedented ways (Needleman, 2011; Semeradova and Weinlich, 2019). Third,

social platforms leverage big data and machine learning to understand and predict user behaviour with unprecedented precision, enabling highly targeted advertising (Zuboff, 2015; Haji and Stock, 2021).

This data-centric approach has led to what Zuboff (2019a) terms "surveillance capitalism," where user behaviour becomes the product sold to advertisers. The implications of this model are far-reaching, from the cultural impact of constant targeted advertising to the potential for manipulation of individual choices and even democratic processes (Zuboff, 2019b; Yerlikaya and Aslan, 2020). Furthermore, critics like Fuchs (2017) and Terranova (2004) highlight the exploitative nature of social media, likening users to "net slaves" in a digital "social factory." Concerns about the concentration of power in the hands of large corporations and the erosion of privacy have become increasingly prominent (Chun, 2005; Hinton and Hjorth, 2013).

Despite these criticisms, social media continues to shape how individuals interact, consume information, and form their sense of self (Lovink, 2008). The tension between the empowering aspects of social media and its potential for exploitation and control remains a central issue in ongoing debates about its role in society. The history and nature of social media reflect a complex interplay of technological innovation, societal changes, and economic forces. From its roots in early online networks to its current status as a global phenomenon, social media has fundamentally altered the landscape of human communication. As we continue to grapple with its impacts, understanding both its history and its underlying mechanisms becomes increasingly crucial for navigating the digital age.

Instant Messaging

Most social media platforms afford individuals the tools to choose who will have access to the content they are choosing to publish. Facebook, for example, allows a post to be private so

the user is the only one to view it; semi-private so only a group of individuals pre-selected by the user can view it; as well as public where everyone on the platform can view it. These privacy settings are often entirely separate to the private messaging platforms also provided free of charge by most social media platforms. In the case of Facebook, this tool is called Facebook Messenger (Facebook Inc., 2021).

Based on the definition of social media offered by Meikle (2024), these private channels are an integral part of the affordances provided by social media platforms. Within the context of pastoral care, this is significant and should be analysed within the social media context rather than as a completely separate field of study, not least because pastors offer pastoral care through public social media platforms and effectively deliver pastoral care through private channels.

The use of instant messaging for personal and professional communication has become increasingly popular since its inception in the 1990s (B Nardi, Whittaker and Bradner, 2000) through platforms such as ICQ, AOL Messenger and eventually Microsoft Windows Live Messenger. Instant messaging platforms have evolved over time, incorporating various features such as privacy settings, file sharing, and multimedia messaging (Isaacs et al., 2002). As social media platforms integrate instant messaging functionalities, they blur the lines between public and private content distribution (Grinter and Eldridge, 2001; Ling and Yttri, 2002). For example, Instagram affords its users the ability to chat privately with other users, so they also serve as an instant messaging platform while WhatsApp allows the publishing of stories to a semi-public group which is a hallmark of a social media platform. Nevertheless, the following are the largest instant messaging platforms: WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, WeChat, QQ, Snapchat and Telegram.

Gender differences in the use of instant messaging have been observed, with college students employing distinct language use and communication styles based on their gender (Baron, 2004). Furthermore, teenagers are known to use instant messaging as a primary form of communication, impacting their social lives, communication styles, and relationships (Quinn et al., 2006). A study by Hu et al., (2004) found a positive relationship between instant messaging usage and perceived intimacy of interpersonal relationships, highlighting the role of instant messaging in developing and maintaining friendships.

The widespread adoption of mobile phones has led to a phenomenon known as “hyper-coordination” in which users rely heavily on instant messaging for social coordination (Ling and Yttri, 2002). This shift in communication patterns has been led by teenagers and young adults, who are at the forefront of adopting new communication technologies (Pujazon-Zazik and Park, 2010). Herring’s (2007) faceted classification scheme for computer-mediated discourse provides a useful framework for analysing various aspects of instant messaging communication.

On the effects of IM on wellbeing, Lee et al., (2011) argue that online interactions, including instant messaging, do not contribute positively to the quality of life to the same extent as face-to-face interactions. However, other studies suggest more complex dynamics. Lee et al.’s work indicates that the absence of nonverbal cues and reduced engagement may contribute to this deficit in quality of life. These findings dovetail with Bordia (1997), who also noted that CMC discussions often have poorer comprehension and evaluation of communication partners compared to face-to-face discussions.

Henderson and Gilding (2004) pivot the discussion by focusing on the unique attributes that CMC, specifically IM, brings to interpersonal relationships, such as the facilitation of ‘fast-tracked’ self-disclosure. They identified four pillars of trust in online friendships: reputation,

performance, self-disclosure, and situational factors. Here, Henderson and Gilding offer a counterpoint to Lee et al., by emphasising the ways in which IM can facilitate meaningful relationships, underlining the importance of reputation and self-disclosure.

While the previous studies focused on more general interpersonal communication, Nardi, Whittaker, and Bradner (2000) examined IM within the specific context of the workplace. They introduced the concept of “outeraction” which refers to activities beyond mere information exchange that IM enables, like negotiating availability. This notion of outeraction complements Henderson and Gilding’s emphasis on self-disclosure and trust-building, as both demonstrate the nature of IM interactions.

Recent research by Sayegh-Jodehl et al., (2022) adds a new angle by exploring IM in the healthcare sector, a field where privacy concerns often deter the technology’s adoption. While the study reported low usage among physicians in Germany, those who did use IM noted its advantages for fast and uncomplicated communication. This observation aligns with Henderson and Gilding (2004) point about the unique opportunities IM provides for fostering trust and fast-tracking communication, albeit within a very different professional context.

When applied to digital pastoral care, churches call on individuals to send their prayer requests through platforms such as Facebook Messenger, a non-public, instant messaging platform. While users may perceive their interactions to be private, the nature of such platforms and their data collection practices can potentially expose sensitive information to advertisers (Isaacs et al., 2002; Pujazon-Zazik and Park, 2010). This raises ethical questions on the practice of conducting pastoral care through Facebook Messenger as churches would be encouraging the sharing of intimate and personal information which may be used for commercial purposes.

Digital Religion

The intersection of religion and digital technology, often referred to as 'digital religion', has a rich and evolving history that spans several decades. This field of study emerged in the mid-1990s, as scholars began to recognize and document the ways in which religious communities were adapting to and utilizing new digital spaces (Campbell and Vitullo, 2016). The journey of religious organizations' engagement with technology reflects broader societal shifts and the complex negotiations between tradition and innovation.

In the early stages of this field, the term 'cyber-religion' was predominantly used to describe religious manifestations in online environments. Hadden and Cowan (2000) defined it as "those religious organizations or groups which exist only in cyberspace" (p. 29). This initial conceptualization emphasized the novelty of religious expression in digital spaces, often viewed as separate from traditional, offline religious practices. Brasher (2001) expanded this definition to encompass both "the presence of religious organization and religious activities in cyberspace" and "the gradual emergence of new, electronically inspired religious practice and ideas" (p. 9, 30).

As the field progressed, scholars like Helland (2000) proposed more nuanced frameworks, distinguishing between 'religion online' and 'online religion'. The former referred to the transposition of offline religious information and practices to digital platforms, while the latter described unique forms of religious expression born in digital environments. This distinction helped researchers to categorize and analyse the various ways religious groups were engaging with digital technologies (Campbell, 2016).

By the mid-2000s, the term 'virtual religion' gained traction, emphasizing the perceived uniqueness of online religious environments. However, this terminology was problematic as it

implied that digitally mediated religious experiences were somehow less authentic or incomplete compared to their offline counterparts. This led to a shift in scholarly discourse, recognizing the interconnectedness of online and offline religious practices (Campbell and Vitullo, 2016).

The concept of 'digital religion' emerged in the 2010s, offering a more holistic understanding of the relationship between religion and digital media. Heidi Campbell, a pivotal researcher in this field, described digital religion as "the technological and cultural space that is evoked when we talk how online and offline religious spheres have become blended" (Campbell, 2012, p.4). Campbell's work has been instrumental in shaping our understanding of how religious communities engage with new media. In her book "When Religion Meets New Media" (2010), she argues that religious communities actively shape their engagement with new media in line with their distinct beliefs, practices, and structures of authority, rather than passively accepting predetermined values and outcomes imposed by technology. This perspective underscores the agency of religious organizations in navigating the digital landscape.

The study of digital religion has evolved through several 'waves' of research, as described by Hojsgaard and Warburg (2005) and expanded upon by Campbell and other scholars. The initial wave focused on documenting and describing new religious phenomena online. The second wave attempted to categorize and develop typologies of online religious practices. The third wave emphasized theoretical and interpretive research, exploring how the internet was influencing religious digital practices in everyday life (Campbell, 2016). A fourth wave, identified by Campbell and Evolvi (2020), examined people's media practices in their everyday lives, paying attention to "existential, ethical, and political aspects of digital religion, as well as issues of gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality" (p. 7). An emerging fifth wave, as suggested by Phillips, Schiefelbein-Guerrero, and Kurlberg (2019), focuses on digital theology and invites

greater collaboration across disciplines. This current wave also grapples with the tension between digital innovation and the reinforcement of traditional religious positions, as seen in studies of prayer apps and online Q&As (Tsuria, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital technologies by religious organizations, with millions of faith communities transitioning to online platforms for worship and community engagement (Campbell, 2020). This global shift highlighted the increasing importance of digital religion in contemporary society and further blurred the boundaries between online and offline religious practices. Campbell and Osteen's research (2021) on how churches digitized during the COVID-19 pandemic provides valuable insights into the real-world experiences of small, under-resourced churches as they navigated the sudden and dramatic shift to online operations. Their study highlighted the challenges, innovations, and long-term implications of this technological transformation for congregations, including the need for pastors to take on new roles as technology managers and the struggle to assist elderly congregants with limited technological literacy.

The use of social media platforms by religious organizations has become particularly significant in recent years. These platforms serve as crucial channels for establishing connections with prospective congregants and cultivating communities in need of pastoral care (Campbell, 2012). However, the public nature of these platforms often necessitates a transition to more private channels for sensitive pastoral interactions. An illustrative example of this trend is the advertising campaign conducted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church on Facebook and Instagram in 2020. This campaign, which utilized big data and machine learning algorithms, aimed to offer prayer support to individuals experiencing personal struggles during the COVID-19 pandemic. The campaign's sophisticated use of targeted advertising and instant messaging

platforms demonstrates the evolving strategies religious organizations are employing to reach and engage with their audiences in the digital age (Adventist News Network, 2021).

The integration of digital technologies into religious practices has also raised important questions about materiality in digital religion. Campbell and Connelly (2020) explore how the digital shapes and changes understandings of the religious, highlighting debates over what constitutes authentic religious expression online and how religious authority and boundaries are negotiated in digital spaces.

As we look to the future of digital religion, it's clear that the relationship between religious organizations and digital technologies will continue to evolve. Campbell and Osteen's (2022) research on pastoral entrepreneurship during the pandemic suggests that pastors who are more entrepreneurial may be more inclined to adopt newer technologies, even in normal circumstances. This insight points to the ongoing importance of innovation and adaptability in religious leadership as digital technologies become increasingly central to religious practice and community building.

The study of digital religion offers valuable insights into how religious organizations are navigating the challenges and opportunities presented by digital technologies. From early explorations of 'cyber-religion' to contemporary investigations of how digital media shapes and is shaped by religious practices, this field continues to illuminate the changing nature of religious expression and community in the digital age. As religious organizations continue to integrate digital technologies into their practices, scholars of digital religion will play a crucial role in understanding and interpreting these shifts, contributing to our broader understanding of the intersection between religion, technology, and society.

Self-Disclosure

The term 'self-disclosure' as a focus of academic study was first explored by Jourard and Lasakow (1958) in their research on how much subjects disclose about themselves through their various relationships such as spouse, mother, or father. They would come to define self-disclosure as "the process of making the self-known to other persons" (Jourard and Lasakow, 1958). Cozby (1973) would limit self-disclosure to "any information about himself which person A communicates verbally to person B". Prior to Jourard, the phenomenon was studied using different terms such as "verbal accessibility" or "social accessibility" by Fromm, Lewin, Riesman, Block, Lindquist and Block and Bennett (Cozby, 1973).

More recently, Roloff (2009) describes self-disclosure as "the expression of personal information that is of a descriptive, affective, or evaluative nature". This personal information is not widely known and can vary in topic and intimacy. Research in self-disclosure originally focused only on face-to-face interaction, with its roots in psychology. However, communication researchers have expanded the study of self-disclosure to many new areas, including the focus of this study: computer-mediated communication.

Lee et al., (2020) acknowledge the significant role of self-disclosure in fostering relationships and its association with happiness, identity, and self-worth, emphasising that "Self-disclosure is related to happiness, identity, and self-worth, and the role of self-disclosure in relationship building has been a major focus of research over the past 40 years" (p.1328).

Theories of Self-disclosure

While Jourard and Lasakow (1958) focused their efforts in understanding what kind of information is shared within the context of intimate relationships, Taylor and Altman (1975) explored the rewards gained from self-disclosure as an incentive for individuals to continue self-

disclosing ever more intimately. They investigated the breadth of self-disclosure (how much information was shared) as well as the depth of self-disclosure (how intimate was the information shared). Altman and Taylor (1973) later developed the social penetration theory which refers to the range of behaviours that occur in growing interpersonal relationships.

There are four stages of self-disclosure within social penetration theory (Altman and Taylor, 1973). During the "orientation phase", individuals are careful and hesitant in their discussions, as societal norms and conventions offer broad rules for interaction. The "exploratory affective exchange phase" sees conversational partners sharing more personal information across a broader spectrum of subjects. The "affective exchange phase" involves partners revealing more about their inner selves and core personalities, fostering a stronger bond that can lead to close friendships or romantic relationships. Lastly, the "stable exchange phase" is characterised by open and comprehensive communication between partners, leading to complete self-disclosure and a significantly deeper level of intimacy in the relationship. Since the 1970s social penetration theory has been researched and applied to face-to-face interactions (Gudykunst, Nishida and Chua, 1987) as well as to CMC (Panos, 2014).

Derlega and Chaikin (1977) broadened the scope by discussing self-disclosure in relation to privacy, suggesting that privacy is a dynamic process involving the regulation of boundaries, both physical and emotional. This regulation includes controlling the amount and kind of information individuals reveal about themselves, thereby affecting the depth and nature of their relationships. Their conceptualisation of privacy moves beyond Cozby's (1973) focus on verbal communication to include various behaviours like nonverbal cues and even physical barriers. The implication is that self-disclosure serves as a critical tool for interpersonal boundary regulation, which in turn affects an individual's sense of autonomy and self-worth.

The aspect of boundary management is further nuanced by individual characteristics such as gender, age, and social context, as pointed out by Dindia and Allen (1992). They explore the different factors influencing self-disclosure, suggesting that women are generally more inclined to disclose than men in certain contexts. It also acknowledges that other variables, including but not limited to, self-monitoring and personality traits can impact the likelihood of self-disclosure. Contrary to this, Franzoi, and Davis (1985) argued that gender differences in self-disclosure are more related to emotional variables and situational factors like loneliness and private self-consciousness. Specifically, they found that women showed a stronger correlation between self-disclosure and loneliness, suggesting that self-disclosure serves as a mechanism to mitigate feelings of isolation, especially among adolescents. This was also among the first studies to explicitly explore the connection between personality traits such as private self-consciousness and self-disclosure.

Building on the issue of individual characteristics, Farber (2003) extended the discussion into the therapeutic context, noting that while most patients in therapy disclose personal experiences, a significant subset intentionally withhold information. The study provided a nuanced perspective by suggesting that both men and women are equally likely to disclose, but the topics of disclosure vary. Farber's work thus offers a somewhat divergent perspective compared to Dindia and Allen (1992) by emphasising the uniformity in disclosure across genders in therapeutic settings. The focus on therapeutic disclosure was further enriched by Frattaroli (2006a), who highlighted the psychological and physiological benefits of self-disclosure in controlled environments, adding a layer of empirical support to the concept's functional utility.

This study by Frattaroli (2006) emerges as a meaningful contribution to the understanding of the efficacy of experimental disclosure, which is the process of disclosing

information, thoughts, and feelings about personal and meaningful topics. This concept is rooted in the expressive writing paradigm, which posits that writing or talking about one's deepest thoughts and feelings about significant experiences or traumas can have therapeutic effects on psychological health and well-being. Frattaroli (2006b) employed a robust methodology that encompassed a four-pronged literature search and included 146 studies that met specific inclusion criteria. This research utilised a random effects model to offer a comprehensive analysis of both effect size and moderating variables. Significantly, the study revealed that experimental disclosure yielded a small but meaningful improvement in psychological, physiological, and reported health outcomes, as well as overall functionality and perceived impact of the intervention. This is noteworthy because it confirms the positive outcomes of experimental disclosure across a variety of metrics, thereby substantiating its applicability in therapeutic contexts. In addition, the study provides valuable insights into moderating variables such as the format and conditions of disclosure sessions, which can guide future research and practical applications. For instance, variables like the number, length, and spacing of disclosure sessions, along with the specific topic and location of the disclosure, can influence the effectiveness of the intervention. Participant characteristics, such as having a health issue or history of trauma, also played a role, whereas factors like gender and ethnicity did not, thereby narrowing down the focus for future research.

Overall, the study's nuanced approach and comprehensive findings make it a critical reference point for understanding the impact of experimental disclosure. However, Frattaroli (2006b), diverges from previous literature by arguing that variables like gender, ethnicity, and personality traits do not significantly moderate the effects of self-disclosure, thus placing more

weight on the mechanics of the disclosure process itself rather than the individual characteristics of the discloser.

The domain of self-disclosure was also extended into romantic relationships by Sprecher and Hendrick (2004), who found high levels of self-disclosure in romantic partners, correlating positively with various markers of relationship quality such as love and commitment. However, they note that the level of self-disclosure itself was not predictive of the relationship's long-term stability, adding a layer of complexity to the existing dialogues on self-disclosure and relationship outcomes. In a more introspective vein, Sherby (2005) explored the concept of self-disclosure in the professional life of psychoanalysts, suggesting a need for awareness and balance between the analyst's need for both connection and protection.

Johnsen and Ding (2021) brought another dimension to the literature by focusing on therapist self-disclosure with children and adolescents, an area not exhaustively explored. Their work adds that the dynamics of disclosure vary significantly when working with younger clients and depend on several factors including the therapist's own comfort, theoretical orientation, and understanding of developmental psychology. Finally, the realm of online communication introduced by Krasnova et al., (2010) provides a more contemporary twist, stating that while people disclose information online primarily for relationship maintenance and enjoyment, concerns about privacy and security often act as significant barriers.

Pastoral Care

The word 'pastoral' has its roots in the Latin '*pastoralis*' which means shepherd (Kelley, 2010). This imagery of a shepherd emerges from the following passages which have shaped the theory and practice of pastoral care. These stem from Jesus' claim to be 'the good shepherd' who lays down his life for the sheep and his command for Peter to care for his flock. The New

Testament describes the life of a local congregation of followers of Christ as a community striving to live compassionately as they cared for one another (Clebsch and Jaekle, 1994). In the early centuries of Christianity, pastoral care was primarily provided through face-to-face interactions and written communication such as letters. Thus, I will start my literature review of pastoral care in the New Testament.

The pastoral care literature spans for almost two millennia. After a brief overview of its development, I will focus on the pastoral care framework within the Adventist Church as that is the context of my research. Following this exploration, I will analyse more recent literature that has influenced the praxis of pastoral care following technological advancements and societal shifts such as the introduction of the telephone, for instance, which allowed pastoral caregivers to maintain contact with those in need of spiritual support even when physical presence was not possible (Flanagan and Thornton, 2014).

Pastoral Care in the New Testament

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity, is portrayed as an unconventional rabbi who prioritised healing over teaching. His disciples and followers emulated this focus, caring for the less privileged, such as widows and orphans. Despite his brief ministry, Christ emphasised the holistic care of individuals' mental, physical, and spiritual well-being, particularly those in crisis. He challenged ethnic and social norms, extending care to those rejected by social, economic, and religious elites. The parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) is often cited as a model of biblical pastoral care. Christ told this parable to Jewish leaders who had rejected Samaritans due to prejudice, illustrating the importance of caring for one's neighbour regardless of their background or social status.

²⁵ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶ “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” ²⁷ He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’” ²⁸ “You have answered correctly” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” ²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?” ³⁰ In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ ³⁶ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” ³⁷ The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.” (Bible, 1984)

There are several reasons why the parable of the good Samaritan has become a core biblical reference for pastoral care (Capps, 2009). The clergy, who were expected to care for the robbed and beaten man, ignored him. Instead, a layperson from a rejected ethnicity showed mercy and acted to heal the man’s body and mind, which is a function of pastoral care. The Samaritan's actions were not miraculous or supernatural; he used the tools available to him to exercise compassion, another foundational tenet of Christian pastoral care.

The original question that led Christ to tell the parable was related to eternal life, a key dimension of Christian pastoral care. Christianity understands eternal life as a continuum from this life into eternity, evoking a sense of meaning in caring for others here and now. Christian

pastoral care demands that all life is valuable, even the lives of others who may despise you, and that what is done to care for someone here and now has consequences for eternity.

In my exploration of the literature on pastoral care, I found that certain biblical texts from the New Testament, the canonical text documenting the formation of Christianity (Wright, 1992), have historically underpinned the Christian model for pastoral care, emphasising its significance across various church traditions.

Acts 20:28 establishes the duty of church leaders as overseers and underlines the sacrificial nature of pastoral care, rooted in the concept of stewardship. 2 Corinthians 1:4 frames pastoral care as a ministry of comfort, highlighting the reciprocal nature of comfort in the Christian community. John 21:15-17 defines the pastoral role as an act of love and dedication towards the spiritual welfare of the congregation. James 5:14-20 brings in the aspect of healing and confession in pastoral care, underlining the role of the church in physical and spiritual healing. John 13:34-35 frames pastoral care as an expression of Christian discipleship, visible through acts of love and care within the community. 1 Peter 5:2-3 provides a model for the attitude and approach of pastoral caregivers, calling for them to be examples to the flock.

Historical development of pastoral care

In the post-apostolic period, pastoral care was largely the domain of clergy, specifically bishops, who acted as the chief shepherds of the congregation. This demarcation between clergy and laity was significant; the clergy were considered the divine conduit through which pastoral care flowed. Bishops, priests, and deacons constituted a three-fold ministry, and their pastoral duties were primarily geared towards the marginalised, such as widows and orphans. The essence of pastoral care was anchored in unconditional love (agape), an approach considered divine and God-ordained. The bishops served as spiritual guides with a unique role of leading

both the clergy and the laity, following the model of Jesus Christ, the Supreme Shepherd, beyond their managerial duties (Jibiliza, 2021).

In the post-Constantinian era, following the conversion of Emperor Constantine, Christianity gained legal status, subsequently modifying the epistemological framework of pastoral care. While certain challenges remained, such as the threat of heresy, the newfound socio-political status of the Church required a reorientation in pastoral approach. As Christianity became associated with state power, the pastoral mandate expanded to address emergent societal issues like homelessness. During this period, the complexities of pastoral responsibilities were underscored; the shepherd needed to guide the flock and bear the burdens of his community. The hierarchical structure endowed pastors with considerable influence, positioning them as moral and spiritual arbiters (Evans, 2000).

The Middle Ages saw the emergence of more systematic pastoral frameworks. Pope Gregory the Great, for example, contributed significantly to the ecclesiastical literature on pastoral care (Jibiliza, 2021). His treatise, *Pastoral Care*, offered comprehensive guidelines for clergy on how to lead their flock responsibly and ethically. The text highlighted that the role of the pastor was for the benefit of the congregation, not vice versa. The pastoral role became increasingly institutionalised, demanding rigorous ethical standards and a focus on serving the spiritual and material needs of the community. Gregory advocated that pastoral care had to be more than just rule-following; it necessitated self-awareness and introspection from the pastoral caregiver. The essence of pastoral care during this time was anchored in a commitment to ethical conduct and a shepherd's unwavering care for his flock (Jibiliza, 2021).

The Reformation period brought radical theological shifts which impacted pastoral care. While the Reformation was a diverse movement, its core was a passionate concern for the well-

being of souls. Leaders like Martin Luther, Martin Bucer, and Ulrich Zwingli brought a renewed focus to pastoral care, emphasising the ministry's outreach as not confined to the Church but extended to the broader world. Luther, for example, placed enormous emphasis on the transformative power of God's Word, advocating for a pastoral approach that nurtured faith through preaching, caregiving, and prayer. Bucer emphasised the evangelical dimension of pastoral work, advocating for a proactive outreach to all souls. Zwingli, by contrast, prioritised the need for pastors to guard their flocks against spiritual and moral dangers, considering the pastoral role as a divine gift. The Reformation leaders, despite their theological differences, collectively emphasised the intrinsic connection between doctrine and pastoral practice. They viewed the role of the pastor not as an arbitrary assignment but as a divine calling to nourish, guide, and protect the spiritual life of the community (Evans, 2000).

The emergence of the Evangelical Revival, particularly through the work of John Wesley, marks a critical juncture in the trajectory of pastoral care, particularly in its convergence with computer-mediated environments. Wesley's marriage of theology with practical ministry laid the groundwork for an interactive model of pastoral care that was focused on engagement rather than mere dissemination of dogma. In writing thousands of letters to members in distress, Wesley essentially established an early form of remote pastoral care that catered to the emotional and spiritual needs of his flock. This emotive practice, involving guidance, consoling, and spiritual 'psychotherapy', was similar to what occurs in today's computer-mediated pastoral settings. His emphasis on personal confessions on paper, seen as archaic in a digital age, can be reinterpreted as the precursor to the modern self-disclosure seen in online pastoral environments. The class meetings of the Methodist tradition, where burdens and insights were shared for communal spiritual benefit, mirrors the forums and chat rooms of online religious communities, where

anonymity or pseudonymity often facilitate deeper self-disclosure and thus a more potent form of spiritual care (Holifield, 2005).

As the 20th century approached, we observe how scholars and practitioners like Hiltner further refined the scope and methods of pastoral care. Hiltner (1954) acknowledged the significant role of individual experiences in shaping and renewing theology, which already gestured toward the virtual ecclesiastical landscapes of the 21st century. In these landscapes, experiences are often shared and archived, providing an unprecedented resource for pastoral and theological reflection. Hiltner's focus on lived experiences as a source of theological knowledge could be seen as especially salient in the context of online communities, where life experiences, even those as harrowing as addiction, are often laid bare for collective insight. His observations affirm that theological richness and a deeper understanding of God's manifold interactions with humanity can be gleaned from even the most unconventional of pastoral settings, including computer-mediated environments (Park, 2006).

Adventist Pastoral Care

Theological Framework

The development of pastoral care in the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been shaped by its historical and theological roots. Emerging from the Millerite movement, Adventism initially focused heavily on the imminent Second Coming of Christ, which led to a prioritization of evangelism and proclamation over social and ethical involvement (Knight, 1993b). This apocalyptic worldview, characterized by a pessimistic view of humanity and social reform, significantly influenced the church's approach to pastoral care. As Pearson (1986) notes, there was a tension between "prepare to meet your Maker" and "occupy till I come," with the focus

gradually shifting from "preparation" to "occupation" as the church's existence extended beyond initial expectations.

Over time, the Adventist Church began to recognize the need to address socio-political and ethical issues. Plantak (1998) observes that later generations of Adventists have come to "learn the lessons about human rights and the dignity of human beings." This led to the development of various humanitarian initiatives, such as The Dorcas Welfare Society and The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA). However, as Bosch (1980) points out, these caring ministries were often viewed instrumentally, "as the means to an end," with service being valued primarily for its ability to facilitate gospel proclamation. This pragmatic approach to pastoral care, focused on "doing what works and supports proclamation," has been a consistent feature of Adventist ministry.

"It should also be noted that throughout the history of Adventism, pastoral care has been situated within a "confessional applied theology" where OT and NT studies set the rules for a pragmatic ministry... Any form of a pastoral care has always been very much a dogmatic one where fundamental truth was the guide to believing and behaving... Adventism is devoid of any meaningful practical theology for pastoral care—a pastoral care praxis has never been developed." (Finucane, 2009, p.157)

The development of pastoral care within Adventism has been significantly influenced by the church's strong emphasis on biblical authority and doctrinal correctness. As Knight (1993b) observes, this focus on "present truth" often led to a prioritization of cognitive understanding over relational and emotional aspects of faith. This tendency aligns with what Rice (2002) describes as a "believing" and "behaving" orientation, which has sometimes overshadowed the importance of "belonging" within Adventist communities.

The church's eschatological focus, while providing hope and purpose, has also presented challenges for developing a comprehensive theology of pastoral care. LaRondelle (1974, p225)

notes that Adventism's distinctive eschatology has sometimes led to a neglect of present realities in favour of future expectations. This tension between present engagement and future hope has implications for how pastoral care is conceptualized and practiced within the church.

Adventist anthropology, rooted in a holistic understanding of human nature, provides potential resources for pastoral care. As Blazen (2000) argues, the Adventist rejection of soul-body dualism offers a foundation for addressing the interconnected physical, mental, and spiritual needs of individuals. However, this holistic vision has not always been fully realized in pastoral practice, often defaulting to a more cognitive or behavioural approach.

The church's historical ambivalence towards professional psychology and counselling has also shaped its approach to pastoral care. While influential writers like Ellen White emphasized the importance of understanding the human mind, there has been a reluctance to fully engage with secular psychological theories. Dudley and Cummings Jr (1982) note that this cautious stance has sometimes limited the tools available to Adventist pastors in addressing complex emotional and relational issues.

Despite these challenges, there have been efforts to develop a more robust framework for pastoral care within Adventism. Dybdahl (2007) advocates for a "theology of presence" that emphasizes God's immanence and involvement in human affairs, providing a theological basis for empathetic pastoral engagement. Similarly, Rice (2002) calls for a greater focus on narrative approaches to theology and ministry, recognizing the power of story in shaping faith and identity.

However, as Finucane (2009) observes, these efforts have often remained peripheral to the church's main theological discourse. The lack of a well-developed practical theology within Adventism has meant that pastoral care practices are frequently borrowed from other Christian

traditions without sufficient critical reflection on their compatibility with Adventist beliefs and values. The Adventist emphasis on the "priesthood of all believers" potentially offers a foundation for a more communal approach to pastoral care. However, as Oliver (1989) notes, this doctrine has often been understood primarily in terms of evangelistic responsibility rather than mutual care and support within the faith community.

In the mid-1950s, as the field of pastoral counselling was gaining prominence in mainstream Christianity, some Seventh-day Adventist leaders recognized the need to develop a distinctly Adventist approach to pastoral care. W. John Cannon's (1956) article in *The Ministry* magazine represents one of the earliest attempts to provide a theological foundation for pastoral care within the Adventist context. Cannon sought to ground the practice of pastoral counselling in biblical principles and Adventist theology, addressing concerns about the compatibility of modern psychological approaches with Adventist beliefs.

Cannon's (1959) research into the use of psychological concepts, approaches and methods by pastoral counsellors reflects the tension within Adventism at the time between embracing new insights from the behavioural sciences and maintaining fidelity to traditional Adventist interpretations of Scripture. He argued for a more directive approach to counselling than was typically advocated by secular psychologists, emphasizing the pastor's role in guiding individuals toward biblical truth and conversion. At the same time, Cannon acknowledged the value of understanding human psychology and the importance of developing effective counselling skills. His attempt to synthesize Adventist theology with emerging counselling practices represents an important step in the development of a distinctly Adventist approach to pastoral care, even as it highlighted the ongoing challenges of integrating faith and contemporary psychological insights within the denomination.

In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the need to address the emotional and relational needs of church members and the wider community. Paulien (1993) argues that in a secular and postmodern context, genuine relationships and empathetic care are essential for effective ministry. This insight points towards the need for a more intentional and theologically grounded approach to pastoral care within Adventism.

As the Seventh-day Adventist Church continues to navigate the complexities of ministry in the 21st century, the development of a distinctive and comprehensive theology of pastoral care remains an important task. While the church has rich resources in its holistic worldview, emphasis on divine-human relationship, and commitment to service, there is a need for more intentional integration of these elements into pastoral practice. Moving beyond a merely applied or borrowed approach to pastoral care will require sustained theological reflection and a willingness to engage critically with both Adventist tradition and contemporary insights from the broader field of pastoral theology.

Despite the challenges in developing a comprehensive theological framework for pastoral care, the Adventist Church has demonstrated a significant commitment to ministering to the spiritual and emotional needs of its members and the broader community. With over 20,000 Adventist pastors providing continuous spiritual care and visitation to more than 22 million members across 170,000+ congregations worldwide, the church's pastoral care efforts are substantial and far-reaching (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2021). This extensive network of care represents a lived theology that, while perhaps not fully articulated, is nonetheless deeply embedded in the church's practice.

Furthermore, recognizing the changing landscape of ministry in the digital age, the Adventist Church is expanding its pastoral care operations online. This expansion goes beyond

mere proclamation and evangelism, focusing on genuine care for individuals through prayer, counselling, and spiritual support in virtual spaces. As Bruinsma (2009) suggests, this adaptation to new forms of ministry while maintaining core Adventist values demonstrates the church's capacity for growth and innovation in pastoral care. These developments point towards a promising future where the Adventist Church can continue to refine and expand its approach to pastoral care, potentially developing a more robust theological framework that integrates its distinctive beliefs with contemporary pastoral insights.

Adventist pastoral care also extends to chaplains who serve in other contexts such as hospitals, schools, universities, and the military. Adventists believe that a human soul is not simply a spirit within us, but the combination of the body with the spirit. This belief impacts the practice of pastoral care, especially for Adventist chaplains who approach pastoral care with a distinctive focus on holistic well-being, integrating physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of health (Adventist Chaplaincy Institute, 2022). They are further guided by Seventh-day Adventist principles and beliefs, emphasizing Christ-centred ministry, hope in God's healing power, and the importance of Sabbath rest. Adventist chaplains are trained to provide compassionate care that respects diverse faith traditions while maintaining their own spiritual identity. They aim to offer support that aligns with Adventist values of wholeness, hope, and healing, addressing not only immediate spiritual needs but also considering long-term wellness and preparation for eternity.

The Impact of Adventist Church Structure on Pastoral Care

The Seventh-day Adventist Church operates with a distinctive organizational structure that significantly impacts the implementation and oversight of pastoral care. This structure, as outlined by Oliver (2020), is designed to balance the church's Protestant roots, which are wary of

centralized power, with the need for cohesive global mission fulfilment. The hierarchy consists of several levels: local churches, local conferences/missions, union conferences/missions, and the General Conference within its divisions.

At the foundation of this structure are the local churches, where most direct pastoral care occurs. Pastors are typically hired by local conferences to serve these churches, providing spiritual leadership, pastoral care, and coordinating various ministries (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2015). This arrangement allows for local autonomy in pastoral assignments while maintaining broader organizational integration.

The path to becoming a fully recognized pastor in the Adventist Church is a lengthy process, typically taking between seven and eleven years. This period includes formal education at Adventist seminaries, where future pastors are trained in theology, church doctrine, and practical ministry skills, including pastoral care and evangelism. Following graduation, pastors enter a period of internship and mentorship before being considered for ordination or commissioning (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2022).

The decentralized nature of the church structure allows for considerable autonomy at various levels, particularly in the implementation of pastoral care. Local conferences and unions have freedom to define policies and protocols for pastoral care within their jurisdictions based on global principles, values, and policies voted by the world church. This autonomy enables contextual adaptation but can also lead to inconsistencies across different regions. For example, safeguarding policies and pastoral care protocols may vary significantly from one geographic area to another.

In some cases, larger administrative units like divisions may coordinate policies across multiple unions within their territory. For instance, the North American Division might establish

overarching guidelines for pastoral care that apply to all unions within the United States, Canada, and their other territories. In contrast, in smaller territories, a single union, such as the British Union Conference, may oversee these matters for an entire country. This variability extends to other entities offering pastoral care within the Adventist system, such as hospitals and schools. These institutions often operate under their own administrative structures, adding another layer of complexity to the overall pastoral care landscape within the denomination.

Despite this decentralization, there are mechanisms for global influence on pastoral care practices. The General Conference, as the highest administrative body, plays a role in setting broad values, policies, and standards. One significant way it influences pastoral care globally is through its digital initiatives, providing resources and support that reach beyond local boundaries. Furthermore, the General Conference convenes quinquennial sessions where delegates from around the world determine criteria for ordination and commissioning of pastors (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2022). This global input into pastoral qualifications provides a unifying element amidst the diverse local implementations of pastoral care. However, it's important to note that while the General Conference sets these criteria, the actual decision to ordain or commission a pastor is made at the union level.

The tension between global standards and local autonomy remains a constant feature of the Adventist approach to pastoral care. This reflects the church's broader struggle to maintain unity of mission while respecting cultural and regional diversity. It also presents both challenges and opportunities for developing a cohesive yet flexible approach to pastoral care that can meet the needs of a global church body. In practice, this structure means that while there are overarching principles and standards for pastoral care within the Adventist Church, the specific implementation can vary significantly from one region to another. This can lead to innovations

and contextually appropriate approaches, but it can also result in inconsistencies in the quality and nature of pastoral care provided across the global church.

Modern Approaches to Pastoral Care

The diversification and globalisation of pastoral care in the late 20th and early 21st centuries bring additional layers of complexity. This period experienced an explosion in the methodologies and schools of thought in pastoral care, extending its reach far beyond the traditional pulpit and into various facets of human experience, including the digital space. Pastoral care was revived in the 1950s as the adoption of psychotherapy techniques and concepts were incorporated into pastoral care and counselling. Capps (1990) describes the criticism these methods accrued from Gherkin, Browning and Poling among others for the semi-secular nature of these methods. In his own contribution to pastoral care, Capps (1990) offers the ‘reframing’ methodology which draws heavily on the parables of Jesus and other Biblical examples of this method being used by early Christians. These new methodologies, coupled with the technological advancements already discussed in this chapter, changed how pastoral care is offered and perceived in recent years. In this section I will explore this technological shift along with the safeguarding and ethical research that have further shaped pastoral care in this period.

Impact of Technology in Pastoral Care

Many researchers provide critical frameworks for the evolution of pastoral care into the 21st century, emphasising the need for practitioners to be versatile interpreters of both scripture and human experience (Park, 2006). The implications here for digital pastoral care are manifold. In an age of algorithmic sorting and digital echo chambers, the ability to interpret and contextualise is more critical than ever. As more and more people turn to online resources for spiritual sustenance, the pastoral caregiver's role must adapt to meet these changing dynamics.

The diversity of pastoral care in the 21st century is reflected online, where virtual congregations can consist of a myriad of ethnicities, nationalities, and cultural backgrounds, each bringing their own sets of challenges and insights to the pastoral setting.

In the 21st century pastoral care is also being analysed in terms of technology, such as in this research, as well as its core function. Doehring (2014) explores pastoral care in a post-modern context, where story and narrative are paramount to counselling cross-culturally. She notes the necessary attention to be given to listening for narrative themes as well as assessing social privileges or disadvantages. However, the underlying definition of helping people in crisis has been consistent throughout the centuries. This also applies to digital pastoral care, especially on asynchronous instant messaging platforms.

With the advent of the internet and digital technology, pastoral care has further evolved to meet the needs of a rapidly changing world. Digital pastoral care is now being integrated into the traditional methods, as it provides new avenues for individuals to access support and resources (Waters, 2005). According to Elias (2006), the use of digital technology in theological education has created opportunities for pastoral caregivers to reach a wider audience and offer support to those who might not otherwise have access to such care.

One notable development in the provision of digital pastoral care is the use of email. Mills (2011) argues that email can be an effective tool for Christian pastoral care, as it allows caregivers to provide timely, thoughtful, and compassionate responses to those in need. Similarly, the rise of social media platforms has opened new channels for pastoral care. Gorrell (2018b) highlights the potential of social media in providing spiritual care, while Hathaway (2020) underscores its importance in fostering a sense of belonging among faith communities during challenging times, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another important aspect of digital pastoral care is the role of lay leaders, who are increasingly using digital platforms to provide support to their communities. Farabaugh (2009) discusses the importance of lay pastoral care giving, while Peterson (2006) focuses on internet training for lay leaders to meet pastoral care needs. Additionally, Ramer (2008a) explores the use of CMC in providing pastoral care to youth in a high-tech world.

Despite the numerous advantages of digital pastoral care, some challenges and concerns remain. Issues related to anonymity, privacy, and the potential for misunderstandings in digital communication have been raised (Van Drie, Ganzevoort and Spiering, 2014). Moreover, there is a need for further research and exploration of the best practices in digital pastoral care to ensure that it remains an effective and compassionate means of support. Thus, the history of pastoral care has seen a significant shift from traditional face-to-face interactions to the integration of digital technologies.

In the last two decades, the digital transformation has pervasively influenced various sectors, including religious organisations, fundamentally altering how pastoral care is conceptualised and administered. The shift from traditional face-to-face interactions to computer-mediated environments represents a complex metamorphosis, involving new modes of engagement, challenges, and opportunities, beyond just a change in platform. Pastoral care online has emerged as a significant extension of traditional pastoral work, facilitating a form of “digital shepherding” that encompasses virtual congregations through forums, social media, video conferencing, and even specialised pastoral care software. As Campbell (2012) highlighted, this shift can be seen as part of a broader transition toward a “networked religion” where religious activities and engagements are not confined to physical spaces or traditional schedules. Digital pastoral care provides unprecedented access to spiritual guidance and

community, transcending geographical limitations and potentially mitigating issues such as stigmatisation that sometimes occur in traditional religious settings. Anonymity and pseudonymity in online spaces may encourage deeper levels of self-disclosure, although they also raise questions about authenticity and ethical boundaries.

The digital medium also introduces complexities related to the immediacy and permanence of online interactions; while pastoral advice or conversations can be revisited and reflected upon due to their digital achievability, this same permanence can pose challenges concerning privacy and the long-term impact of pastoral guidance (Bingaman, 2018). Moreover, the ability to gather data analytics on user behaviour offers both an opportunity and an ethical challenge; it can enable more personalised and timely pastoral care but also risks commodifying spiritual guidance into quantifiable metrics. The shift to digital pastoral care is thus not simply a digitisation of existing practices but a transformative development that requires a nuanced understanding of digital culture, ethical considerations, and theological frameworks that are suited for a digitally interconnected world.

Bingaman (2018) further argues that technological advancements are significantly impacting our physical and spiritual selves. He discusses the transition from homo sapiens to "techno sapiens" and the potential threats and benefits of this change. Bingaman emphasises the need to balance technology with preserving human qualities such as attentional control, relational intelligence, and mindful awareness. He proposes meditation, specifically centring prayer, and compassion meditation, as tools to maintain human compassion and empathy in the face of increasing digitalisation.

However, the practice of pastoral care has evolved in many ways since the early Christians began to take care of the communities around them, always adapting to the medium

without allowing it to change its Christian theological framework. Pastoral care is a proactive discipline that embraces the complexities of human experience, in both physical churches and online communities, rather than just being a reactive service. The convergences between historical and modern, physical, and digital, show that pastoral care is not a static field but an evolving practice that must continue to adapt to serve an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

The digitisation of pastoral care has instigated a plethora of new research avenues, fundamentally challenging and extending the academic discourse around pastoral theology and practice. Prior to the digital age, pastoral care research was largely confined to the domains of theology, psychology, and social work, which tended to focus on face-to-face interactions, community building, and spiritual development. However, the advent of digital pastoral care has led to interdisciplinary inquiries involving fields such as computer science, information technology, and communications studies. Scholars are now examining the efficacy of digital interventions in pastoral care, the ethical implications of data-driven spiritual guidance, and the complexities of establishing genuine spiritual connection and community in a virtual setting (Ramer, 2008b).

Research has also probed the changing dynamics of self-disclosure in computer-mediated environments, scrutinising how the affordances of digital platforms impact the traditional pastoral relationship. Questions about authority, authenticity, and anonymity have gained prominence, urging researchers to reconsider traditional pastoral principles in the context of digital culture. Studies are increasingly utilising empirical methods, incorporating user experience surveys, in-depth interviews, and even sentiment analysis of text-based pastoral interactions to garner a more comprehensive understanding of the emerging dynamics in online

spiritual care (GM, Israel, and Naidoo, 2021; Abraham et al., 2022; Winiger, 2022).

Furthermore, new theoretical frameworks are being developed to guide best practices in digital pastoral care, often borrowing concepts from internet studies, such as network theory and digital ethics, to inform a theologically robust approach to online ministry (Afolaranmi, 2022). Given this burgeoning landscape of inquiry, my research will focus on the nuanced literature at the intersection of pastoral care and CMC, with a special emphasis on the role and dynamics of instant messaging in facilitating digital pastoral interactions.

Impact of Safeguarding and Ethics in Pastoral Care

Since the 1950s the landscape of pastoral care has undergone significant transformations in response to the growing emphasis on safeguarding practices. This shift has influenced the way religious institutions approach their care responsibilities, especially concerning vulnerable individuals within their communities (Eliason, 2013). This evolution of safeguarding measures in pastoral care reflects a broader societal recognition of the need to protect vulnerable individuals. In the mid-20th century, pastoral care primarily focused on providing spiritual support, with limited formal safeguarding protocols (Leimgruber, 2022). However, the emergence of high-profile abuse cases within religious institutions during the 1970s and 1980s catalysed a paradigm shift in approach. This period saw the gradual development and implementation of formal safeguarding policies across various religious organizations (Fortune, 2004).

The introduction of the Children Act 1989 in the UK marked a significant milestone, emphasizing the welfare of children and influencing religious institutions to adopt more rigorous safeguarding measures (Best, 2007). By the 1990s, many denominations had developed comprehensive safeguarding policies, integrating them into their pastoral care frameworks. The ethical dimensions of safeguarding became a focal point in the early 21st century. Liégeois

(2024) highlighted the ethical implications of physical touch in pastoral care, particularly concerning vulnerable individuals. This period saw the introduction of mandatory safeguarding training for clergy and pastoral caregivers, aiming to equip them with the skills to identify and respond to signs of abuse appropriately.

Despite these advancements, the implementation of safeguarding measures has been fraught with challenges. Resistance to change, varying interpretations of safeguarding principles, and the complexity of addressing historical abuse cases have been significant barriers (Leimgruber, 2022). For example, the ambiguity surrounding appropriate physical touch in pastoral care remains a contentious issue, necessitating clear guidelines and continuous education.

In recent years, safeguarding practices in pastoral care have increasingly embraced multidisciplinary approaches. Collaboration with social workers, psychologists, and legal experts has become more common, enhancing the effectiveness of safeguarding measures. This shift towards a holistic approach is evident in the adoption of frameworks that prioritize the well-being of individuals, as seen in the *Every Child Matters* initiative in the UK (Best, 2007). This has led to more structured and professionalized approaches with safeguarding at their core, resulting in the development of specialized roles within religious institutions, such as safeguarding officers and pastoral care coordinators. Moreover, theological education has evolved to incorporate safeguarding modules into curricula, reflecting the central importance of these practices in contemporary pastoral care (Nauer, 2014).

Further research has also highlighted the prevalence of abuse within pastoral care settings. Dreßing (2018) found that three-quarters of sexual abuse victims in the Catholic Church were in a clerical or pastoral relationship with the accused. Similarly, Garland (2009) reported

that 3.1% of adult women who regularly attend religious services had experienced clergy sexual misconduct. These findings underscore the need for robust safeguarding measures within pastoral care contexts.

The power dynamics inherent in pastoral relationships have been identified as a significant factor contributing to the potential for abuse. Fortune and Poling (2004) examine sexual abuse by clergy as a crisis for the church, discussing the complex power dynamics in pastoral relationships. Haslbeck and Kerstner (2016) emphasize that pastoral counselling settings are not free from power dynamics, highlighting the need for awareness and appropriate boundaries.

Keul (2020a) introduces the concept of "vulnerance" to highlight the readiness to use violence in situations where vulnerabilities exist. This concept is particularly relevant in pastoral care settings, where power imbalances can create conditions conducive to abuse. Leimgruber (2022) argues that pastoral care settings inherently contain risks due to power asymmetries that can facilitate abuse, emphasizing the need for structural changes to prevent misconduct.

The importance of ethical standards and credentialing for clergy engaged in pastoral care and counselling is highlighted by Eliason et al. (2013). They stress the need for ongoing training and adherence to professional codes of ethics to maintain high standards of pastoral care and prevent abuse. The same transformations could also be observed within the Adventist Church, albeit nuanced to the intricacies of Adventist theology, structure, and culture.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church's approach to safeguarding exemplifies the balance between centralized guidance and decentralized implementation, reflecting the church's global structure and local adaptations. This approach is evident when comparing the global principles outlined in the Church Manual, a global document that guides the practices of every Adventist

congregation, with the specific policies implemented by local entities such as the British Union Conference.

At the global level, the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual (2022, p. 175) provides foundational safeguarding policies to protect children and vulnerable adults within the church community. These policies include 1) A Two-Adult Policy, requiring two adults to be present in children's classrooms or activities; 2) An Open Door Policy, discouraging private one-on-one contact with children; 3) Volunteer Screening, including reference checks and police background checks where legally required; 4) A Six-Month Policy for newly baptized or transferring members before they can work with children; 5) Regular training for teachers and volunteers on child protection.

These global standards ensure a baseline level of safeguarding across all regions. However, the decentralized implementation allows for flexibility in addressing local needs and legal requirements. For example, The British Union Conference (BUC)'s Safeguarding Policy and Procedures (British Union Conference, 2024) exemplifies how these global principles are adapted and expanded at the local level. The BUC policy outlines an extensive and comprehensive approach to safeguarding, emphasizing the protection of both children and vulnerable adults. This policy mandates rigorous training, clear reporting mechanisms, and the establishment of safeguarding officers within each church. The document details procedures for recruitment, emphasizing the importance of vetting and training to prevent abuse. This structured approach ensures that each church under the BUC jurisdiction adheres to a standardized set of guidelines, creating a uniform safeguarding environment across the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland (BUC territory). The BUC policy also highlights specific UK legislation, such as the Children Act 1989 and the Care Act 2014, which influence their safeguarding

policies and demonstrates how local entities must consider national regulations in addition to the global church guidelines.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church's commitment to safeguarding is further illustrated by various initiatives and training programs across different regions. For example, the Caribbean Union has actively promoted child protection awareness through virtual child protection certification training (Caribbean Union, 2023). Similarly, the North American Division's 2023 *enditnow Summit on Abuse* demonstrates a proactive stance in addressing abuse within the church, highlighting the church's dedication to creating safe environments for all members (Agboka, 2023).

Functions of Pastoral Care

Clebsch and Jaekle (1994) defined pastoral care as “helping acts, done by representative Christian persons, directed toward the healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling of troubled persons whose troubles arise in the context of ultimate meanings and concerns” (p.4). These four functions became widely accepted in the practice of pastoral care and will serve to identify pastoral care goals within my research interviews and analysis.

Healing

Healing as a function of pastoral care is complex to understand and practice. Research indicates that methods are secondary to the relationship with the pastoral care giver (Kelley, 2010). It is the validation of suffering as a human experience that finds resonance with the pastoral care giver. The Christian doctrine presents God as a transcendent being who became fully human and experienced pain, suffering, and death. The resurrection of Christ is central to Christian doctrine precisely because of its implication for the healing of all those who are suffering.

Clebsch and Jaekle (1994) define healing as “a pastoral function that aims to overcome impairment by restoring a person to wholeness and leading them to advance beyond their previous condition” (p.33). Holifield (2005) observed that the incorporation of psychotherapy into pastoral care in the 1950s and 1960s provided tremendous tools to the pastoral care giver in this healing function, leading to the development of pastoral counselling as a specialised field.

However, healing in the context of pastoral care often relies on the entire Christian community rather than just a typical weekly session with a therapist or counsellor. Much of the healing happens through the experience of Christian fellowship, worship, prayer, and service. The application of healing in pastoral care is much broader than just physical healing and includes healing from “grief born of injustice” (Kelley, 2010) which has a spiritual dimension.

Throughout its rich history, this pastoral care function of healing has been practiced in a variety of ways (Clebsch and Jaekle, 1994, p.92). Although many of these historical methods are not widely practiced today, “pastoral healing surely continues in our time, but the function has become contracted, isolated, or confused about itself in relation both to other applications of the healing art and to the Christian pastoral tradition of healing” (p.42).

Sustaining

Sustaining as a function of pastoral care applies when life seems to be spiralling downward, such as after the loss of a loved one or any other irreparable event. Clebsch and Jaekle (1994) have identified a four-step process in sustaining a person: preservation, which involves a sharp resolution to stop life from spiralling out of control; consolation, which involves helping to relieve a person from their sense of misery while acknowledging the irreparable nature of the experience; consolidation, which aims to set the loss within the total focus of life and enable the person to accept their deprived life as the only life left to live; and redemption, which

leads the person to pursue once again their destiny and purpose after embracing their loss and regrouping their remaining resources.

Guiding

The pastoral care function of guiding is useful when a person has a difficult decision to make. It assumes that each human being has the divine freedom to make decisions that may carry consequences. The guiding function aims to provide insights, wisdom, and perspective to the choice at hand, often through listening intently, asking relevant questions, and quoting scripture as revealed wisdom. The Christian worldview has traditionally presented the opposing forces of good and evil as being intensely interested in every human decision, so identifying what God or Satan may be encouraging a person to decide is still a feature of pastoral care across the world.

Reconciling

The pastoral care function of reconciling aims to reconnect someone with God and their neighbours. Historically, there has been a focus on church discipline as a way to reach forgiveness, with different faith traditions developing rituals and practices related to confession, reconciliation, forgiveness, and restitution (Clebsch and Jaekle, 1994). This function addresses guilt, shame, and fear on the part of the transgressor, as well as anger, revenge, and resentment on the part of the victim.

Beech (2010) proposed cultural differences in how sin is viewed, with Western cultures tending to view sin in terms of guilt, Eastern cultures in terms of shame, and African cultures in terms of fear. However, Whiteman (2018) has recently pointed out that the empirical evidence and critiques available suggest that the divide between shame and guilt is not as clear-cut as previously thought. This implies that missiology should consider the conceptual intricacies and the limited empirical support for such distinctions.

Forgiveness is a central theme in the Bible and a cornerstone of Christian doctrine, with implications for pastoral care in challenging both transgressors and victims to forgive. It is a common experience for both transgressors and victims to become Christians through the process of pastoral care and the challenge to forgive. The example of Kim Phuc, who became a Christian after her journey of forgiveness following the Vietnam War, illustrates this experience (Chong, 2001).

Intersection of Research Fields

In this section I will explore the research that addresses the various intersections between CMC, self-disclosure, and pastoral care.

Intersection of CMC and Self-disclosure

Since the 1980s the study of CMC has consistently found an increase in self-disclosure when compared to face-to-face interaction (Sroull and Kiesler, 1986). Patients were found to share more about their symptoms through a computer than face-to-face; parents of psychiatric hospital patients answered more candidly and honestly yielding greater data validity (Ferriter, 1993); participants in computer-mediated user groups reported higher levels of intimacy and self-disclosure (Parks and Floyd, 1996). In trying to understand the phenomena, Rheingold (2000) argued the increase in self-disclosure through CMC was a consequence of the technological limitations such as being constrained to verbal communication.

McKenna and Bargh (2000) later suggested that the elements which were initially viewed as technological constraints, such as anonymity, the diminished significance of physical appearance, geographical separation, and the ability to control the timing and speed of interactions, actually enhanced self-disclosure in CMC. They likened online communication to a

conversation in a dimly lit room where visibility of the other person is limited. The relative anonymity provided by the internet can potentially encourage individuals to be more open and take more risks when disclosing information to their online acquaintances compared to those they meet in traditional, face-to-face settings. Postmes, Spears and Lea (2000) further suggested that this veil of anonymity allows users to express their genuine thoughts and feelings. Therefore, if individuals tend to reveal more personal information and do so earlier in potential online relationships than in potential real-life ones, it could lead to the development of intimacy and closeness in online relationships at a faster pace than in offline relationships (McKenna and Bargh, 2000, p.62).

Postmes, Spears and Lea (2000) developed and expanded upon the social identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE) in their exploration of visual anonymity. The SIDE model posits that, despite the absence of direct physical interaction, mediated groups can have a significant psychological reality for their members. This model examines the contrast between the anonymity of an individual within a group and the anonymity of the group to the individual. Their findings suggest that when a group is anonymous to an individual (i.e. visual anonymity), it can lead to an increased self-awareness and consequently, a stronger adherence to the group. Conversely, when an individual is anonymous within a group (i.e. lack of identifiability), it provides an opportunity for the individual to express their authentic self without the worry of self-presentation, potentially leading to a decrease in conformity to group norms (Postmes, Spears and Lea, 2000).

The growing body of literature on self-disclosure in CMC traverses through a complex intersection of ideas concerning visual anonymity, self-awareness, online disinhibition, norms of self-disclosure, and even the tangential impact of global events like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although originally delineated through studies from the early 2000s, the basic tenets emphasize how the architecture of CMC facilitates high levels of self-disclosure (A N Joinson, 2001). This attribute has been initially ascribed to the elements of visual anonymity and the unique psychological state engendered by CMC, in which heightened private self-awareness coupled with reduced public self-awareness culminates in greater volubility (Joinson, 2001).

Joinson (2001) has become a foundational researcher at the intersection of CMC and self-disclosure. The study's rigorous mixed-methods approach is comprised of three separate experiments involving undergraduate students and various conditions to measure the dependent variable of self-disclosure. Notably, the findings reveal that CMC leads to higher levels of self-disclosure than face-to-face communication, confirming the influential role of the medium itself in shaping interpersonal interactions. Even more intriguing is the discovery that visual anonymity further augments this propensity to self-disclose, underscoring the psychological mechanisms that encourage open communication in anonymous settings. The study's third experiment illuminates the nuanced relationship between different forms of self-awareness and self-disclosure; specifically, elevated private self-awareness coupled with diminished public self-awareness resulted in higher levels of spontaneous disclosure. This offers a compelling perspective on how internal psychological states interact with external conditions to influence online communication behaviours.

An important concept that emerged within the research intersection of CMC and self-disclosure is the online disinhibition effect which posits that people behave differently online due to a myriad of factors like dissociative anonymity and invisibility (Callaghan, 2016). But does this disinhibition mean that the self-disclosure we observe is truthful or honest? Suler (2004) argues that this is not a transparent window into one's "true self" but a varied expression that

hinges upon the specific online environment. Interestingly, norms of self-disclosure within CMC environments, especially in synchronous discussions, tend to develop over time, manifesting as a reciprocally reinforced behaviour (Dietz-Uhler, Bishop-Clark and Howard, 2005a). This does not operate in isolation but reflects the oscillating nature of self-disclosure, often influenced by the sensitivity of the topic under discussion, as seen in discussions concerning mental illness. In these environments, self-disclosure appears to follow a pattern: initial disclosure leads to retreat, which is followed by renewed disclosure as the conversation progresses, particularly when encouraged by positive feedback (Dietz-Uhler, Bishop-Clark and Howard, 2005b).

Pivoting to the notion of disinhibition, Joinson further elucidates how this doesn't solely pertain to behaviours generally considered negative or impulsive but also encompasses positive behaviours like self-disclosure (Joinson, 2007). This suggests that what we observe online is a reduction in social inhibitions and a complex, multi-faceted expression of identity that aligns with social identity theories. In other words, online self-disclosure is an individualistic social endeavour influenced by group dynamics and social norms. And as much as we'd like to believe that offline and online behaviours are congruent, norms about the disclosure of personal information offline don't necessarily correlate with online behaviour (Mesch and Beker, 2010). The gap between online and offline self-disclosure extends to the realm of privacy, beyond just behavioural differences. Despite concerns about privacy, these concerns often don't translate into behaviours that protect privacy online. Trust emerges as a mediator in this complex relationship between privacy and self-disclosure, where it could compensate for low privacy perceptions, adding yet another layer to this complex construct (Joinson et al., 2010).

While it's tempting to view online self-disclosure as a mere extension of offline self-disclosure, the rate at which it occurs online is conspicuously faster (Attrill and Jalil, 2011). This

acceleration, however, doesn't necessarily equate to a deeper quality of interactions but contributes to an enhanced quantity of superficial exchanges. Such dynamics have not remained static but evolved with technological advances. For instance, mobile messaging applications allow for a higher frequency of communication but do not completely replicate the depth of face-to-face interactions, emphasising the role of contextual factors in determining the nature of self-disclosure (Knop et al., 2016). Moreover, the emotional impact of self-disclosure doesn't seem to discriminate between human and artificial conversational agents, suggesting that the cognitive processes involved are more influenced by the act of disclosure itself than the recipient (Ho, Hancock, and Miner, 2018).

Adding another layer of complexity, Linders (2019) introduced the idea that online self-disclosure can, in turn, stimulate offline self-disclosure, thereby enriching the quality of friendships. This relationship is, however, not as straightforward, with face-to-face interactions still being perceived as richer in terms of media richness theory. Moreover, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has further nuanced our understanding of self-disclosure online by introducing new factors, such as social responsibility, that have complicated the risk and appropriateness calculus for disclosing certain types of information (Nabity-Grover, Cheung, and Thatcher, 2020). The pandemic has thus presented a unique context for reassessing long-standing theories, calling for further inquiry into how these extraordinary circumstances are moulding online disclosure behaviour.

Recent scholarship has highlighted the growing need for robust theoretical frameworks to understand these evolving online interactions more holistically. The arena of interpersonal relational maintenance in CMC has started to adapt existing theories, such as Social Penetration Theory, to encapsulate the nuanced dynamics of self-disclosure online (Mason and Carr, 2021).

This trajectory indicates that the arena of CMC is undergoing a phase of theoretical consolidation and refinement as technology assumes an increasingly pervasive role in our lives. In sum, the literature on self-disclosure in CMC presents a panorama that transcends simplistic binaries of online and offline or individual and social, continually challenging us to rethink and reconceptualise our understanding of how, why, and under what circumstances people disclose personal information in the digital landscape.

The facilitation of relationship formation can be aided by making self-disclosure easier, as it enhances a sense of intimacy (Bargh and McKenna, 2004). This has contributed to the growth of social media as users connected to both old and new relationships. McKenna, Green and Gleason (2002) concluded that subjects who self-disclosed truthful elements about themselves are more likely to form close relationships as they normally move to a face-to-face basis. They also verified that most of these relationships remained intact after two years.

Looking to the future of research for this intersection of CMC and self-disclosure, human-robot interactions have already been investigated. Eyssel et al., (2017) conducted an experiment to examine how self-disclosure by both humans and robots affects mind perception and interaction quality. They found that self-disclosure types significantly influenced participants' perception of the robot's mind. Specifically, their study revealed that "participants to whom the robot self-disclosed rated it higher on Mind-Experience ($M = 1.90$ $SE = .18$) than those participants who were asked factual questions by the robot ($M = 1.30$ $SE = .18$) $p = .02$ " (p.926). This finding highlights the impact of self-disclosure on the perceived quality of human-robot interactions, contributing to the broader discourse on CMC and self-disclosure.

Intersection of CMC and Pastoral Care

Throughout this chapter I have already explore the intersection in the literature between CMC and pastoral care, especially in the sections focused on *digital religion* and *modern approaches to pastoral care*. In this section I will first explore the broader impact of societal changes that impact both CMC and pastoral care as a way to understand their true intersection, especially as it relates to CMC's impact on time and space (Campbell, 2010). I will then focus on the impact of CMC within the various settings pastoral care occurs.

Time and Space

It is the ubiquitous affordance of asynchronous CMC that makes it possible for communication to happen without respect to time or space. Platforms such as WhatsApp, SMS or Facebook Messenger make it possible for anyone with access to a smartphone to send and receive text, image, audio, and video messages that will be appropriated by recipients who do not share the same space as the sender and may engage with the content at a later time. Thus, time and space have been reordered to accommodate a new standard of convenience.

The near immediate transfer of information and symbolic content over vast distances often leads to a cultural tension. This tension is pointed out by Castells who created a distinction between the *space of places*, where people live, and the *space of flows*, which is the new perception of the world for those who make constant use of mediated communication in the new networked societies. For Castells, "A place is a locale whose form, function, and meaning are self-contained within the boundaries of physical contiguity" (2010). Meanwhile, a space of flows is the system of interconnectedness between locales. This interconnectedness has created a higher layer of abstraction to our social construct which has fuelled the globalisation project by reshaping our identity beyond geographic boundaries. In other words, new generations who

engage with mediated content are less likely to be connected to the traditions of their locale and much more likely to consider themselves as global citizens. Castell goes further:

“There follows a structural schizophrenia between two spatial logics that threatens to break down communication channels in society. The dominant tendency is toward a horizon of networked, ahistorical space of flows, aiming at imposing its logic over scattered, segmented places, increasingly unrelated to each other, less and less able to share cultural codes. Unless cultural, political, *and physical* bridges are deliberately built between these two forms of space, we may be heading toward life in parallel universes whose times cannot meet because they are warped into different dimensions of a social hyperspace.” (Castells, 2010, p.459)

The recent rise of nationalism has led to a polarisation of society, with some advocating for strong borders and others for global openness. This tension is amplified by the appropriation of mediated content from outside one's immediate locale. Moreover, mass urban migration over the last century has necessitated the constant building of new relationships and the loss of old ones (Williams, 1981). Social media platforms have grown to meet the need for connection outside of time and space constraints (Wei and Gao, 2017).

Pastoral care has also been affected by mass urban migration. Traditionally, Christian clergy and laity provided care in the context of a community that knew each other for decades. However, in the last 50 years, urban migration and residential mobility have changed this dynamic. Church members now live far from the church building, inhibiting lay-led pastoral care and reshaping clergy methodology. Secularisation has also contributed to the diminishing of pastoral care to the non-attending community. This has led to the growth of digital pastoral care, with churches using social media platforms to provide care to anyone seeking help. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this process, with millions of churches moving online (Hathaway, 2020).

Pastoral Care Settings

The literature that investigates CMC in pastoral care is largely focused on settings where pastoral care occurs. I will concentrate my analysis through each role carried out by pastoral care providers.

Chaplains

The increasing integration of technology into healthcare has significantly impacted the role of chaplains in clinical settings, a trend accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the most pertinent challenges highlighted is the difficulty of maintaining pastoral closeness amid physical distancing measures and the use of personal protective equipment (Byrne and Nuzum, 2020). Virtual technology, especially video-call platforms, has emerged as a viable means to overcome these barriers. The deployment of such technology in an Irish hospital showed a beneficial impact on pastoral care, particularly in enhancing face-to-face communication and reducing feelings of depersonalisation and isolation among patients. This sentiment is echoed by Fontenot (2022), who investigates the broader application of telehealth technology in spiritual care within the clinical environment. Fontenot describes an intervention at Methodist Sugarland Hospital where chaplains received training on video conferencing technology, subsequently equipping each patient room with iPads for this purpose. Most patients responded positively to virtual visits, perceiving them as effective in fulfilling their spiritual needs (Fontenot, 2022).

Both studies corroborate the idea that technology can adequately complement traditional forms of pastoral care without necessarily replacing the unique value of physical presence. However, it's crucial to underline that while these platforms offer a semblance of interpersonal connection, both Byrne and Nuzum (2020) and Fontenot (2022) agree that the irreplaceable value of physical presence in pastoral care must not be overlooked. Technology serves to

augment the scope of pastoral care, especially in restrictive or isolating circumstances, but does not diminish the significance of physical interactions.

Transitioning the scope to a broader U.S. healthcare context, Winiger (2022) examines the integration of telechaplancy in three different healthcare settings, emphasising its transformative impact on how chaplains operate. Notably, telechaplancy affords improved access for rural populations and enables chaplains to meet patients within the comfort of their homes. This modality of pastoral care necessitates new skill sets for chaplains and modifies the nature of their encounters with patients, which become shorter, and more issue focused. Nevertheless, the technology also facilitates the establishment of longer-term relationships and deepens the sense of connection between chaplains and patients.

While these studies exhibit a consensus on the potential advantages of integrating technology into pastoral care, they also uniformly recognise the emergence of new challenges. Regulatory issues, economic concerns, and changing core competencies are among the obstacles that chaplains face in fully embracing telechaplancy (Winiger, 2022). Fontenot (2022) emphasises the importance of informed patient consent and addresses issues related to technology, privacy, and scheduling that must be considered for successful technological integration. Byrne and Nuzum (2020) similarly underscore the continued importance of maintaining physical presence despite the availability of technology as a tool for communication.

Counsellors

The discourse on online counselling, especially via instant messaging, reveals both common themes and differences. Young people often see online counselling as a safer, less emotionally revealing option compared to in-person or phone counselling, as highlighted by King et al., (2006) and Ersahin and Hanley (2017). The textual nature of online interactions adds a layer of protection, reducing the emotional vulnerability typically associated with verbal or

face-to-face sessions. However, this form of communication complicates the expression of emotional subtleties, presenting challenges for both counsellors and clients (King, Bambling, Lloyd, Gomurra, S L Smith, et al., 2006). This situation illustrates an ongoing debate in the literature about the benefits and limitations of text-based counselling.

Similarly, Ersahin and Hanley (2017) amplify the prospect of online counselling as a service capable of effectively supporting the social and emotional needs of young people aged between 11 and 25 years, particularly within educational settings. They outline four key themes that provide a nuanced view of the online counselling landscape, among them the importance of creating safe and youth-friendly environments, characteristics of online clients, in-session processes, and session alliance and outcome. Although both Ersahin and Hanley (2017) and King et al., (2006) are optimistic about the emotional safety of online counselling, Ersahin and Hanley introduce a cautionary note: educational providers must exercise discretion to ensure that online counselling services adhere to professional standards and cater to the specific needs of the youth, thereby not treating online platforms as a one-size-fits-all solution. The intricate in-session processes and the dynamics of the client-counsellor relationship are also far from straightforward and warrant further investigation.

Adding another layer to the ongoing discussion is the relatively recent study by Situmorang (2020), which posits that online counselling has proven to be an indispensable mental health resource during the COVID-19 outbreak. Situmorang's work corroborates earlier findings about the effectiveness, accessibility, affordability, and anonymity of online counselling and addresses its pertinence in the context of a global pandemic. However, Situmorang introduces another key point that has not been extensively covered in previous works: the need for specialised training and technical skills for counsellors to effectively navigate the intricacies

of online platforms. This resonates with Ersahin and Hanley's concerns about adhering to professional standards but broadens the discourse to include technological competencies and the ethical considerations that are unique to the online setting.

Lastly, a recent protocol by Tibbs et al., (2022) for a systematic review aims to examine online synchronous chat counselling with a comprehensive lens, focusing on design features, acceptance, effectiveness, and therapeutic processes. This initiative to systematically analyse and synthesise empirical findings in the field represents an acknowledgment that while much has been discovered, more remains to be understood. Tibbs et al., specifically highlight the need for patient and public involvement in the research process, indicating a shift towards co-creating knowledge and thereby democratising the field further.

Pastors and Priests

In the contemporary pastoral landscape, the burgeoning influence of digital media platforms on religious practices and pastoral care is inescapable. Whether one attributes this shift to the digitisation of society or emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the pattern of pastoral practices adapting to online modes is increasingly prevalent. The crux of this development lies in the ambivalent impact of social media and online platforms on human well-being, spirituality, and pastoral care. Gorrell (2018a) articulates this tension by acknowledging both the positive and detrimental aspects of social media on spiritual lives. While social media platforms enable connection, learning, and inspiration, they can also engender a dissociation between online and offline identities, potentially giving rise to harmful emotional and relational outcomes. A nuanced understanding of this duality is essential for spiritual care practitioners to adequately address both the positive and negative experiences of their congregants in an increasingly digitalised world.

This adaptation to digital platforms is not confined to one locale but has been observed globally, including in regions with specific challenges. A case in point is the study by GM, Israel, and Naidoo (2021) that focuses on how pastors in South Africa made a calculated shift to online platforms such as Zoom, YouTube, and social media during the pandemic. Despite infrastructural challenges like limited internet connectivity and financial constraints, the church could still offer comfort, spiritual guidance, and emotional support to their flock, especially those grieving from the loss of loved ones due to COVID-19. In using technology, pastors leveraged it to reach a wider demographic and inspire governmental partnerships with faith-based organisations for societal impact, rather than just as a stopgap measure.

While the shift to digital pastoral care has been largely reactive to the COVID-19 crisis, it is important to note that it has also been a crucible for innovation and rethinking traditional modes of religious engagement and spiritual guidance. Abraham et al., (2022) explore this by discussing alternative methods such as online media technology and discipleship strategies through familial settings. The study suggests that churches should be agile in adapting to seismic changes in the pastoral landscape, focusing on both conventional religious rituals and the spiritual and emotional well-being of their congregation. Their research underscores the need for a multi-generational approach, emphasising the inclusion of younger cohorts in ministry and the value of extending pastoral reach to non-churchgoers via online platforms.

While the adoption of digital platforms presents numerous opportunities for pastoral care, it's not without its unique set of challenges. Afolaranmi (2022) argues that obstacles like irregular electricity supply, limited internet access, internet network failures, and even the rampant spread of fake news are substantial barriers to the sustainable development of digital pastoral care. Solutions such as changing negative perceptions about social media, educating

pastors and congregants on technology, and integrating information and communication technology experts into pastoral strategies were proposed as remedies to these challenges.

Moreover, the trend toward digitisation in pastoral care isn't isolated to Christian congregations but has been observed in other religious traditions as well. Olga (2021) examines this in the context of the Russian Orthodox Church, highlighting how websites aimed at direct communication with priests are flourishing. This transition is perceived as a strategy to adapt to modern communication avenues and as a response to a communication crisis within the Church itself.

Bryson, Andres, and Davies (2020) introduce an intriguing concept of 'intersacred spaces', emerging from the blending of the sacred and secular due to the rapid transition to online services. This blending extends beyond mere geographic and spatial considerations and calls for an integrated theological and geographic discourse on the meaning of 'place' and 'space' in the modern era.

Other Pastoral Care Contexts

Zwart et al., (2000) assesses the efficacy of technology in pastoral settings by exploring how lay-led telephone-based interventions can amplify interpersonal support and spiritual well-being within Christian communities. This avenue is intriguing because it suggests a democratisation of care within religious institutions by involving laypersons in pastoral activities. Moreover, the marked improvement in the spiritual well-being of participants compared to a control group indicates that technology-based interventions have the potential to be more than mere stopgaps; they could be integrated parts of a new pastoral care paradigm. This conversation naturally leads to Hogue's (2000) concerns about the encroachment of technology into spirituality and the human psyche. Hogue raises valid questions regarding the transformation of humans into "techno sapiens" a shift that while promising to alleviate suffering also threatens

to undermine human attributes such as attentional control, relational intelligence, and contemplative awareness. While Zwart et al., (2000) point to the constructive uses of technology in pastoral care, Hogue's (2020) caution suggests that we cannot overlook the existential challenges posed by this intersection. To navigate these pitfalls, Hogue proposes a multi-faceted approach that includes regular meditation and theological reflection to maintain a balanced human-technological ecology, particularly emphasising the potential role of spirituality in negotiating the complex terrain of technology adoption.

Advancing further into the domain of technology's role in pastoral care, the theological dimensions come into focus through Proudfoot's (2023) exploration. Proudfoot debates the viability of artificial intelligence in pastoral contexts by discussing the "I-Thou" relationship, a cornerstone of pastoral interactions. While AI may not have a relationship with a higher spiritual power, the author contends that it could potentially facilitate meaningful encounters with humans, thereby somewhat compensating for its limitations such as lack of embodiment or divinely inspired consciousness. This viewpoint adds a nuanced layer to Hogue's (2020) apprehensions about techno-sapien transformations by suggesting that, when carefully considered, technology could complement human pastoral efforts without entirely replacing the unique qualities that humans bring to spiritual care. However, both Proudfoot (2023) and Hogue (2020) seem to agree on the need for a careful, reflective integration of digital technologies into pastoral care practices.

Campbell (2010) notes the diverse responses to media based on differing traditions and practices, reflecting the importance of considering the specific characteristics and lived experiences of religious groups when examining media use: "This varying sense of boundaries and obligations means that religious faith traditions are unlikely to have a monolithic or unified

response to a given media. Rather, responses are negotiated and dictated by the life patterns of the specific group to which religious believers belong...it becomes important to consider not only the tradition a religious community comes from but also the characteristics and lived practice of the specific group when reflecting on media use” (p.19).

Lastly, Saptorini et al., (2022) offer a unique perspective by focusing on the pastoral care of missionaries in the era of pandemics and digital transformations. Their study emphasises the need for utilising digital tools for virtual pastoral care, particularly underlining the importance of a sending church's comprehensive support in the spiritual, emotional, and financial dimensions. This aligns with Zwart et al.'s, (2000) earlier arguments for broadening the scope of pastoral care by involving more laypersons and using technology to supplement traditional approaches. Saptorini et al., (2022) further elaborate on a structured approach to implementing virtual pastoral care systems, thus providing a more actionable framework compared to Zwart et al.'s, (2000) focus on proving efficacy. Their work also indirectly resonates with Hogue's (2020) and Proudfoot's (2023) concerns by highlighting the need to adapt and evolve with the ongoing digital transformation but within the boundaries of theological and existential considerations.

Intersection of Self-disclosure and Pastoral Care

In examining the intersection of self-disclosure and pastoral care, I will explore many works that offer compelling viewpoints on the subject. Chege and Obrempong (2021) suggest that self-disclosure is pivotal for fostering healthy interpersonal relationships within the church context, thereby advocating for trust and confidentiality as essential elements. This resonates with Walsh et al., (2003) who argue that the quality of the supervisory relationship, notably mutuality, significantly influences self-disclosure among counsellor trainees. The correlation both studies draw between healthy relationships and self-disclosure appears to lay the

groundwork for a broader understanding of how relational dynamics within pastoral settings can either inhibit or facilitate self-disclosure. While both sets of researchers appreciate the role of self-disclosure in relational health, they differ in context: one situated in the church and the other in clinical pastoral education. However, both studies explore how relational integrity may lead to increased self-disclosure. Chege and Obrempong's (2021) focus on trust as an enabler is remarkably akin to Walsh et al.'s emphasis on the significance of a mutual supervisory relationship, reinforcing the thesis that relationships framed by trust or mutual respect are more conducive to self-disclosure.

Conversely, Dutton and Sotardi (2023) present a different angle by examining the stressful impact of self-disclosure on educators during the COVID-19 pandemic, suggesting that support structures are needed to mitigate the adverse effects. This work presents self-disclosure as a potential source of emotional and psychological strain for the recipient, in this case, educators, as well as a beneficial act. The study diverges from Chege and Obrempong (2021) and Walsh et al., (2003) by implicating self-disclosure as potentially burdensome, a perspective that enriches our understanding by introducing the psychological costs involved, thereby complicating the overwhelmingly positive portrayal of self-disclosure in pastoral contexts.

Salwen et al., (2017) introduce yet another layer by revealing that self-disclosure flexibility and spiritual well-being do not necessarily influence evangelical seminary students' attitudes towards seeking professional help. This study diverges from the previous literature by examining how self-disclosure intersects with attitudes towards professional psychological aid, thereby underlining that self-disclosure is not a one-size-fits-all solution in pastoral care. Like Dutton and Sotardi (2023), Salwen et al., (2017) also suggest that the supportive structures surrounding self-disclosure practices require further scrutiny.

Morgan (2010) provides an essential framework for the conversation by dissecting the ethical, professional, and structural challenges associated with maintaining confidentiality in pastoral care. While previous studies like those of Chege and Obrempong (2021) and Walsh et al., (2003) casually cite trust and confidentiality as enablers of self-disclosure, Morgan's work analyses the complexities surrounding these concepts. Like Dutton and Sotardi (2023), Morgan also focuses on the burdens of those on the receiving end of self-disclosure but approaches it from a theological and ethical standpoint (Morgan, 2010). This study raises imperative ethical considerations and offers a theological foundation for confidentiality, which serves as an enabler and as a burden in self-disclosure within pastoral care.

Intersection of CMC, Self-disclosure, and Pastoral Care

Despite the increasing volume of literature in the areas of CMC, self-disclosure, and pastoral care, there is little to no research on the intersection of these three areas. This void has real-world implications for pastoral caregivers who increasingly rely on digital communication platforms, as well as for individuals seeking a confidential environment to share personal matters, beyond academic concerns. The absence of this specialised research is what points the direction of my work. My aim is to acknowledge and comprehensively explore this intersection, providing a nuanced understanding of how instant messaging affects self-disclosure in pastoral care settings. Therefore, in the next chapter I will document how my research design has contributed to scholarly knowledge in the intersection of instant messaging, self-disclosure, and pastoral care.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In the previous chapter I explored the literature on CMC, self-disclosure, and pastoral care to discover a knowledge gap at the intersection of these three areas. This gap has real-world repercussions for pastoral caregivers and those seeking care, beyond being a theoretical void. My research aims to bridge this gap by investigating the perception of pastors on how instant messaging platforms influence the dynamics of self-disclosure within pastoral care settings, particularly within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Addressing these questions requires a clearly defined set of research questions and an appropriately designed methodology to ensure the study's rigour and validity.

In this chapter I will document my research design, starting with my research questions, which will guide the research strategy. I will then clarify my methodological choices and the underlying theories, providing a rationale for each decision. My focus will then shift to the practical implementation of the study, including sampling methods, interview procedures, and strategies. Finally, I will analyse the reliability and validity aspects of my research, alongside the ethical considerations integral to maintaining academic integrity and adhering to ethical standards. Subsequently, in chapter four, I will detail the application of my research design in the collection and analysis of data, documenting the practical execution of the theoretical framework established in this chapter.

Research Questions

Self-disclosure is a crucial component of pastoral care, as individuals must openly convey their life circumstances for meaningful pastoral care to occur. This study focuses on the perspectives and reported experiences of those providing pastoral care in the Seventh-day

Adventist Church, particularly their attitudes towards digital communication platforms and how they perceive these platforms to affect self-disclosure. The research aims can be summarised by the following questions:

- 1) How do pastoral care providers perceive the effect of instant messaging in encouraging or discouraging self-disclosure?
- 2) What ethical considerations do pastoral care providers perceive when utilising data-driven, commercial platforms for pastoral care?

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative approach to investigate the perceptions and experiences of pastoral care providers in the Seventh-day Adventist Church regarding digital communication platforms, particularly instant messaging. The research design is guided by three key considerations: the relationship to theory, epistemological stance, and ontological perspective (Bryman, 2016).

An inductive approach would be better suited to address the subjective nature of my research questions rather than testing existing theories through deductive reasoning (Marshall, 2011). Epistemologically, the study takes an interpretivist stance, recognizing that the social phenomena under investigation are subjective and context-specific (May, 2011). Ontologically, the research assumes a socially constructed reality, acknowledging that individuals' experiences and perceptions are inherently subjective (Marshall, 2011). While some studies in pastoral care have employed quantitative methodologies (Fritz, 2023; McCormick, 2023; Dickens, 2021), these approaches are not suitable for the current research aims. Quantitative methods are better suited for investigating specific variables or testing hypotheses, whereas this study seeks to

explore the nuanced perceptions and experiences of pastoral care providers regarding digital platforms.

My research questions are inherently context-dependent and subjective, making them better suited for a qualitative approach (Greener, 2011; May, 2011; Bryman, 2016). A qualitative strategy allows for an in-depth exploration of these complex and context-dependent areas, aligning with the study's focus on process ('how') rather than variable dependency ('what' or 'when') (Greener, 2011). This approach is consistent with the research's interpretive and subjective nature, in contrast to the positivist and objectivist foundations often associated with quantitative research (Marshall, 2011; Bryman, 2016).

Qualitative Methodology

In my search for an appropriate research method, I considered several qualitative approaches, including ethnography, phenomenology, narrative inquiry, qualitative case studies, basic qualitative research, heuristic inquiry, and hermeneutics (Daymon and Holloway, no date; Liamputtong, 2005; Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). I found ethnography unsuitable due to the sensitive nature of self-disclosure in pastoral care, where my presence could alter dynamics and impact data validity (Hine, 2000). Phenomenology, while excellent for exploring subjective experiences, would require a prohibitively large sample size for my study and may not provide the analytical depth needed to explore the ethical and practical considerations surrounding the use of digital platforms in pastoral care (Liamputtong, 2005; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). I ruled out narrative inquiry as it focuses on gathering life stories rather than understanding specific attitudes and perceptions toward digital communication platforms in the context of pastoral care (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

I also considered qualitative case studies but decided against them due to their limited generalizability (Taylor, 2016). Basic qualitative research lacked the rigour and structured methodology I sought (Creswell, 2007). While heuristic inquiry and hermeneutics offer rich investigative depth, I found they may not provide the practical implications crucial for my study (Bryant and Charmaz, 2012; Urquhart, 2012). Given the complexities surrounding the subject of self-disclosure in a digital environment, I determined that a more systematic approach like GT would be preferable.

I chose GT as the most suitable approach for my study as it aligns closely with my research questions and offers the flexibility and analytical rigour required for studying self-disclosure in digital pastoral care. GT satisfies key criteria such as credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness that I deemed essential for my research (Bryant and Charmaz, 2012; Urquhart, 2012). I appreciate how GT acknowledges the constructed realities of individuals and allows me to explore largely unmapped terrain, generating new concepts or theories that can give voice to the unique challenges and opportunities pastoral care providers face when engaging through instant messaging platforms (Hood, 2012; Urquhart, 2012). I find GT's adaptability particularly suitable for creating a theoretical framework that resonates with the experiences of pastoral care providers and has practical implications. This dual focus on process and results aligns with my objective to analyse the complexities of self-disclosure in digital pastoral care, beyond just documenting them (Bryant and Charmaz, 2012).

Several studies have effectively employed GT in areas related to pastoral care and self-disclosure, reinforcing my decision to use this methodology. Raffay (2016) used GT to investigate perceptions of Spiritual and Pastoral Care Services in the UK's NHS, demonstrating its ability to generate practical theoretical frameworks. Müller (2019) applied GT to explore

counselling psychologists' understanding of self-disclosure, showcasing its capacity to capture decision-making processes in care-giving roles. Townsend's (2011) extensive study on pastoral counsellors' descriptions of 'pastoral' care employed GT to propose a theory of pastoral identity, highlighting the context-sensitivity of pastoral interpretations. Nawabi (2004) utilized Constructivist GT to explore self-disclosure decisions among students with mood disorders, resulting in the "Lifting the Veil" theory. Lastly, Leow (2022) used CGT to investigate the adoption of mobile instant messaging in higher education. These studies collectively demonstrate GT's versatility in capturing complex social realities and generating applicable theoretical frameworks, validating my choice for exploring pastoral care within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Constructivist Grounded Theory

After considering the various approaches to GT, I find that CGT aligns exceptionally well with the specific demands and nuances of my research into the Seventh-day Adventist Church's pastoral care. This GT variation was first proposed by Charmaz (2014) and has been consistently used in social research over the last few years. The method allows for a rich, in-depth exploration into the complex emotional and ethical landscapes navigated by pastoral care providers and resonates with my research questions. One of the primary considerations in this choice is the high degree of contextual importance that CGT offers. Given the nuanced setting of pastoral care within a religious institution, this method allows me to analyse into the specific complexities of the church community. This aligns with CGT's orientation towards multiple realities, allowing for an expansive and inclusive understanding of the variegated perspectives involved in pastoral care.

Moreover, CGT emphasises researcher reflexivity, a crucial feature given the sensitive nature of self-disclosure in pastoral care. The reflexive nature of this approach allows me to employ my lens and worldview constructively in shaping the analysis. This is inextricably linked with the idea of the researcher as a practice-researcher. My role within the community enriches the data collection process and allows me to better understand and articulate the nuances involved, adding depth to the research. The reflexive approach of CGT thereby makes the research both a mirror reflecting realities and a prism refracting various angles and perspectives, capturing the nuanced essence of the subject matter (Charmaz, 2014).

CGT employs abductive reasoning, which opens a creative space for more imaginative interpretations and theoretical explanations (Walton, 2014). This is particularly important when dealing with a subject matter that involves subjective experiences and ethical considerations, where conventional logic might fail to encapsulate the complexities involved. Abductive reasoning thereby acts as a bridge connecting the practical orientation of pastoral care providers to the emerging theory. What makes CGT particularly apt for this research is its focus on process rather than just the result. This is crucial for understanding the dynamics of attitudes towards digital communication platforms in pastoral care. It aligns well with the research's goal to understand the 'what', the 'why', and the 'how' behind these sentiments and attitudes, making it a tool for understanding the complexities of the phenomena being studied. The intricate design and comprehensive nature of CGT provide a robust and fitting methodological framework for this study.

I find Nawabi's (2004) study and Leow's (2022) study to be particularly useful examples that underscore the value of using CGT in qualitative research. Nawabi (2004) focused on the experiences of undergraduate students with mood disorders, specifically how they navigate the

decision-making process around self-disclosure in a college environment. The study employs CGT to explore the nuances of these students' experiences, culminating in an emergent theory called "Lifting the Veil" which comprises categories like 'receiving diagnosis', 'constructing an illness identity', and the 'impact of stigma'. Leow (2022), on the other hand, explores the adoption and adaptation of mobile instant messaging applications, like WhatsApp, in higher education. Using CGT, Leow investigates the functional, cultural, and political factors that influence the use of these technologies, providing insights into how these applications are integrated into educational settings.

Both studies exemplify the strength of CGT as a qualitative research methodology capable of capturing the nature of human experiences within specific contexts. Nawabi's research illuminates the emotional and ethical landscapes navigated by students with mood disorders, whereas Leow's study sheds light on the complexities of adopting new technologies in educational settings. These studies validate my choice of CGT for exploring the nuanced settings of pastoral care within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, given that all three research endeavours require a contextual understanding of the phenomena at hand. They show that CGT's emphasis on researcher reflexivity and its capability to contribute to emergent theories make it an invaluable tool for qualitative inquiry across diverse subject matters.

In selecting CGT as my research method, I have tried to ensure my methodology adheres to the foundational principles of GT and does not deviate into Hood's Generic Inductive Qualitative Model (GIQM) (Hood, 2012). CGT is designed to generate a new theory through the process of systematic data collection and analysis. It emphasises the development of theoretical explanations that are 'grounded' in the data itself. To maintain this focus, I have rigorously followed the steps of GT methodology, including open coding, axial coding, and selective

coding. Unlike the GIQM, which allows for more flexibility in its approach and could potentially end in merely descriptive findings, GT mandates a systematic and iterative comparison of data throughout the research process. This iterative process ensures a constant interplay between data collection and analysis, allowing the emergent theory to be continually refined. While GIQM can be less demanding in terms of theoretical sampling and may not require the emergence of a theory at the end, GT is explicit in its aim to produce a well-constructed theoretical framework that explains the phenomena being studied. By adhering to these strict methodological guidelines, I ensure that the study remains true to the principles of GT and does not morph into a form of GIQM.

Research Methods

In the previous sections I have chosen a qualitative methodology for my research after analysing my research questions and their relationship to theory as well as the epistemological considerations and ontological perspectives that arise from them. I then chose GT after exploring the various qualitative research methods available and measured their potential efficacy in addressing my research questions. My next step was to select CGT as the most helpful GT variant in generating and analysing data for my research. In this section I will document my considerations about the best methods for generating data in the pursuit of addressing my research questions.

Having selected CGT and considering my research questions, I opted for semi-structured interviews with Adventist pastors as my data collection method (Marshall, 2011; Urquhart, 2012; Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). It is essential to clarify here that my study is not attempting to measure the objective impact of instant messaging on self-disclosure; rather, I am exploring the subjective interpretations and experiences of pastors in this context.

The choice for semi-structured interviews was made after careful consideration of alternative methods within the purview of CGT (Bryant and Charmaz, 2012; Patton, 2015; Bryman, 2016). For example, I could have used focus groups, ethnographic observations, or even content analysis of pastoral instant messaging exchanges. Focus groups could have fostered group dynamics that influenced individual pastors to conform to a shared viewpoint, hence diluting unique perceptions. Ethnographic observations, while rich in contextual data, could have been overly intrusive, especially given the sensitive nature of pastoral care. Observing real-time interactions could also raise substantial ethical issues. Content analysis of instant messaging exchanges would miss the subjective lived experiences and tacit understandings of pastors, which are crucial to my research questions.

The absence of a shared, established vocabulary around digital pastoral care further justifies my choice of semi-structured interviews. These interviews provide the flexibility needed to allow pastors to articulate their perspectives in their own terms, thus creating room for ‘ramblings’ that could reveal nuanced insights. Such flexibility is particularly vital for capturing the detailed, thick descriptions required for CGT analysis. Additionally, the evolving and iterative nature of CGT suggests that more than one interview per participant might be needed for clarification or further exploration, something that more structured interview formats or other methods would not easily accommodate (Charmaz, 2014).

Sampling

The significant global reach of the Adventist Church ensured that my findings would have a broad applicability and potential impact, enabling the collection of a diverse and rich set of data beneficial for GT development. The Adventist Church has been providing pastoral care for over a century while always encouraging their pastors to use every tool available to connect

with their members to offer pastoral care. This provides a rich historical context against which the modern shifts toward digital pastoral care could be studied. The Adventist Church is among the main practitioners of large-scale, structured digital pastoral care, and its denominational leadership actively encourages local pastors to integrate digital platforms into their pastoral care practices. This made the Adventist Church an ideal candidate for investigating the nuanced complexities and opportunities that digital pastoral care offers.

I also considered the broader religious landscape, where pastoral care services can vary widely among different Christian denominations. By focusing on the Adventist Church, I was able to explore the specific theological and organisational frameworks unique to this denomination, which was conducive to a more detailed and nuanced exploration, consistent with CGT's emphasis on studying social phenomena in their specific contexts. Another fundamental tenet of CGT is the mutual construction of meaning between the researcher and participants. Given my history as a Seventh-day Adventist and 19 years as a pastor within the denomination, I had an existing rapport and shared understanding with potential participants that was invaluable in co-constructing nuanced understandings. This background allowed me to build a relationship in which both the researcher and participants contributed to shaping the emerging theory, in keeping with CGT's focus on comprehending human action in its social context (Charmaz, 2014).

I chose to focus on pastors rather than recipients of pastoral care for several compelling reasons that contributed to the richness and validity of my data. I could have also interviewed lay members of the church who offer pastoral care with minimal training. By centring the study on pastors, I was able to tap into a wellspring of varied experiences across multiple interactions and contexts. This is consistent with most pastoral care research (K A Bingaman, 2023; Jibiliza,

2021; Afolaranmi, 2022). Pastors are often trained professionals with a nuanced understanding of the theological and practical dimensions of pastoral care, making their perspectives invaluable for a comprehensive exploration of the impact of instant messaging on self-disclosure. Furthermore, their role involves long-term ministerial commitments, giving them a unique longitudinal perspective on the changing dynamics of communication in pastoral care. This vantage point proved instrumental in capturing broad trends and shifts, thereby adding depth to the emergent GT.

Focusing on pastors also had the advantage of creating a more controlled research environment. By eliminating the variable of recipients' personal idiosyncrasies, the study minimised confounding factors that could muddle the investigation. The experiences of care recipients could be influenced by myriad personal factors such as comfort with technology or emotional state at the time of care. Concentrating on pastors mitigated these variables, allowing for a focused and incisive inquiry into the key research questions. This strategic choice in participant selection enriched the data set and helped ensure a higher degree of focus and reliability in my findings.

Out of 20,924 Adventist pastors employed by the denomination (Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2021), I initially applied a two-layer sampling strategy, as outlined by Bryman (2016, p378), to select my participants. The first layer operated through an online application form, which Adventist pastors voluntarily filled out to apply for participation in my research. Affirmative consent was gathered at this stage, enhancing the transparency and ethical integrity of the research process. The data collected from these application forms was not analysed but served exclusively to facilitate the second layer of purposive sampling. Initially, the criteria for this sampling included being currently employed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a local

church pastor, fluency in English, having over five years of experience in face-to-face pastoral care, over two years of experience in digital pastoral care, and utilising instant messaging tools for digital pastoral care for more than two hours per week on average.

However, as the interviews progressed, it became apparent that local church pastors held the belief that effective pastoral care couldn't be exclusively digital. To investigate the validity of this perspective, I adapted my sampling criteria to include pastors who only offer digital pastoral care. This change allowed me to explore whether these digital-only pastors held similar beliefs, thus enriching the study, and aligning it more closely with the principles of theoretical sampling. In this way, the research design evolved, in keeping with the fluid and adaptive nature of CGT, into a hybrid sampling methodology that combined elements of both generic purposive criterion sampling and theoretical sampling. While the former ensured that the participants were initially chosen based on their potential to provide rich, detailed insights into the realm of Digital Pastoral Care, the latter allowed the study to evolve in response to emerging complexities, thereby facilitating a more robust theory development. This adaptability enabled me to construct a more comprehensive understanding of pastors' perceptions about the impact of instant messaging on self-disclosure in various pastoral care settings, including the increasingly prevalent hybrid models of both face-to-face and digital pastoral care.

Application Form

The online research application form was designed to collect initial information from Seventh-day Adventist pastors who were interested in participating in my research. The form begins by providing background information about me, detailing my affiliations with the Communication and Media Research Institute (CAMRI) at the University of Westminster and my role at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The form also details what they

can expect from the interview process and how their data will be handled from this form and the research interview data generated. Here is the full list of questions on the research application form:

1. Name
2. Email
3. Mobile Phone Number
4. Are you currently employed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church?
5. What is your experience as a local church pastor?
6. What is your experience offering digital pastoral care?
7. On average, how many hours per week do you spend offering digital pastoral care?
8. What platforms do you use in digital pastoral care?
9. English Language Skills
10. Captcha

The form ends with a CAPTCHA field to ensure that the applications are genuine, followed by a submit button to complete the application. The information gathered from this form provided the basis for a detailed multi-dimensional analysis, crucial for participant selection and the later stages of the research process.

Candidate Selection

Out of 107 Adventist pastors who applied through the research application form, seventy-three met the full initial criteria that required both face-to-face and digital pastoral care experience. To prioritise the interview schedule, I devised an order of priority based on multiple factors from the application data. These factors included the extent of experience in face-to-face and digital pastoral care, as indicated by the answers to questions five and six. Pastors with longer experience in both arenas were given precedence, as they could potentially offer richer, more nuanced perspectives. Furthermore, the time dedicated to digital pastoral care, gleaned from question seven, also factored into the prioritisation. Pastors who spent more time in online settings were assumed to have a more comprehensive understanding of the digital landscape, thereby providing more substantial insights into the research questions.

The platforms used for digital pastoral care, addressed in question eight, offered additional layers of granularity. Pastors who utilised multiple platforms were given priority, as their diverse toolset likely influenced their perspectives on self-disclosure and ethical considerations. Moreover, the fluency in English, as gauged by question nine, was crucial in ensuring the depth and clarity of the interviews. This multi-dimensional analysis of the application form data assisted in optimising the selection for the initial batch of interviews and played a vital role when adjusting the criteria to include pastors who offer digital pastoral care.

After conducting three series of interviews, including 20 with district pastors and 10 with digital pastors, I reached the point of theoretical data saturation which I will explore in the next chapter. To clarify, district pastors in the Seventh-day Adventist Church are responsible for multiple congregations within a designated geographical area, balancing both face-to-face and online modes of pastoral care. Digital pastors, conversely, engage exclusively in online pastoral settings. In line with data protection best practices, I have assigned pseudonyms for all district pastors starting with Pastor A and progressing alphabetically until Pastor T, and for digital pastors starting with Digital Pastor A to Digital Pastor I.

Interviewing

I conducted three series of interviews. The first series used an interview guide that focused on both face-to-face and digital pastoral care. The second series used the same interview guide to include the experience of digital pastors. With the development of my CGT, I conducted a third set of interviews based on a new interview guide addressing focused questions that helped validate my CGT. Utilising these well-crafted interview guides proved to be invaluable in conducting my semi-structured interviews. A primary advantage of both guides was a level of order and consistency to the interview process. Having a pre-set list of questions or topics

ensured that the same general areas were explored with each participant in each interview set. This consistency was essential for comparing the data collected across different interviews, directly contributing to the reliability and validity of my research (Bryman, 2016).

Simultaneously, the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for the flexibility to digress from the guide when it was beneficial. This feature was particularly useful in my research, where the focus was on pastors' perceptions of self-disclosure and ethical considerations in digital pastoral care. When the conversation naturally ventured into unanticipated yet relevant areas, the guide served less like a rigid structure and more like a navigational tool. This flexibility was integral for allowing new and unexpected concepts to emerge, especially when discussing complex and multi-faceted issues like the impact of instant messaging on self-disclosure or the ethical dimensions of using commercial platforms for pastoral care (Bryman, 2016).

Another key advantage in the design of my interview guide was the use of redundant language. While this is not a typical feature, it was vital in my context because digital pastoral care is an emerging field without an established vocabulary. Repeating questions in multiple ways made it more likely that the nuances of the interviewees' experiences and perceptions were captured (Bryman, 2016).

In my approach to data gathering, I intentionally abstained from using photographs, illustrations, or any other form of media during the interviews. This decision was guided by the rationale that the introduction of external media could distract from the central focus of the dialogue, thereby diluting the quality of the verbal data collected. Specifically, visual aids could have introduced a level of interpretation or subjectivity that might not align with the interviewee's personal experiences or perceptions, thus skewing the data (Greener, 2011).

Equally crucial in my interview strategy was the avoidance of leading questions, which can subtly prompt the interviewee to provide answers that align more with my preconceptions than with their authentic experiences (Marshall, 2011).

Another aspect of the interview design focused on the format and presentation of the questions. I structured them so that they would not resemble a test or examination. I sought to create an atmosphere that was more conversational than interrogative, as this approach generally elicits more open and sincere responses (Liamputtong, 2005). Language plays a pivotal role in any research setting, and I conducted the interviews in English. My fluency in the language allowed me to understand the nuances in the pastors' answers, thus enabling me to draw better insights and conclusions. The choice of language was also practical, as it eliminated the need for translation and the potential for semantic inaccuracies that can arise from it (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2015).

At the beginning of each interview, I took time to build rapport with the pastors. I shared the broader aims of my research and emphasised its significance for both the Adventist Church and as a contribution to the field of pastoral care in a more general sense. I found that this initial connection set a positive tone for the conversation and encouraged more candid responses. As each interview concluded, I allotted time for reflection and final comments. This end segment often resulted in new insights as it gave the participant a chance to mentally review the conversation and share any additional thoughts they may have initially overlooked (Marshall, 2011).

Interview Guide

Ultimately, the primary objective of every interview was to uncover the individual meanings and interpretations that pastors attach to their experiences in digital pastoral care. I

guided the conversation to explore these perspectives thoroughly, often circling back to earlier points or following up on answers to analyse into each topic. This cyclical approach to questioning ensured that all or most of the themes from the interview guide were covered, providing a comprehensive set of data that was rich in detail and scope (Greener, 2011).

Below is the first interview guide I used during my first two series of interviews:

1. Ministry

- *Questions like:* Tell me about your previous and current pastoral assignments. What are the key characteristics of the places where you've worked, such as number of churches and the demographic of the members?

2. Views of Pastoral Care

- *Questions like:* What is your understanding of pastoral care? Can you give examples of activities you consider as pastoral care?

3. Face-to-Face Practices

- *Questions like:* Discuss 1-3 of the most important pastoral care activities you perform face-to-face. What are the typical settings, and how often do these activities happen?

4. Online Practices

- *Questions like:* Discuss 1-3 of the most important pastoral care activities you perform online. Which platforms do you prefer, and what is the nature of the information shared?

5. Commercial Platforms

- *Questions like:* Have you considered the ethical aspects of using commercial platforms for pastoral care? How does this understanding affect your approach?

6. Future of Pastoral Care

- *Questions like:* How do you see the future of pastoral care, both face-to-face and online?

7. Additional Thoughts

- *Questions like:* Do you have any other thoughts or considerations you'd like to share about pastoral care?

Below is the second interview guide I used in my third series of interviews.

Questions related to the Pastoral Care Provider

1. Relationship to Technology

- *Questions like:* How has your relationship with technology evolved over the course of your ministry? Can you share specific instances where technology significantly impacted your pastoral care delivery?

2. Digital Pastoral Care Skills

- *Questions like:* Describe the online listening skills you find most effective when providing pastoral care. How do you build trust online with members of your congregation?

3. Language Proficiency Online

- *Questions like:* How do you adjust your communication style when providing pastoral care online compared to face-to-face interactions? Share any challenges you've faced with language or communication in online pastoral care and how you've overcome them.

4. The Personality of the Pastoral Care Provider

- *Questions like:* Reflecting on personality traits, which do you think most significantly impacts a pastor's ability to provide care digitally, and why? How does your personality influence your approach to digital pastoral care?

5. Beliefs: Theological and Ethical Framework

- *Questions like:* How does your theological framework guide your approach to digital pastoral care? Can you discuss any ethical dilemmas you've encountered in digital pastoral care and how you addressed them?

Questions related to the Pastoral Care Recipient

1. Relationship to Technology

- *Questions like:* How do you perceive the impact of technology on your congregation's willingness to engage in digital pastoral care? Share experiences where technology either facilitated or hindered effective pastoral care.

2. Access and Age

- *Questions like:* How do age and access to technology affect a member's engagement in digital pastoral care? Have you noticed differences in the way different age groups respond to online pastoral care?

3. Familiarity with Technology

- *Questions like:* How does a member's familiarity with technology influence their interaction with digital pastoral care? Are there any specific programmes or initiatives your church has implemented to increase digital literacy among your members?

4. Emotional State and Past Trauma

- *Questions like:* How do you approach pastoral care for individuals with varying emotional states or past trauma in a digital context? Share examples where digital pastoral care has been particularly effective or challenging for individuals with specific emotional needs.

5. Relationship to Pastor and Mental Health

- *Questions like:* How does the existing relationship between you and your members influence digital interactions, especially in the context of pastoral care? How do you address mental health issues in your digital pastoral care practices?

6. Content and Urgency

- *Questions like:* Discuss how the content and urgency of a member's concern influence the mode of pastoral care you choose (digital vs. face-to-face). How do you prioritise pastoral care needs in a digital environment?

7. Personality Traits

- *Questions like:* How do you see personality traits influencing a member's propensity to engage in digital pastoral care? How do you tailor your digital pastoral care approach to accommodate different personality types?
- 8. **Beliefs: Theological and Ethical Framework**
 - *Questions like:* How do members' theological and ethical views on technology impact their participation in digital pastoral care? Are there concerns or discussions within your congregation about the ethical implications of digital pastoral care?

Questions related to the Pastoral Care Context:

1. Technological Environment

- *Questions like:* How do you perceive the role of technological innovation in shaping the pastoral care environment, particularly in relation to self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care? Share examples of how technological surveillance has impacted your approach to providing pastoral care online.

2. Sponsoring Institution

- *Questions like:* How does the institutional context of your church or organisation influence the provision of digital pastoral care? In what ways does the training provided by your institution prepare you for digital pastoral care? How does your institution support digital pastoral care initiatives? Are there policies in place that facilitate or hinder your ability to provide care digitally?

Selecting the appropriate setting for interviews was crucial for the integrity and quality of the data collected. After considering various options, I chose to conduct all interviews exclusively via Zoom, a video meeting technology. This decision was primarily driven by the need to access a global pool of participants without the logistical and financial constraints that come with travel. Using Zoom for interviews provided a practical solution to challenges and ensured gathering rich, nuanced data from diverse locations. I found that Zoom was an effective platform for facilitating meaningful conversations, and it allowed me to capture the depth of information required to understand how instant messaging impacts self-disclosure in the context of pastoral care. Therefore, Zoom became the sole platform for conducting all interviews, proving instrumental in producing the rich and comprehensive data set that underpins this research.

Reliability and Validity

In assessing the reliability and validity of any qualitative research, it's crucial to explore different frameworks that specifically cater to the nuances of qualitative methodologies. As I navigated the complex intersection of CMC, self-disclosure, and pastoral care within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I found it necessary to weigh different models of reliability and validity applicable to my research design, especially as it applies to CGT.

LaCompte and Goetz (1982) offered one of the earliest frameworks for evaluating the reliability and validity of qualitative research. They adapted the traditional notions of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity to fit the context of qualitative studies. Their model would entail ensuring that my findings are consistent and can be tracked back to my data (reliability), that my interpretations match the realities of my participants (internal validity), and that my findings can be generalised to some extent (external validity). Though their model provides a foundational approach, it still hinges on traditional positivist criteria that may not fully encapsulate the depth and nuance that qualitative research, especially CGT, can offer. Given my focus on subjective experiences and context-specific phenomena, LaCompte and Goetz's model might be too limiting.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) and later Guba and Lincoln (1994) offer an alternative paradigm known as trustworthiness, which includes criteria like credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility parallels the traditional concept of internal validity but is enriched by activities like member checking, where I'd return to my participants to validate my findings. Transferability relates to external validity but acknowledges that the researcher cannot specify the transferability of the findings; the readers or users do. Dependability is akin to reliability and entails a thorough methodological description, allowing future research to follow

the same tracks. Confirmability relates to objectivity and is ensured by maintaining a clear record of the steps taken, from data collection to interpretation.

More recently, Tracy (2010) offered an eight “Big-Tent” criterion for excellent qualitative research that I found to be most in tune with the ethos of my research. Tracy’s framework includes worthy topic, rich rigour, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence. Given my focus on a scarcely researched yet socially significant issue involving the intersectionality of technology and pastoral care, my topic aligns with Tracy’s criteria for being “worthy”. The rich rigour is evident in the adaptive methodological design, including sampling strategies, interview guide construction, and the recursive nature of GT. Sincerity and credibility are inherent in my research as it uses a co-constructive approach, acknowledging both my role and that of the pastors in shaping the data. This is especially relevant given that I, as a practice-researcher within the Adventist community, already have an intrinsic understanding of the pastoral context. The resonance aspect is achieved through the applicability of my findings to real-world pastoral settings, especially those involving digital platforms. Significant contributions emerge both theoretically, through the generation of new theories around digital pastoral care, and practically, by offering insights that the Seventh-day Adventist Church can integrate into its pastoral frameworks. Ethically, the research upholds confidentiality and gains informed consent, aligning with both ethical and academic guidelines. Finally, meaningful coherence is evident as all aspects of my research connect logically, offering a comprehensive exploration of the research questions.

Tracy’s (2010) framework allows me to substantiate why my research methodology and findings can be considered both reliable and valid, or more aptly, trustworthy. While the models by LeCompte and Goetz (1982) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) provide excellent backdrops for

understanding qualitative reliability and validity, Tracy's multi-faceted approach to assessing the quality of qualitative research offers a more holistic evaluation, particularly apt for complex, context-specific, and co-constructed studies like mine (Tracy, 2010).

Ethical Analysis

Every social research must go through a careful ethical scrutiny of the methodology involved in producing and analysing data. This has become an increasing concern for universities and other research focused organisations. Questionable ethical research standards will produce questionable data and severely limit the utility and trustworthiness of that research. The public and private sectors have established careful ethical guidelines so as not to sponsor unethical research. Bryman (2016, p125) references the ethical framework offered by Diener and Crandall (1978) who propose four main issues to be analysed in social research: harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy and deception. In this research, I have carefully followed the *Code of Practice Governing the Ethical Conduct of Research* (University of Westminster, 2021) and the *Research Ethics Guidance* (Social Research Association, 2021) as both documents address these four issues as they apply to my research.

Considering the University of Westminster's Code of Practice Governing the Ethical Conduct of Research, my research methodology aligns closely with the stipulated guidelines. My study falls under Class 1 as it has minimal ethical implications to me or the research participants. I have carefully followed the code's emphasis on obtaining valid consent, providing accurate information, managing health and safety, and protecting the research participants' data.

The code addresses the responsibilities of researchers, supervisors, and heads of colleges and schools, focusing on promoting research integrity and responsible conduct. As a researcher, I have been transparent about the nature of my study to minimise potential harm to participants.

This aligns with the code's goals of ensuring ethical and responsible research conduct, which underscores the importance of protecting participant rights and well-being. I also considered the potential professional, reputational, and financial risks to participants. My current position as the Associate Director of Communication for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists could pose professional, reputational, and financial risks to participants as they are employed by local legal entities connected to the General Conference. These risks have been mitigated in two ways. Firstly, by including very transparent language in the online application form as to the nature of my research, the interview process, what is expected of participants, and how their data has been collected, stored, analysed, and published. Secondly, I have collected and stored participants' data using industry standard encryption technology (JotForm Inc, 2022) combined with anonymisation techniques and all other requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (Kotsios et al., 2019).

CHAPTER 4

APPLIED RESEARCH

In this chapter I will explore the methodology used for data collection and analysis in line with the CGT design described in chapter three. I will construct this chapter as a narrative of my research process which will include detailed examples and the logical progression from coding the interviews to a summarised description of my CGT of self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care. For more information about the pastors I interviewed, please refer to appendix A. For a timeline of the interview and coding analysis, please refer to appendix B. For examples of interview transcripts, please refer to appendix C and appendix D. In the subsequent chapters I will explore in more detail the categories that make up my CGT and directly influence self-disclosure and the practice of hybrid pastoral care based on the perceptions of the pastors I interviewed.

Line-by-Line Coding

I started by interviewing the first three pastors, Pastor A, Pastor B, and Pastor C, and generating codes through a process commonly known as “line-by-line coding”. Incorporated within the open-coding analysis were some existing memos I had written during the interviews. Below is a table with the memos for the focused codes constructed from the first three interviews. One of the columns contains the information of “Where code was first encountered”. This helped me keep track of new information with each interview which was useful when a new code emerged, prompting me to revisit previous interviews for a comprehensive understanding of how each new insight connected with earlier analyses. Furthermore, in this initial phase, I diligently recorded memos to document connections with preceding interviews.

Table 1. Interview Codes and Memos: Interviews 1-3

Code #	GT Codes	Where was Code First Encountered	Memos of Interview with Pastor A	Memos of Interview with Pastor B	Memos of Interview with Pastor C
1	Navigating Care Environments	Pastor A	Pastor A functions as a hospital chaplain, interacting with patients and staff.	Pastor focuses on using WhatsApp groups for global pastoral care.	Pastor provides spiritual care to Southeast-Asian workers in Dubai labour camps.
2	Constructing Caregiver Relationships	Pastor A	Pastor A tailors pastoral care approach based on unique challenges of different groups.	Pastor maintains traditional caregiver role in digital spaces like WhatsApp.	Home visits by pastor increase subsequent church attendance.
3	Labelling Pastoral Interactions	Pastor A	Pastor uses 'pastoral visits' for caregiving, impacting how care is delivered and received.	Pastor redefines pastoral visits to include online group interactions.	Pastor's visits include sharing, singing, praying, and food.
4	Defining Visit Purposes	Pastor A	Pastor's visits focus on addressing emotional, spiritual needs and guiding individuals to find solutions.		Visits build trust, encourage sharing struggles, and promote church attendance.
5	Fostering Self-Disclosure	Pastor A	Pastor employs techniques to promote self-disclosure, focusing on non-verbal cues and probing questions.		Pastor promotes in-person communication for self-disclosure, citing limited online openness.
6	Responding to Self-Disclosure	Pastor A	Pastor A empowers individuals by guiding them to find their own solutions.		Pastor provides comfort, relevant scriptures, and prayers following self-disclosures.
7	Initiating Digital Outreach	Pastor A	Pastor uses proactive digital outreach for pastoral care on social media.		Pastor utilises WhatsApp for sharing prayers, comfort, and Bible passages.
8	Selecting Digital Platforms	Pastor A	Pastor uses digital platforms for pastoral care, influencing engagement and personal disclosure.	Pastor adeptly uses various digital platforms for flexible pastoral care.	Primarily uses WhatsApp for sharing and Zoom for group meetings.
9	Prioritising Listening	Pastor A	Pastor emphasises importance of listening in both in-person and digital pastoral visits.		Pastoral visits should prioritise listening to allow members to express themselves.

Code #	GT Codes	Where was Code First Encountered	Memos of Interview with Pastor A	Memos of Interview with Pastor B	Memos of Interview with Pastor C
10	Assessing Digital Self-Disclosure	Pastor A	Online anonymity encourages self-disclosure, influenced by individual's age.	Pastor disagrees with peer, finds face-to-face self-disclosure easier than online.	More self-disclosure in face-to-face interactions than digital ones.
11	Expanding Digital Accessibility	Pastor A	Digital pastoral care becomes more accessible and widespread due to decreasing technology costs.	Pastor anticipates continued future presence of digital pastoral care.	Pastor prefers personal matters handled through face-to-face interactions over digital care.
12	Contemplating Ethical Implications	Pastor A	Pastor A sees no ethical issues in his pastoral care, suggesting strong ethics or lack of reflection.	Pastor B overlooks ethical aspects of digital pastoral care and self-disclosure.	Recognises ethical issues in online sharing, not linked to commercial platforms.
13	Comparing Self-Disclosure Mediums	Pastor B		Pastor disagrees with peer, sees self-disclosure starting offline then moving online.	Prefers in-person communication for self-disclosure over online interactions.
14	Modulating Emotional Display	Pastor B	Pastor thinks visible emotions may hinder people's willingness to share.	Pastor B believes people prefer showing their emotions, unlike Pastor A's view.	
15	Envisioning Pastoral Care's Future	Pastor B	Tech usage and availability will continue to increase.	Pastor B predicts continued importance of digital platforms in future pastoral care.	
16	Adapting to Digital Transformation	Pastor B		Pastor recognises inevitable move to digital platforms in life, including pastoral care.	Utilises digital platforms for various pastoral care tasks.
17	Navigating Online Training Needs	Pastor B		Pastor promotes formal training in digital pastoral care due to current lack.	Trained in digital outreach, specifically for youth engagement.
18	Grappling with Governmental Oversight	Pastor C			Worries about government surveillance affecting online pastoral discussions.
19	Addressing Privacy Concerns	Pastor C			Members express fear over third-party access to online chats.
20	Acknowledging Cultural Influences	Pastor C			Cultural norms influence behaviours and expectations in pastoral visits.

In the next few paragraphs, I will document some key examples of the early coding process as I applied the principles of CGT (Charmaz, 2014) when I conducted a careful analysis of the interview data collected from Pastor A, Pastor B, and Pastor C. This involved the intricate task of coding for action by embracing the use of gerunds (Charmaz, 2014, p121). By leaning on gerunds, I could discern both themes or topics and processes and actions that underlie the experiences and perspectives of the pastors. The focus on gerunds brought out the fluidity and dynamism inherent in the pastoral roles and responsibilities, thereby providing a more nuanced understanding that aligns closely with the lived experiences of the pastors I interviewed. This coding approach encouraged an analytical perspective grounded in the insiders' point of view, eschewing an externally imposed framework that could distance the analysis from the participants' meanings and actions.

Take, for example, the code "Navigating Care Environments" first encountered with Pastor A. The term 'navigating' captures the dynamism and complexity of the pastor's role as a hospital chaplain. It allows for an interpretation that is process-oriented, emphasising the pastor's continuous adjustment to the specificities of a healthcare setting. On the other hand, Pastor B's experience of navigating WhatsApp groups for pastoral care illustrates the active role of selecting and adapting to digital platforms, thereby highlighting their agency in making pastoral care decisions. Similarly, Pastor C's work in labour camps in Dubai is captured through the action-oriented lens, emphasising the steps taken to extend pastoral services to Southeast Asian workers.

I also paid close attention to implicit meanings and emergent links between processes in the data, in accordance with the best practices of constructivist GT. For instance, the code "Constructing Caregiver Relationships" was instrumental in exploring how Pastor A constructs

his pastoral relationships in a healthcare setting, whereas Pastor B does so through digital platforms. This difference is significant in understanding how caregiver roles are performed and received in different contexts. The code also pointed to directions for further inquiry, such as how the different pastors adapted their caregiver roles in synchronous or asynchronous communication channels.

The code “Fostering Self-Disclosure” afforded insights into the pastors’ techniques and strategies to encourage open conversation. The gerund ‘fostering’ helped spotlight the active, ongoing endeavour on the part of the pastors to create an environment conducive for self-disclosure, whether it be Pastor A's attention to hidden cues or Pastor C’s preference for face-to-face interactions. By coding for action, I could explore the ways each pastor facilitated or inhibited self-disclosure, and thereby could address one of the key research questions concerning the role of instant messaging in such facilitation.

Ethical considerations were particularly salient in the code “Contemplating Ethical Implications”. The action-oriented terminology guided an examination of the pastors’ proactive or reactive stances towards ethical considerations. Pastor C, for instance, acknowledged the ethical complexities of online sharing, but did not see any issue with the commercial nature of the technology used for pastoral care. This addressed the second key research question regarding the perception of ethical considerations in using data-driven platforms.

Focused Coding

Instead of proceeding with the interviews and continuing with the line-by-line coding process, I started the focused coding phase much sooner. Now that I had 20 open codes and memos written for these three interviews, I focused my codes to subsume numerous initial codes

and make it more effective to apply these focused codes in subsequent interviews. After careful analysis, these interviews provided the following nine focused codes.

Table 2. Combined Interview Codes: Interviews 1-3

New Code #	New Combined Open Code Names	Meaning of Codes	Combined Codes
1	Identifying Care Settings	Process of recognising the type of environment where pastoral care takes place and who is involved.	1, 2, 20
2	Conducting Face-to-Face Visits	Actions, time spent, and expected outcomes during in-person pastoral interactions.	3, 4
3	Initiating and Navigating Online Visits	The platforms used for pastoral care online, how visits start, and the dynamics of care in a digital context.	7, 8, 11
4	Engaging in Self-Disclosure	Moments where personal information is openly shared, and the dynamics of this sharing.	5, 6, 10, 13, 19
5	Addressing Ethical Dilemmas	Explicit or implicit ethical considerations or challenges that arise.	12
6	Contemplating Privacy	Exploration of mentions or implications around privacy concerns in care settings.	17, 18
7	Practising Listening	Specific remarks on the role and importance of listening actively in pastoral care.	9
8	Expressing Emotions	Instances and context in which emotional expression occurs in pastoral interactions.	14
9	Envisioning Future Care Modalities	Perspectives on the future of pastoral care, including the adoption of digital or hybrid approaches.	15, 16, 7

I then applied these codes to the interview transcripts of Pastor D, Pastor E, and Pastor F. I also combined my memos from the interviews and continued expanding the line-by-line coding when none of these focused codes clearly fit the data. There were notable gaps in the memos that had not been written for codes that emerged in further transcript analysis. For example, code 29, “Considering Personality Traits,” only emerged in interview 6 with Pastor F, which is a demonstration of the importance of applying new codes to earlier interviews.

The next phase of my research was to apply all these codes to determine what all previous pastors in this set of three interviews expressed about these actions. This constant iterative process is crucial for all GT methods. The structure of my codes and memos, developed in this systematic way, allowed me to perform a constant comparison of my interview data while naturally progressing toward the construction of a GT. However, I will not include these subsequent memos as I am simply providing a narrative sample of the CGT method I applied in every stage of my research.

The next group of three interviews were some of the most insightful. I prioritised the pastors to be interviewed based on theoretical sampling strategies informed by my previous codes and what I knew from the original research application form they had filled in. After coding line-by-line, I then focused on writing memos for codes that could become categories or at least clarify the pastors' perceptions about the impact of CMC to self-disclosure and pastoral care.

After doing this with the three groups of three interviews, I had enough to attempt constructing broader categories and even some theories that could be tested against previous interviews and future ones. I had nine focused codes that emerged from the first three interviews which I had applied to all nine interviews. Charmaz (2014, p.127) suggests a constant process of asking theoretical questions for all focused codes to keep the research moving forward. These questions treat focused codes as processes rather than objects or concepts. Using the theoretical questions she suggests, I created a table that compares these core processes side-by-side.

Table 3. Theoretical Questions and Related Memos

	What Process(es) is at Issue Here?	How Does it Develop?	Actions, Thoughts, Feelings	Change & Consequences
Identifying Care Settings	The identification of diverse settings where pastoral care occurs.	Pastors adapt their care approach based on the settings, which can be influenced by the congregational demographics, geographical location, and the influence of digital technologies.	The pastors navigate through various settings, from local churches to educational and medical centres. Their considerations seem to be influenced by the complexity and the transience of their audience.	There's a noticeable pivot to digital platforms, especially during challenging times like the COVID-19 pandemic. The move to digital platforms may risk depersonalising pastoral care, although it also offers a unique set of opportunities.
Conducting Face-to-Face Visits	The meticulous planning and conducting of face-to-face visits.	Depending on the pastor, these visits can be formal or informal and have different duration windows.	Many pastors highlight the emotional depth achieved in face-to-face visits, although the time spent can vary. They generally seem to appreciate the tangibility and warmth that comes from physical presence.	Some pastors are augmenting face-to-face with digital channels. This raises questions about the future of traditional pastoral care models.
Initiating and Navigating Online Visits	The mechanisms for initiating and managing online pastoral visits.	Adoption of various digital platforms like WhatsApp, Zoom, and Messenger.	Pastors express an openness to digital tools but also share reservations concerning their limitations, such as reduced emotional richness.	A shift toward digital platforms might cause a gap between generations or exclude those who are technologically disadvantaged.
Engaging in Self-Disclosure	The practice and dynamics of self-disclosure in pastoral interactions.	Gradually, depending on trust and the setting.	Pastors generally felt that self-disclosure is easier in face-to-face interactions but noted that digital platforms can also facilitate openness.	Digital platforms might encourage a different form of self-disclosure, potentially lessening the emotional burden or risks involved.
Addressing Ethical Dilemmas	Ethical considerations around digital pastoral care.	Varies by pastor, with some raising concerns about data privacy on commercial platforms.	Pastors are becoming increasingly conscious of ethical challenges, but there seems to be an uncertain terrain about how to navigate them.	Failure to address these concerns could jeopardise the trust and ethical integrity of pastoral care.
Contemplating Privacy	Privacy considerations in both digital and face-to-face settings.	Privacy is implicitly considered, although not always explicitly discussed.	Some pastors feel helpless in terms of guaranteeing privacy, particularly on digital platforms.	Lack of privacy may become a future ethical dilemma, potentially affecting the willingness of congregants to engage in self-disclosure.
Practicing Listening	The role of active listening in pastoral care.	Implied to be vital, although not explicitly discussed.	Listening appears to be a gateway to trust and effective pastoral care.	Future research should address the absence of this theme, considering its importance in both theological and interpersonal aspects of pastoral care.

	What Process(es) is at Issue Here?	How Does it Develop?	Actions, Thoughts, Feelings	Change & Consequences
Expressing Emotions	Emotional expressions in pastoral care.	Varied; in some cases, emotional expressions are more visible in spiritual contexts like prayer.	Emotional interactions can be subtle and may be influenced by the medium of interaction.	The move to digital platforms might risk diluting emotional richness in interactions.
Envisioning Future Care Modalities	The future of pastoral care.	There is a general consensus on integrating digital platforms.	Most pastors see digital platforms as inevitable, with some open to innovations like AI.	This opens up opportunities for reshaping theological education and pastoral practice, though it also raises questions about the sustainability and ethicality of such shifts.

Constructing Theory

Having better clarity about the main processes that emerged from my data, I then tried to group all focused codes into categories. I first organised the codes into five categories, namely pastoral care environment, face-to-face pastoral care, digital pastoral care, self-disclosure, and ethical considerations. Then I analysed all my memos for each focused code for all nine interviews and realised the constant comparisons the interviewed pastors had made between face-to-face pastoral care and digital pastoral care within a given environment. After careful analysis of their own words about the convergence and relationship between these categories, I consolidated the first three categories using the term hybrid pastoral care.

The subsequent step was to apply these categories to all nine interviews and compare the relationship between previously defined focused codes that applied to each category. For much of the analysis, it was very confusing to force these codes to talk to each other. However, once I went back to the data and immersed myself in the pastor's own words, I began to construct new and much broader patterns which I had not seen before. This was a very long but helpful exercise that generated my first attempt at something resembling a GT.

The pastors constantly reflected on their choice of face-to-face or digital pastoral care depending on their own characteristics and circumstances as well as the individual receiving the care or the environment they were in. They would mention age, culture, and environmental expectations as some of the reasons for choosing a form of hybrid pastoral care. Pastor I, for example, cited his age as the primary reason for using text mainly to schedule Zoom and face-to-face meetings rather than any meaningful interaction. The same pastor later described providing pastoral care for 90 minutes through instant messaging based on the circumstances of the person he was caring for as they were too ashamed of sharing what had happened to them on Zoom.

“There’s a pastoral colleague who lives far away from me with whom I’m in a counselling process, and he really has issues. One day we had an appointment on Zoom, and he was so ashamed to talk to me that we started to text. It was really one and a half hours just texting because he was afraid of seeing me, even though we have a very intensive and very personal relationship, but he was so full of shame.” Pastor I

Abductive reasoning became very helpful at this point in my data analysis. Abductive reasoning is a form of logical inference that starts with an observation or set of observations and then seeks the most plausible explanation for those observations. Unlike deductive reasoning, which aims to derive certainty, and inductive reasoning, which makes generalised propositions from specific instances, abductive reasoning focuses on generating the most likely conjecture or hypothesis to explain a particular set of data or phenomena (Shodikin et al., 2021). From a CGT perspective, abductive reasoning is particularly relevant as my aim is to construct theory ‘grounded’ in empirical data. In this context, abductive reasoning allows for the dialectic interaction between the empirical data and emergent theoretical constructs (Charmaz, 2014, p.200).

My hypothesis, developed from analysing the data and focused codes, suggests that pastors practicing hybrid pastoral care are influenced by key properties such as age, culture, and technology access. These properties are specific to three main categories: the pastor (provider of pastoral care), the member (recipient of pastoral care), and their shared environment. Essentially, a pastor’s use of technology in pastoral care is shaped by factors like their own age and personality, the characteristics of their members, and the contextual environment. This influences their choice between face-to-face and digital pastoral care methods. I have created the following diagram to illustrate my CGT at that point in the data analysis. This initial diagram and theory would evolve with the theoretical development and subsequent interviews.

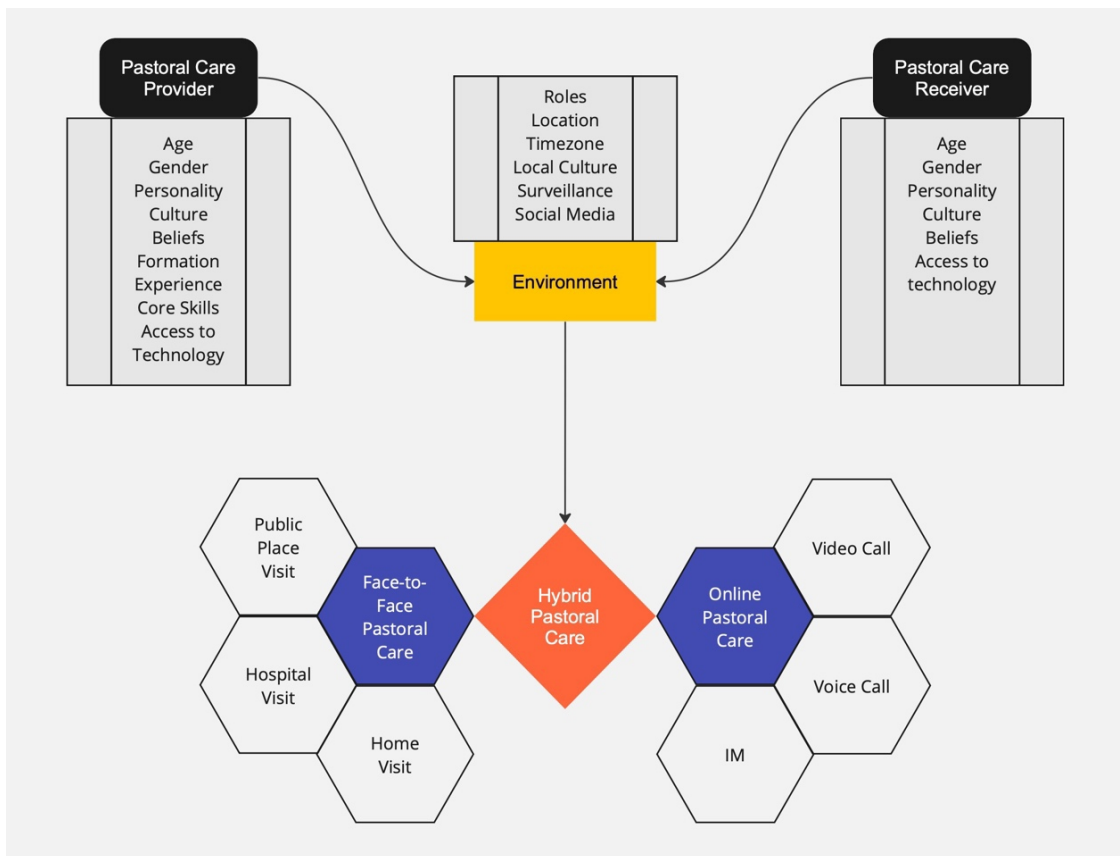


Figure 2. Early version of CGT model

In testing this GT constructed from the data, I applied it to the first nine interviews to ascertain how these pastors perceived each property’s effect to the choice of pastoral care

modality (face-to-face or online). Through this new theoretical analysis, I created a list of all the properties mentioned by each of these nine pastors for my three core categories of hybrid pastoral care: 1) properties related to the pastoral care provider; 2) properties related to the pastoral care recipient; and 3) properties related to the pastoral care environment. As many of the pastors mentioned similar properties, I compared the words they used with the meaning the pastors were trying to convey about both the process and the concept.

Digital Pastors

After analysing my interviews with district pastors, it was very surprising to find that none of them favoured exclusively digital pastoral care, countering my initial expectation of a preference for purely digital methods. Even pastors enthusiastic about online care did not endorse its use without face-to-face interactions. They unanimously viewed digital technology as a complement, not a replacement, for traditional pastoral care, advocating for a hybrid approach. Here is an example of this sentiment:

“Pastoral visits are crucial as they involve the visiting pastor meeting with church members in their homes. If I neglect these visits, people may not come back to the church. Therefore, I believe that visitation is vital because the more I visit people, the better I understand their personal struggles and challenges. By visiting their homes, the pastor can help individuals feel more connected to the church.” Pastor C

Therefore, in line with CGT’s emphasis on theoretical sampling, I broadened my research to include digital pastors working exclusively in digital pastoral care. I expected these digital pastors who offer pastoral care exclusively online would advocate for a modality of care that doesn’t require face-to-face interactions. However, none of these digital pastors agreed with this assessment as a viable pastoral care strategy, reflecting the same opinion from the pastors offering hybrid pastoral care.

The line-by-line coding for the next set of three interviews explored how digital pastors think and practice pastoral care. When I moved into the focus coding phase, I applied my GT to test its validity with the new group. As I mentioned above, the resulting analysis was very consistent as Digital Pastor A, Digital Pastor B, and Digital Pastor C all agreed that pastoral care should be hybrid as they constantly encourage people to visit their nearest local church for face-to-face interactions. The digital pastors did not believe digital pastoral care on its own was sufficient and could replace face-to-face care one day. These pastors also acknowledged that choosing a pastoral care modality will highly depend on the pastor, the member, and the pastoral care context.

Once I repeated the same process for the next set of three interviews with Digital Pastor D, Digital Pastor E, and Digital Pastor F, it became clear that most of my focused codes from the beginning of the process were sufficient to address these interviews. In fact, the last two interviews with Digital Pastor E and Digital Pastor F did not generate any new focused codes. Much like the previous set of interviews, these pastors do not believe digital pastoral care has come to replace face-to-face pastoral care, but to enhance and expand it. My analysis of their interviews also demonstrated that properties related to the pastor, the member and the environment will determine the modality and practice of care.

District Pastors vs. Digital Pastors

At this point in my research, I analysed my GT against nine interviews with district pastors and six interviews with digital pastors. My next step was to carefully compare the properties and factors from the district pastors with the properties and factors of the digital pastors. At first glance, they looked very similar. In fact, I was able to use practically the same words to describe the categories of pastors, members, and the pastoral care context. Even the

properties were mostly similar. However, when I compared the categories and properties of the digital pastors with the language used by the district pastors to describe their hybrid pastoral care practice, their differences became much more evident. I will present my comparative analysis of just the first element of my theory, the pastoral care provider, as an example of my CGT process.

Firstly, each group approached technology differently. District pastors often spoke about their technological familiarity, which seemed to go beyond mere skill acquisition to encapsulate a general sense of comfort and adaptability. For them, technology was not an end in itself, but a tool to be wielded carefully, always with an underpinning of ethical considerations. Here are two examples of these perceptions:

“Indeed, one of the social networks I have been using and still use is WhatsApp. I primarily use WhatsApp for pastoral care purposes, as that is currently my main focus... Often, when I inquire about how things are going, it leads to deeper conversations. From these chats, issues often emerge, prompting me to offer to schedule an appointment for a more in-depth discussion. Subsequently, I arrange to visit the individual in person.” Pastor G

“I see that pastoral care will reach millions of people. It will touch more lives and reach more individuals. I hope that the world will now become aware of the benefits of these technologies due to the widespread availability of messages. People can now access pastoral care any time. In other words, there is no reason for individuals not to seek this kind of support as it is now available to everyone.” Pastor A

In contrast, digital pastors approached technology from a standpoint of competency, frequently highlighting specific technological skills and literacies, such as references to algorithms and platform specific features. This specialised terminology indicated a more intricate understanding of the digital medium they operate within. Here are examples of their perceptions:

“We gather prayer requests and then follow up after seven days or as per the individual’s situation. Our platform not only receives prayer requests

but also serves as a space for individuals to share their challenges related to marriage, finances, children, and more. The sheer volume of people seeking assistance is overwhelming. It is evident that there are millions of individuals who are in dire need of God's help, not just spiritually but also practically." Digital Pastor G

"That is why after a week or so, we actually make a follow-up so that we can maintain that relationship. By doing so, we build trust and confidence within them, showing that we genuinely care about them and are aware of what's happening in their lives. This practice makes them more comfortable in sharing more about themselves." Digital Pastor F

Another contrasting point that emerged concerned the role of professional experience in pastoral care. District pastors used the word 'experience' to describe the benefits from long-term practice, where the complexities of human interactions can only be fully grasped through sustained engagement. Digital pastors, however, preferred to use synonyms of the word 'skill' to describe their learned practices, such as active listening, building trust, and eliciting daily responses. They also framed their pastoral care in terms of ethical and professional considerations, which they identified as standalone categories, not mere subcategories under broader belief systems or experience. This separate categorisation of ethics implied a more nuanced and analytical approach, one that is more sensitive to the unique ethical challenges posed by digital spaces, such as data security and the potential for dehumanisation.

The personal attributes of pastoral care providers also drew some interesting contrasts. District pastors emphasised the importance of personality traits like introversion or extroversion in shaping their pastoral care approach. This emphasis revealed a personal dimension to their practice, as if the act of pastoral care is in some ways an extension of their own personality traits, shaping how they interact and connect with their community. Digital pastors, on the other hand, singled out flexibility and adaptability as critical traits instead. They didn't mention their own

personality in the same way. Their focus on these qualities could be indicative of the fluid and continually changing nature of digital spaces where their own personal attributes like introversion and extroversion may be less easily discernible or may play a less critical role in pastoral effectiveness. However, it is possible that their choice of pastoral care modality may have also been influenced by personality rather than this influencing what they do within that modality.

Gender and demographic considerations also set the two groups apart. District pastors explicitly mentioned gender sensitivity, potentially underscoring the unique dynamics of physical spaces where in-person interactions might make issues like gender more immediately salient. Their attention to a broad cultural and demographic awareness was understood as part of their overall environment, not just as a ‘context’. Conversely, digital pastors did not even mention age and gender as influential in the choice of modality, leading me to speculate that these demographic factors might be considered less impactful online in the way they might affect self-disclosure. Also noteworthy was the proactivity digital pastors exhibited in building trust, which they regarded not as a by-product of their interactions but as a focused goal. This likely stems from an understanding that digital interactions come with their own set of limitations that require proactive strategies to overcome.

My data analysis suggested that while both district and digital pastors operate in overlapping domains, their emphasis and vocabulary are different. These variations led me to refine the language used in my grounded theory to depict each group’s unique approach more accurately. The disparity in vocabulary among these pastors validated my decision to employ semi-structured interviews within a CGT framework.

Self-disclosure

After comparing the categories and focused codes of the digital pastors with the same data from the district pastors, I used abductive reasoning again to build the hypothesis that self-disclosure is the result of the relationship between the properties of pastors, members, and the pastoral care context. In other words, if the characteristics and circumstances of the pastor, the member, or the context aren't conducive to digital pastoral care, self-disclosure is less likely to happen. All pastors described self-disclosure as the product of various circumstances such as 'the amount of time a member has known the pastor for' as a face-to-face example, and their 'relationship to technology' as an example of digital pastoral care. I then incorporated that hypothesis within my GT and proceeded to test it with the subsequent interviews. This addition adds a layer of utility to my CGT as the effectiveness of digital pastoral care can then be measured based on the depth of member self-disclosure that occurs.

Toward a Constructivist Grounded Theory of Self-Disclosure in Hybrid Pastoral Care

I continued to interview and analyse another two sets of three interviews with district pastors and digital pastors to test my GT and assumptions. These interviews with Pastor J, Pastor K, Digital Pastor G, Pastor L, Pastor M, and Digital Pastor H were very useful in confirming the theoretical framework I constructed above, but surprisingly, contributed very little to its expansion. I found the focused codes and categories in the previous analyses were sufficient to encapsulate everything that was said in these interviews, despite my attempt in the interviews with Pastor L, Pastor M, and Digital Pastor H to expand the interviews into other potential areas. This was also true about the categories and properties directly related to the theory. These interviews provided examples and different stories but did not expand the theoretical models derived from the first five sets of three interviews. I continued to test this point of theoretical

saturation through two more interviews with Pastor N and Pastor O, but they did not yield any theoretical contribution either.

Having refined my CGT through the constant analysis of these interviews, I then changed my interview guide completely to validate my CGT more directly. I then conducted interviews using this guide with Pastor P, Pastor Q, Pastor R, Pastor S, Pastor T, Digital Pastor B (again), and Digital Pastor I. I repeated my interview with Digital Pastor B as they were the most experienced pastor in digital pastoral care that applied to be part of the research. This was a valuable decision as their 12-year experience was very helpful in validating my CGT.

Theoretical saturation is a key milestone in CGT, denoting the point at which additional data does not lead to new information or insights pertinent to the developing theory (Charmaz, 2014). In this context, the interviews conducted with Pastor N and Pastor O exemplify this saturation. This was further validated through the last series of seven interviews as they didn't bring any new theoretical insights. Their contributions, while valuable in reinforcing existing patterns and themes, did not introduce any new categories or significantly alter the theoretical framework already developed. This phenomenon aligns with the descriptions provided by Glaser and Strauss (1967), who initially articulated the concept of saturation, suggesting that it occurs when the data collected becomes redundant and no longer contributes to the evolution of the theory. This replication of patterns and themes across interviews, serving as a form of validation rather than an expansion of theory, clearly indicates my research had reached its point of theoretical saturation, validating my CGT and underscoring my findings.

Conceptual Model

Although the overall conceptual model of my constructed GT of self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care was confirmed in all interviews, there were variations and disagreements about

what constituted the most definitive properties in how to practice pastoral care online and face-to-face. I revisited the transcripts and focused codes multiple times to ascertain the meaning behind the pastors' answers to my questions. The resulting conceptual model with the most influential properties based on the interviews can be found below.

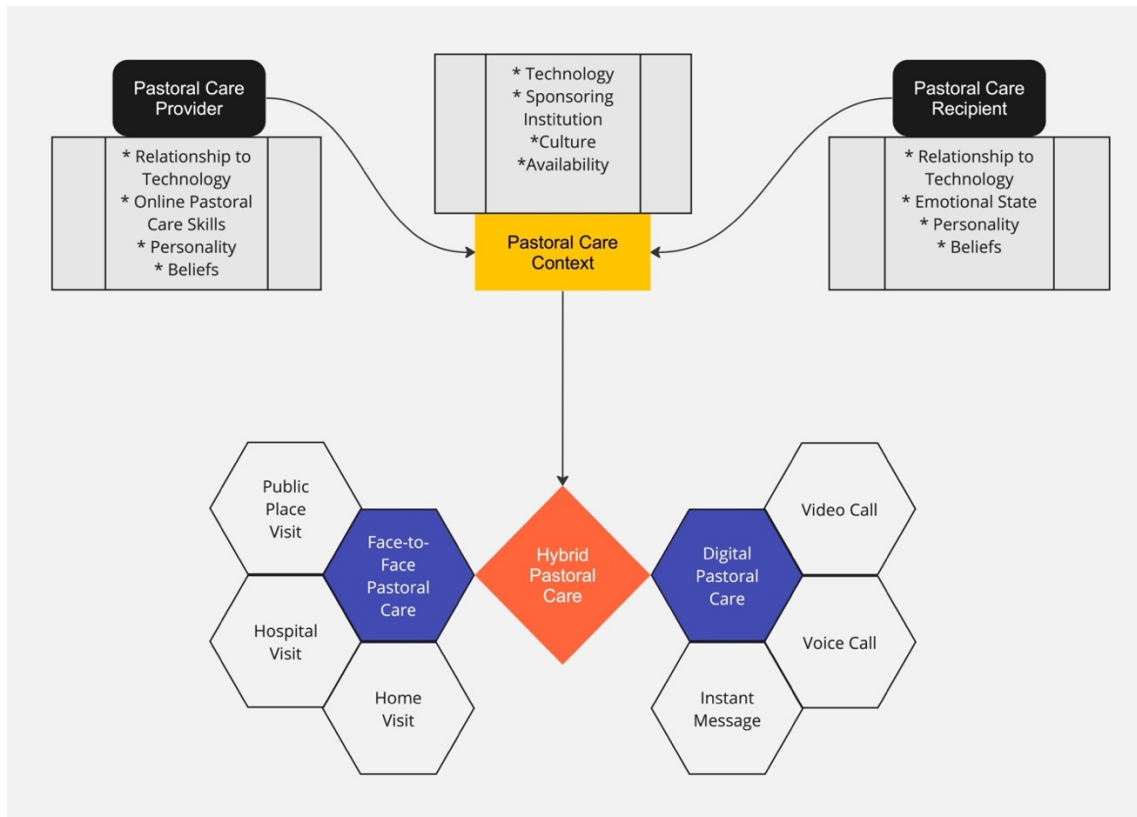


Figure 3. Final CGT Model

My CGT suggests that the rise of digital communication has ushered in a hybrid mode of pastoral care that optimises both face-to-face and digital interactions toward member self-disclosure. This optimisation is influenced by the characteristics and circumstances (properties) of the pastoral care provider (pastor), the recipient (member), and the context. Examples of these core properties include ‘relationship to technology’, ‘personality’, and ‘cultural norms’. In other words, the choice between traditional and online pastoral methods is a fluid, contextual decision, influenced by core properties of the pastor, the member, and the context, which aims to cultivate

the most supportive environment for pastoral care, as determined by the level of member self-disclosure. Hybrid pastoral care allows pastors to adapt to the unique circumstances and characteristics of everyone they are caring for, making it a dynamic, context-sensitive practice.

To avoid confusion common in specialised terminologies, I will document below the definition of the key terms of my CGT: 1) hybrid pastoral care; 2) self-disclosure in pastoral care; 3) pastoral care provider; 4) pastoral care recipient; and 5) pastoral care context.

Hybrid Pastoral Care

Refuting the belief that internet use disconnects believers from traditional practices, thereby creating a dichotomy between online and offline Christianity, Campbell (2010) presents findings that show a strong link between online and offline Christian communities, which often ground their unique online praxis in established theological doctrines:

“Research on religious use of the internet does not support these assumptions. Researchers have found that practices and beliefs of internet Christianity are closely connected to offline Christianity and its related communities. Even in instances when online Christian communities do develop unique theological methods or praxis, they often base these on traditional theological doctrines and structures” (p.38).

Despite my hypothesis that many pastors would consider digital pastoral care as sufficient, my research demonstrated the opposite, as every pastor perceived face-to-face pastoral care as an irreplaceable practice. This conclusion was shared by both district pastors and digital pastors alike. Similarly, all interviewed pastors saw many potential benefits for the future of the vocation as a consequence of digital pastoral care. In fact, there was broad consensus in all transcripts that pastoral care should be practiced as a hybrid experience. Some of it will be face-to-face, and other will be online. All pastoral care will focus on the functions of healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling (Clebsch and Jaekle, 1994). Therefore, *hybrid pastoral care*

is the combined use of CMC and face-to-face interactions to offer pastoral care to effect healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling.

Self-Disclosure in Pastoral Care

Since the 1950s many academics have attempted to define self-disclosure within the study of communication, psychology, and CMC. Based on these many definitions, covered in my literature review, combined with the perception from the pastors I interviewed and my own understanding of pastoral care, *self-disclosure in pastoral care is the intentional sharing of one's personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings, which serves to reveal the inner self, manage interpersonal boundaries, and foster healing and connection within the pastoral relationship.*

As the definition implies, both the pastoral care provider and the recipient can practice self-disclosure to affect the pastoral interaction and relationship. None of the pastors interviewed could imagine pastoral care without self-disclosure. After all, without awareness of what is happening in the recipient's life, or at least in their hearts, there can be no healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling. Thus, self-disclosure can be seen as a foundational element of pastoral care.

The Pastoral Care Provider

Considering the preceding definitions, a pastoral care provider is defined in this research as *an individual who facilitates the process of healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling within a community.* The role allows for paid and volunteer providers, including lay-led pastoral care, a common practice within the Adventist Church and other Christian denominations. It also encompasses chaplains, pastors, religion teachers, and all other roles that provide pastoral care to their communities, whether online or face-to-face. I will explore the pastoral care provider's

properties and the related factors in Chapter 5. I will refer to the pastoral care provider simply as ‘the pastor’.

Pastoral Care Recipient

A ‘Pastoral Care Recipient’ in the context of hybrid pastoral care is *an individual who actively engages in receiving guidance, support, and care from a pastoral care provider*. This engagement is not limited to passive receipt of spiritual or religious guidance but extends to active participation in emotional, psychological, and social support processes. The recipient, often a member of a religious or spiritual community, may also include any individual seeking such support. Their role in the dynamic of pastoral care is characterised by an active collaboration with the care provider, which shapes the nature and direction of the care. I will explore each of these properties and their related factors in Chapter 6. I will refer to the pastoral care recipient simply as ‘the member’.

Pastoral Care Context

The ‘pastoral care context’ in hybrid pastoral care is *the composite of the relational dynamics between the pastoral care provider and the recipient within the institutional, cultural, and technological environment within which pastoral care is offered*. It encapsulates the unique characteristics and interactions that define the pastoral relationship, considering the self-awareness and personal attributes of both the pastor and the member. This context extends to include the institution where pastoral care is administered, encompassing its ethos, governance, and support structures. Additionally, it is influenced by the broader cultural and technological milieu, acknowledging how these external factors shape the mode, efficacy, and nature of pastoral care. I will explore the pastoral care context’s properties and their related factors in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 5

THE PASTORAL CARE PROVIDER

Before I start providing a report on my findings, I will briefly summarise my research document up until this point. I have started by reviewing the relevant literature at the intersection of CMC, self-disclosure, and pastoral care. Then I designed a qualitative research methodology to address its limitations and therefore define how my research would contribute to scientific knowledge. At the core of my methodology is the development of a CGT of self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care which directly addresses my research questions. My CGT is based on the perceptions of Seventh-day Adventist pastoral care providers about online self-disclosure and the ethical implications of providing pastoral care through data-driven, commercial platforms.

As described in the last chapter, I have used theoretical sampling to select 30 pastors whom I've interviewed to construct my GT based on my own experience as a pastor and my interpretation of these interviews. My CGT contains three categories: the pastor, the member, and the pastoral care context. Each category comprises various properties, reflecting the characteristics and circumstances pertinent to that category. These properties encompass several factors that significantly influence self-disclosure and the practice of hybrid pastoral care, so my analysis has focused on each factor rather than the properties they belong to. Given the long-standing tradition of face-to-face pastoral care, spanning over 2,000 years, my analysis has primarily investigated how these factors impact self-disclosure in the context of digital pastoral care rather than face-to-face pastoral care.

In this study, a qualitative methodology guides the examination of each factor's impact on self-disclosure in digital pastoral care, steering clear of a granular analysis of each factor's exact influence which would tend toward a quantitative analysis that, although useful, would fall

beyond the scope of my research. My analysis has focused on the significant variations within each factor, avoiding the very extremes which are less representative. For instance, considering the age factor, the study explores the inclination towards digital pastoral care among younger and older pastors, specifically looking at pastors in the more common age ranges, rather than the rare instances of extremely young or extremely old pastors. This approach, utilising a 20% low and 80% high parameter analysis, aims to provide a balanced and realistic assessment of how each factor either encourages or discourages self-disclosure in online pastoral environments so I will apply it to every factor in all three categories.

My analysis will account for the perceptions of the pastors I interviewed as well as the scientific literature related to each factor. I will often quote the interviewed pastors verbatim or simply point to their overall perception of how each factor may influence online self-disclosure. My analysis of each factor will culminate in a multifactorial examination for each category, assessing how the interplay of these factors influences self-disclosure in digital pastoral care. I will conclude my research by synthesising my findings across all categories and properties, elucidating how the combination of factors impacts self-disclosure in digital pastoral care scenarios. Based on the perception of my interviewed pastors, my CGT aims to predict optimal conditions for digital pastoral care and identify situations where such care may be ineffective or inadvisable.

In the current chapter, I will focus on my first category to explore the core properties of the pastor and their related factors, as perceived by the pastors I interviewed. I will start with the pastor's relationship to technology which encompasses the pastor's access to technology, their age, and their familiarity with online tools. I will then explore the pastor's digital pastoral care skills that emerged from my interviews as the most influential in online self-disclosure, namely

the pastor's online listening skills, trust-building skills, and communication skills. The third property I will explore pertains to the pastor's personality where I will analyse how each of the five-factor model of personality as referenced in the interview data might affect online self-disclosure. Finally, I will explore how the pastor's beliefs might affect online self-disclosure as it relates to the pastor's theological and ethical frameworks. In my analysis, I will avoid conjecture and ensure the findings are grounded in the interview data. In subsequent chapters, I will continue my analysis of the 'member' and 'context' categories.

Relationship to Technology

Campbell (2012) asserts that the introduction of high-speed internet access considerably alters user behaviour by enabling participation in multiple, dynamic online social networks, which is a departure from traditional, geographically-bound community structures: "This transforms notions of membership in fixed geographically bound community to highlight the fact that people live simultaneously in multiple social networks that are emergent, varying in depth, fluid and highly personalised" (p.83).

All pastors I interviewed in my theoretical sampling strategy were avid providers of digital pastoral care to their church members or patients. They all demonstrated varying degrees of familiarity and emotional connection to technology. Some of the pastors I interviewed identified the need of training pastors who aren't familiar at all with technology. In this section, I will explore their perceptions along with the relevant literature as it relates to the following factors: the pastor's access to technology, their age, and their familiarity with online tools.

Access

Nor surprisingly, the pastors I interviewed believe the cornerstone of effective digital pastoral care lies fundamentally in access to technology, particularly the internet. Pastor F, for example, stated:

“All I can say is that with the little experience I have here, pastoral ministry can be conducted through technology as long as we have an internet connection. That's the only limitation. I believe that I can expand my pastoral care. There is a great possibility of expansion because it's boundless as long as you have an internet connection; I can expand it really well.” Pastor F

This perspective was echoed by Digital Pastor F, who underscored the value of ubiquity provided by the internet, saying, “A major advantage is the ability to connect with others anytime, anywhere. As long as you have a laptop and a connection, you can easily connect with people.” These insights emphasise the fundamental role of internet connectivity in the expansion and accessibility of pastoral care, underscoring its potential for boundless reach, yet also highlighting its fragility, where the loss of such connectivity could mean a complete halt in digital ministry.

The reflections of Digital Pastor A and Pastor Q offer nuanced views on the technology's role and the basic requirements for embarking in digital ministry. Digital Pastor A's insistence, “There is no way today that a pastor is not available on some social network. You have to have Instagram, you have to have WhatsApp, you have to have Facebook. You have to be at least in one of these places” emphasises the critical need for presence across digital platforms as a prerequisite for contemporary pastoral care. Meanwhile, Pastor Q provides a practical perspective on starting digital ministry with minimal resources, illustrating, “I started just with a cell phone and few books. I did not have tripod because I was not equipped for this ministry. I

also bought a light, that's it. At least people can see me." This highlights the low barrier to entry for digital pastoral care, suggesting that effective ministry does not necessitate high-tech setups, but rather the ingenuity and willingness to utilise available resources to maintain connection and visibility.

More than half of the pastors interviewed mentioned video calls as part of their online ministry, especially among the district pastors. Pastor I, Pastor S, and Pastor N mentioned video calls the most within their answers. Pastor N discusses his use of video: "I'm here in Dubai right now, but my assignment is in KSA [Kingdom of Saudi Arabia], so I am conducting many of my meetings, the nominating committee, via Zoom and even personal sensitive one-on-one counselling." Widespread use of video calls happens in locations with access to capable video hardware and sufficient bandwidth to sustain it, as seen in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the lack of such attributes significantly influences user preferences (Frimpon & Adaku, 2018).

Additionally, high-speed internet access tends to shift user behaviour towards diverse online services and away from traditional media (Cho, Byun, & Sung, 2003), suggesting a greater openness to various forms of digital pastoral care. Pastor B expresses this as a pressure he has felt: "Everything that we were used to doing, even at our workplace, is now digital, and to some extent, it is also forcing us, one way or another, to need Wi-Fi internet services so that at least you can communicate." The broader impact of high-speed broadband in sectors like education and health indicates its potential to improve digital pastoral care's reach and effectiveness (Rampersad & Troshani, 2020). Overall, it is the perception of the pastors I interviewed that while high-quality internet facilitates better online pastoral engagement, meaningful interactions are possible across a spectrum of internet access levels.

Age

Most pastors interviewed did not believe the pastor's age to be the most influential factor in determining their capacity for online pastoral care. Sentiments like this were commonplace in the data:

“I think that the pastoral care in a digital way is happening for all pastors, even through a small message or in a more diverse way. I don't think that there are specific details about who can do that. As long as someone is willing to dive into the digital era, anyone can do it. You can have access to all the material you need to grow and to reach people in a digital way. I have seen young pastors do it. I have seen pastors with grey hair do it. I've seen different people using technology for gospel outreach.” Pastor P

At first, I included age as a direct property of my GT as some of the pastors I interviewed mentioned the pastor's age as a determining factor in the selection of digital or face-to-face pastoral care. Pastor T, for example, when asked about the age of the pastors who are most likely going to engage in digital pastoral care, offered: “Age-wise, it's hard for me to pinpoint because young people do everything via text, even when they're in the same room.” However, a closer analysis demonstrated that age is simply an indication of someone's affinity with technology.

This would align with research as experiments have demonstrated that younger generations preferring instant messaging instead of face-to-face interactions (Quinn et al., 2006). Although the literature remains focused in general communication outside of the context of pastoral care, based on my interviews, it is likely that younger pastors will be more likely to utilize digital pastoral care in many given circumstances when compared to a pastor close to retirement.

Pastor D mentions an example of an older pastor who is learning new technologies to take advantage of the new opportunities they afford:

“I’m an optimist. I see more and more of my colleagues adopting this message, this methodology. My father-in-law is 85, going on 86, a retired pastor. He has Facebook and WhatsApp. More often than not, he tells me about his communication with former members on those platforms. It’s possible. Nothing is too much, nothing is impossible. And I am proud to say that the vast majority, if not all of our colleagues, are doing their best and making efforts. In the past, you had to sell everything and take a boat to a far place like Africa, then walk, get on the back of a truck, or ride a donkey to reach people who were otherwise unreachable. I think creating an account on any social media platform is a million times easier and more efficient than that.” Pastor D

The influence of age on the choice of communication channels, particularly instant messaging, has been a topic of research interest in understanding communication preferences. Wilkins et al., (2018) indicates that age is a determinant in the choice of communication channels, highlighting that preferences can vary significantly across different age groups. This can be extrapolated to suggest that younger pastors might naturally gravitate towards digital means of communication such as instant messaging due to their exposure and adaptability to online platforms. Further supporting this notion, Koch and Stachl (2020) explore the predictability of age and gender based on language use in WhatsApp messages, a popular instant messaging platform. Their findings that language features can predict age and gender underscore the differences in communication styles across age groups, potentially influencing pastors’ choices in favour of instant messaging for pastoral care.

In contrast, Dunaetz, Lisk, and Shin (2015) indicate that age is not a significant predictor of media richness preference. This aligns with my observation above that the relationship to technology, and not necessarily age itself, is what influences communication preferences. This insight is particularly valuable when considering the implementation of various communication

channels for pastoral care, emphasising a more personalised approach that considers technology affinity over age as a determining factor.

Digital Pastor I mentioned their ideal team for pastoral care would include young and old pastors for reasons that transcend their relationship to technology and natural proclivities:

“In my experience, I have observed the importance of having a highly dynamic team. It is crucial not to have a team composed of only one type of person. We require younger individuals who can easily relate and communicate with the issues faced by their peers. Similarly, older team members bring diverse life experiences and perspectives that can be shared effectively. For instance, as a 24-year-old who is not yet married and does not have children, I may struggle to fully understand a mother’s worry about her son returning home late.” Digital Pastor I

The general perception of the pastors I interviewed indicates that younger pastors would tend to encourage online self-disclosure while older pastors would tend to prefer face-to-face pastoral care, as exemplified by Pastor F, “I think older pastors would prefer face-to-face interactions, especially when communicating.” However, when I cross referenced each pastor’s relationship to technology to my visual memos, where I estimated their age, there was no clear pattern to be observed. What really mattered was their relationship to technology and digital literacy rather than age. Their direct perception, however, was that younger pastors are more likely to prioritise instant messaging in pastoral care.

Familiarity

The relationship between the pastoral care provider and technology will depend on their familiarity with the tools they are using to provide pastoral care. Isetti, Stawinoga and Pechlaner (2021a) quotes a study by Lacović, Badurina and Džinić (2017) to assert that “clergy, especially younger and well-educated ones managing larger parishes, were increasingly using computers for prayer, preaching, and spiritual direction. This usage was positively correlated with the

clergy's perception of technology. Moreover, even older parish priests used the Internet for religious activities, indicating an institutional shift towards digital engagement" (p.359).

Pastors that are familiar with technology will demonstrate a higher level of technical proficiency as well as their ability to communicate using the norms of that platform. This will include using emojis and other digital communication language, which some pastors remember struggling with (Pastor D, Pastor H, Digital Pastor F). If a pastor isn't familiar with these, they will misunderstand what their members are trying to disclose and be misunderstood, which could lead to diminished online self-disclosure. This tension and risk often lead unfamiliar pastors to minimise instant messaging and prioritise video calls and face-to-face pastoral care. In other words, pastors who have a greater familiarity with technology will be more likely to use instant messaging in pastoral care.

Pastor F, who articulates a straightforward and functional use of messaging platforms like WhatsApp and Messenger for pastoral care, which underscores a keen understanding of these platforms as tools to be wielded for ministry:

"The platform I use online is WhatsApp and Messenger. These are my everyday go-to messaging apps because people can reach me at any time. This method allows me to provide online care by sharing messages of encouragement. While I rarely offer prayers on these platforms, I find it more convenient to record prayers using WhatsApp for my pastoral care. It is a seamless process - I just click to record, listen to the prayer once, and then send it promptly." Pastor F

Similarly, Pastor N and Pastor Q's experiences reflect a pragmatic and evolving relationship with digital tools. Pastor N remarks on the transition to Zoom for more in-depth interactions: "Yes. Firstly, we connect either through Messenger or WhatsApp because that's the platform we are using at the church. If the issue requires more time, we will promptly switch to Zoom." This flexibility and familiarity with digital platforms enable a more dynamic and

responsive form of pastoral care. Pastor Q's adoption of Facebook live for prayer sessions, despite initial unfamiliarity, further exemplifies how embracing new technologies can enhance the reach and impact of pastoral ministry: "This was the time that I started on Facebook, live a prayer session every day. I was so busy I did not even think that I would be busy like that."

Many of the pastors I interviewed demonstrated a superior level of familiarity with their preferred tools, especially Digital Pastors. This was demonstrated by their descriptions of ministry online without any reference to the tools and the technology at all. Notice this example from Pastor M's integration of digital strategies into their ministry without explicit mention of technology platforms:

"So, I have three main strategies for digital pastoral care. The first one is for church engagement. I created numerous short videos, including reels showcasing daily life, doctrines, the Sabbath School lessons, and various other topics. These videos aimed to educate the church community. The second action involved perceiving God's guidance or insights through interactions with the people I ministered to, particularly the youth. I made it a practice to send messages on birthdays and special occasions like Mother's Day and Father's Day, which often elicited responses. These everyday interactions often yielded more meaningful responses as they were not solely focused on prayer requests but on building personal connections. I found that these moments of personal connection and care had a deeper impact on the individuals I ministered to." Pastor M

Conversely, the narrative of pastors like Pastor I reveals the challenges and learning curves associated with adopting digital tools. Pastor I is a great example from my interviews of how a limitation in familiarity and preference directly impact's their digital pastoral care: "I am not someone who enjoys texting very much. Most of the time, I use texting to schedule appointments to meet people on Zoom." This single answer demonstrates clearly that his members aren't going to be encouraged toward self-disclosure through IM platforms.

Another common theme in the interviews was the pastor's endless journey toward familiarity with new online tools. Pastor R's reflection on the evolution of technology use in pastoral care highlights the diverse approaches and adaptations pastors must navigate in the digital age:

“Well, when you talk about technology, we're talking about everything, like phones, Internet, everything, right? So definitely there has been an increase in the use of technology since I started in 2004. Back then, cell phones were already a thing, and we definitely used them, but not as much as now working in a rural setting. People in Portugal were still, at that time, used to using landlines and so on, but very quickly were shifting to cell phones, emails, and having members who lived at a great distance, I would definitely have to use that. I can say that was the beginning. Email, cell phone, and that has been the basic thing that I use in technology, emails and cell phones. Text messages became much more prominent over the years, and eventually I started also using other platforms.” Pastor R

A more incisive mandate came from Pastor T, who underscores the imperative for pastors to continually adapt and embrace new technologies, recognising the shifting preferences of younger congregants:

“There's no question it's going to only grow. Young people want to unite on Discord. We just had a youth evangelism congress for the Lake Union in Chicago. We had nine of us there talking to young people, “We'll start a group text on Discord.” I don't have Discord, so I guess I need to download it. First of all, I think we as pastors need to keep up with what young people are doing.” Pastor T

In contrast, Pastor I expressed his lack of enthusiasm for digital communication as follows: “I'm a person, I don't have Instagram, I don't have TikTok, I don't have all these. I'm not so much into digital communication. This is why I'm not so fascinated by it.” From a general analysis, digital pastors were much more familiar with features and affordances of instant messaging platforms than the district pastors I interviewed. Pastor L, for example, mentioned, “I

can perform pastoral ministry via technology, like, almost all elements of ministry because now that I know how to use it, I no longer think that I cannot use technology.” Overall, this familiarity with technology was mostly expressed in terms of skills, as I’ll discuss next.

Digital Pastoral Care Skills

In this section I will analyse the second core property influencing the pastor. My analysis has centred on how a pastor’s skills in digital pastoral care shape their approach to hybrid pastoral care and the impact this has on member self-disclosure. The factors identified for this property, based on my research interviews, are a pastor’s listening skills, their ability to build trust, and language proficiency. I will explore how each of these skills are perceived by my interviewees to contribute to the effectiveness of hybrid pastoral care, examining their influence on the depth and nature of self-disclosure from members. I will not consider the pastor’s face-to-face pastoral care skills as my research interest is the impact of CMC to self-disclosure in the context of digital pastoral care.

Online Listening Skills

The pastors I interviewed emphasised that active and empathetic listening is crucial, whether in person or online. This skill involves both hearing words and perceiving the emotions and intentions behind them. The capacity to listen effectively across various platforms enables pastors to discern subtle messages conveyed by those seeking counsel, ensuring that the essence of pastoral care—to be present and attentive to the other—is maintained, regardless of the medium. Such a level of engagement ensures that the essence of pastoral care—to be genuinely present and attentive—is upheld across all mediums of communication.

The pastors I interviewed consistently emphasised the centrality of empathetic and active listening. I will provide a sample of the most relevant data from the interviews. Pastor D

conveyed the joy and pastoral fulfilment found in simply being with someone, stating, “Being present there and lending a listening ear, listening and sharing my own experience makes me very happy. And in my mind, I know I am offering pastoral care also.” In digital spaces, where the absence of physical presence could potentially dilute the connection, the skill of listening takes on additional dimensions. Digital Pastor A reflects on the discipline required in such settings: “And then you listen without judgment, without prejudice, without hunches. Sometimes you even want to say something, but you have that active listening that you wait for the person to say everything.”

Pastor J elucidates a process akin to traditional pastoral care but adapted to the digital realm. Their approach underlines the active nature of listening, emphasising the importance of clarifying, questioning, and engaging with the communicant to foster a deeper understanding and connection, mirroring face-to-face methodologies within the constraints of digital communication.

“Normally, the people I talk to online, especially during the pandemic, have some problems to share. Initially, they ask me to pray with them, and later on, I inquire if there’s anything I can help with. They begin sharing things, and I listen attentively. Sometimes, I also ask them questions to encourage them to share more about their problems. I provide clarifications to ensure I understand what is truly happening, as I may misinterpret their words. I often ask them questions like, ‘What do you think about it? What do you think about your reaction? How do you feel about the events? Does it bother you?’ This process is similar to my face-to-face interactions. I inquire if it’s alright to pray for them, especially on social media, where they often request prayers. This is a common practice during our prayer sessions.” Pastor J

Pastor N represents the pastors who prefer video calls as a medium that approximates the nuances of face-to-face interaction, “I prefer face-to-face interactions, even via Zoom. That is the real situation. You can observe their facial expressions or something similar. You can even

verify. You can promptly follow up on what he or she is saying.” This perspective illuminates the importance of visual cues in comprehending non-verbal signals, which are crucial for empathetic and effective pastoral care.

Digital Pastor H and Pastor R further develop this discussion by highlighting the limitations and adaptations required in text-based or non-visual communication. Pastor H describes an initial focus on understanding the individual’s situation:

“At first, I will properly internalise what his situation is. I will not pray for them directly. I will ask, ‘What’s going on?’ I will put myself in their shoes and encourage them to vent out before praying for them or before assisting with what I can do for this guest.” Digital Pastor H

Pastor R then contrasts the nuances of interaction across mediums:

“When we minister to people online, we cannot see their response unless it’s video. We cannot see their face, we cannot hear their tone, and they cannot hear ours. So if it’s written format and you don’t want to use emojis too much like I do, I think you need to be careful with what we write. We could probably be more assertive in person in certain situations if we see there’s openness for that type of thing than online. Because online, if your comments are sometimes too direct and too strong, you never know what’s going to happen on the other side. If it’s video, it’s much easier.” Pastor R

Digital Pastor I introduces the dimension of time and the progressive nature of building comfort and intimacy online. Their perception is that the dynamic and individualised nature of digital pastoral care, acknowledging the diverse preferences and comfort levels of individuals in digital communication.

“To converse with anyone, it is always essential to gauge their level of comfort. This comfort level is crucial, as some individuals may be at ease right from the start, engaging at what we might consider a higher level of intimacy. Speaking with someone on this level can feel quite personal. However, not everyone is immediately open, which is where the internet

can assist by allowing conversations to progress gradually. It's a process of trial and error, similar to pastoral care. Sometimes, when we send the first audio message, the recipient may respond with a flood of messages, expressing surprise at the new form of communication and feeling closer as a result. It's all about experimenting and finding what works best for each person. While some may prefer audio messages, others may be more comfortable with text, especially if they are concerned about privacy. The approach varies significantly depending on the individual's preferences." Digital Pastor I

Pastor A describes their techniques, "We really don't give any advice to them; we are just the listening ministry and then guiding them through questions that will lead them also to answer their individual problems." This approach underscores the listening skill as foundational for facilitating self-discovery and personal growth within the care-seeking individual.

Listening is an active process that encourages self-disclosure, more than just a passive reception of information. Terry and Cain (2016) propose the idea of 'digital empathy'—the expression of traditional empathic characteristics through CMC. However, they also acknowledge the challenge presented by digital communication, which often lacks the emotional signals and cues present in face-to-face interactions, potentially leading to impersonal and less empathetic exchanges. This underscores the significance of a pastor's ability to listen attentively and empathetically in online settings, as without this skill, the encouragement of self-disclosure in digital interactions may be significantly hindered.

The pastor's insights, along with the findings of Terry and Cain (2016), align with the broader understanding of pastoral care emphasised by Magezi and Nanthambwe (2022). The latter's discussion on public pastoral care highlights the multi-dimensional role of pastors, which extends beyond spiritual guidance to encompass emotional, social, and personal support. The art of listening is crucial for one-on-one interactions and a vital component of community building

and development. Digital pastoral care works in the same way and online self-disclosure is equally dependent on listening.

Ability to Build Trust Online

In this section I will explore the distinction between pastors who excel at building trust in online environments and those who struggle to do it. Drawing on interview data and academic literature, I will explore how the ability to build trust in digital spaces affects the pastor's success in fostering meaningful digital pastoral care and encouraging self-disclosure among members.

It is clear from my interview data that trust is the cornerstone of any pastoral relationship, and the ability to cultivate trust across digital and face-to-face environments is vital. The pastors perceive transparency, consistency, and a demonstration of confidentiality as crucial elements of this process. In face-to-face settings, nonverbal cues contribute to trust-building, whereas online, it might involve being responsive and ensuring a secure communication platform. A pastor skilled in creating a safe space for sharing can foster deeper relationships with their members, encouraging openness and vulnerability which are key to effective pastoral care.

Mills (2011) emphasises the importance of assurance about confidentiality and the credibility of the pastoral figure in fostering online trust, which echoes the pivotal roles of understanding individual narratives and integrity in trust-building online: "The qualitative analysis of the personal data revealed a need for reassurance concerning the confidentiality of the person by the chaplain together with the knowledge that e-mails were being answered by an ordained Christian minister" (p.112).

Pastors who successfully foster trust and meaningful digital pastoral care often start by acknowledging the unique dynamics of online interactions. They recognise the significance of prompt responses, the privacy afforded by messaging, the authenticity revealed through video

calls, and the importance of personal connection and relatability. This approach not only encourages self-disclosure among members but also bridges the gap between the digital and physical realms of pastoral care. Pastor A highlights the proactive nature of online engagement, underscoring the importance of reaching out first to individuals who show interest in the church's online presence. Pastor A's method exemplifies a strategic approach to digital pastoral care, where the emphasis is on accessibility and responsiveness.

“We try to get in touch with those who message us or comment on our posts. We expect them to reach out to us because they have shown interest in our posts. Therefore, we need to take the first step in reaching out to them. We ask them about any special concerns that the pastors or the church can address for them. It may not involve a physical visit, but we can handle it online. Most of the time, these visits take place on platforms like Zoom, Messenger, or Instagram.” Pastor A

Similarly, Pastors L and K provide insight into the gradual building of trust through digital communication. “And when it begins with a chat, sometimes the person will call and say, ‘I want to talk to you, I want us to talk.’ Then the person calls, and those who have no time to chat bring voice messages” (Pastor L).

“With new people, when I first make contact, I usually begin by exchanging messages to establish trust. We may text for about five to ten minutes initially. As we progress, the conversations become longer. Naturally, people desire to meet and engage in discussions. Subsequently, we start calling each other and exchanging messages as a way to initiate the conversation or meeting. However, the actual main meeting occurs when we engage in verbal communication. Visual meetings or consultations are primarily conducted when working with families or couples. It is preferable for both parties to have visual contact. When there are multiple participants, using video conferencing is deemed more effective. Therefore, if there are more than two people involved in the dialogue, it is recommended to utilise video communication.” Pastor K

Pastors N and M reflect on the personal connections that can be formed online, noting how their individual backgrounds and the blending of online and offline relationships contribute to trust-building.

“Well, I would say that it varies depending on the situation. Of course, in the first meeting, they will not disclose right away unless one member calls your attention and says, ‘Pastor, do you have time? I have something. My heart is really heavy. I have a sentiment, please.’ My graduate degree in law or juris doctor degree has helped me a lot, especially in my context where the problem concerns marital issues and property. There are so many issues back in the Philippines. It has become the connecting agent between my parishioners and me. Personally, I am happy because I can apply my law degree and my chaplaincy skills. It varies depending on the situation. There are times when one member will express all their sentiments in the first meeting, and there are also members who may take at least three or four meetings before they end up expressing, revealing, or disclosing sensitive information to you.” Pastor N

“Obviously, I don’t have all the truth, but I think that because, how can I put it this way? I believe that due to my relationships with many of them being both online and offline, some of the things I did online help to build their trust. As a result, they feel more comfortable sometimes talking to me in person.” Pastor M

Pastor D’s cautious approach to not being overly inquisitive resonates with the ethical considerations of pastoral care, ensuring that trust is not compromised: “So, I have to use my discernment because I don’t want to be intrusive. I don’t want people to feel pressured, and I don’t want them to lose trust in me because I am too inquisitive.” Meanwhile, Digital Pastor A brings a unique perspective on the intimacy of online interactions, observing that the virtual presence in one’s home creates an environment of authenticity and honesty. This setting encourages a more genuine connection, facilitating an open and trusting relationship.

“One significant aspect that sets online interactions apart is the realisation that the person is virtually present in your home. Even though it is just

through a camera, they are essentially inside your living space. They witness your daily life, your messy house, your appearance without makeup, and they see you in your true reality. So, I believe that this, in itself, initiates a more honest relationship. You expose your life to allow the person to connect with you, to see you as a real person willing to reveal yourself to receive them. One crucial aspect, in my opinion, is to be able to say, ‘You know, I’ve faced a problem and have gone through similar experiences,’ creating a connection where the person sees that you, like them, are a regular human being dealing with challenges, which encourages them to open up.” Digital Pastor A

Digital Pastors B, D, E, and F emphasize the significance of empathy, promptness, and follow-up in building trust. They advocate for a supportive, non-judgmental stance, understanding the individual’s needs, and showing genuine interest in their well-being. This approach solidifies the trust between the pastor and the parishioner, encouraging open communication and self-disclosure. These techniques seem to be the consequence of experience in digital pastoral care.

“And so, the only objective we have is to help. I always say that I am there to help, not to judge, because we are all flawed, sinners. I think that this helps her a lot to feel confident in being able to vent, expose something that she has experienced.” Digital Pastor B

“Personally, I would prefer a prompt response because it shows me that they are interested in assisting me. Therefore, if we take a longer time, such as 24 hours, to reply to them, I believe the client’s interest in returning to us will decrease. However, this will also rely on how they access the internet and their devices. Nevertheless, our promptness in addressing their inquiries or issues impacts our relationship with them.” Digital Pastor D

“If somebody contacts us asking for a prayer, we are building rapport by trying to understand more about them, by trying to understand why they would like to ask for prayers, and at the same time to pray for them too. So, knowing first the background of why they are asking for this prayer

makes them more comfortable in opening up about what is happening to them. At the same time, that builds trust and confidence within them, some of whom are sceptical because asking for too much information could make them doubt if it might be a scam. So, doing the least that we could do in order for us to gain their trust is building that rapport by gaining their confidence, by knowing the background in a minimalist way. Because if we try to maximise all the information that we want, we could forget that there's a prayer first before they even message us." Digital Pastor F

"If you do not reply immediately or neglect that guest, we might lose their trust. If we reply to them promptly, they may feel that they are important and that we care for them. Yes, we do that. After sending prayers and having some conversations, we send follow-ups. For instance, between three to seven days later, we follow up with them because we are interested in understanding how God works in their lives, and that is important to us." Pastor H

Pastor R and Digital Pastor I engage in meaningful conversation, establishing a personal connection through self-disclosure and the expression of affection, even across digital mediums. Their strategies highlight the importance of personal stories, open-ended questions, and the thoughtful use of digital communication tools to convey empathy and understanding, thereby fostering a trusting and supportive pastoral relationship.

"On instant messaging, I normally ask questions and questions that really are open ended, questions that allow them to speak. So how have you been doing? How's life? How's your faith? How's your relationship with Jesus? And I see if they open up or not. And the more they open, the more I can get specific with my questions." Pastor R

"The main point is talking about ourselves. Whenever we share a personal story, something that happened, not always directly related to what the person is saying, but the fact that we have opened up about ourselves to show that we are also human. I know the symbol here is of the church, but I am a person. This makes people feel more comfortable and opens up many dialogues from there. So, that's the main thing. The second point is

precisely trying to get to a closer level. It's trying to apply the five love languages from a distance. Since I have many long-distance relationships, most of my friends are far away. My engagement was also long-distance, which is sort of weird. It's something I've been practicing for a long time. So, I like to convey as much affection as I can through a screen. Using that with people, with contacts, whether it's a message where I again write the person's name, which already makes it a closer contact, I use emojis, which show expression, so the person sees that it's not a dry message, and you can't read the tone of it. An audio message makes the person feel the tone I'm speaking with. Saying "Good morning" is one thing, but saying "Good morning, John, how are you today?" is another. By incorporating these issues and examples from the person's life and other details to show that we are close, we can establish immediate trust for the person to remember us." Digital Pastor I

Digital Pastor D highlighted the role of integrity in trust-building, noting that it is manifest in the manner we respond to the congregants' concerns: "First is I think the integrity of the church or the person that they are talking to. It shows in how we answer their concerns their problems." This statement echoes Terry and Cain's (2016) discussion on digital empathy, underscoring the imperative of conveying genuine concern and care even in the absence of physical presence.

The challenge of establishing trust without the aid of nonverbal cues in digital communication was a recurring theme throughout my interviews. Digital Pastor H remarked on the importance of prompt responses to engender trust: "Because if you did not reply immediately or you neglect that guest, we might lose their trust. If we reply to them immediately, they may feel that they are important and that we care for them."

In instances where a pastor might lack this skill in an instant messaging context, their ability to encourage self-disclosure online would be significantly hindered. The absence of trust could lead to superficial interactions, thereby impacting the depth and effectiveness of pastoral

care and eventually lead the interaction more and more toward face-to-face pastoral care if at all. Digital Pastor B's method of persistent messaging and reassurance seemed like the most nuanced among the interviewed pastors. "And I realised that over time, so much so that we send messages and say to the person 'you can count on me'. Some people after a while say, 'wow thank you for praying and dedicating your time to pray for me and such.'"

Magezi and Nanthambwe (2022) emphasise the church's role in community development, expanding on the pastor's ability to build trust beyond individual relationships to influence the broader community. Trust has collective implications, beyond being a personal matter. When trust is established, pastors can create a sense of community that propels both individual and communal growth. In fact, trust in online communities is not absolute and may be contingent upon offline knowledge of contacts, supporting the importance of prompt digital responses for trust maintenance: "Research indicates that users do not entirely trust online communities and that trust is also dependent on whether or not one knows the contacts also offline" (Schrammel, 2009).

Highlighting the crucial aspects of pastoral online trust-building skills, Hogue (2020) posits that empathy and positive regard are fundamental elements in the therapist-client (or pastor-member) dynamic, supporting the insight that understanding individual narratives and demonstrating integrity are key to building trust online. This trust is eroded when messages aren't read and responded to quickly as the impression left with the member is that pastors don't care or are too busy to read their messages. Therefore, pastors who are adept at building trust online will be able to successfully encourage online self-disclosure while pastors who are inept at trust building online will discourage online self-disclosure accordingly.

Language Proficiency Online

In this section, I will explore how a pastor's language proficiency impacts their ability to encourage and understand self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care settings. Language proficiency encompasses not only fluency in the member's primary language but also the ability to adapt communication styles to suit the member's needs and preferences. This includes considering factors such as the member's educational level and vocabulary when engaging in pastoral conversations. Pastors with a high level of language proficiency can effectively navigate between different modes of communication, choosing the most appropriate channel to express empathy, provide counsel, and convey understanding. Some pastors may find written language, such as emails or instant messages, to be a powerful tool for clarity and reflection. Others may prefer face-to-face interactions, where they can capture the full spectrum of verbal and nonverbal cues. The choice of modality depends on the pastor's strengths and the member's needs, with the ultimate goal of fostering an environment conducive to self-disclosure.

However, if a pastor lacks proficiency in the member's language or struggles to adapt their communication style to the member's level of understanding, they may face significant challenges in encouraging and comprehending self-disclosure. This linguistic barrier can limit the pastor's ability to offer effective pastoral care, both online and face-to-face. Therefore, language proficiency is a crucial factor in determining the success of hybrid pastoral care, as it directly influences the quality and depth of the pastor-member relationship.

Pastor R's insights underscore the importance of adapting communication styles to the audience's language proficiency and cultural background, particularly in a multi-ethnic pastoral context. This adaptability enhances the clarity of the message and ensures it resonates with the recipient, making the pastoral care experience more personal and effective. Pastor R emphasises

the strategic use of simple language and, when necessary, more sophisticated vocabulary to match the recipient's educational background, thereby facilitating a better understanding and engagement in the conversation.

“Depending on the person, since I’m pastoring a multi-ethnic church, even depending on the level of English of the person that I’m interacting with, I try to make my comments and questions very easy to understand, use very simple language. Of course, if I’m talking with somebody who is very educated, I will probably use one or two words that are a little bit more fancy. But I normally, as a general rule in everything in ministry, just try to use very simple language that is very understandable. I think I’ve had good response with that.” Pastor R

Digital Pastor B highlights the critical first contact in digital pastoral care, noting the need for warmth and personal touch even in brief messages to encourage further engagement. This insight speaks to the broader theme of ensuring digital communications convey empathy and genuine interest, setting the stage for deeper pastoral interactions.

“For example, there are people who only say, ‘Hi, how are you?’ To show the person is interested in them. And sometimes we don’t know what is behind the reply. That’s why I always pray to God to put people in our path, but let Him be the one to speak to that person’s heart, because we don’t know what’s behind that ‘I’m okay’. Sometimes it’s not even okay. And then if the answer is ‘all right’ we have to try to express the joy of receiving this message. ‘You are very important to us. I am very happy with this opportunity’ for the person to feel good about being contacted.”
Digital Pastor B

While Digital Pastor B believes longer messages are the best way to communicate with the people he offers pastoral care to, Pastor D and Pastor T highlight the importance of adapting language and communication styles to suit different audiences. Pastor D emphasizes the need to understand and employ the communication preferences of younger generations, such as using emojis and concise messages, to effectively convey empathy and build connections. This

approach reflects a high level of language proficiency in the digital realm, as it demonstrates the ability to tailor communication to the specific needs and expectations of the audience.

"Communication with me on this platform is similar to communicating with anyone else, except for the topic, which I would say is about spiritual death. I had to learn all the abbreviations and emojis, understanding their meanings and messages. Emojis are often used to convey emotions like joy, sadness, or crying, and for me, that suffices. I believe I can interpret these symbols into feelings; when I see something, I can sense how they feel." Pastor D

The pastoral adaptation involves understanding the underlying ‘digital language’ spoken by the congregation, beyond just familiarising oneself with a new tool or platform. As Pastor D aptly puts it, “They send you an emoji. Sometimes I get messages that are only emojis and I have to translate them to understand how they feel. And I have to respond like for like.” This highlights a specific communicative challenge that requires a level of digital fluency to navigate. A pastor’s response to such messages is a delicate dance of interpretation and expression within the digital sphere, where traditional forms of pastoral communication may not suffice. This language familiarity has a direct impact on self-disclosure for the pastoral care providers and recipients alike.

Furthermore, Pastor D’s assertion that “If I get the message with five emojis I cannot send them links to five scriptures - you have to speak their language” suggests that the pastoral role must evolve beyond conventional methods to include these digital competencies. Noh (2016) establishes a strong correlation between digital literacy and information use behaviour, especially on bit literacy as it aligns closely with the pastoral need to interpret and respond to digital communications effectively. As Noh suggests, the impact of digital literacy on information use behaviour is significant, and in the pastoral context, this extends to how well a pastor can ‘read’ and ‘write’ in the digital language of emojis (Gesselman, Ta, and Garcia, 2019;

Koch, Peter and Stachl, 2020). This digital literacy enables deeper connections and a more empathetic response, which are the cornerstones of effective pastoral care as they lead to self-disclosure (Rains, Brunner, and Oman, 2016).

Similarly, Pastor T's perspective underscores the significance of choosing the appropriate communication channel based on the situation and the individual's preferences. By recognizing when a voice call may be more effective than a text message in clarifying misunderstandings, Pastor T exhibits a nuanced understanding of language proficiency in hybrid pastoral care. This ability to discern and adapt to the most suitable mode of communication is crucial in fostering self-disclosure and providing effective pastoral support.

“We are dealing with a different generation with a different mindset and culture. Oftentimes, I receive direct messages such as ‘I’m getting married’ or ‘My boyfriend has been arrested.’ There seem to be no boundaries, like when someone shares that their mom passed away. I’ve been a colporteur for many years, and so you kind of find your way without pressing people, but gently leading them to get on the call. Really, because I want to be able to clear things up. It’s hard to clear things up via text. I believe a lot of misunderstanding can come through just texting alone.” Pastor T

These insights collectively illuminate the nuanced considerations pastors must navigate in choosing the appropriate mode of communication for pastoral care. It becomes evident that language proficiency in the digital realm extends beyond mere fluency to include an understanding of the medium’s limitations and potentials. Pastors must choose their words carefully and decide the most effective mode of delivery—be it text, emojis, or voice calls—to ensure their message is received in the spirit of empathy and care they intend. This strategic choice is critical in fostering an environment conducive to self-disclosure and meaningful

pastoral care, highlighting the adaptive and situational nature of hybrid pastoral practices in the digital age.

These skills are not isolated; they interconnect and reinforce each other, creating a comprehensive approach to pastoral care. A pastor's skill set, honed through experience and reflection, becomes the lens through which they assess and choose the most effective way to offer pastoral care. If a pastor doesn't know how to be an effective listener in an instant messaging visitation, they are less likely going to lead their members to self-disclosure, which will reinforce to the pastor that instant messaging can be used to schedule the visitation while face-to-face is where pastoral care really takes place.

Thus, pastors who have a high proficiency in the language spoken by their members online will be more successful in encouraging online self-disclosure. Conversely, pastors with a low proficiency of language and online communication skills will effectively discourage online self-disclosure.

The Personality of the Pastoral Care Provider

Next, I will focus on personality, the third core property under the pastor category. This segment of my analysis will examine how a pastor's personality traits influence their practice of hybrid pastoral care and the subsequent member self-disclosure. It was clear from my focused coding that many pastors used terms such as 'shy,' 'talkative,' and 'open' to describe one's preference for self-disclosure online or face-to-face in the context of pastoral care. For example, they expressed sentiments that 'talkative' pastors may thrive in face-to-face interactions, while pastors who 'love new things' may be more experimental with digital platforms. These terms are normally associated with the study of personality. However, I did not expect the terminology used by the pastors I interviewed to match any known personality framework. They gestured

toward personality being a factor despite the terminology they used. Building upon these emergent descriptors, it is crucial to anchor my analysis in a structured framework of personality.

Various models of personality, such as Eysenck's three-factor model, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, and the DISC profile, offer distinctive lenses through which to view personality traits (Huang et al., 2014; Lee, Tsai, and Wu, 2020; Lv et al., 2022). Eysenck's model, for example, focuses on extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism as primary dimensions, while the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator proposes a typological approach with 16 distinct personality types based on preferences in perception and judgment (Myers, 1962). The DISC profile, alternatively, categorises behaviour across four primary traits: dominance, influence, steadiness, and conscientiousness. Although these personality models offer valuable perspectives, they don't match the solid scientific support and straightforward comprehensiveness of the five-factor model. This model covers a broad range of personality traits and is known for its strong ability to predict behaviour and its dependability (Digman, 1990; Piedmont, 1999).

The five-factor model of personality emerged from several independent researchers' efforts during the 1950s and 1960s who were interested in understanding the fundamental traits that define human personality. The model was derived using a technique known as factor analysis. This process aimed to cluster related terms of personality descriptors into broad categories that could capture the essence of individual differences. By the 1970s and 1980s, researchers Lewis Goldberg, Robert McCrae, and Paul Costa further developed the model, solidifying its standing in the psychological community. They identified five broad factors—Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism—collectively known as OCEAN (Digman, 1990; Zhao and Seibert, 2006).

The dominance of the five-factor model in psychometric literature is largely due to its comprehensiveness and its empirical basis. The model has been found to reliably capture a wide array of individual differences in personality and is used extensively in psychological research and practice. It also has a strong cross-cultural validity, which means it tends to describe personality constructs across different cultures effectively. Additionally, it's been applied in various domains, including occupational, clinical, and social psychology, making it a versatile tool for understanding human behaviour. Moreover, the five factors have been linked to a myriad of life outcomes, such as job performance, academic success, interpersonal relationships, and well-being, further cementing its relevance and dominance in psychometric research. This widespread applicability and the robustness of the five-factor model have made it a central model for discussing personality in both academic and applied settings (Özkan, 2018).

The five factors—openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism—resonate with the descriptors unearthed in my focused coding and offer a comprehensive, evidence-based, and widely recognised framework for analysing how personality may influence a pastor's practice of hybrid pastoral care. The model's factorial approach somewhat aligns with the language used by the pastors and facilitates an analysis grounded in a scientifically validated structure, providing a rationale for its selection in examining the impact of the pastor's personality to online self-disclosure.

Overall, the interviews suggested that the pastor's personality traits such as Openness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism as potentially influential personality factors could play a significant role in digital pastoral care. Openness is a personality trait that reflects the range, depth, and intricacy of a person's mental and experiential existence. It includes active imagination, sensitivity to aesthetics, awareness of emotions, preference for diversity, and

intellectual curiosity. Openness is defined by a readiness to consider new ideas and non-traditional values, and an ability to engage in abstract, complex thinking. This trait is marked by the richness of a person's intellectual life, extending beyond mere intellect to encompass appreciation of art and beauty, emotional depth, and a sense of adventure. Openness indicates the extent to which an individual is receptive to a variety of experiences and their ability to be insightful and open to exploring new ideas and non-traditional values (Digman, 1990; McCrae and John, 1992).

Extraversion is defined by its attributes of energy, receptiveness to positive emotions, assertiveness, sociability, and the inclination to look for stimulation in social settings. It includes a range of characteristics, including sociability, warmth, activity, and the likelihood to feel positive emotions. Individuals with high levels of extraversion are typically enthusiastic, proactive, and prone to accepting exciting opportunities. They are frequently seen by others as lively and joyful (Digman, 1990; McCrae and John, 1992).

Extraversion is consistently linked to a greater propensity for self-disclosure across various contexts, from social networking sites to more formal job settings, and this extends to the domain of pastoral care. The research by Loiacono et al., (2012), Gentina and Chen (2019), Lv et al., (2022), and others underscores the role of extraversion in fostering open communication and community building. Extraverted individuals, including pastors, are likely to engage actively on digital platforms, broadening their outreach and potentially enhancing the frequency and diversity of communication with their congregation. They are generally more comfortable with social interaction, which translates into a robust online presence and the ability to foster digital communities that complement in-person care.

Individuals who are amiable tend to prioritise harmonious relationships with others and are typically thoughtful, amicable, generous, supportive, and prepared to balance their own interests with those of others. They also maintain a positive perspective on human nature, holding the belief that people are fundamentally honest, respectable, and reliable. Agreeableness is also associated with altruistic behaviour, the kind that shows a selfless concern for the welfare of others (Digman, 1990; McCrae and John, 1992). One of the intrinsic traits of agreeableness is compassion, which is one of the foundational experiences in pastoral care. This is true of hybrid pastoral care for both face-to-face and online interactions. Compassion involves recognising suffering, understanding its universality, forming an emotional connection, tolerating uncomfortable feelings, and being motivated to act (Gu et al., 2017). Pastors with a high degree of agreeableness would experience compassion more often and are therefore, more likely to engage in listening to provide a non-judgmental space that can significantly enhance self-disclosure among their pastoral care recipients.

Neuroticism is a term used to describe a propensity towards experiencing negative emotions, including anger, anxiety, and depression. It can also be referred to as emotional instability, or conversely, emotional stability. This trait is linked to an individual's stress management and impulse control. Individuals with high neuroticism levels are more likely to experience negative emotions and exhibit a greater emotional response to stress (Digman, 1990; McCrae and John, 1992).

Pastors with high neuroticism may exhibit increased emotional responsiveness and face challenges in impulse control, which can significantly affect their pastoral interactions (McCrae and John, 1992). These challenges are particularly pertinent in hybrid pastoral care settings, where the integration of face-to-face and online modalities demands a high degree of emotional

regulation and adaptability. Loiacono et al., (2012) and Loiacono (2015) have demonstrated that individuals with higher levels of neuroticism tend to be more reserved in their self-disclosure on Social Networking Sites (SNS), a finding that can be extrapolated to pastors' behaviour in digital communication. This reservation can limit the depth and authenticity of pastoral interactions online, potentially affecting the relational dynamics and the congregants' willingness to engage in self-disclosure.

Digital Pastor A's reflections provide a poignant example of openness, one of the five factors. Their account of developing deep intimacy through online interactions underscores the potential for digital platforms to facilitate significant levels of vulnerability and connection, often surpassing traditional face-to-face encounters in the depth of disclosure.

“So there is the first conversation, there is the second, then the third, fourth, and fifth conversations, you are already talking about things that sometimes you do not talk about with your mother, your sister, your brother-in-law, because the person is already in this incredible intimacy with you, that is already inside your house, you know? Sometimes you find yourself cooking with the computer on, chatting, and the person is already a part of your daily life simply because they are already inside your house.” Digital Pastor A

This data suggests that pastors who are naturally open and comfortable with digital mediums may be particularly adept at fostering meaningful online relationships, encouraging self-disclosure in a manner that feels incredibly intimate and integrated into daily life.

Furthermore, Digital Pastor A observes that those engaging in online evangelism often exhibit a predisposition towards openness. “I realise that individuals who engage in online evangelism, in general, are already predisposed to greater vulnerability and a greater sense of openness compared to those who do not participate in this type of activity.” This remark aligns with the openness trait, suggesting a natural inclination among digital pastors to embrace

vulnerability and new experiences, thereby enhancing the depth and quality of online pastoral care.

Pastor R's commentary illuminates the role of extraversion and agreeableness in pastoral care. They highlight how different pastors possess varying levels of comfort with public speaking and technology use, indicating that extraversion may influence a pastor's ease in both in-person and digital settings. Pastor R's personal adaptability to both live audiences and online platforms, despite recognising their own imperfections, points to a blend of extraversion and agreeableness that facilitates effective ministry across different modalities.

“I think that pastors have different gifts and different personalities. There are pastors who feel very at ease in the pulpit. In a public speech setting it also makes some people nervous. There are pastors who are okay with in-person preaching in person to a great congregation. And there are pastors who, even though they feel at ease with that, do not feel at ease online in front of a camera, for instance.” Pastor R

Digital Pastor I's insights into the nuanced preferences of men and women for online pastoral care suggest a keen understanding of the social and emotional aspects of agreeableness and openness. They note that women, in general, express a need for more extensive communication and flexibility, indicating that pastors who are able to adapt their approach to meet these needs likely score high on openness and agreeableness. Similarly, men's preference for a somewhat anonymous online interaction to avoid direct judgment highlights the importance of creating a non-threatening, accepting environment, further underscoring the value of agreeableness in online pastoral care.

“Within both profiles, men and women, it's kind of different. I believe that women generally need to express themselves more, need to talk more, and need to fit this into their routine. So, those who would seek online pastoral care in this regard can be anywhere with their cell phone, talking to their children, running back and forth, or coming out of a university, so the age

range also widens quite a bit. Now the husband is resting, he has no one to talk to, he needs that prayer, the husband is not a believer. So I believe that this case fits well. And men generally too, because they open up a little to someone they're not going to have that eye-to-eye contact with, who won't feel that direct judgment, who doesn't have a strong emotional bond. So it's easier to open up on the internet in an almost anonymous way, right, to share more and even take the first steps in faith often. So I imagine very broad profiles like this because it's already happened in more than one case for us, so I think it fits in a very broad way." Digital Pastor I

Based on the various synonyms used to describe the pastor's personalities in relation to digital pastoral care, the perception of the pastors I interviewed is that pastoral care providers with high levels of openness, extraversion, and agreeableness, coupled with low levels of neuroticism, are likely to maximise the encouragement of online self-disclosure. This combination of traits seems to foster a digital environment that encourages openness and self-disclosure. Conversely, pastors with low levels of openness, extraversion, and agreeableness, coupled with high levels of neuroticism, are likely to discourage self-disclosure, especially online. Such personality profiles may lead to environments that are less conducive to open communication, making it more challenging for members to express their personal struggles or insights both online and face-to-face.

Beliefs

The final core property of this category pertains to the beliefs of the pastor. My analysis here will be centred on understanding how a pastor's beliefs, specifically their theological and ethical frameworks, shape their engagement in hybrid pastoral care. I will investigate how these belief systems influence a pastor's willingness and approach to providing pastoral care through digital platforms. The factors for this property are the pastor's theological framework,

particularly any concerns they may have regarding the use of digital platforms for pastoral care, and their ethical framework, focusing on any ethical dilemmas or considerations they encounter in the digital pastoral care context. These two factors were influential in every interview, although most pastors did not acknowledge their own theological and ethical framework when addressing the use of technology in ministry. These frameworks aren't normally seen but are rather the lenses through which you see everything else.

Theological Framework

The theological framework is a pastor's set of beliefs, doctrines, and interpretive lenses that shape their understanding and application of their faith's teachings (Lartey, 2013). Their theological framework fundamentally influences a pastor's approach to ministry, guiding their perception of divine mandates, ethical norms, and spiritual practices. In pastoral care, especially within the context of hybrid (online and face-to-face) pastoral care, this framework dictates how pastors engage with their congregation and respond to diverse needs and challenges in physical or digital spaces (Savin-Baden, & Reader, 2018).

When considering the use of technology in pastoral care, my interviews suggested that pastors fall generally into two broad categories based on their theological beliefs. On one end are pastors who view technology as a God-given tool for ministry. For these pastors, digital platforms are perceived as both modern conveniences and divinely provided resources that extend the reach and effectiveness of pastoral care. This viewpoint aligns with an interpretative lens that sees scriptural mandates, such as "feeding the flock" (Peter 5:2-3, Bible, 1984) as inclusive of digital engagement.

For a pastor with this perspective, online tools like social media, video conferencing, and digital prayer groups become vital components of their ministry, enabling broader, more

inclusive pastoral care. This openness to digital platforms likely fosters an environment conducive to self-disclosure, where church members feel encouraged to share and connect in online spaces. Such pastors might actively promote digital forums or support groups, seeing them as spaces where communal sharing and spiritual growth can flourish.

Pastors like Pastor O and Digital Pastor C demonstrate a proactive approach to digital platforms, viewing them as divine tools for ministry. Pastor O, for instance, highlights the viability of online discipleship, reflecting a theological stance that embraces digital means as a legitimate extension of spiritual growth and community building. Digital Pastor C's anecdote about Jesus's use of the net further elucidates a theological interpretation that embraces technology as part of God's providence for ministry. He shared, "Why did Jesus use a net? It was already there, washed and stored... Because that's what he had in his hand." This reflection metaphorically positions modern digital tools, like the internet, as the contemporary nets given by God to reach out and minister to the global community. Such a viewpoint underscores a theological framework that sees the utilisation of available tools, including digital ones, as aligned with divine intentions for evangelism and pastoral care.

On the other hand, the narratives from pastors like Pastor P present a more cautious approach towards integrating technology into ministry. Pastor P articulates concerns about the digital divide, especially among the elderly, highlighting a nuanced consideration of how theological principles of inclusivity and accessibility influence the practical deployment of technology in pastoral care. He says, "This is my concern because, for example, in my reality, most of the members are elderly, so they're not very fond of technology."

In line with the principles of CGT, it was important for me to reflect on my own theological framework as I interpreted the transcripts of my interviews. Most of the pastors I

interviewed had a similar theological framework to mine as it related to the use of technology in ministry. They viewed it as a positive, God-given tool, which I also believe. Campbell (2010) posits that the adoption of media technology for religious purposes has long been a tradition, suggesting that for those who see technology as a God-given resource, there is a compelling movement to embrace and utilise it for ministry purposes: “Seeing media technology as a God-given resource to be embraced for religious purposes is a legacy and belief clearly seen in many Protestant Christian groups' media usage especially in an era of televangelism and religious internet use” (p.21).

However, many of the pastors I interviewed pointed out the need of training in seminaries to help reshape the theological framework of the second group which consists of pastors who believe that technology can never substitute face-to-face ministry in any way or circumstance. These pastors might prioritise in-person interactions, viewing them as more authentic or spiritually significant. Their theological framework may emphasise the incarnational aspect of ministry — the physical presence and direct, personal connection as essential components of pastoral care.

The perception of the pastors I interview is that pastoral care providers who hold this theological view will consider digital platforms as inadequate, perhaps even detrimental, to the genuine relational depth and spiritual engagement they believe can only be achieved through physical presence. Consequently, such pastors might discourage or limit the use of digital means for pastoral interactions, especially when sensitive issues are involved. They will likely use digital pastoral care simply to schedule their face-to-face visitations and will keep it to generic use. Their approach to encouraging self-disclosure would likely be centred around physical settings, where they believe more authentic and spiritually meaningful interactions can occur.

In both scenarios, a pastor's stance on technology in ministry is rooted in their theological framework. It influences their approach to providing pastoral care and shapes the nature and depth of congregational engagement and self-disclosure. A pastor who embraces digital platforms as part of their ministry might encourage a culture of openness and sharing in both physical and virtual spaces, whereas a pastor sceptical of technology's role in spiritual care may foster deeper personal connections and self-disclosure primarily in face-to-face settings.

Ethical Framework

An ethical framework in the context of pastoral ministry refers to the set of moral principles, standards, and values that guide a pastor's decision-making and behaviour, especially concerning privacy, security, and other ethical considerations when engaging with digital platforms for ministry. Morgan (2010) highlights the relationship between ethics and pastoral ministry: "managing the ethical dilemmas associated with maintaining confidentiality on the one hand and assisting care seekers to sort through and respond to their own ethical dilemmas on the other remains a critical skill for pastoral providers" (p.18). Furthermore, the ethical framework for pastoral ministry is often set within the institutional context where pastoral care is offered. As Lebacqz (2010) concludes, "clergy ethics is determined by the institution" (p.47).

Ethical concerns expressed in the interviews were primarily focused on issues of privacy and confidentiality. The pastors interviewed did not directly address safeguarding policies as directly influencing whether they would prefer face-to-face or online pastoral care. When they did allude to safety, they did it in the context of the sponsoring entity who determines such policies. I will address these instances in chapter 7 while in this present section I'll address the privacy and confidentiality dimensions of a pastor's ethical framework because these were the primary areas addressed by their answers.

These concerns on privacy and confidentiality are heightened in digital spaces where the potential for data breaches, unauthorised access, and misuse of personal information is significant (A N Joinson et al., 2010). A pastor's ethical stance on these issues will greatly influence their approach to using digital platforms for pastoral care. If a pastor has substantial concerns about privacy and security on digital platforms due to their perception of third-party surveillance, they are likely to restrict their use of these tools for pastoral care, especially for sharing or discussing sensitive information.

Pastor J's reflection on the use of commercial platforms like Facebook Messenger for pastoral care reveals a conscientious approach to privacy and data protection. His proactive stance on not posting birthday greetings without explicit consent from individuals showcases a deep understanding of privacy concerns and the potential for trust erosion if personal information is mishandled. "Yes, I do think about it. A few days ago, I made an announcement to the church, or rather to the district pastors, that we will not be posting birthday greetings on our Facebook page unless the individual whose birthday it is gives us permission to do so", illustrates Pastor J's commitment to respecting congregants' privacy and his cognisance of the ethical implications inherent in digital communications.

At the other end of the spectrum, Digital Pastor A's remarks highlight a critical and somewhat sceptical perspective on the safety and privacy of digital platforms. Digital Pastor A's concern for the potential misuse of shared information on platforms like Google Drive and Facebook Messenger reflects a deep-seated apprehension about third-party surveillance and data exploitation. "I think about this a lot... I'm that person who doesn't create a Google Drive shared with anybody because I don't think it's safe. So I think about this a lot," they shared. This heightened awareness of privacy issues and scepticism towards platform owners like Zuckerberg

and Musk underscores the complexity of ethical decision-making in the digital age. Digital Pastor A's stance embodies a critical vigilance that, while unique among their peers, underscores the importance of safeguarding congregant privacy in an increasingly surveyed digital landscape.

Contrastingly, pastors such as Pastor A and Pastor O admitted to not having considered the ethical implications of using commercial platforms for pastoral care. "I haven't yet", said Pastor A, and similarly, Pastor O confessed, "No, I haven't." This lack of consideration for the ethical dimensions of digital pastoral care points to a potential gap in the awareness or prioritisation of privacy and security concerns among some pastoral care providers. It suggests that while some pastors are deeply engaged with ethical considerations, others may benefit from increased awareness and education on the implications of digital platforms for pastoral care.

This caution stems from a desire to protect the confidentiality of their congregation, adhering to a moral obligation to safeguard the privacy and well-being of their members. In such cases, these pastors might limit digital pastoral care to superficial interactions and avoid encouraging self-disclosure of personal or sensitive matters. They might prefer face-to-face interactions or use secure, private methods of communication for more in-depth pastoral care. Pastors and members considering the use of technology for pastoral care must weigh the increased risk of information security associated with social networking sites against more traditional communication methods: "Providing information on this social networking site would involve more information security risk (i.e. loss of my personal information) when compared with more traditional ways of communicating with others" (Loiacono, 2015).

Conversely, there are pastors who have a high level of trust in digital platforms and minimal ethical concerns regarding their privacy and security. These pastors might fully embrace digital tools for pastoral care, valuing the accessibility, convenience, and outreach potential they

offer. They may believe that adequate measures are in place to protect privacy and confidentiality on these platforms, or they may view the benefits of digital engagement as outweighing the potential risks. Such pastors might encourage open sharing and self-disclosure on digital platforms, using them as primary channels for pastoral communication and support. This approach can foster a sense of connectedness and community among members who are comfortable with digital interactions, potentially expanding the scope and impact of their pastoral ministry.

Mills (2011) highlights the nuanced balance between confidentiality and the efficacy of pastoral care: “The code of practice associated with the Internet-based workplace chaplaincy promises to discard all e-mail conversations after six months” (p.109), illustrating the commitment to confidentiality in digital communication. This approach is vital in establishing trust, particularly when pastoral care is delivered through technology. Further, Mills (2011) emphasises the importance of transparency and trust, stating, “trust is significant in e-pastoral care, with some users needing assurance of communicating with an ordained minister” (p.112).

Although most pastors I interviewed had never considered the ethical implications of offering pastoral care through digital platforms, many mentioned their fears of surveillance by government actors. They shared how this fear limits their use of instant messaging to scheduling face-to-face visitation. Pastors who are highly cautious about digital platform security may inadvertently limit the reach and effectiveness of their pastoral care, especially among members who prefer or rely on digital communication. Conversely, those with minimal concerns about digital privacy may expose their congregation to risks associated with data breaches, surveillance, and misuse of personal information, as mentioned by Digital Pastor A. This ethical balancing act requires pastors to continually assess and navigate the evolving landscape of digital

technology, weighing the moral implications of their choices against the pastoral needs of their congregation.

Conclusion

Based on the perception of the pastors I interviewed, each factor related to the pastor that I analysed in this chapter interplays with all other factors, creating a complex web that will influence the practice of hybrid pastoral care and the online self-disclosure of members. After normalising the data, I have consolidated all the factors pertaining to the properties of the pastoral care provider into the table below.

Table 4. Factors Influencing Pastoral Care Providers

Factors - Pastor	Encourages Online Self-Disclosure	Discourages Online Self-Disclosure
Access to Technology	High	Low
Age	Young	Old
Familiarity with Technology	High	Low
Online Listening Skills	Advanced	Basic
Online Trust Building Skills	Advanced	Basic
Online Language Proficiency	Fluent	Beginner
Trait Openness	High	Low
Trait Extraversion	High	Low
Trait Agreeableness	High	Low
Trait Neuroticism	Low	High
Theological View of Technology	Positive	Negative
Ethical View of Technology	Safe	Unsafe

Encouraging Online Self-Disclosure

The pastors' characteristics and circumstances that will maximise member self-disclosure in digital platforms are young pastors who are open to new experiences and have ample access to technology for the best hardware, software, and internet connection. They are very familiar with

the affordances of online platforms and believe they are private and safe tools given by God for ministry. These pastors are also extraverted and agreeable. They are not sensitive to negative emotion and have learnt how to build trust by listening to their members so as to successfully encourage self-disclosure in online platforms.

Discouraging Online Self-Disclosure

Pastors who tend to minimise self-disclosure on digital platforms often exhibit a distinct set of characteristics and circumstances. The perception from my pastors is that pastors who would discourage online self-disclosure are older, suggesting a generational distance from the most current digital trends and platforms. Their access to technology might be limited, not necessarily from a lack of resources. They are less familiar with the nuances of digital communication, perhaps finding it hard to navigate the subtleties of online interaction. Their belief system might include theological and ethical concerns about the use of digital platforms for ministry, fearing that such platforms are not entirely private and may be subject to surveillance by governments or private companies. These pastors may also experience higher levels of neuroticism, making them sensitive to the potential risks of digital engagement. Their online listening skills and trust-building abilities aren't well developed, possibly because they prioritise face-to-face interactions where they feel more adept and secure.

CHAPTER 6

THE PASTORAL CARE RECIPIENT

In the previous chapter, I examined the characteristics and influences on pastoral care providers within the context of hybrid pastoral care, focusing on how these aspects determine their methods for fostering online self-disclosure. Moving forward, this I will now shift my focus to the recipients of pastoral care, referred to as ‘members’. This designation will cover a wide range of individuals across different settings, including local church members, patients in hospitals or clinics, students, and others seeking pastoral support. My core goal is to explore how various factors affect members’ readiness and capacity to self-disclose in a digital pastoral care setting. I will analyse member’s relationship to technology, their emotional state, their personality, and their beliefs. Following the structure of the previous chapter, my analysis will conclude with the identification of two groups of characteristics and situations: one that encourages online self-disclosure and another that inhibits it.

Relationship to Technology

In this section I will explore how a member’s relationship to technology affects their online self-disclosure when receiving pastoral care considering the three main factors which emerged from my research interviews: their familiarity with technology, their age, and their access to technology. Within each factor I will consider the characteristics and circumstances that would encourage or discourage self-disclosure online.

Access

The availability and quality of technology significantly influence how members engage in pastoral care, especially in a hybrid model. My exploration of the pastors’ access to

technology in the previous chapter equally applies to the members access to technology, especially as it relates to fast internet connection. In their study of Pastoral Care and Mental Health in Post-Pandemic South Africa, Moodley and Hove (2023) observed that:

“Online platforms became crucial for maintaining connections between churches and congregants during lockdowns. The use of video calls, Zoom, and WhatsApp was instrumental in ensuring accessibility. However, the online space also highlighted socioeconomic divisions, as some church leaders and congregants lacked the technical skills or financial resources for online engagement. This was particularly significant in areas with connectivity issues and financial constraints to accessing live streaming services” (p.3).

The evolution of technology not only expands the reach but also deepens the impact of pastoral services. This dynamic interplay between technology and pastoral care is vividly reflected in the experiences and insights shared by various pastors I interviewed. Pastor A’s enthusiasm for the potential of technology to extend pastoral care to millions underscores a significant shift in the landscape of spiritual guidance.

“I see that pastoral care will reach millions of people. It may be an assumption, but I believe that the technologies we have now will reach more people than what is outlined in our job description here at the hospital. It will touch more lives and reach more individuals. I hope that the world will now become aware of the benefits of these technologies due to the widespread availability of messages. People can now access pastoral care anytime. In other words, there is no reason for individuals not to seek this kind of support as it is now available to everyone.” Pastor A

Similarly, Digital Pastor D’s reflections articulate the boundless possibilities that the digital realm opens for pastoral care. Their forward-looking vision emphasises the transformative power of digital connectivity in transcending physical boundaries, enabling pastors to offer care and support to individuals regardless of their physical location.

“Well, I believe this is indeed the future of our pastoral care. Counselling is no longer limited to in-person sessions. I have observed that physical proximity is not a barrier in providing pastoral care. Geographically, we can reach individuals anywhere as long as they have internet connectivity. I anticipate that there will be minimal boundaries, with the only potential obstacle being language differences, which we can address through specialised teams. The future of pastoral care, and even the church, lies within our digital realm.” Digital Pastor D

However, the optimism surrounding technological advancements is tempered by the realisation of existing disparities in access and digital literacy. Digital Pastor I’s comments shed light on the nuanced challenges that come with relying on digital platforms for pastoral care.

“It will depend on the region, varying from case to case, but it does have an impact, yes. If there are individuals who require close care, we must communicate with them regularly. It can be detrimental if the person does not receive our messages or is unable to respond. Some individuals have lost their cell phones, had to borrow from others, and were unable to reconnect. There are also people who struggle to use their devices or navigate through materials and links. This is where our role comes in—to adapt and find alternative communication methods. For instance, if someone cannot communicate through a social network, we can use WhatsApp if it is available, as it may be quicker. On the other hand, some individuals may not have access to WhatsApp but can use social networks on a computer or at a cybercafé. In some cases, communication is limited to the work network. The impact is reciprocal, affecting both the sender and the receiver. For those involved in pastoral care, constant communication with contacts is essential. The response from the recipient will vary depending on the situation, but we do our part, ensuring that the message eventually reaches them and they try to respond. If not, we adjust accordingly.” Digital Pastor I

It may seem rather obvious, but if members aren’t able to access technology or the internet, digital pastoral care is impossible. On the other hand, simply having the latest technology and reliable internet access doesn’t guarantee it either. The insights from the pastors I

interviewed show their different contexts and reveal a landscape where technology holds immense potential to extend the reach and enhance the impact of pastoral care.

Age

The age of members significantly shapes their engagement and self-disclosure, a phenomenon that becomes particularly pronounced when contrasting the experiences of teenagers and young adults, with those of older members. Starting with generational differences in tech adoption and usage, younger people seem to integrate technology into their lives more easily. Younger subjects in a study by King et al., (2006) were found to be more comfortable with online/cyber counselling, feeling secure and non-judgmental in a virtual environment. This facilitated revelations and quicker disclosure of their problems compared to face-to-face sessions.

Conversely, Fontenot (2022) found that “despite initial expectations that younger participants (aged 20-50) would be more receptive to virtual spiritual care due to their familiarity with technology... 42.9% of the participants were outside the 20–50 age range, with active participation from individuals as old as 85+” (p.140), which suggests that age was less of a factor in adapting to virtual spiritual care than anticipated.

Pastor A’s observation highlights a notable reluctance among the new generations to openly express their true selves and emotions, opting instead for written communication as a means to self-disclose: “Most of the new generations now are too ashamed to show their true selves, their real feelings, the person inside, the physical person. They are somehow very ashamed or hesitant to be open. They are very hesitant to show the real side of the story, so they just put it into writing.” Pastor F’s observation, “Especially Millennials, they prefer to communicate this way. Based on my experiences with young people, they prefer conversing

online rather than in person”, underscores the comfort and preference that younger generations have towards digital platforms. This preference is echoed by Pastor G, “ I think when someone is in his twenties, maybe even late teens, twenties or thirties, there will be a lot more contact and deeper connections over social media. I believe there will be more sharing in advance, like letting me know what’s going on before I visit.” These observations highlight the natural inclination of younger individuals towards digital platforms for fostering connections and sharing personal experiences, a testament to the digital-native identity that profoundly influences their mode of interaction and self-disclosure.

Conversely, Pastor R’s experiences with the elderly segment of his congregation reveal a different engagement pattern with technology:

“I have a congregation where the majority, or the largest group, is elderly. And so of course they do not interact with technology as 15–20-year-olds do. We do have 15- and 20-year-olds. What I've seen is that elderly people are using some form of technology, be it just using their text messages to wish Happy Sabbath to everybody, and they love it. They feel that this is a ministry just in and of itself. So I see that if they are housebound, they always watch the sermons online. Always.” Pastor R

Despite a general hesitance towards digital platforms, older generations don’t always demonstrate a noticeable effort and appreciation for technology’s role in maintaining connection within the church community. Pastor P shared his experience stating, "Most of the members are elderly, so they’re not very fond of technology, and they don’t know how to use it. And for a pastor to be digitally active, we have to teach the people about the digital era as well. That’s a big issue, and it would consume a lot of pastoral work, and maybe not always be efficient.” This negativity toward digital adoption isn’t generalised, however. Pastor O was surprised by the active participation of an older individual in digital formats: “I’ve been surprised by the older people in our small group who join in on Wednesdays; there’s a lady in her 90s who actively

participates in our Zoom conversations.” The pastors I interviewed shared the challenges of digital adoption among older generations, but they also perceive a willingness and potential for engagement when facilitated appropriately.

The impact of age on perceptions of digital privacy is another crucial aspect. Those who came of age during a time where online presence is the norm, often have a more relaxed approach to digital privacy. This comfort with sharing personal information online translates into their willingness to engage in self-disclosure through digital pastoral care. On the other hand, older members, who may not have the same level of familiarity or comfort with online spaces, often harbour concerns about the privacy and security of digital communications.

Closely linked to privacy concerns is the relationship between age and trust in digital pastoral care. Younger members, accustomed to forming and maintaining relationships digitally, may find it easier to trust and open up in an online pastoral setting. Their trust is rooted in their understanding and experience with digital platforms. Conversely, older members, who may associate trust with physical presence and established relationships, might find it challenging to develop the same level of trust in a digital setting.

The diversity in digital engagement across age groups is further illustrated by pastors’ experiences with specific age-related concerns and the time of day when these digital interactions occur. Pastor D’s experience with teenagers points to the contextual and temporal factors that influence when and how younger individuals choose to engage in self-disclosure digitally. “It’s mainly late in the evening when teenagers and young people open up and send me a text or a WhatsApp message. This is because that’s the time when they are likely to be at home, reflecting and thinking about important life issues.”

Digital Pastor B brings an overarching perspective that transcends age, highlighting that the magnitude of the crisis often dictates the urgency and openness to self-disclosure, regardless of age:

“What matters is the magnitude of the crisis. I have interacted with numerous elderly individuals, people in my age group, as well as young people who are grappling with issues such as homosexuality and drug abuse, leading them to seek help. The main concern is the problem itself and the apprehension they feel about confiding in someone, depending on the situation.” Digital Pastor B

Some of the pastors I interviewed mentioned loneliness as a problem often addressed in pastoral care, especially in urban areas. Gentina and Chen (2019) discuss the appeal and potential drawbacks of online platforms for addressing loneliness and forming new relationships for younger people.

“When they encounter loneliness, digital natives may deem the Internet an appealing platform for self-disclosure; digital natives even are referred to as ‘screen addicts’. The Internet has the capacity to protect anonymity and provides a vast pool of active users. Users can turn to it to develop new contacts beyond their face-to-face lives and thus potentially compensate for their lack of social connectivity. [...] However there is a potential downside of using online systems to make friends. Media richness theory notes that online communication provides a narrower bandwidth than face-to-face communication does, and social presence theory suggests that online communication deprives people of the sense that another human being is involved in social interactions thus keeping the contacts impersonal” (p.6).

Age-based adaptability to changing technology also plays a pivotal role. Younger members, having witnessed and adapted to rapid technological changes throughout their lives, often exhibit resilience and flexibility in adopting new forms of communication. This adaptability ensures that they can maintain their engagement with pastoral care even as the

modes of delivery evolve. In contrast, older members might find the pace of technological change overwhelming, creating a barrier to fully engaging with digital aspects of hybrid pastoral care. Digital Pastor E's reflection encapsulates this: "I have had to adapt and learn new technologies... But I see the value in it. I think the younger members of the congregation appreciate the convenience of digital things... The older members don't adapt very quickly."

Gentina and Chen (2019) emphasise the perception of younger users regarding the significance of online interactions, especially to mitigate loneliness through passive coping: "the high efficacy and low cost of using the Internet to extend personal networks may propel adolescents to adopt passive coping... The Internet thus offers an ideal platform for teenagers who use passive coping to self-disclose and improve their social lives" (p.11). Therefore, it is clear through my interviews and the relevant literature that a member's age significantly influences the depth and nature of self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care. For younger members, the digital medium might encourage more open and frequent self-disclosure, as they feel more in control of the interaction and less inhibited by physical presence. Older members, however, might associate deeper self-disclosure with traditional, in-person interactions, where the physical presence of the pastoral caregiver provides a sense of security and authenticity.

Familiarity

A member's familiarity with technology refers to their comfort level, proficiency, and regularity of use of digital platforms for communication. This familiarity significantly influences how members engage in pastoral care, affecting their willingness and ability to disclose personal information and concerns. Isetti, Stawinoga and Pechlaner (2021b) "suggest a correlation between regular internet usage, age, and self-perceived digital competency... [where] the

majority of respondents (91%) considered the internet useful for parish activities, indicating an overall positive attitude towards digital tools in pastoral care” (p.369).

Members in a congregation who aren't familiar with technology might find digital forms of communication daunting or impersonal. Pastor E highlights this by noting, “Members not familiar with technology are more likely to benefit from more traditional visitation.” For these members, the lack of comfort with technology can create a barrier to effective communication in a digital setting. Pastors need to recognise this and adapt their approach, as emphasised by Pastor C: “Some people don't share their problems on Zoom or other online platforms. If they want to talk to me about anything private, they call me, or I go to them.”

Pastor K's observation underscores a critical aspect of digital familiarity: the reluctance to share personal matters on open platforms like Facebook and Twitter. This hesitation stems from a broader cultural practice where individuals prefer showcasing only the positive aspects of their lives on these platforms, leaving little room for the authentic, vulnerable exchanges necessary for effective pastoral care. “Yes, I think that people will not share their deep feelings and private matters on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and other open platforms. They may not share; I haven't heard of anyone sharing what they want to show as the best part of their life to people.”

Similarly, Pastor P's comments further illustrate the impact of technology familiarity—or the lack thereof—on pastoral engagement. His experience with an elderly congregation reveals not just a lack of interest in technology but also a significant barrier to its adoption: the steep learning curve and the pastoral effort required to educate the community about digital tools.

“Most of the members are elderly, so they're not very fond of technology, and they don't know how to use it. And for a pastor to be digitally active, we have to teach the people about the digital era as well. That's a big

issue, and it would consume a lot of pastoral work, and maybe not always be efficient.” Pastor P

The varied digital engagement is further nuanced by Pastor D and Digital Pastor I, who both recognise the diversity within their congregations. Pastor D keeps “the lines open for them to use the one they prefer”, acknowledging that individuals have varied preferences and comfort levels with different instant messaging platforms. This approach aligns with the understanding that familiarity with technology is not monolithic but personal and varied. Digital Pastor I expands on this by identifying two distinct profiles: those who are technology-savvy and those who are reclusive yet find solace and a voice through digital means.

“I think there are two very distinct profiles. There’s the profile of people who are already more connected to technology, and they like to maintain those contacts. They enjoy being in that dynamism, and they are usually the ones who share much more. We even see elderly ladies who like to put everything in as many groups as possible, seeking a bit more attention and getting that affection back. They feel like someone is actually praying for them, someone is responding to their gif, and they enjoy putting their stories out there. There is also the profile of people who are reclusive and find in technology the first place where they can actually be heard without having to deal with all the social pressure of being in a physical church or talking to people who may not give them clear attention, especially within the family circle. For instance, a person with five siblings may feel that their parents can’t divide their attention among everyone. It’s quite easy to identify profiles ranging from the most reclusive to the most extroverted. However, I feel that the reclusive individuals are stronger in their connection because the extroverted ones get distracted more easily. They may stay for a while and then move on to another place, but the reclusive individuals really feel embraced and want to stay. They feel safer and protected.” Digital Pastor I

Furthermore, Pastor F highlights that a deeper familiarity with IM platforms will lead to higher self-disclosure as privacy features might encourage more sharing: “Self-disclosure using WhatsApp or Signal with disappearing messages for very personal conversations can facilitate

more frequent and immediate communication.” The comfort with technology can encourage a higher level of self-disclosure, as these members might feel more at ease expressing themselves in a digital format. However, even within this group, preferences can vary. Pastor H observes, “It’s crucial to understand the individual’s comfort level with technology... Sometimes for more sensitive discussions even the most tech-savvy members prefer a meeting.”

Emotional State

Past Trauma

Trauma, particularly when related to trust and communication, influences how members engage with pastoral care. This analysis is based on my interviews and the issues raised by the pastors in relation to the traumatic experiences of their members and how this may impact self-disclosure. For some members face-to-face interactions can be daunting, riddled with anxiety and hesitation, a sentiment echoed by Pastor E, who observed members preferring ‘unspoken prayers’ over explicit sharing. In contrast, digital platforms, as highlighted by Pastor H, offer a veil of safety, enabling more open communication for those with such traumas. The ease with which individuals without these traumas navigate both environments—physical and digital—underscores the significant impact of past experiences on self-disclosure patterns.

Pastor R told a deeply moving account of providing pastoral care to a family dealing with the sudden and tragic loss of their son. He recounted,

“Their emotional state can affect how pastoral care happens completely. For instance, I had a family that lost a 28-year-old son. The mother found him dead in the living room. He had either overdosed or just mixed drugs that he shouldn’t mix. And so, in one hour after he passed and his mother found him, I arrived at the house and the police were there, detectives, like the whole thing. The body was still laying on the living room floor and the parents were definitely in shock. So, after that whole ordeal, I continued

via text. I continued pastoral care with the family every day, and I would visit them in person twice a week.” Pastor R

This narrative vividly demonstrates the role of trauma in shaping the modalities and dynamics of pastoral care. The initial in-person contact in such a traumatic moment laid the foundation for trust, enabling the mother to later share her grief both in person and via text. The ease of sharing deep, personal experiences through text, as highlighted by Pastor R, suggests that digital communication can serve as a valuable tool in pastoral care, especially for individuals processing trauma. It offers an alternative avenue for self-disclosure that might not be as readily accessible in face-to-face interactions, catering to those who find it challenging to express their emotions in person due to their introverted nature or social difficulties.

In cases where the trauma is associated with the church, however, is a very different scenario. Digital Pastor B provided a poignant example that underscores the delicate nature of trust in the context spiritual trauma. His narrative illustrates how accusations and judgment can exacerbate the trauma, leading to resistance and a reluctance to engage in new relationships, including those within pastoral care. The refusal to change churches by the girl highlights how previous experiences, particularly those related to trust, can significantly impact an individual’s openness to new pastoral relationships. “Our churches sometimes accuse others, right? Accusing people doesn’t help; pointing fingers and judging only obstructs. The other day, there was a girl who I invited to church, and she declined, saying, ‘Look, my intention is not to change churches’” (Digital Pastor B).

Members with negative past experiences may carry a sense of shame or mistrust towards the church and pastors in general, making them reticent to open up. This spiritual trauma will have long lasting effects on the desire and capacity of the member to seek, or indeed receive,

pastoral care. Panchuk (2020) highlights how this trauma extends beyond mere distrust towards God and religious communities, often leading to symptoms like intrusive memories, hyperarousal, and severe changes in beliefs about themselves, the world, and the divine. She notes that certain theological commitments within religious communities can mask the recognition of abuse, deepening the survivor's confusion and pain. In some cases, this distortion in the perception of divine love can result in incapacitating fear and shame, despite an intellectual understanding of the trauma. These insights underline the complex challenges faced in providing effective pastoral care to those with a history of religious trauma. In a previous study, Panchuk (2018) concluded that "religious trauma can be genuinely religiously incapacitating" (p.2).

The impact of trauma associated with a particular denomination introduces another layer of complexity. This trauma can manifest as either a hesitancy to engage with the practices and figures of that denomination or as a broader scepticism towards organised religion. Doyle (2008) in his study explores the effects of spiritual trauma on victims, particularly those abused by clergy. He concludes that a primary symptom of such trauma is a drastic change in the victims' attitudes towards priests and the Church. Initially, victims may experience confusion due to their respect for the clergy, which becomes tainted by the abuse. This confusion often evolves into anger and loathing, extending beyond the individual abuser to encompass all priests and the Church as an institution. Victims feel a significant sense of betrayal, not only due to the actions of the abusing priest but also because of the perceived inaction and lack of support from other clergy members. This leads to a broader estrangement from the Church and its sacraments.

"A primary symptom of spiritual trauma is the radical change in feelings towards priests. Some victims report serious confusion which at first is grounded in the deep respect and reverence for the priest but is now compromised by the feelings brought forth by the sexual abuse. As these

feelings continue to develop, they often turn to anger and loathing not only with regard to abuser but for all priests. [...] Many also feel profoundly betrayed by priests in general because no other cleric stepped up to protect or support them. [...] The betrayal by the trusted priest is enmeshed with a sense of betrayal by the institutional Church the guarantor of spiritual/religious security as well as a betrayal by the sacraments personified in the priest” (Doyle, 2008, p250).

Digital platforms introduce unique challenges for individuals with trauma-related concerns. Privacy issues become paramount, as the fear of personal information being inappropriately shared can be a significant barrier. This is particularly relevant for members who have experienced breaches of trust or confidentiality in the past. The nature of online communication, while providing a sense of safety for some, can exacerbate anxiety and paranoia for others. For instance, Pastor H’s observation of members finding text messages or emails easier for communication illuminates the complexity of digital interactions. The contrast with individuals without such trauma—who may navigate digital platforms with relative ease—underscores the need for careful consideration and adaptation in digital pastoral care.

Trauma often manifests in emotional and psychological responses that can hinder effective communication. Anxiety, social withdrawal, and various coping mechanisms can significantly impede self-disclosure in both face-to-face and online settings. Members with such trauma may find it challenging to articulate their thoughts and feelings, resorting to indirect or minimal communication (Marriott, Lewis, and Gobin, 2016). From my own interviews, Pastor E perceived that “sometimes people are not ready to share what happened to them... you just have to give them time.”

Likewise, my interview with Pastor A revealed greater insight into members being too ashamed to express their real feelings, further underlining this barrier. Those without such trauma, however, might approach pastoral care with more openness and trust, unaffected by prior

negative experiences. However, the ability to disclose the stressful or traumatic experience might bring many benefits to their well-being by writing about it as a consequence of digital pastoral care. Bowen (2011) points to an improvement in physical and psychological health, fundamental beliefs, and personal development when individuals wrote about their stressful experiences in an emotionally revealing manner. This suggests that written emotional disclosure, particularly when guided with direct questions or examples, can be a beneficial tool in overcoming the inhibiting effects of trauma on self-disclosure.

Relationship to Pastor

In this section I will explore the impact of the relationship between the pastor and member on self-disclosure and how that effects the hybrid pastoral care they receive. The depth and nature of these relationships, characterised by their duration, quality, and previous interactions, impacts the modalities of pastoral care—whether online or face-to-face—and the extent to which members are willing to open up about their personal challenges and concerns.

Pastor L's reflections offer a vivid illustration of the profound impact that face-to-face interactions, such as home visits, can have on the depth of self-disclosure by church members.

“When we visit their homes, we truly get to know the families we are working with. This is when they open up about their problems, some struggling to make ends meet. At times, we have to dig into our own pockets to assist them, feeling deeply for their situations. The church setting doesn't always reveal these challenges, but during home visits, we witness firsthand the living conditions and family concerns. We also encounter marital issues during these visits and strive to find ways to address and support these individuals.” Pastor L

Similarly, Pastor M articulates the complementary nature of online and face-to-face interactions, where each mode of communication serves to reinforce the other. His comments highlight the symbiotic relationship between digital and physical modes of pastoral care, where

online interactions can lay the groundwork for deeper, more meaningful face-to-face encounters, further enhancing the potential for self-disclosure and the effectiveness of pastoral support.

“I understand that communication has a cost in terms of helping people, reconciling people, and so on, but it also works for those who already know us, and they can also engage because I see that people like my videos, and so on, and when I meet them face to face, we already have a stronger connection. That’s the beauty of it. When we have this online relationship and then meet face to face, it helps.” Pastor M

The reflections shared by Pastor I and Digital Pastor A underscore the significance of adapting pastoral approaches based on the pastor’s relationship with each member.

“Some people, I don't dare to call them or make an appointment immediately because I’m not sure if I am allowed to. Instead, I would text first and see how they react. From their reaction to the text, I would rely on my instincts to either make an appointment, offer to pray for them, or tell them to text me if they need me. It depends very much on the relationship I have.” Pastor I

Digital Pastor A emphasises the intentionality behind digital interactions, stating,

“The first thing is the intentionality of people in the relationships they have with others. It is important to understand that there is an objective in these interactions, and this objective is not about baptism or studying. The primary goal, the most crucial aspect of these connections, is to genuinely care about the other person and to take care of them.” Digital Pastor A

Digital Pastor B’s experiences reveal the capacity of digital platforms to facilitate unexpected levels of self-disclosure:

“People crying, and... people who send audio of crying, I cry too. In short, people expose themselves in a way and talk about problems that even their family does not know about. They ask for help in decisions that they do not know how to solve. Anyway, it’s fantastic, pastor, what I have. Even after 12 years of service, always looking for that closer personal contact,

now taking it to my personal WhatsApp, taking greater care. It really is incredible.” Digital Pastor B

However, two of the pastors I interviewed, Digital Pastor G and Pastor R, shared their perception that the lack of a relationship with the pastor could lead to more self-disclosure.

“It depends on the case. It really depends on what his or her problem is. When their issue feels like it’s imploding within them without being shared with anyone... The positive aspect of online platforms is that there was an individual who visited our page and expressed, ‘Oh, you know what? She’s Filipino and she’s speaking my language. So, she said, ‘You know what? I could confide everything in you.’ I responded, ‘Wow, that’s nice.’ ‘Well, yes, because you don’t know me personally. So, I don’t feel embarrassed at all.’ I replied, ‘Yes, sure, that’s nice. But you can rest assured that what you shared with us is safe.’ Just reassure them that we are a safe space.” Digital Pastor G

“Again, I think it really depends on the personality of the person and also the relationship they have with the pastor. So, I would say that if they don’t have a very close connection with a pastor, sometimes it’s easier for them just to write it because it’s less intimidating. I would say that for people who have a close connection with a pastor, if they want to share something very private, many times, I would say the majority of the times, at least. That’s, again, my experience. They do want to meet with me. They want to come to my office. They want me to visit them at their house. They want to go out for a cup of decaf, and they want to speak in person.” Pastor R

The general consensus from the interview data is that a longer acquaintance, if characterised by mutual trust and positive interactions, fosters a conducive environment for self-disclosure. From the data above, this can be attributed to the gradual building of trust and understanding over the years. Members tend to share more about their lives when they feel understood and valued by a pastor who has been a part of their journey for a significant period. In contrast, a longstanding relationship does not automatically equate to deeper self-disclosure.

If, over time, the member perceives the pastor as untrustworthy or lacking empathy, the duration of the relationship might inversely affect the willingness to share personal issues. The quality of the relationship is paramount, focusing on both its duration and quality.

Even in digital interactions, the duration of engagement and the pastor's attentiveness to subtle cues can foster a conducive environment for sharing. Pastor G observed that "although in online [platforms] they don't usually share...But if I can sense something that there is a need to talk more, then I'll chat to them the following day..." Contrarily, a longstanding relationship without trust can inversely affect openness, as Pastor K notes, "Although there are also people who are saying that I have to know you first because it is quite uneasy to share something without knowing you first."

The nature of past interactions shapes the trust and therefore the propensity for self-disclosure. For instance, if a pastor has been involved in significant life events such as premarital counselling, officiating weddings, dedicating children, or baptisms, these interactions often create a deeper bond. Such milestones, marked by the pastor's involvement, contribute to building a reservoir of trust, leading to enhanced self-disclosure during pastoral care sessions, be it digital or face-to-face. The emotional weight and spiritual significance of these events create a shared history and understanding, reinforcing the bond between the pastor and the member. Pastor E said that "When it begins with online chat, sometimes the person will call and say I want to talk to you, I want us to talk" which exemplifies how digital conversations can evolve into deeper, more meaningful exchanges. Similarly, Pastor D's experience, "Definitely he will share more if you are visiting physically...But in the digital media, you can create an atmosphere where he will share also" indicates that both digital and physical mediums can be equally effective if handled with empathy and skill.

Consistency in engagement is crucial in both contexts. Pastor C's statement, "So if I don't visit people, they may not return to the church...the more you visit people, you will know personally they want to share something" underlines the importance of regular, meaningful interactions in maintaining and enhancing relational bonds. In my findings, pastors who are inconsistent in their interactions, such as failing to respond promptly to messages or missing scheduled visitations, significantly diminish the trust and consequently, the level of self-disclosure from members. Timeliness and reliability in responding to members' concerns are critical in maintaining and enhancing the relationship. Neglect in these areas, whether in a digital or physical context, results in a weakened bond and a reduced willingness from members to share personal struggles and seek guidance.

In the hospital chaplaincy environment, there is often no pre-established relationship between the pastoral care giver and recipient. The pastors I interviewed did not indicate this to be a hindrance to self-disclosure. Pastor A describes this dynamic as starting with social visits to meet people and turning that encounter as a pastoral visit that ministers to the patients' emotions:

"We do some social visits that lead to pastoral visits. We establish a rapport by visiting them socially, and then we try to manage their emotions and the spiritual areas of their life, especially as this is the reason for the pastoral care services of the hospital. So, we typically visit them and minister to their emotions, minister to their spirituality, and if necessary, we can also do some special services, such as anointing services and any other services that the patients actually need. But for a day-to-day situation, we visit and then conduct prayer for these people as they want it to be." Pastor A

Content and Urgency

The content to be shared and the urgency felt by members during crisis situations exerts an impact on their pastoral care preferences for communication and their readiness to engage in

online self-disclosure. When examining high urgency contexts, such as domestic violence and severe health challenges, pastors often encounter late disclosures, with members reaching out when situations have already escalated dramatically. For example, Pastor Q lamented the delays in members coming forward, saying, “And more often than not, both domestic violence or health challenges come to my attention too late. Too late because it ends up in divorce or the person is already in a hospital bed in a coma, and I cannot provide that uplifting pastoral care to them.” This quote illustrates the urgency and severity of some member situations and the challenges pastors face in providing timely care.

Online communication tends to facilitate a different level of emotional expression from members who may otherwise feel too ashamed to share their deepest concerns face-to-face. Pastor A noted the dynamics at play: “They might be too ashamed to open up their real claims or probably the chaplain has not established the right rapport with them first... Most of the people really opened up when they are online but if ever in a face-to-face situation you can still establish rapport, and they can also be open in the same manner.” When the content of the disclosure involves anything that may bring feelings of shame, there will be a tendency to seek an environment with a diminished public self-awareness, which would maximise the potential for online self-disclosure (Joinson, 2001).

Brown (2006) defines shame as “an intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of acceptance and belonging” (p.45), highlighting its emotional impact, far surpassing mere embarrassment or guilt. This feeling leads individuals to perceive themselves as fundamentally deficient, significantly inhibiting their willingness to open up. Brown further describes, “Participants described shame using terms including devastating, noxious, consuming, excruciating, filleted, small, separate from others, rejected, diminished”

(p.45). These terms illustrate the consuming nature of shame, affecting individuals' self-perception and interactions. In digital pastoral care, recognising the impact of shame is crucial for fostering an atmosphere of acceptance and empathy, enabling members to feel comfortable sharing without fear of judgment or rejection, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of hybrid pastoral care.

Pastoral care in clinical settings, such as emergency rooms, requires immediacy and adaptability to rapidly changing situations. Pastor M reflected on the intensity of providing comfort and assurance in emergency contexts: "But when I became a chaplain, the situation is totally different... Especially in the emergency room...you have to spend at least 30 minutes to pacify to give that assurance that everything will be okay... here in the Middle East, things changed rapidly before the Pandemic. Why? Because face-to-face is very much limited."

The role of digital communication in urgent pastoral care situations has evolved, as illustrated by Pastor G's experience with a prayer warrior group: "We created a prayer warrior group... We don't just receive prayer requests, but we also receive a lot of people who are sharing problems about their marriage, finances, children and so on." Digital platforms have become a place where urgent personal needs are expressed and addressed through community support.

The significance of simply offering a listening ear was evident in the pastors' accounts, with Pastor A sharing, "There are plenty of people that only need some time to be heard rather than advising them... but listening to people's problems really does matter to them." When urgency is felt, the immediate need is for pastoral caregivers to be available to listen, highlighting the importance of presence over immediate solutions even in a digital environment.

Crisis encounters can happen at any time and often demand immediate attention from pastoral caregivers, as Digital Pastor C described a particularly harrowing experience: “The other day I thought: I am not well enough to attend today. And in my first appointment, the girl comes online and sends me a photo of the cut saying that there is no point in living anymore.” Pastors are regularly faced with life-and-death situations that require their immediate and full attention, even when they themselves are dealing with personal issues.

Other interviews offered validation to the insights above and suggested more ways the content and its urgency may impact self-disclosure. Pastor A as noted above, and Pastor G suggest that digital communication can sometimes facilitate a more open and honest dialogue in situations where shame is the leading emotion due to the perceived anonymity and emotional safety it offers. Individuals may prefer digital communication in instances where the immediacy of their emotional state compels them to seek support without the discomfort of physical presence, which might inhibit the expression of their true feelings.

“Then the problems really escalated; it’s far too much to explain in just five minutes, but getting to the part of the pastoral care is with this church elder. I have been writing a lot on WhatsApp, asking how she feels about the problem. She was pretty open in every single detail. I noticed that she used WhatsApp as a way to write off her feelings and seek support. Of course, those WhatsApp conversations more than once ended up in a telephone call because then I actually said, ‘Okay, well, this is not what’s happening anymore. We need to have a face-to-face conversation.’ That’s genuine. Sorry. She needed this talk at such moments. I did not necessarily need to come to her, which is of course another level, but just a telephone call would be enough to speak in-depth about the problems.” Pastor G

This narrative illustrates the transition from online to offline communication as the crisis evolves, indicating that while digital platforms are effective in initiating conversations and enabling individuals to articulate their issues freely, there may be a point where the depth of the

crisis necessitates a more direct form of contact, such as a phone call or a face-to-face meeting. The shift towards online ministry has been significant, partly due to necessity, as Pastor K elaborated: “You use this nice word hybrid ministry, and we came to this point that to have face-to-face meetings and have person to person visits is almost like luxury now... life and pandemics and many other things, economic crisis pushing us to use online more” (Pastor K).

The level of urgency experienced by members can influence the dynamics of self-disclosure and the corresponding pastoral care approach. The preference for digital or face-to-face communication is often dictated by the immediacy requirements and personal comfort within crisis contexts. In general terms, the perception of the pastors interviewed is the more heightened the crisis, the more online self-disclosure can be expected.

Personality

The pastors I interviewed indicated the impact of their member’s personality in digital pastoral care interactions, albeit without the appropriate technical language to pinpoint exactly how personality might affect self-disclosure in digital pastoral care. This general perception is in line with current academic research on the impact of personality on online self-disclosure: “Given that users are more likely to self-disclose information when they perceive the benefits from using the social network site to be high... personality traits are significant contributors to people’s attitudes and thus are important factors for managers and marketers to understand” (Loiacono, 2015, p.66). This is echoed by Lv et al., (2022): “Personality traits and perceived value of the media are important factors that affect users’ online self-disclosure” (p.12). Using the same five-factor model I used in the previous chapter to explore the impact of the pastor’s personality to self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care, I will now consider the member’s

personality based on my interview data through the same five factors: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism.

Pastor K's reflection, "I think that when people know that we are observing them, they may feel ashamed or shy, thinking about how others perceive them. Perhaps they confront their fears, feeling vulnerable, and perhaps we may not fully comprehend them," underscores the impact of neuroticism and introversion. This comment suggests that individuals with higher levels of these traits might experience heightened feelings of vulnerability and concern for privacy, influencing their willingness to self-disclose in digital settings.

Pastor E's answers suggest that digital environments might offer a more comfortable space for self-disclosure for those high in neuroticism or introversion. The digital medium's perceived anonymity and distance can lower barriers, encouraging more open communication.

"Looking at the scenario, in the first instance of a physical visit as a new pastor and the first time we meet, I believe there may be limitations. Perhaps he is unable to share more due to feelings of shyness or similar reasons. However, when considering the situation of online ministry or connecting with him online, I think he can express himself more freely."
Pastor E

Digital Pastor G commented on how digital pastoral care serves as a modern confession room, particularly beneficial for introverts and those with high neuroticism. This unique setting allows for confidential, one-on-one interactions that can facilitate deeper self-disclosure and foster self-esteem, showing how digital platforms can be particularly effective in reaching individuals who might otherwise remain silent.

"Because I was raised a Catholic before. When we went to a church, when I was in high school we went to a church with a confession room and a priest, one-on-one. We talked, the priest said, 'Okay, confess your sins now and then pray these ten Hail Marys.' Something like that. So yes, it [digital pastoral care] is something like a confession room. People who are

really introverted, who are afraid to come out, who are shy, or even embarrassed to share their family problems or whatever problems they have, will go to online pastoral care and share everything, and they will eventually gain self-esteem from here.” Digital Pastor G

Pastor R’s insights further affirm the notion that digital communication can be a more accessible avenue for self-disclosure for introverted individuals or those struggling with social anxiety. The option to articulate thoughts and feelings through text can remove the immediacy and pressure of face-to-face interactions, offering a safer space for expression.

“I do see, and I felt this throughout my home ministry, actually, that there are people who definitely can open up better via text or in an email than when you are in person with them. These are people who are normally, this is my experience, a little bit more shy, more introvert. People that have some social difficulty when they are in person but online or via text they just share.” Pastor R

Digital Pastor I’s comprehensive reflection encapsulates the flexibility and adaptability of digital pastoral care to meet diverse personality needs. It highlights how digital platforms can provide multiple communication options, from text to video, accommodating individuals’ varying comfort levels and facilitating a gradual build-up to more personal interactions.

“Generally, more introverted people, those who struggle to maintain prolonged eye contact, or individuals who easily feel embarrassed, may focus more on the social aspect rather than the current situation. They might not grasp that the conversation is confidential and secure, have difficulty articulating their thoughts verbally, or be highly emotional, leading them to believe they could be at a disadvantage, become tearful, struggle to express themselves accurately, or say things incorrectly. Perhaps they need to consider the writing process more thoroughly, right? They might be unsure of what to write. A letter handed to them by the professor that they keep staring at. However, they might find this behaviour odd. Generally, this is the profile of such individuals. Therefore, online platforms offer a variety of alternatives. Depending on whether it’s a local church in my vicinity, I can provide that flexibility to attempt

genuine eye contact even from a distance. Progressing through various communication levels with the individual, suggesting text, audio, call, or video conversations, until they feel comfortable meeting face-to-face.”

Digital Pastor I

Therefore, members who exhibit high levels of openness, extraversion, and agreeableness, along with low levels of neuroticism, appear to be ideally disposed to optimise self-disclosure in both online and face-to-face pastoral care settings. There was no indication that conscientiousness affected self-disclosure at all based on my interviews. However, members with personalities marked by low openness, extraversion, and agreeableness, particularly when juxtaposed with high neuroticism, are least likely to encourage online self-disclosure. These members may find it difficult to navigate the nuances of digital communication, which often lacks the immediacy and unspoken cues available in face-to-face interactions, making the transmission of emotional nuances all the more critical.

Beliefs

This section of my research will explore the belief systems of pastoral care recipients, focusing on how the pastors I interview perceive the spiritual and moral convictions of the members shape their engagement with and response to pastoral care. I will analyse the impact of the members’ personal theological perspectives and ethical values to their proclivities toward online self-disclosure.

Theological Framework

In my exploration of hybrid pastoral care, I have found that a member’s theological framework influences their expectations and engagement with pastoral care, which in turn impacts the level of self-disclosure they exhibit, especially online. Just as a pastor’s theological

beliefs shape their approach to ministry, so too do the beliefs and doctrinal understanding of church members affect their receptivity and participation in pastoral care interactions. The pastors I interviewed referenced members who preferred online interactions and those who were more 'traditional' who preferred face-to-face care (Pastor D, Pastor F, Pastor N).

Digital Pastor B told the story of a lady who was having an affair with a married man. By seeking online pastoral care, it is clear that her theological framework embraced digital communication as she believed God would provide direction to her life by using technology to talk to a pastor. This theological framework seems to be shared widely among the members of the pastors I interviewed, especially by those members who engage with them online. Other members who do not share this theological framework prefer face-to-face visitation.

“I told her that I also made mistakes, everyone does. I told her there are also people who make mistakes but are seeking God’s way. And I already noticed, when that happens, the person feels safe. They can see a light at the end of the tunnel, that even with the difficulties things will be okay. They say to themselves: “Well, I’m making a mistake, but I can get out.” And then I always try to guide her, you know, that it is not pleasing to God and harmful to her as well. But you have to be very careful. And the person themselves ends up seeing that over time. I mentioned to her [lady having an affair with a married man] that being with the married man was not in God’s plan for her life. I emphasised that she was very important to God and suggested that perhaps this relationship was hindering something greater from occurring in her life.” Digital Pastor B

Members with a theological framework that embraces technology as an integrated component of religious life are more likely to be comfortable with online interactions. These individuals often view digital communication as a natural extension of their faith practice, presenting new opportunities for spiritual connection and support (Campbell, 2010). They are generally open to receiving pastoral care in diverse forms, whether it’s through video chats, social media, or faith-based online forums. Their conceptualisation of church community

transcends physical boundaries, enabling them to feel a sense of belonging and fellowship in virtual spaces.

This theological viewpoint allows for a broader interpretation of ‘where’ and ‘how’ pastoral care can be experienced and encourages self-disclosure in whichever medium seems most accessible or immediate (Savin-Baden, & Reader, 2018). Members who frame their use of technology within their theological understanding are therefore more likely to actively engage and share personal experiences, struggles, and reflections within online platforms, seeing these mediums as valid spaces for spiritual support and guidance.

Conversely, members who believe that authentic spiritual support and community must be firmly rooted exclusively in face-to-face interactions may be less inclined to engage in self-disclosure online. These individuals likely place a high value on the incarnational aspects of their faith — the embodied practice, the physical gathering of believers, and the direct personal contact with pastors (Pastor B, Pastor G). They may perceive online interactions as too impersonal or shallow for the vulnerable act of sharing personal or spiritual concerns. For these members, the physical church and the presence of a pastor or care group within that real-life context remain the most legitimate and effective settings for receiving pastoral care (Pastor M). When presented with digital options for such care, these individuals might be more hesitant to open up or may limit their online engagement to logistical arrangements for in-person meetings.

Ethical Framework

The ethical framework of church members influences their propensity to self-disclosure and their preferred modality for receiving pastoral care. Crucially, this ethical framework encompasses members’ beliefs and values related to privacy, security, and trust, particularly

within the context of digital communication and the sharing of personal information (Mills, 2011).

Pastor B's reflections highlight an acute awareness of the business-oriented nature of social media moguls like Elon Musk and the potential implications for young church members engaging with these platforms. This awareness underscores a broader ethical concern about the commercialisation of digital spaces where pastoral care occurs.

“I have been following various news outlets on social media platforms, such as how Elon Musk is conducting his activities. Since he owns this Twitter platform, there are certain implications to consider as they share their content. I particularly focus on the youth when providing pastoral care, as they are the most affected and need to understand that these individuals are business-oriented and have their unique approach. These are some of the aspects I consider, although I am not fully immersed in this area. Nonetheless, I am continuously seeking ways to provide the best assistance possible.” Pastor B

Similarly, Digital Pastor A's account resonates with the tension between the desire for a secure, trusted platform for pastoral care and the inherent vulnerabilities of existing digital platforms. Their dilemma is encapsulated in their reflection on the ubiquitous data privacy concerns and the trade-offs involved in utilising commercial instant messaging (IM) platforms:

“Sometimes it is very hard for people to realise what they are accepting and what they are giving to these companies [IM platforms]. These days, I really wanted to download an app, but it required a lot of permissions that I was not willing to grant from my cell phone. Then, someone said to me, “Just download it, what difference does it make? You are already on Google.” My dream was to have a platform in our church, an Adventist platform, to achieve this, you know? A place that we can trust to be safe, where the information will not be released or sent elsewhere or leaked by someone.” Digital Pastor A

Members who harbour strong ethical concerns regarding privacy and data security in digital spaces may exhibit considerable hesitancy toward self-disclosure online. Their concern might arise from various issues, including the fear of data breaches, the potential exposure of sensitive information, and the anxiety of being under surveillance, whether by malevolent actors, corporations, or government bodies. These fears are not unfounded, as stories of compromised personal data and invasive tracking technologies frequently populate media narratives, thus informing and reinforcing such ethical stances. Members with these concerns are likely to be more guarded in their digital interactions, preferring face-to-face pastoral encounters in which they can exercise greater control over their privacy and the sanctity of the shared information.

From my interviews, the issue of ethics was addressed as fears that members have of being exposed in the digital environment (Pastor A, Pastor D, Pastor F, Pastor G, Pastor H, Pastor K). For some members, the impersonal nature of digital communication can amplify their ethical reservations. They may question the integrity of online pastoral interactions, feeling that the digital medium undermines pastoral care fidelity, particularly when confidentiality is concerned. The sense of security they derive from in-person exchanges, where they can interpret non-verbal cues and feel the immediacy of presence and empathetic responses, can be a pivotal factor in choosing to disclose personal matters in a traditional, physical setting rather than an online one.

On the other hand, members whose ethical framework leads them to have a high degree of trust in digital communication for pastoral care will be encouraged toward online self-disclosure. They might believe that technology, when used responsibly, can provide secure and private channels for authentic interaction (Campbell, 2010). Such trust could be the result of personal savviness with technology, a good grasp of privacy controls, or faith in the church's

ability to safeguard digital environments. From my interviews, pastors describe their younger members as appreciative of the accessibility and convenience that technology brings to pastoral care, opening up opportunities for self-disclosure that are not bound by geography or constrained by scheduling limitations (Pastor D, Pastor F, Digital Pastor A, Digital Pastor B, Digital Pastor C). Their confidence in the digital medium enables them to engage more fully in online pastoral activities, such as virtual counselling sessions, prayer groups, and spiritual guidance chats, where they can discuss personal challenges and growth.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have analysed the impact of 13 factors that may encourage or discourage the pastoral care recipient toward online self-disclosure. I have summarised the conclusion for each factor in the table below considering the binary structure similar to my analysis of the factors related to the pastoral care provider.

Table 5. Factors Influencing Pastoral Care Recipients

Factors - Member	Encourages Online Self-Disclosure	Discourages Online Self-Disclosure
Access to Technology	High	Low
Age	Young	Old
Familiarity with Technology	High	Low
Past Trauma	Resolved	Unresolved
Relationship to Pastor	Strong	Weak
Mental Health	Inconclusive	Inconclusive
Urgency	Immediate	Non-Urgent
Trait Openness	High	Low
Trait Extraversion	High	Low
Trait Agreeableness	High	Low
Trait Neuroticism	Low	High
Theological View of Technology	Positive	Negative
Ethical View of Technology	Safe	Unsafe

Encouraging Online Self-Disclosure

Members who are more inclined towards self-disclosure in online settings typically possess a high level of access to and familiarity with technology. They are often younger, aligning with generational trends in digital literacy. A history of resolved past trauma can contribute to a greater willingness to open up online, as can a strong relationship with the pastor. While mental health influence remains inconclusive, members with immediate needs or urgencies are more likely to engage in self-disclosure digitally. High levels of personality traits such as openness, extraversion, and agreeableness, coupled with low neuroticism, further facilitate this tendency. Moreover, a positive theological and ethical view of technology as a safe and valid medium for pastoral care significantly encourages members to share personal matters in digital spaces.

Discouraging Online Self-Disclosure

Conversely, members less likely to engage in online self-disclosure often have limited access to or are less familiar with technology. Older members may exhibit more reservation due to lower digital literacy or differing attitudes towards technology. Unresolved past trauma can be a significant barrier to online openness, as can a weaker relationship with the pastor. The inconclusive impact of mental health factors adds complexity to this trend. Members with non-urgent needs may also prefer traditional, face-to-face interactions. Personality traits such as low openness, extraversion, and agreeableness, along with high neuroticism, can hinder online self-disclosure. Lastly, negative theological and ethical views of technology, seeing it as unsafe or inappropriate for spiritual communication, significantly reduce the likelihood of members sharing personal matters online.

CHAPTER 7

THE PASTORAL CARE CONTEXT

In the previous two chapters I presented an examination of the properties and factors influencing the pastoral care providers and recipients of hybrid pastoral care. My analysis focused on what elements shape the member's proclivities toward online self-disclosure. In this chapter I will explore the broader pastoral care context and its influence on hybrid pastoral care through an analysis of the main factors affecting the technological environment, the sponsoring organisations, the broader culture and the availability of the pastors and members.

After exploring each property as outlined above, I will analyse how these properties work together to impact online self-disclosure. I will then identify the most conducive characteristics and circumstances of the pastoral care context that will encourage and discourage online self-disclosure as I did in the previous chapters as it related to the pastors and members. To conclude this current chapter, I will identify the characteristics and circumstances that will online self-disclosure the most based on the perception of the pastors I interviewed.

Technology

My exploration of the impact of technology within the pastoral care context will reflect the focused codes from my interview transcripts and the relevant literature that addresses the main issues mentioned by the pastors I interviewed as having had an impact in their pastoral ministry. My analysis will explore the two main factors that emerged from my interviews - technological innovation and technological surveillance.

Technological Innovation

The first property of the pastoral care context category that I will analyse is the technology environment. Özkan (2018) indicates the technological environment, with its possibility for anonymity, results in broader information disclosure, which further implies a tendency to shift behaviour towards diverse online services, away from traditional media. Özkan (2018) affirms that “in online environments where it is possible to make misrepresentations, to feel anonymous and less vulnerable, information disclosure is more widespread and apparent” (p.260). Over the last few decades technology has been used to create such environments that have directly impacted pastoral ministry.

Pastor B’s insights reveal a pragmatic acceptance of innovation in digital communication as a transformational component of modern pastoral care. The pressures of modern life have collectively made traditional face-to-face interactions more challenging to maintain. This led to a constant stream of innovation by companies the world over.

“Due to the pressures that people have, and as people are busy, seeking money, and being self-employed, some are self-employed, so it’s difficult to continually have those face-to-face interactions... Instead, digital communication is one of the things that we need to embrace more since it’s here to stay.” Pastor B

Similarly, Pastor K reflects on the changing dynamics within pastoral ministry as a result of technological innovation, viewing online interactions as increasingly central to their work, not least as a response to the expectation from members who are adopting these innovations.

“I see us transitioning to a point where face-to-face meetings and in-person visits have become a luxury due to the prevalence of online interactions in what you refer to as hybrid ministry. I believe that approximately 90% of our interactions will be online, with only 10% occurring in person. This shift is becoming increasingly valuable as

factors such as life events, pandemics, and economic crises are driving us to rely more on online platforms.” Pastor K

Pastor R’s narrative provides a historical perspective on the adoption and evolution of technology in pastoral ministry. Starting from a point where technology was less integrated into daily life, the rapid adoption of cell phones, emails, and other digital platforms marked a significant transition.

“I think it [technological innovation] definitely changed the landscape completely. I think that the evolution of technology has given pastors resources that we did not have before to connect with our members, to connect with people all over the world, and to allow the members and other people to open up with a pastor in amazing ways... So, I do think that this changed everything. It’s a new world and depending on what the pastor can and wants to do, it opens up avenues and opportunities for ministry like never before.” Pastor R

The pastors I interviewed have expressed the main developments of the technological innovations they’ve had to adapt to in their ministry. The early 2000s saw the widespread adoption of email in pastoral care contexts, offering asynchronous communication that allowed thoughtful, deliberate exchanges between pastors and their members. However, the formality and delay inherent in email exchanges often limited their usefulness for more immediate pastoral needs. As instant messaging services like Microsoft Messenger grew popular, they introduced real-time interaction that enabled a more conversational style of communication. Pastors could offer spontaneous support and create a sustained presence in members’ daily lives. With the arrival of Skype, pastoral care took on a new dimension, incorporating voice and video calls that promised to mitigate the impersonal nature of text-based interaction. The pastors I interviewed recount the first video calls as significant breakthroughs. The richness of video calls allowed for more nuanced communication, fostering greater self-disclosure through visual cues and the

semblance of face-to-face dialogue. As quoted previously, here is an example of a pastor's descriptions of this development:

“Back then [2004], cell phones were already a thing, and we definitely used them, but not as much as now working in a rural setting. People...very quickly were shifting to cell phones, emails, and having members who lived at a great distance, I would definitely have to use that... Text messages became much more prominent over the years, and eventually I started also using other platforms.” Pastor R

Social media platforms further diversified the avenues for pastoral care, with their expansive networks and communication options, including direct messaging, public commenting, and group conversations. Their public-private nature allowed pastors to engage with wider congregations while still enabling one-on-one pastoral interactions. The ubiquity of smartphones and apps also heralded an age of constant connectivity. Tools like FaceTime integrated video calling into everyday life, and apps like WhatsApp revolutionised pastoral care with features like end-to-end encryption, delivering a sense of security that encouraged more open self-disclosure. Digital Pastor B's experience with WhatsApp exemplifies such group engagement: “WhatsApp calling. For example, I still remember when I had to ask a family to add me to their WhatsApp family group. They would do the WhatsApp calling as a group.”

Zoom, becoming widespread during the COVID-19 pandemic, cemented its place in pastoral care by offering a reliable platform for congregations to convene virtually. Its popularity among pastors and members for church services, Bible studies, and prayer meetings reflects an increasing comfort with and reliance on digital means for spiritual connection. The portability of pastoral care has reached a peak with digital tools that facilitate an ‘always-on’ ministry. With a smartphone, a pastor can provide care from virtually anywhere, as Digital Pastor D remarks on the global reach facilitated by technology: “With the technology we have now, a pastor can

provide care from virtually anywhere. As I see it, even if you're in Abu Dhabi, you can minister to anyone worldwide. It doesn't matter where they are; you have the capability to reach out and offer pastoral care."

Campbell (2010) demonstrates the shift in member engagement through digital services, as shown with the Church of Fools, which underscores the evolving landscape of religious participation:

"Beginning in May 2004, Church of Fools ran highly publicised weekly services that allowed congregants to attend as avatars that could sing, pray, and interact synchronously in a 3D multi-user environment. Within its first twenty-four hours online the church had 41,000 visitors and raised much discussion in the international press about the implications of an online church for organised religion [...] the virtual church remained online allowing members the opportunity to drop in and visit the sanctuary or crypt and interact with others in a 2D environment with a bulletin board and chat room. Through this interaction a core of participants met there and went on to form St Pixels: Church of the Internet in May 2006. The community offers blogs chat rooms and a 'live' online worship forum to its members" (p.24).

Through each phase of technological evolution, from emails to video calls, the practice of pastoral care has adapted, influencing when, how, and to what extent members disclose their personal experiences and spiritual needs. These digital tools have expanded the scope and reach of pastoral care and created new norms and expectations around immediacy and intimacy of support. Thus, an environment of accelerated technological innovation will encourage online self-disclosure through new hardware, new platforms, or even new affordances. Conversely, an environment of slow innovation is likely to discourage new levels of online self-disclosure.

Technological Surveillance

My interviews have uncovered significant insights related to the impact of technological surveillance to the practice of hybrid pastoral care in general and online self-disclosure in particular. The perception from the pastors interviewed is that surveillance of conversation may come from governments, commercial platforms, and individuals around the church and pastoral family.

The concern over government or commercial surveillance significantly affects the practice of hybrid pastoral care. Pastor N from the UAE offers a clear example of the curtailing effects of government surveillance, stating,

“In the UAE you know the capability of the government to listen in. And I heard this is a problem. But for pastoral care, you obviously need privacy. How do you deal with that? So, to be honest with you, we face a great deal of challenge here in UAE. Because as you have said it’s being monitored by the government.” Pastor N

Pastor C also articulates the constraints imposed by such surveillance, particularly in regions with strict monitoring practices. Their reflection vividly demonstrates the chilling effect of surveillance on digital communication, prompting a preference for in-person discussions or phone calls over potentially monitored digital platforms.

“They don’t share their personal problems unless they want to speak with me directly. So, all the people are at my fingertips on WhatsApp on my phone and even on Facebook. No, they don’t text me, but they will ask if the pastor can come. They want to talk to you. So, we go, and we understand the problem. They don’t write on WhatsApp, but some people phone me. They called me and we talked. Because privacy is important, not everything can be shared, especially in a country like this. Yes, naturally. Due to the situation of the land here, even WhatsApp and Messenger calls are blocked, as you may know. Therefore, they cannot share everything through WhatsApp or social media, other than speaking directly or through the phone.” Pastor C

Pastor K's statement further illustrates the reluctance to use certain digital platforms due to surveillance concerns,

“I don't use Facebook and Twitter because I don't want people to greet me like, 'Hi, you are a missionary in that place,' or something like this. Even in Zoom chat, when we are sending private messages during the Zoom meeting with many people, the owner of the Zoom account can read and download the video, chats, and individual conversations. I believe that in these chats, people are not very open.” Pastor K

The concern for privacy goes beyond external governmental surveillance and stretches into more intimate circles, such as the family. Pastor R elaborates on how familial surveillance impacts self-disclosure. Pastor L addresses the need for assurance that private conversations remain confidential.

“That impacts greatly the member or whoever is receiving pastoral care. If it's a private conversation and the person is opening up, he or she needs to have full assurance, or as much as possible to be assured that the pastor will keep that to himself unless he asks, can I share this with my wife? Or do you want me to share this with our prayer group? So, I've had many instances where people open up to me and I even have to guide them through the options because they want others to pray. But sometimes they don't want others to know all the details.” Pastor R

“So that's another thing that I believe, maybe all those things that I may say to members about confidentiality and things like that, they already know that once a message is sent in Messenger or even text messages or whatever, they know that it's no longer private. It's no longer confidential.” Pastor L

Digital Pastor B's experience underlines the concern for who might read the messages and illustrates the critical role of trust in digital pastoral care and the necessity of clear communication about privacy to alleviate concerns over personal surveillance.

“In the case of the person, many ask, ‘Who will be reading the message?’ Some ask, and indeed, many ask when they are going to present a delicate situation. They inquire about who will be reading. At this point, trust begins to form. Then, they question who will read it, who will expose it. In response, I always clarify that I am the one talking, I am the one reading.”
Digital Pastor B

Such strategies reflect pastors’ awareness of digital tool security and the need to differentiate channels based on privacy to minimise surveillance risks. However, we still depend on the platform’s own descriptions of the extent of their privacy policies and practices (Zuboff, 2019b). Pastor D recognises the limitations that surveillance imposes, preferring face-to-face encounters for sensitive matters: “But right now, since we are being watched... there are things that I have to say to them, and have to meet with them personally. That’s why I prefer meeting personally.” The inclination towards in-person pastoral care highlights the caution pastors exercise in digital communications, acknowledging the compromises in security that can occur.

The pervasive nature of modern computing technologies means that more aspects of our lives are being monitored and recorded, previously considered offline and private. This widespread data collection can make individuals more cautious about what they disclose online, impacting the dynamics of pastoral care in digital settings. Joinson et al., (2007), when commenting on ubiquitous computing, observed:

“For instance, it is likely that people will disclose information without full awareness or control (e.g. their location via a cell phone) – instead they may need to rely on privacy profiles or preferences to negotiate the disclosure on their behalf. In these circumstances, discussion, or measurement of a single instance of disclosure is meaningless without full consideration of the context in which disclosure occurred” (p.237).

Much research has been dedicated to understanding privacy. Trepte and Reinecke (2014), addressing *privacy and self-disclosure in the social web*, have identified three prominent models

of privacy that been used to underpin the research into the impact of surveillance on online self-disclosure (p.9). The first is Westin's Theory of Privacy (1967), which centres on the concept of individuals controlling their own privacy through the regulation of information disclosure. He identifies four states of privacy: solitude, intimacy, anonymity, and reserve, each facilitating different levels of self-disclosure and interaction with society. Westin posits privacy as essential for emotional adjustment and self-realisation, highlighting its dynamic nature in balancing between too little and too much privacy. In the context of surveillance, this theory suggests that increased observation may disrupt this balance, leading to either overexposure or excessive withdrawal, thus impacting online self-disclosure.

Altman's Theory of Privacy (Taylor and Altman, 1975) is the second model of privacy. Altman views privacy as a dynamic process of interpersonal boundary control, emphasising the need for a balance between desired and actual privacy levels. His theory revolves around the idea that privacy is a bi-directional function involving both inputs from and outputs to others. Altman's focus on the social and environmental aspects of privacy implies that surveillance, by altering the external conditions, can disrupt the balance of privacy regulation, affecting how individuals manage their online self-disclosure in response to perceived intrusions.

The third model, Petronio's Communication Privacy Management Theory (Petronio, 2002), extends Altman's ideas by focusing on the dialectical nature of privacy, highlighting the tension between opening and closing personal boundaries. It emphasises the rule-based management of privacy, considering factors like cultural values and contextual impacts. In the context of surveillance, this model implies that increased monitoring could influence the rules individuals use to manage their privacy, potentially leading to more guarded or selective online self-disclosure as they navigate the balance between privacy and social interaction.

All three models support the generalisation that a church member's perception of surveillance will inhibit their self-disclosure in digital pastoral care. Beyond perceptions, Digital Pastor B raises further ethical concerns about providing pastoral care on commercial platforms, which primarily exist for data-led revenue generation. His concerns are in line with researchers like (Zuboff, 2019b) and others: "These are commercial platforms, and they may use the data to learn behaviour that will eventually help them make money... It's a challenge actually for us in the ministry. Because we don't know where this data goes."

Although most of the pastors I interviewed had not considered commercial surveillance, they were all very cognisant that pastoral care settings with a high perception of surveillance would lead members to become more cautious, potentially self-censoring, thereby affecting the depth and genuineness of shared information. Conversely, in environments with a low perception of surveillance, self-disclosure tends to be more open and uninhibited. Members might engage with digital pastoral care more freely, taking advantage of the immediacy and accessibility digital platforms offer. Nevertheless, even in these seemingly secure contexts, pastors must diligently uphold confidentiality, given potential data vulnerabilities. Ensuring a trusted atmosphere conducive to authentic self-disclosure remains a crucial facet of pastoral care practice in any surveillance context.

Sponsoring Institution

In this chapter I will examine the factors influencing online self-disclosure in pastoral care under four key factors: Institutional Context, Training, Accountability, and Institutional Support for Telechaplancy. These factors encapsulate the insights from various pastoral care providers I have interviewed and are crucial in understanding how digital communication

intersects with traditional pastoral care methods, shaping the dynamics of care and self-disclosure.

Institutional Context and Safeguarding Policies

The institutional context significantly determines the role of the pastoral care provider and the expectations of care recipients. Different settings, such as schools, churches, or hospitals, create distinct dynamics in pastoral care. For instance, in schools, pastoral care providers might serve as chaplains or counsellors, focusing on personal growth and transitions, while in churches, their role is more spiritual, potentially encouraging deeper personal disclosure. Another dimension of the institutional context are the safeguarding policies of the sponsoring institution. In this section I will analyse my research data to explore their perception about the impact of the institutional context and its safeguarding policies to the practice of pastoral care.

Pastors C and N describe their roles in geographically and culturally distinct environments—Dubai and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, respectively—underscoring the adaptive strategies pastoral care providers must employ in diverse settings. Pastor C’s work with labour camps and Pastor N’s oversight of 13 congregations in a restrictive context highlight the challenges and opportunities for self-disclosure in settings where the church’s physical presence is limited or under scrutiny.

“Yes, I am doing ministry in Dubai. My main work is in the labour camp because we have tens of thousands of expatriates from Southeast Asian countries working as labourers. I am conducting ministry by meeting people, sharing Bible studies, and forming worship and study groups. This is the ministry I am involved in alongside my regular pastoral work. I serve as a pastor for four large churches here in the United Arab Emirates - one in Dubai Creekside, Sharjah, Ajman, and Umm Al Qawain. I have been engaged in this ministry for the past seven years while living with my wife and daughter. Our whole family participates in the ministry, and we are happy to be here.” Pastor C

“Well, for now, it’s very complicated, especially in our context. I am currently assigned as the sole pastor in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, overseeing 13 congregations. We have eight organised churches, two companies, and the remaining are small groups. In addition to my pastoral duties, last December during the session, I was also elected to lead the youth department, which includes both junior and senior youth. It is indeed a heavy responsibility.” Pastor N

This diversity is further exemplified in the digital realm, where pastoral care assumes new dimensions. Digital Pastor B’s experience with online prayer requests reveals a different strategy for encouraging online self-disclosure.

“People reach out on the pages, asking for prayers. I end up sending messages, inquiring about how the person is feeling, and I attempt to gain their trust. Usually, when people make a prayer request, they may not fully open up, revealing what is truly happening in their lives. They prefer to feel comfortable with the person they are conversing with before opening up and trusting them completely.” Digital Pastor B

The need for a team approach in both digital and local church contexts is another theme that surfaced in my interviews. The following data highlights the critical role of collaboration in expanding the reach and effectiveness of pastoral care: “This is another very important point: a united and cohesive team with a shared vision makes things work” (Digital Pastor C); “Since we are a team and we have shifts scheduled, it seems that we receive many people contacting us for prayer requests. If I am not available during my shift, my fellow moderators will handle the inquiries, particularly from pastors, regarding Bible questions” (Digital Pastor E); and

“When we’re thinking about a project like digital evangelism in our church and you scale it, you’re putting ads on Facebook and it’s getting to thousands of people, I think that you definitely need a team. I could sense that from the beginning. I knew it would be impossible for me, and even with my associate pastor, to run the whole thing.” Pastor R

The context might also influence technology adoption. Commenting on hospital chaplaincy, Fontenot (2022) observes “there has been resistance to technology in clinical spiritual care, leading to stagnation in integrating technology into spiritual care provided by chaplains” (p.1). On the other hand, there has been a surge in technology adoption in the local church setting (Abraham et al., 2022).

Campbell (2012) underlines how established religious behaviours and beliefs offline directly shape the online expressions, especially in different institutional contexts that offer pastoral care, which reinforces the concept that digital interactions are continuations of offline social religious environments: “Here recognised offline patterns of religious life and belief directly frame and contextualise life online. This expression of multisite reality encourages the view that the online is an extension of the offline religious social world” (p.85).

In terms of safeguarding, none of the pastors addressed the safeguarding policies of their sponsoring institution directly. Their concerns were the safety of the information self-disclosed to them as outlined in the questions of privacy and confidentiality within the various contexts where pastoral care occurs. This omission may be an indication that pastors are not completely aware of such policies or at least don't think about them while discussing member safety. Nonetheless, these regional or national policies are better known by church administrators and will continue to have a direct effect in pastoral care.

The British Union Conference (BUC) Safeguarding Policy (British Union Conference, 2024) serves as an example of how a local Adventist entity might implement safeguarding measures within its jurisdiction. This policy, like others developed by Adventist organizations worldwide, is rooted in the denomination's global values and principles while incorporating legal nuances specific to the United Kingdom.

The policy provides definitions of abuse types and guidance on recognizing signs of abuse (p. 4-10), reflecting both international Adventist standards and UK-specific legal frameworks. It establishes a safeguarding structure with defined roles such as Safeguarding Persons, Responsible Persons, and Disclosure Clerks at the local church level (p. 11-12). This structure may vary in other countries based on local organizational needs and legal requirements.

The policy document outlines recruitment practices, including criminal record checks for those working with vulnerable groups (p. 14-17). The specific mechanisms for these checks (e.g., DBS in the UK) would differ in other countries, but the principle of vetting staff and volunteers is likely to be consistent across Adventist entities globally. Guidelines for creating safe environments and working safely with vulnerable groups are detailed (p. 21-24), as are procedures for responding to and reporting concerns (p. 25-26). While the specific steps may vary by country, the underlying principles of risk assessment, adequate supervision, and prompt reporting are likely to be common across Adventist safeguarding policies.

The policy's impact on pastoral care modalities and self-disclosure patterns among church members is an important consideration. In face-to-face pastoral interactions, the policy necessitates a balance between building trust and maintaining boundaries as outlined in the code of conduct (p. 36-38). For online pastoral care, the digital safety guidelines (p. 56-61) become relevant, though the specific platforms and technologies mentioned may differ in other contexts.

The comprehensive nature of the policy may influence members' willingness to disclose sensitive information. Some may feel more confident in the handling of disclosures, while others might be hesitant due to concerns about formal reporting processes. These dynamics are likely to be present in any context where robust safeguarding policies are implemented, though cultural

factors may influence the specific manifestations. To address potential challenges, the policy suggests that pastors and church leaders should communicate clearly about safeguarding and pastoral support, explain confidentiality policies, receive appropriate training, and establish referral networks. These approaches are likely to be applicable in various cultural contexts, though the specific implementation may vary.

It's important to note that while this policy serves as an example, other Adventist entities in different countries would need to develop their own policies that align with both denominational principles and local legal requirements. The specific content, structure, and emphasis of these policies may vary significantly based on factors such as local laws, cultural norms, and the specific needs and resources of the local Adventist community.

Training

Based on my interviews, most pastors are acutely aware of the need and impact of training current and future pastors in digital pastoral care. My interviews did not explore training outside of the Adventist Church as an institution that provides pastoral care around the world. However, none of the pastors I interviewed shared knowledge of seminaries who are actively training future pastors in this area of expertise. They were not aware of any institutional training for current pastors either. However, in this section of the research I will share their thoughts and opinions about the importance they place on institutional training to affect online self-disclosure.

Pastor B articulates the need for pastors to evolve alongside technological shifts, “We need to have that shift of understanding that we are also moving with the times... So basically, that’s what pastors need to be taught.” The training should encompass not only the traditional messages but also the modern methods suitable for the digital age, such as social media platforms. By integrating these tools into their pastoral repertoire, pastors improve their ability to

engage church members online, potentially enhancing the level and depth of online self-disclosure within the congregation.

Pastor D highlights the overarching trend in ministry to accommodate the surge in digital communication, understanding its inevitability in future pastoral care, “We cannot deny the fact that this is the ministry nowadays. The online pastoring... So, we need to train more of our pastors.” Training aimed at leveraging digital tools is essential for pastors to maintain their ministerial presence and effectiveness. Moreover, such training might encourage members to open up and share more freely online, knowing their pastors are well versed in virtual platforms and the nuances of online communication.

Digital Pastor A appeals for an embrace of digital evangelism within pastoral training, pinpointing it as a critical area of competency for modern pastors, “It is something that I also think about, every day... He [the pastor] needs to have a profile. There is no way today that a pastor is not available on some social network" (Digital Pastor A). The push for digital fluency among pastors can create congregational environments that encourage open communication and self-disclosure online. As members witness their pastors engaging competently with technology, it may build trust and openness in virtual spaces traditionally outside the realm of typical pastoral care.

These interviews collectively underscore the need for training across various disciplines to enrich the pastoral care experience and is foundational in delivering effective care. Pastoral care providers must be trained in handling the nuances of online communication, balancing counselling, spiritual guidance, and sometimes educational advice. Training shapes how providers navigate their varied responsibilities and maintain confidentiality in digital settings, fostering an environment conducive to self-disclosure. This aspect is critical in interactions with

vulnerable populations, where the provider's skill set directly impacts the quality of care and the level of trust established with the care recipients.

Institutional Support for Digital Pastoral Care

Christian institutions have been supporting face-to-face pastoral care for centuries. More recently, as covered in my literature review, many institutions have been supporting new digital forms of pastoral care. From my interviews with Adventist pastors, it is clear they receive varying degrees of support and most asked for training from their sponsoring institutions, either Adventist Conferences, Hospitals, or the Universities they served. Campbell (2010) underscores the importance of adapting to new media, providing critical insights into the way religious communities negotiate with and adapt to new media in a globally connected society. Without solid support to new media initiatives, it is unlikely that online self-disclosure will thrive beyond a handful of pastors who are open to new technology, especially in older organisations with a rich history of face-to-face pastoral care.

She goes further to illustrate the influence that religious values have on the adoption and use of media within religious communities to the point that an organisation's theological perspective on technology can greatly affect their integration of digital tools in pastoral care: "The application of religious values guides patterns of media use emerging from the historical tradition of a religious community... identifying which social and religious values guide a community's decision-making provides important insights into how religious communities make choices about their interaction with media technology" (p.90).

Pastor A's reflection illustrates a proactive step by an institution to adapt to digital pastoral care. The hospital's decision to transition to online ministries reflects an institutional acknowledgment of the value and necessity of digital engagement in pastoral care.

“We just try to ask them if they have time to have a FaceTime session so that we can directly connect with each other, pray for them, and listen to them. In fact, we have transitioned pastoral care at the hospital to online ministries. It is primarily about listening to and ministering to them online.” Pastor A

This sentiment of necessary transition is further echoed by Pastor H, who highlights a gap in understanding and training for digital ministry within educational and oversight bodies. In fact, most pastors I interviewed believe there is a disconnect between the current curriculum and the emerging needs of digital ministry, highlighting an urgent call for educational institutions to evolve and prepare pastors for the realities of digital pastoral care.

"Those of us working in the field of communication are well aware of the necessity of this ministry. We understand what actions to take and what type of training is required for our volunteers or the pastors who collaborate with us. However, I am concerned that the individuals instructing or overseeing our seminaries and colleges may not fully grasp the significant need we are facing. Therefore, it is essential for us in this department to engage with them. While they may possess some knowledge, it is crucial to convey the deeper and broader requirements of this ministry to them. Subsequently, we can propose innovations or revisions to the curriculum that will address the needs of not only our members but also the individuals we aim to connect with through this online ministry or online pastoral care.” Pastor H

Furthermore, the insights provided by pastors across different regions and settings underscore a collective recognition of the digital era’s challenges and opportunities. For instance, Digital Pastor D’s critique of the current theological curricula in the Philippines points to a broader issue within seminary education:

“As a student, I have reviewed the different curricula of various schools in the Philippines... I have compared the theology students’ curricula and have not come across any subjects that would enhance pastors in the field of digital ministry. I inquired why there is no subject for theology students

focusing on digital evangelism. I believe it is more effective to train pastors while they are still students rather than providing training when they are already in the field.” Digital Pastor D

The desire for institutional support extends beyond the need for educational reform; it encompasses a call for practical resources and structural changes that recognise the unique demands of digital pastoral care. Pastor P’s commentary on financial support reflects this broader perspective:

“One thing they are doing is providing funds so that every district has access to technology, good quality equipment to produce digital material. We have those funds. Now, what I would suggest, not only here but everywhere possible, is that we don’t just need to train pastors. We should also produce people with digital skills that churches could hire. Imagine if the conference hires a pastor, but the church could also hire someone who is very good with media, content production, sound equipment, and all those technologies.” Pastor P

In a hospital setting, the integration of telechaplancy and other forms of digital pastoral care into institutional care strategies, such as in hospitals and academic settings, transforms the delivery of spiritual support. Telechaplancy offers a unique insight into patients’ lives, humanising them beyond their immediate medical conditions. The nature of digital interactions in telechaplancy, where patients have greater control over their interactions with chaplains, can significantly influence self-disclosure. This empowerment differs from the ongoing personal relationships typically found in face-to-face interactions in academic and church settings. The effectiveness of telechaplancy in fostering self-disclosure depends on how well institutions promote and integrate these services into their overall care strategy, ensuring that recipients are aware of and can easily access these services.

Therefore, the relationship between pastoral care providers and their sponsoring institutions, the training they receive, the accountability processes in place, and the institutional support for programmes like telechaplancy are pivotal in understanding and optimising online self-disclosure in pastoral care. Institutions that lead the pastoral care recipient to expect a high quality of pastoral care and enable them to easily access a pastoral care provider through digital platforms will naturally encourage online self-disclosure. Conversely, institutions that don't communicate their pastoral care services and/or don't make these services easily available will inevitably discourage online self-disclosure.

Culture

The cultural context within which pastoral care is provided significantly shapes the practice and the experiences of both caregivers and care receivers. Culture seems to function as the 'personality' of the country or geographic region as well as the internal organisational culture within which pastoral care occurs. In exploring cultural differences, Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory (Hofstede, 1984), Trompenaars' Seven Dimensions of Culture (Trompenaars, 1996), and the GLOBE Study (House et al., 2004) stand as three prominent models, each offering unique insights (Tocar, 2019). Hofstede's Theory is renowned in cross-cultural psychology for its six-dimensional framework that quantitatively assesses national cultures and facilitates comparative analysis. Trompenaars' model adds depth by examining seven cultural dimensions that encapsulate values and behaviours, crucial for understanding cultural diversity in a globalised world. Meanwhile, the GLOBE Study expands upon these ideas with nine dimensions, accentuating the role culture plays in shaping leadership and organisational practices.

Despite the advantages of other models (Javidan et al., 2006), I have chosen Hofstede's model for my cultural analysis for its rigorous, evidence-based approach that reliably captures cultural influences on interpersonal dynamics which are key to my study of pastoral care. Hofstede's theory, with its emphasis on dimensions like individualism versus collectivism and power distance, provides direct relevance to the communication patterns I am investigating. In contrast, Trompenaars' focus on values and behaviours, and the GLOBE Study's orientation towards leadership, don't align as intimately with my work, which centres on personal communication and how cultural proclivities inform the extent of self-disclosure in pastoral care.

Developed by Geert Hofstede through his extensive research at IBM Europe between 1967 and 1973, the theory initially identified four primary cultural dimensions: power distance, individualism, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity. Later, it expanded to include long-term orientation and indulgence versus restraint. I have used Hofstede's model to provide a helpful evaluation of cultural tendencies within the specific context of my research, guiding the pastoral care process in both face-to-face and digital environments. The theory elucidates six key dimensions which significantly impact communication styles, perception of authority, and interpersonal relationships in diverse cultural settings (Taras, Kirkman and Steel, 2010).

Pastor C emphasises the importance of navigating cultural sensitivities, particularly in a region where honour and shame are pivotal to social interactions.

“There is no danger as long as we are wise in what we speak and how we present the truth. That is more important. We should be careful not to hurt anyone's feelings but be kind and compassionate. We should be mindful of the words we use, especially when living in the Middle East. In this region, there is an Eastern culture that values honour and shame. Therefore, it is crucial to consider our words and presentation carefully to avoid any risks.” Pastor C

Their statement vividly illustrates the high-context nature of Eastern cultures, where indirect communication and the preservation of honour are critical, which directly reflects Hofstede's dimensions of Masculinity vs. Femininity and Uncertainty Avoidance, as the emphasis on not causing offence and the careful use of language suggest a tendency towards nurturing qualities and a high sensitivity to uncertainty in social interactions (Hofstede, 2011).

Contrasting this, Pastor L's observation about communicative openness in different cultural settings highlights the variance in Individualism vs. Collectivism across cultures. This divergence in self-disclosure reflects the more collectivist cultures' preference for indirect communication and the more individualist cultures' directness and openness in expressing personal needs (Hofstede, 2011).

“They don't normally open up about the issues on WhatsApp. They will just say unspoken prayers to tell you exactly the main problems; some of them will not share. But back in Africa, the person is not shy to tell you what they need. If she needs a husband, she will definitely tell you. You open up, but here all that we see is spoken prayer.” Pastor L

Pastor D underscores the need for pastoral care providers to adapt to a wide range of cultural norms and expectations. This aligns with Hofstede's dimensions of Power Distance and Long-Term Orientation, as the approach to pastoral care must be flexible enough to accommodate different attitudes towards authority and various temporal focuses. Their experience with a congregation comprising 48 nationalities showcases the multifaceted nature of cultural influences on pastoral care.

“I have been blessed to work with a wide variety of cultures where I pastor now; we've documented 48 nationalities. It is an extremely diverse culture, which has advantages and challenges. I'm not saying disadvantages because then there's no such thing. There are challenges and opportunities, better world opportunities. Prior to that, again, I've pastored only in multicultural environments, both the society and the community in which

I've operated, and the composition of my congregation. So, I have to confess, I would be curious to see how pastoring in a monocultural society would work. However, I don't think there is such a thing. Unless you go to an isolated tribe in Africa, in the Amazon, where you come from, or in Asia, in cities. It's almost impossible to find monocultural communities. Even in the east of Europe where I'm from, such as Romania or Ukraine, you would not believe how diversified the church and the society are.”
Pastor D

Furthermore, Pastor D explores his perceptions about the openness of various cultures as he reflects on his own culture and sensitivities. His insights demonstrate the significant affect that culture has on self-disclosure as explored by Broeder's (2023) analysis of the impact of culture in self-disclosure:

“The time it takes for individuals to open up depends on their culture and background. Although we are all in Britain and British individuals from different original cultures, such as South Americans, Latinos, Spanish, and Portuguese people, tend to open up quicker. They often share everything even at the first meeting. For others, it may take years, and some may never share the real problem or its magnitude. British people are known for being very private and tend not to share a lot of personal things. Although I work with the elderly, who are sometimes first-generation immigrants and come from diverse cultural backgrounds such as Africa and the Caribbean, I find it easy to relate to them because my own cultural background is similar. With these individuals, I establish a connection from the start. I am not surprised when they share details and open their hearts with a wide-open door, so to speak. However, when dealing with second-generation immigrants or their children, they tend to be even more private and distant initially.” Pastor D

The insights from Digital Pastor A, reveal that, “When you are living with a person and you build this persona, it sometimes takes much longer, or sometimes you don't even achieve the goal of really connecting with the person. Of course, it depends a lot, I guess, on the region, country, and culture. There are all these cultural aspects to be considered”, further reinforces the

importance of cultural awareness in establishing connections within pastoral care. This highlights Hofstede's dimension of Indulgence vs. Restraint, where the culture's orientation towards gratification or control of desires can impact the ease of connection and openness in pastoral care.

These reflections, grounded in the real experiences of pastoral care providers, underscore the profound impact of cultural dimensions on the practice and perception of pastoral care. However, as the pastors weren't familiar with Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, it is beyond the scope of my research to validate each dimension's effect on self-disclosure in digital pastoral care. The natural conclusion from my dataset is that pastors perceive some cultures to be more open to self-disclosure and other cultures to be more closed.

Availability

Availability emerged in my research as a core property of the pastoral care context which impacts self-disclosure and the practice of hybrid pastoral care through its two main factors of space and time. Manuel Castells' (2010) proposes the distinction between the "space of places" and the "space of flows", which has the potential for significant impact on the field of pastoral care as it relates to time and space. Castells conceptualises "space of places" as locales defined by physical contiguity and "space of flows" as the interconnectedness between locales, a key characteristic of networked societies. This distinction is critical for understanding the evolution of pastoral care in the digital age. In traditional pastoral care, the "space of places" dominated, as physical proximity and direct, face-to-face interactions were essential. Pastoral care providers were part of the local community, deeply embedded in the social fabric, and interactions were largely confined to physical locales. This proximity allowed for a deep understanding of community needs and facilitated immediate, personalised care.

However, the rise of digital technology and social media platforms, accelerated by global trends such as urbanisation and secularisation, has shifted pastoral care into the “space of flows”. This transition reflects a move from a geographically bound, place-centric model to a network-centric approach. In this new paradigm, pastoral care transcends physical boundaries, reaching individuals across vast distances. Online platforms like Facebook Messenger become tools for providing care, enabling pastors to connect with individuals who are physically distant or unable to access traditional church services. This shift is not merely logistical but also cultural, as it changes the nature of relationships and community dynamics.

I will frame these factors of time and space within my CGT through two opposing scenarios, each involving time and space constraints. The first is characterised by geographical proximity between pastor and member and a favourable members-to-pastor ratio, which would significantly affect how available the pastor is to each member. This scenario would encourage in-person avenues of pastoral care and foster face-to-face self-disclosure. The second scenario, marked by geographical separation and a high members-to-pastors ratio naturally encourages online self-disclosure as the pastor will require a more efficient way to visit the members.

Space

It is self-evident that the physical separation between the pastoral care provider and receiver significantly influences the choice of pastoral interaction methodologies. Technology serves to bridge distances and offers pastors the capacity to connect with their members “anytime, anywhere”. This accessibility transforms the reach of pastoral care, negating issues of geographic isolation by facilitating connections previously hindered by physical proximity. The data from my interviews illuminate the diverse perspectives and experiences of Adventist pastoral care providers, underscoring the complex relationship between physical presence and

technological mediation. The pivotal role of technology in bridging geographical distances, enhancing accessibility, and fostering connections that were once limited by physical proximity cannot be overstated (Gao, Q. et al., 2022).

Pastor A and Pastor I are examples from my dataset that express how important it is to maintain sincerity and connection whether face-to-face or online. Pastor A expresses his concern that online only may not build sufficient connections with people to truly help them. Meanwhile, Pastor I seems to share this sentiment, even as they celebrate the ability to help more people through the digital connections.

“One concern I noticed here is that sincerity may not be truly felt if they cannot see them personally. Therefore, it would be better if they could have an online platform but still be able to reach out to people or to the nearby pastoral caregiver because there is a certain connection with physical interaction.” Pastor A

“This is wonderful. Many things are easier now. Yes, this makes many things easier. And I have people I’m in the counselling processes with, people with whom it would not be possible to connect if we did not have the technical support. Yes, because of the geography. They are too far away. They could talk to everybody else, but if they want to talk to me, they don't have to come to Hanover anymore. They stay at home. I have experienced this, and I mentioned it to my wife last week. However, I cannot accurately describe it yet with some people after months of meeting every second week. It is a very fluid dynamic, as if we met in person every day. With others, it is more complicated. Every time I end a Zoom call, I think about how I would have liked to meet that person in person, but I cannot pinpoint exactly what it is.” Pastor I

Pastor L believes in the vast potential of digital platforms in transcending geographical barriers, allowing for a global ministry that was previously unattainable.

“If not for this digital technology? As I speak now, I have some people that I’ve been praying for in Switzerland. Yes, I have some in France that I’m praying for. Yes, I have some that I’m praying for in the Philippines.

So, as I'm saying, a lot of worldwide, US and so forth, if not for this technology, how could I do all these things? So, what I see is that with this technology that we have now, you may be in Abu Dhabi, here as a man, I am betting you are a pastor worldwide, you can minister to anybody wherever they are." Pastor L

Digital Pastor F reinforces the efficiency and accessibility of online pastoral care. They believe the global connectivity facilitated by digital platforms is highlighted, underscoring the ability to engage with individuals worldwide, which significantly expands the scope and reach of pastoral care.

"The accessibility of online pastoral care is very efficient. Why? Because just like what we are doing right now, we can connect with people from Africa, Germany, Europe, Asia, and all continents. We can connect with them, converse with them, and talk to them. That's the accessibility of virtual pastoral care, which is different from face-to-face interactions." Digital Pastor F

The study of spatial dynamics within pastoral care elucidates the complex interplay between digital technology integration and traditional practices. This transformation, moving from a proximity-based to a digitally enabled model, necessitates a careful balance between ensuring genuine interaction and capitalising on the expansive reach of online platforms. The insights derived suggest a pivotal shift to a network-centric approach in pastoral care, highlighting the challenge of emulating the authenticity and depth of in-person interactions within virtual settings. As digital technologies enable broader connectivity, the imperative emerges for a hybrid model that combines digital accessibility with the essence of personal engagement. This approach advocates for a strategic selection of interaction methods aimed at preserving the integrity of pastoral relationships across distances.

Time

The availability of time can be determined by the life circumstances of the members, such as their professional demands and family responsibilities. It can also be determined by the ratio of members-to-pastor in any given environment such as a church, hospital, or school. This ratio is calculated by dividing the number of individuals requiring pastoral support—such as members of a congregation, hospital patients, or school students—by the number of pastors available to serve them. The resulting figure provides an insight into the level of potential personal attention each member may receive. Isetti, Stawinoga and Pechlaner (2021b) noted that “the use of technology in pastoral care varied, influenced by factors like the number of parishes a priest administered and their respective roles” (p.377).

Pastor N’s description of his visitation schedule shows that in scenarios where this ratio is low, indicating fewer members per pastor, the environment is conducive to the traditional, relational models of pastoral care. Activities like sharing meals and conducting home visits become tenable, providing ample space for self-disclosure and the cultivation of deeper relationships. This low ratio allows for a high degree of individual attention and time investment from pastors into each member’s pastoral needs, fostering environments that encourage open communication and emotional intimacy.

“I generally spend about an hour on each pastoral visit, as I attend various types of visits including those for baptism, parenting, and with the youth. My preference is to incorporate a meal during these visits, as it provides a comfortable setting that encourages people to open up and share their thoughts, much like Jesus engaged with people.” Pastor N

Conversely, when faced with a high ratio of members to pastors, the likelihood and practicality of implementing these traditional approaches diminish. In such scenarios, as represented by Pastor A’s transition to digital communication platforms, the necessity for

adaptability becomes evident: “While I may not always conduct physical visits, I make use of digital platforms like Zoom, Messenger, and even Instagram to fit our meetings into modern schedules. This approach helps overcome logistical challenges and keeps the lines of communication open.” The use of Zoom, Messenger, and Instagram is a tool to circumvent modern time constraints and a response to the limitations imposed by the high ratio, empowering members to partake in pastoral care on their terms. This ensures that pastoral support remains accessible despite the limited availability of pastors.

Digital Pastor D’s remarks on the expected timeliness of digital responses underscore the role of responsiveness in the digital realm to foster relationships and self-disclosure, even when the ratio of members to pastors is elevated: “In today’s digital age, responsiveness is crucial for relationship building. Personally, I value prompt replies as it shows the person’s interest and willingness to support me, and I believe this holds true in pastoral relationships as well.” In high-ratio contexts, digital platforms provide a lifeline for sustained pastoral engagement, offering immediacy that can partially compensate for the lack of physical presence.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have analysed the impact of various factors related to the pastoral care context that may encourage or discourage online self-disclosure. I have summarised the conclusion for each factor in the table below considering a binary structure similar to my analysis of the factors related to the pastor and member.

Table 6. Factors Influencing Pastoral Care Context

Factors - Context	Encourages Online Self-Disclosure	Discourages Online Self-Disclosure
Technological Innovation	Accelerated	Slow
Technological Surveillance	High Perception	Low Perception
Institutional Context	Varied	Varies

Training for Digital Pastoral Care	Advanced	Basic
Accountability	High	Low
Institutional Support for Digital Pastoral Care	Strong	Weak
Culture	More Open to Self-disclosure	Less Open to Self-disclosure
Space Availability	Far	Near
Time Availability	Low	High

Encouraging Online Self-Disclosure in Pastoral Care

Following my analysis of the data from my interviews, in this section I will document the perception of the pastors about the factors of the pastoral care context that may encourage self-disclosure the most. Firstly, technological innovation and the rapid advancement and integration of digital tools in everyday life, particularly when it is accelerated, plays a pivotal role in facilitating online self-disclosure, not least because people tend to share more when they become familiar with the digital tools they use every day.

The varied institutional contexts that embrace and adapt to digital methodologies create environments conducive to online self-disclosure. This adaptability is crucial in accommodating the diverse needs and preferences of members. Additionally, advanced training for digital pastoral care equips caregivers with essential skills and insights, enabling them to create secure, understanding, and empathetic online spaces. Such environments are key to encouraging self-disclosure among members. Furthermore, strong institutional support for digital pastoral care, characterised by resources and policies that back digital initiatives, significantly enhances the capacity of pastoral caregivers to foster an online environment that encourages self-disclosure.

Some cultures tend to generate much more self-disclosure than others. Examples of Africans being more open while the British seem more reserved are examples of the generalised understanding of the pastors' interviews. In terms of availability, the pastors interviewed

perceive that a high ratio of members to pastors along with a larger geographical distance between pastors and members will also encourage self-disclosure in digital pastoral care.

Discouraging Online Self-Disclosure in Pastoral Care

Conversely, the pastors interviewed perceived certain factors can hinder online self-disclosure. Slow technological innovation limits exposure and comfort with digital platforms, leading to hesitance in engaging online. A low perception of technological surveillance might raise concerns about privacy and security, deterring members from sharing sensitive information online. Institutional contexts that lack variability and fail to incorporate digital methods may create barriers to effective digital pastoral care. Lack of basic training for digital pastoral care might leave caregivers underprepared to handle the nuances of online communication, negatively impacting members' willingness to open up. Weak institutional support for digital pastoral care, marked by insufficient resources and lack of policy backing, can impede the development of a nurturing online environment, thereby discouraging self-disclosure.

Culture may also influence self-disclosure as pastors believe some cultures are more open than others. In terms of availability, the pastors interviewed perceive that a low ratio of members to pastors along with a shorter geographical distance between pastors and members will also discourage self-disclosure online as people would prefer face-to-face interactions.

Overall, these factors related to the pastoral care context collectively shape the propensity of pastors and members to engage in online self-disclosure. In the next chapter I will analyse the interplay of all of the factors from chapters 5, 6 and 7 into a full exploration of my CGT of self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

For the first two millennia, Christianity has practiced various forms of face-to-face pastoral care alongside practices that used paper as its primary mediated alternative (Elias 2006). Over the last two decades, however, the integration of digital communication in pastoral care has signified the largest disruption and opportunity to the care of souls in the history of the religion (Gorrell 2018a; Hathaway 2020). This has prompted critical inquiries into the dynamics of self-disclosure and the ethical landscape navigated by pastoral care providers (Henderson and Gilding 2004; Farabaugh 2009). Having been confronted with the reality that people seemed to share more intimate details about their lives online than face-to-face and seeing first-hand some extreme cases of online self-disclosure in digital pastoral care, I was moved to investigate what I considered a strange behaviour.

I began my research by investigating and outlining the academic literature for the intersections between CMC, self-disclosure, and pastoral care. The integration of digital technologies into religious practices has given rise to the field of digital religion. Heidi Campbell, a pivotal researcher in this domain, has significantly advanced our understanding of this field, particularly in her more recent works. Campbell's earlier description of networked religion as "the technological and cultural space that is evoked when we talk how online and offline religious spheres have become blended" (Campbell, 2012, p.4) laid the groundwork for understanding the reciprocal influence between digital technologies and religious practices. This concept moved beyond the binary of online versus offline religion, acknowledging the complex interplay between these spheres.

Building on this foundation, Campbell's recent work has further explored the evolving landscape of digital religion. In "Digital Creatives and the Rethinking of Religious Authority" (Campbell, 2021), she examines how digital media producers are challenging traditional religious authority structures. Her research highlights how new forms of religious leadership and influence are emerging in the digital space, reshaping the dynamics of religious communities.

The study of digital religion has evolved through several 'waves' of research, as described by Hojsgaard and Warburg (2005) and expanded upon by Campbell and other scholars. The initial wave focused on documenting and describing new religious phenomena online. The second wave attempted to categorize and develop typologies of online religious practices. The third wave emphasized theoretical and interpretive research, exploring how the internet was influencing religious digital practices in everyday life (Campbell, 2016). A fourth wave, identified by Campbell and Evolvi (2020), examined people's media practices in their everyday lives, paying attention to "existential, ethical, and political aspects of digital religion, as well as issues of gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality" (p. 7). This convergent wave brought together insights from previous waves, resulting in a more mature field of study.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital technologies by religious organizations, with millions of faith communities transitioning to online platforms for worship and community engagement (Campbell, 2020). This global shift is indicative of the increasing importance of digital religion in contemporary society and further blurred the boundaries between online and offline religious practices.

Within the context of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, pastoral care has undergone significant transformations. The church's historical ambivalence towards professional psychology and counselling has shaped its approach to pastoral care. While influential writers

like Ellen White emphasized the importance of understanding the human mind, there has been a reluctance to fully engage with secular psychological theories. Dudley and Cummings Jr (1982) note that this cautious stance has sometimes limited the tools available to Adventist pastors in addressing complex emotional and relational issues.

Despite these challenges, there have been efforts to develop a more robust framework for pastoral care within Adventism. Dybdahl (2007) advocates for a "theology of presence" that emphasizes God's immanence and involvement in human affairs, providing a theological basis for empathetic pastoral engagement. Similarly, Rice (2002) calls for a greater focus on narrative approaches to theology and ministry, recognizing the power of story in shaping faith and identity. However, the Adventist Church's commitment to pastoral care is evident in its extensive network of over 20,000 pastors providing continuous spiritual care and visitation to more than 22 million members across 170,000+ congregations worldwide (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2021). This extensive network represents a lived theology that, while perhaps not fully articulated, is nonetheless deeply embedded in the church's practice.

Recognizing the changing landscape of ministry in the digital age, the Adventist Church is expanding its pastoral care operations online. This expansion goes beyond mere proclamation and evangelism, focusing on genuine care for individuals through prayer, counselling, and spiritual support in virtual spaces. As Bruinsma (2009) suggests, this adaptation to new forms of ministry while maintaining core Adventist values demonstrates the church's capacity for growth and innovation in pastoral care.

In terms of pastoral care more directly, use of technology and safeguarding practices have also impacted the practice throughout the world. In terms of technology, the integration of computer-mediated communication (CMC) into pastoral practices since the 1980s has

consistently shown an increase in self-disclosure compared to face-to-face interactions (Sproull and Kiesler, 1986). The advent of email in the early 2000s offered asynchronous communication that allowed for thoughtful, deliberate exchanges between pastors and their members. As instant messaging services grew popular, they introduced real-time interaction that enabled a more conversational style of communication. The arrival of video calling platforms like Skype added a new dimension to pastoral care, incorporating visual cues that promised to mitigate the impersonal nature of text-based interaction. Social media platforms further diversified the avenues for pastoral care, with their expansive networks and communication options. The ubiquity of smartphones and apps heralded an age of constant connectivity, with tools like WhatsApp revolutionizing pastoral care through features like end-to-end encryption. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this digital transformation, with platforms like Zoom cementing their place in pastoral care by offering reliable virtual congregation spaces (Campbell and Osteen, 2021).

Similarly, the evolution of safeguarding practices directly affects pastoral care as it reflects a broader societal recognition of the need to protect vulnerable individuals. In the mid-20th century, pastoral care primarily focused on providing spiritual support, with limited formal safeguarding protocols. However, the emergence of high-profile abuse cases within religious institutions during the 1970s and 1980s catalysed a paradigm shift in approach. By the 1990s, many denominations had developed comprehensive safeguarding policies, integrating them into their pastoral care frameworks. The ethical dimensions of safeguarding became a focal point in the early 21st century, with Liégeois (2014) highlighting the ethical implications of physical touch in pastoral care. This period saw the introduction of mandatory safeguarding training for clergy and pastoral caregivers. In recent years, safeguarding practices in pastoral care have

increasingly embraced multidisciplinary approaches, collaborating with social workers, psychologists, and legal experts to enhance the effectiveness of safeguarding measures. The digital transformation of pastoral care has introduced new challenges in safeguarding, particularly concerning data privacy and online safety, prompting religious institutions to develop new policies and guidelines for digital pastoral care practices.

The intersection of CMC and self-disclosure has been significantly influenced by the work of Adam Joinson. His research has consistently found an increase in self-disclosure in CMC compared to face-to-face interaction (Joinson, 2001). This phenomenon has been attributed to various factors, including the perceived anonymity and reduced social cues in online environments.

Joinson's (2001) study, which has become foundational in this field, employed a rigorous mixed-methods approach comprising three separate experiments involving undergraduate students. The findings revealed that CMC leads to higher levels of self-disclosure than face-to-face communication, confirming the influential role of the medium itself in shaping interpersonal interactions. Even more intriguing is the discovery that visual anonymity further augments this propensity to self-disclose, underscoring the psychological mechanisms that encourage open communication in anonymous settings. The study's third experiment illuminates the nuanced relationship between different forms of self-awareness and self-disclosure. Specifically, elevated private self-awareness coupled with diminished public self-awareness resulted in higher levels of spontaneous disclosure. This offers a compelling perspective on how internal psychological states interact with external conditions to influence online communication behaviours.

Joinson's work also explores the concept of the online disinhibition effect, which posits that people behave differently online due to factors like dissociative anonymity and invisibility

(Joinson, 2007). However, he argues that this disinhibition is not necessarily a window into one's "true self" but rather a varied expression that hinges upon the specific online environment. Furthermore, the relationship between privacy concerns and self-disclosure in online environments has also been a focus of Joinson's research. Despite concerns about privacy, these concerns often don't translate into behaviours that protect privacy online. Trust emerges as a mediator in this complex relationship between privacy and self-disclosure, where it could compensate for low privacy perceptions, adding yet another layer to this complex construct (Joinson et al., 2010).

Considering the lack of research at the intersection of CMC, self-disclosure and pastoral care, my research was propelled by two fundamental questions: the perception of pastors about the impact of instant messaging on the encouragement or discouragement of self-disclosure in pastoral care, and the ethical implications encountered by pastoral care providers employing data-driven commercial platforms to care for their members.

To address these inquiries, I employed constructivist GT as a method (Charmaz, 2012), conducting 30 semi-structured interviews with Seventh-day Adventist pastors engaged in hybrid forms of pastoral care, including both district and digital pastors. These conversations revealed a unanimous aversion to an exclusively online pastoral model. Irrespective of their primary mode of ministry, the pastors I interviewed recognised an inherent need among their members for physical community interactions. This reinforced the significance of a hybrid approach that marries digital affordances with the irreplaceable value of face-to-face contact. I then referred to pastoral care that uses both face-to-face and digital interactions as 'hybrid pastoral care'.

By applying the CGT process through theoretical sampling and constant comparison of data, I formulated a CGT of self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care which suggests the rise of

digital communication has ushered in a hybrid mode of pastoral care that optimises both face-to-face and digital interactions toward member self-disclosure. This optimisation is influenced by the characteristics and circumstances (properties) of the pastoral care provider (pastor), the recipient (member), and the context. In other words, the choice between traditional and online pastoral methods is a fluid, contextual decision, influenced by core properties of the pastor, the member, and the pastoral care context. Therefore, I will document and analyse 26 factors, brought forward through my interviews, that directly influence online self-disclosure across the 12 properties of the pastors, members, and the context within which they interact.

The perspective of pastors on instant messaging and self-disclosure is not homogeneous. Although they all agree to the benefits of hybrid pastoral care, some encourage online self-disclosure while others actively discourage it. Those who encourage it have cited a deeper level of self-disclosure through instant messaging platforms. This is backed by the literature at the intersection between CMC and self-disclosure which explains that IM provides a heightened private self-awareness and a simultaneous diminished public self-awareness, minimising the experience of shame and enabling deeper self-disclosure (Joinson, 2001; Henderson and Gilding, 2004). Other pastors, influenced by concerns over privacy and surveillance, hesitate or outright reject the proposition of proactively encouraging digital self-disclosure.

I will conclude my research by analysing the intersection between all properties and factors perceived by pastors to directly influence online self-disclosure which constitutes my CGT of self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care. I will also analyse the temporal dimension of my CGT as certain factors exert immediate influence on self-disclosure, such as the member's current situational crisis or whether they have access to the internet, while other factors, like cultural norms and societal changes, may unfold over extensive periods. This recognition and

understanding of the temporal dimension are vital for the practical application of my CGT of self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care.

The concluding analysis will encapsulate the factors encouraging or discouraging online self-disclosure by situating these elements within their respective temporal windows as they relate to members, pastors, and institutions. This will constitute a guide for the strategic advancement of online self-disclosure in pastoral care. The utility of my CGT lies in its ability to offer a blueprint that informs both immediate and long-term strategies (Tracy, 2010), allowing for a calibration of online self-disclosure in the intersection of technology and pastoral care.

Constructivist Ground Theory of Self-Disclosure in Hybrid Pastoral Care

Having analysed the research data for the properties and factors related to the pastors, members, and pastoral care context that affect self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care, I will now conclude by outlining my CGT by exploring how these properties and factors relate to each other in encouraging or discouraging self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care. Properties and factors related to the pastor and member combine with the properties and factors related to the pastoral care environment to define which modality of pastoral care will be selected and how it will be practiced. For example, if a pastor is unfamiliar with technology but their institution offers training and encouragement toward it, it is likely this pastor will encourage self-disclosure in younger members at some point. The figure below outlines the hybrid pastoral care properties as

they combine to determine which is the most effective modality of pastoral care.

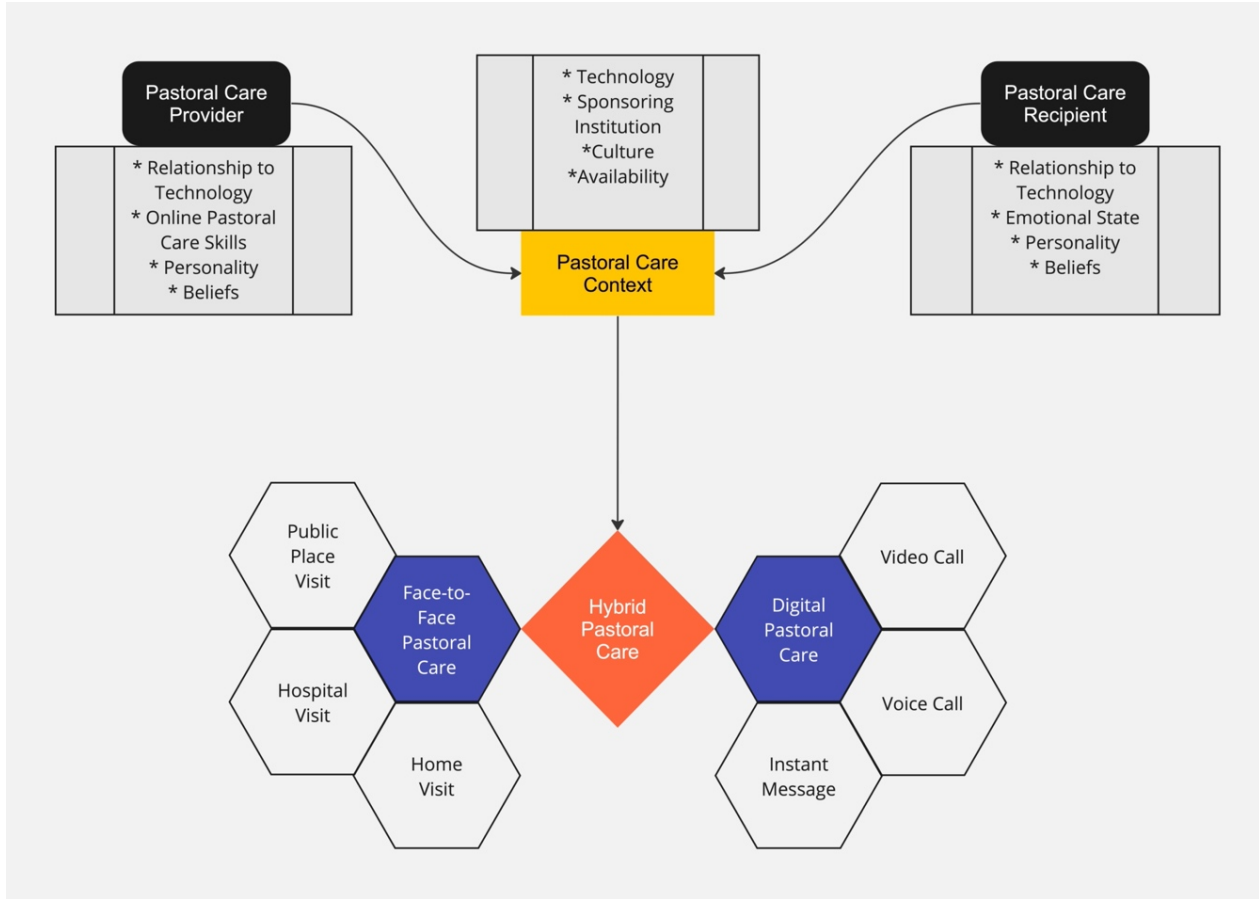


Figure 4. Conceptual model of CGT

In this relational analysis I will explore how pastors, members, and sponsoring institutions, as the main actors of pastoral care, may use the properties and factors identified in my CGT to encourage or discourage online self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care. I will cluster factors based on their innate short-term, long-term, and atemporal application. I will report only on the most influential short-term, long-term, and atemporal factors that may be used by each actor to encourage or discourage online self-disclosure. This shift in perspective will provide a full view of how my CGT of self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care may have real-world implications beyond the theoretical model I have explored throughout my research. Thus, my

analysis will be based on what temporal strategies each actor could employ to influence the factors to encourage or discourage self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care.

Strategies for Pastoral Care Providers

Pastors seeking to optimise their engagement in hybrid pastoral care have various strategic paths available to them. These strategies involve moving to organisations congruent with their beliefs and practices of pastoral care or adapting personal skills and technology usage, influencing members' experiences, and impacting institutional policies and support systems. Influencing the factors affecting them, their members and their sponsoring organisations will require a short-term and long-term commitment as some factors are easier to influence than others. However, there are some factors that are well beyond their ability to influence. For these factors, the best strategy isn't to impact the factor, but rather, to adapt their short and long-term strategies based on a deeper understanding of that factor.

Temporal Factors

The most direct short-term solution for a pastor seeking an environment conducive to their style of hybrid pastoral care is to change organisations. Pastors seeking an institution more receptive and supportive of digital pastoral care or, conversely, one that leans more towards traditional face-to-face methods, should consider a transition to an organisation that aligns with their beliefs, preferences, and expectations. This movement ensures they are within a system that supports their pastoral care strategies and reinforces their ability to cater to member needs effectively.

For those unable or unwilling to transition, they can attempt to influence factors related to themselves, their members, and their organisation. For pastors desiring to encourage online self-disclosure, they can engage in self-reflection and self-improvement, especially concerning

technological engagement. Their own access to and familiarity with technology are crucial in developing and offering digital pastoral care. Improving technological access is a starting point; pastors should strive to procure the necessary hardware and stable internet connectivity to facilitate online interactions. Once infrastructure is established, pastors must hone their abilities with these technologies to navigate digital platforms confidently and competently. Such proficiency allows for a seamless integration of technology in pastoral care, enriching the experiences of both pastors and members.

Furthermore, online listening skills, trust-building, and language proficiency are paramount competencies that pastors must develop for effective digital pastoral care. Listening skills ensure that pastors are attuned to the subtleties of digital communication, where non-verbal cues are less apparent, while trust-building in an online context demands transparency, consistency, and the establishment of a secure space for members to share confidential information. Online language proficiency extends beyond linguistic fluency to include the ability to communicate meaningfully within the confines of digital communication systems. These core pastoral skills directly impact the members' willingness to engage and self-disclose in an online pastoral setting. Most of these developments can be attempted as short-term strategies which should be a focus for any pastor aiming to strengthen their digital pastoral presence.

Pastors can also influence the experience of their members which would mostly involve long-term strategies that would lead congregations toward increased levels of online self-disclosure. Recognising that members have varying degrees of access to and familiarity with technology, pastors can support and educate their members to bridge these gaps. They can facilitate access to digital platforms for members with limited resources and provide training for

those lacking in digital literacy. They may also engage with specialised ministries to provide digital training. Such efforts widen the accessibility of digital pastoral care for all members.

Pastors have a traditional role in influencing the emotional wellbeing of their members as well as their theological and often ethical frameworks. By strengthening relationships through consistent, caring, and responsive online engagement, pastors foster an atmosphere conducive to member self-disclosure. In doing so, they must remain sensitive to the emotional cues that members may exhibit in a digital context, adjusting their care approaches to meet the needs of individuals. Pastors might also work on the long-term strategy of shaping their members' theological and ethical frameworks toward or away from digital pastoral care.

Finally, pastors can influence their sponsoring organisations by advocating for ongoing digital pastoral care training, emphasising the importance of acquiring and refining online engagement skills. Likewise, they can champion the development of robust accountability systems that reinforce ethical standards and confidentiality in digital communication. Conversely, they can advocate against online self-disclosure, even as they promote hybrid pastoral care. Leveraging their position within their organisations, pastors can also recommend or initiate support structures for digital pastoral care, proposing technological investments, advocating for policies that recognise online pastoral activities, and supporting frameworks that facilitate digital engagement.

Pastors should be aware of the physical and time constraints of their ministry context and navigate them appropriately. Where space availability is a challenge, focusing on improving the digital connection can ensure continued pastoral care provision. On the flip side, a high member-to-pastor ratio may necessitate time management strategies that utilise online platforms for broader reach and efficient communication.

Atemporal Factors

Understanding and adapting to atemporal factors in hybrid pastoral care is critical for pastoral care providers as they implement strategies to encourage or discourage online self-disclosure among their members. These factors, primarily consisting of personality dimensions of both the pastor and the members, as well as the cultural context of the pastoral care setting, require strategies that are not about changing the factor itself but about understanding and adapting pastoral care to it.

For pastors, acknowledging their own high trait openness is key to encouraging online self-disclosure. They can enhance their digital environment through creative engagement and a diverse use of platforms, helping to nurture a culture of openness and connectivity. Conversely, pastors with a high level of trait neuroticism, who may find the emotional demands of digital communication challenging, should seek to foster reliability and predictability in their online interactions. This could come in the form of clear communication boundaries and a structured approach to their digital pastoral presence. Pastors with low openness might deliberately choose tried-and-tested channels of communication to maintain a level of restraint in digital discourse, while pastors with low neuroticism can capitalise on their emotional stability to provide a consistent and empathetic online presence to members, promoting self-disclosure through approachability and reliability.

Understanding the personality traits of members further refines a pastor's approach. Members displaying high openness will likely appreciate and respond to innovative digital practices, whereas those with high neuroticism may require a secure and predictable digital environment to feel comfortable opening up. Pastors must tailor their digital engagement to meet

these differing personality needs, fostering a balanced environment where every member can find a suitable mode of self-disclosure.

The cultural context of pastoral care also influences the strategy for managing online self-disclosure. Pastors operating within high individualism cultures should highlight personal spiritual reflection and expression, treating digital platforms as an extension of the individual's spiritual journey. However, in collectivist settings where communal ties are stronger, pastors might focus on shared experiences rather than personal disclosure, which naturally limits the personal details shared online. For pastors working in cultures with high uncertainty avoidance might find members more willing to share when provided with structured and straightforward digital interactions. This sense of predictability can reduce the unease associated with uncertainty, making self-disclosure more likely. In cultures with a lower uncertainty avoidance index, an open-ended approach to digital communication could lead to less personal divulging due to the member's comfort with ambiguity and less need for structured assurance.

For long-term oriented cultures, pastors should focus on nurturing enduring digital relationships, emphasising the longitudinal benefits of spiritual development and self-disclosure, while in more short-term oriented societies, they might concentrate on present, pragmatic interactions to respect the cultural inclination toward the immediate. Pastors must also consider the indulgence versus restraint cultural dimension. In indulgent societies, promoting an expressive and open digital culture may align well with values of free emotional expression. Yet, in more restrained cultures, pastors might establish a more subdued and formal digital communication style, focusing on information over emotional expression.

Throughout all these strategies for both temporal and atemporal factors, the underlying objective is clear: to enhance the pastoral care provided and ensure that it is responsive and

attuned to the needs of the modern, digitally connected community. This may be done by increasing online self-disclosure or making provision for adequate face-to-face pastoral care. By addressing these factors thoroughly and thoughtfully, pastors can craft an enriching and effective hybrid model of pastoral care that maximises opportunities for member self-disclosure and meets the pastoral needs in both digital and traditional settings. Through personal adaptation, member-focused initiatives, and organisational advocacy, pastors navigate the complexities of hybrid pastoral care and act as shepherds in an increasingly digital world.

Strategies for Pastoral Care Recipients

Based on my CGT of self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care, members looking to encourage or discourage their own online self-disclosure have several strategic options such as moving their membership to organisations that resonate with their understanding and practice of pastoral care. Other strategies include modifying their own skills and technology use, or indeed their pastor's. They may also attempt to change institutional policies and support systems within the organisation that is offering them pastoral care. Members must acknowledge that influencing certain factors affecting themselves, their pastor, and the organisation offering them pastoral care necessitates both short-term and long-term dedication, recognising that some factors are more readily influenced than others. However, it is also important to recognise that certain factors lie outside their sphere of influence. For these atemporal factors, the most effective approach is not to attempt to impact these factors directly, but rather, to adjust their short and long-term strategies through a better understanding of these factors.

Temporal Factors

Although members are ultimately in charge of how much they may disclose online, they might be pressured to share more than they are willing to disclosure if they find themselves in

pastoral care environments that naturally encourage online self-disclosure based on the factors brought forward by my CGT. In such cases, the most efficient short-term strategy for members would be to transition to another institution that aligns theologically, ethically, and practically with their expectations of pastoral care. To discourage online self-disclosure, members might opt for organisations that traditionally prioritise face-to-face interactions and possess limited technological infrastructure or support, effectively creating an environment less conducive to digital engagement. Conversely, if they would like to receive in-depth digital pastoral care, and therefore encourage their own online self-disclosure, they might seek an organisation that displays a commitment to technology, both in terms of accessibility and training, and may also hold pastors accountable for the care they provide. These are factors that collectively establish a robust foundation for self-disclosure in an online domain.

For those who prefer not to relocate, there are alternative strategies they can apply to themselves, their pastors and eventually the organisations offering them pastoral care. At a personal level, members can invest in improving their own technological proficiency by developing a greater level of comfort with digital platforms—a significant step considering that familiarity influences the depth of digital communication. Access to advanced technology broadens the medium of expression and can embolden members to share more openly and engage more meaningfully in digital pastoral care.

In terms of relationships with pastors, having a solid rapport based on trust and understanding is paramount for facilitating self-disclosure. Long-term associations enriched through significant life events and empathetic interaction deepen the bond, crafting a safe space for disclosing personal matters. To reshape this dynamic, members can endeavour to enhance or redefine their relationship with their pastor to create an environment more conducive to or

restrictive of digital self-expression. Members might also directly address their expectations with their pastor to prioritise face-to-face or digital pastoral care.

From a mental health standpoint, members might navigate online self-disclosure in a way that suits their individual needs and conditions. For instance, depression and anxiety might lead to increased comfort in online interactions, where anonymity lessens the anxieties linked with face-to-face communication. Conversely, certain mental health conditions such as paranoia may dissuade members from engaging in self-disclosure online. Knowledge of these influences empowers members to either embrace digital platforms for self-disclosure or seek more traditional forms of pastoral care that align with their mental health considerations.

At an organisational level, pastoral care recipients can advocate for better support systems that embrace digital pastoral care, including promoting pastors' training, enhancing accountability mechanisms, and facilitating institutional backing for digital pastoral care endeavours—a clear factor influencing the extent of online self-disclosure. The presence of institutional support reinforces members' confidence in the privacy and ethical standards of digital pastoral communication.

Furthermore, members might manipulate the spatial and temporal availability, a nuanced but significant factor. Increased spatial separation might push members to more readily adopt online engagement, while more immediate proximity may support conventional pastoral care preferences, affecting the degree of online self-disclosure. Regarding the ratio of members-to-pastors, a lower ratio often implies more individualised attention and time for face-to-face engagement, which might reduce dependency on online self-disclosure. Where the ratio is higher, digital platforms become a vital means of communication, facilitating a connective bridge between the pastor and member, thus potentially increasing the propensity for online self-

disclosure. Advocating to organisational leaders for more pastors who live near them will naturally increase face-to-face pastoral care.

Members have considerable agency in shaping their hybrid pastoral care experience via these multidimensional temporal factors. They have the capacity to either augment or diminish the level of their online self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care, based on the careful navigation and strategic application of these influences.

Atemporal Factors

In the complex interplay of hybrid pastoral care, members are both recipients and influencers, possessing the capacity to adjust their own strategies for online self-disclosure considering the atemporal factors of my CGT of self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care. These include their own personality traits, the personality traits of their pastor, and the cultural norms that permeate their environment.

Members who exhibit high trait openness often flourish in the digital realm of pastoral care; they are predisposed to taking advantage of the sweeping range of expressive possibilities offered by digital platforms. These members can intentionally seek deeper insights and connections in their faith journey online, using innovative forms of spiritual engagement to encourage greater self-disclosure in safe and receptive digital spaces. Conversely, those with high levels of trait neuroticism may find the uncertainties of online communication daunting; such members might implement strategies to mitigate risks, such as using more secure, private platforms or preferring real-time interactions that leave little digital trace, thus curbing their propensity to disclose.

Conversely, members who are less open to new experiences may strategically limit their engagement with digital technologies, favouring more traditional, face-to-face pastoral

connections over the possible vulnerabilities of online disclosure. For members who are emotionally stable and display low neuroticism, the steady and predictable nature of online interactions may serve as a solid framework for regular and candid self-disclosure, reflecting the member's intrinsic resilience and comfort with virtual exchanges.

Moreover, members' perception and interaction with their pastors' personalities significantly inform their approach to self-disclosure. Members with pastors who are highly open may feel inspired to explore and share on digital platforms more creatively, mirroring their pastors' innovative approach. But where pastors exhibit higher levels of neuroticism, possibly signalling emotional volatility, members may respond with caution, adapting by maintaining a reserve in how much they reveal online to avoid potential stress or conflict. If the pastor tends to be more traditional and less open, members may mirror this preference and lean towards more established methods of pastoral communication, employing a more conservative digital disclosure strategy.

The cultural context establishes yet another dimension for member strategies. Those from individualistic societies might leverage the personal agency afforded by digital platforms to narrate and reflect on their individual spiritual experiences. In contrast, members embedded in collectivist cultures might emphasise the group over the individual, tempering their personal online self-disclosure in favour of collective engagement and shared experiences. Cultures characterised by high uncertainty avoidance might see members favouring digital interactions that are explicit and structured, supporting clarity and reducing ambiguity, which can cultivate a more conducive setting for self-disclosure. Those accustomed to cultures with lower levels of uncertainty avoidance may display less need for rigid digital communication norms, thus

potentially sharing less personal information in lieu of casual or more ambiguous online interactions.

By engaging in such strategic behaviours, members actively shape their experiences and contributions within hybrid pastoral care, setting the stage for the level of personal sharing that aligns with their self-identified comfort levels, personal dispositions, and the cultural values that guide them. This deliberate navigation underscores the significant role members play in co-constructing the hybrid pastoral care landscape alongside their pastoral care providers, crafting an experience that is collaborative, dynamic, and tailored to their unique spiritual and communicative needs.

Strategies for Pastoral Care Institutions

Leaders of organisations providing pastoral care can implement various strategies that either encourage or discourage online self-disclosure, which is pivotal to the effectiveness of hybrid pastoral care (Campbell, 2012). Central to these strategies are considerations concerning the relationship between the pastoral care provider, the care recipient, and the availability of resources within the context where care is delivered. Based on the core properties identified in my constructivist GT, these strategies revolve around factors such as access to and familiarity with technology, pastoral care skills, and both the theological and ethical views of technology held by providers and recipients.

Temporal Factors

To encourage online self-disclosure, leaders can invest in training and resources that enhance access to and familiarity with technology for both pastoral care providers and recipients. Their aim should be to foster an environment where all stakeholders are comfortable with the use of digital tools for communication. By addressing the age and technological abilities of

providers, organisations can ensure that pastoral care strategies do not inadvertently exclude members who are less technologically adept.

Developing pastoral care skills, particularly in online listening, trust-building, and language proficiency, is essential for providers to effectively engage in digital pastoral care. Institutions can facilitate this by providing comprehensive training programs aimed at enhancing these competencies. Moreover, supporting providers in forming a theological view of technology that embraces its use in care delivery will further align organisational beliefs with contemporary modes of communication and foster a more open approach to technology.

Organisations can also structure their pastoral care context to promote online self-disclosure. Implementing robust accountability measures and offering consistent institutional support for digital pastoral care platforms, such as video conferencing tools like Zoom, allows caregivers to maintain meaningful connections with care recipients, irrespective of physical distance.

Leaders should be aware that members-to-pastor ratio and geographical limitations also impact the pastoral care context. Strategies can include the utilisation of mixed methods for providing care, where both online and face-to-face interactions are valued and deployed strategically depending on the context's specific needs. For example, in situations where geographical separation or a high member-to-pastor ratio exists, encouraging online self-disclosure through digital interactions can help maintain strong pastoral connections and effective support.

Organisational leaders also have a critical role in providing a secure digital environment that fosters trust and encourages pastoral care interaction. One progressive solution lies in the development of safe and bespoke online platforms dedicated exclusively to pastoral care, moving

away from reliance on commercial, data-driven alternatives. By investing in platforms that prioritise security, privacy, and confidentiality, leaders can mitigate the concerns surrounding surveillance and data misuse that frequently deter pastors and members from engaging fully in digital spaces. Such platforms could integrate encryption, secure access protocols, and tailored features that support pastoral activities, ensuring that conversations remain private and genuine connections are fostered. By doing so, organisational leaders can offer a sanctuary online that mirrors the privacy and sanctity of traditional pastoral care settings.

In parallel with providing secure digital spaces, organisational leaders can also harness their ability to shape the future of pastoral care by influencing the educational foundation of upcoming caregivers. Through advocacy and sponsorship, leaders could urge seminaries and other institutions that train pastors, priests, chaplains, and pastoral care providers to include comprehensive digital pastoral care in their curricula. This forward-thinking initiative would ensure that future caregivers are not only theologically and spiritually prepared but are also adept at managing the unique dynamics of digital pastoral care. By instilling these skills at the foundational training level, organisational leaders help to embed online competency as a core element of pastoral care provision, thereby expanding the reach and responsiveness of pastoral support for generations to come.

Ultimately, the leadership of organisations must be proactive in adapting to the shifting landscape of these temporal pastoral care factors, understanding that the balance between traditional face-to-face interactions and digital engagement is not static but should be responsive to the unique demands of their community and the evolving technological landscape (Farabaugh, 2009). Through a mix of short-term initiatives and long-term commitments, organisations can

sustain a pastoral care practice that reflects the complexities and potentials of our increasingly digital world.

Atemporal Factors

Leaders of organisations providing pastoral care should also employ strategic approaches in addressing the atemporal factors outlined by my CGT. These are a complex blend of personality traits of pastors and members, alongside the cultural dimensions of their pastoral care contexts. The aim is to foster environments that either facilitate or discourage online self-disclosure according to the character and cultural fabric of their communities.

Concerning pastors' personality traits, leaders should support personal and professional development in alignment with these traits to optimise hybrid pastoral care (Digman, 1990; McCrae and John, 1992). For pastors with high trait openness, organisational leaders can provide resources that encourage creative digital engagement, such as access to diverse online platforms. Pastors who exhibit high extraversion may benefit from interactive and collaborative digital tools, amplifying their innate social engagement in a digital setting, while those with high agreeableness may be supported through conflict resolution training for online discussions. Leaders should offer emotional support and stress management resources for pastors with high levels of neuroticism to ensure stability in their online interactions.

Member's personality traits are equally critical in crafting digital pastoral strategies (Loiacono et al., 2012; Huang et al., 2014). Understanding these traits allows leaders to create nuanced engagement policies. Members high in openness could be better reached through innovative digital communications that stimulate their interest and willingness to engage. Moreover, conscientious members might resonate more with detailed and reliable digital content. Extraverted members may desire more interactive digital sessions, while agreeable members

might prefer a supportive and community-focused online space. Addressing the needs of members high in neuroticism requires ensuring dependable and secure digital communication channels that mitigate anxiety around online self-disclosure.

Cultural dimensions within the pastoral care context necessitate that leaders guide their organisations in culturally responsive practices (Hofstede, 2011; Bauer and Schiffinger, 2015). In individualistic cultures, digital platforms must cater to personal spiritual autonomy, mirroring each person's unique spiritual path. In contrast, collectivistic cultures might see digital spaces as community-building tools, centralising shared experiences over individual disclosure. With regards to masculinity versus femininity, leaders must calibrate the digital pastoral approach to either emphasise assertiveness and competition or nurture cooperation and care. Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance could necessitate clear, straightforward digital interfaces that provide a sense of security and predictability.

Leaders should acknowledge long-term versus short-term orientation by either encouraging planning for spiritual progression or focusing on immediate, practical digital interactions. Finally, for cultures skewed towards indulgence, leaders can help shape digital interactions to be more expressive and open, while for those that lean towards restraint, a more formal and controlled online dialogue may be observed.

Organisational leaders have the responsibility to skilfully direct their resources and policies when addressing these temporals and atemporal factors. By doing so, they dynamically shape the landscape of hybrid pastoral care to be both inclusive and effective in a space where tradition and innovation coexist. Through such leadership, organisations can navigate the intricacies of a digital ecosystem, providing pastoral care that resonates with the unique constellations of individuals and cultures they serve.

Contribution to Knowledge

My original contribution to knowledge is a conceptual framework which defines the relationship between key factors that directly influence self-disclosure in Seventh-day Adventist hybrid pastoral care, incorporating both digital and face-to-face interactions. I crafted this framework from a constructive adaptation of GT, specifically tailored to uncover the nuanced ways in which pastoral care can be optimised through the integration of digital communication platforms. My work contributes to a deeper understanding of how pastoral care, traditionally a face-to-face practice, can evolve to encompass digital modalities without losing its essence.

The significance of my conceptual framework lies in its novel approach to hybrid pastoral care. By systematically analysing the experiences and perceptions of Seventh-day Adventist pastors, I identified key factors that influence the choice between digital and face-to-face pastoral care. These factors include but are not limited to technological proficiency, relationship dynamics, ethical considerations, and cultural contexts. My research highlights the fluidity of pastoral care modalities, suggesting that the effectiveness of pastoral care hinges not on the medium itself but on the ability of the care provider to adapt to the unique needs and circumstances of the care recipient.

I have made a theoretical contribution by articulating a GT of self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care. This theory elucidates the conditions under which self-disclosure is most likely to occur through factors affecting pastors, members, and the context involved in pastoral care interactions. My findings challenge the conventional dichotomy between digital and face-to-face interactions, proposing instead a blended model that leverages the strengths of both to foster meaningful self-disclosure in pastoral care.

Scholarly Literature

In addressing the unique intersection of CMC, self-disclosure, and pastoral care, my research fills a crucial gap identified in the existing body of scholarly work. Previous research has thoroughly explored the dyadic intersections of these areas—CMC and self-disclosure, self-disclosure and pastoral care, and CMC and pastoral care—yet a comprehensive examination combining all three has been notably absent. This oversight in the literature has limited our understanding of how digital environments impact the dynamics of self-disclosure within the context of pastoral care, an increasingly relevant issue as digital communication platforms become more ingrained in our daily lives and spiritual practices.

The intersection of CMC and self-disclosure literature underscores the potential for digital platforms to facilitate deeper levels of self-disclosure than might occur in face-to-face interactions, attributed to factors like perceived anonymity and reduced social cues. This body of work, however, often stops short of exploring how these dynamics play out in the context of pastoral care, where the nuances of spiritual guidance and ethical considerations introduce additional layers of complexity. Similarly, while the literature on self-disclosure and pastoral care delves into the importance of open communication for effective spiritual guidance, it typically does so within the traditional framework of face-to-face interactions. This research has been pivotal in highlighting the role of self-disclosure in building trust and facilitating meaningful pastoral relationships but has yet to fully consider how these dynamics shift when moved to a digital platform. The exploration of CMC's impact on pastoral care has gained traction, particularly with the rise of digital pastoral care methods. Studies have begun to examine how social media and instant messaging platforms can be harnessed by pastoral caregivers to reach wider audiences and provide support. Yet, these studies often do not

incorporate the critical element of self-disclosure, an essential component of effective pastoral care, into their analyses.

Therefore, I am also contributing to knowledge by filling this literature gap through my integrated analysis of how instant messaging, a prevalent form of CMC, influences self-disclosure within digital pastoral care settings, with a specific focus on Seventh-day Adventist pastors. By examining how these pastors navigate the complexities of fostering self-disclosure in a digital context, my work uncovers new insights into the ethical, relational, and communicative challenges and opportunities presented by digital pastoral care.

Furthermore, my research contributes to a multidisciplinary understanding by combining insights from communication studies, psychology, and religious studies to offer a comprehensive framework for understanding the implications of digital communication on pastoral care. This multidisciplinary addition enhances the academic discourse by providing a richer, more nuanced understanding of the intersections between technology, spirituality, and interpersonal communication, opening avenues for further research and practical application in these intertwined fields.

Methodology

In terms of methodology, my research contributes to the field of pastoral care and media studies through its unique application of CGT to investigate the complex intersection of CMC, self-disclosure, and pastoral care within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. While GT has been employed in related areas such as psychology, counselling, and religious studies, my research is distinctive in its use of CGT to explore the nuanced perceptions and experiences of Adventist pastors navigating the digital landscape of pastoral care.

I have adapted the CGT approach to fit the specific context of my study, combining elements of generic purposive criterion sampling with theoretical sampling to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. This hybrid sampling strategy allowed me to initially focus on pastors with relevant experience in both face-to-face and digital pastoral care, and later expand the scope to include digital-only pastors, thereby enriching the breadth and depth of the data collected. Furthermore, I have employed semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method within the CGT framework, recognising the need for flexibility and adaptability in exploring an emerging field with a lack of established vocabulary. The semi-structured approach facilitated the co-construction of meaning between the researcher and participants, aligning with the constructivist epistemology underpinning my study.

I have also applied the CGT methodology in a novel way by focusing on the specific context of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a denomination at the forefront of integrating digital technologies into pastoral care practices. By situating the research within this unique organisational and cultural setting, I have extended the application of CGT to a previously unexplored domain, thereby contributing to the methodological diversity and richness of pastoral care and media studies research. Moreover, my research stands out in its use of a practice-researcher approach, leveraging my own experience and insights as a pastor within the Adventist community to inform the data collection and analysis process. This insider perspective has allowed for a more refined understanding of the contextual factors shaping the dynamics of self-disclosure in digital pastoral care, adding a layer of methodological originality to the study.

The iterative nature of the CGT process, involving constant comparison and theoretical sampling, has also been instrumental in generating a CGT of self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral

care. By continuously refining the emerging concepts and categories based on new data and insights, I have ensured that the resulting theory is firmly anchored in the lived experiences and perceptions of the pastors interviewed, thereby enhancing its credibility and transferability.

Therefore, my research makes a significant methodological contribution by demonstrating the value and adaptability of CGT in exploring complex, interdisciplinary phenomena such as the impact of CMC on self-disclosure in pastoral care settings. The innovative application of CGT within the specific context of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, combined with the use of semi-structured interviews, theoretical sampling, and a practice-researcher approach, has yielded a rich and refined understanding of the factors influencing online self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care. This methodological approach not only advances the field of pastoral care and media studies but also serves as a valuable template for future research investigating the intersection of technology, religion, and interpersonal communication in various organisational and cultural contexts.

Unexpected Findings

Throughout my research, I encountered several unexpected findings that challenged my initial assumptions and reshaped my understanding of the dynamics of self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care. One of the most striking revelations was the unanimous belief among both district pastors and digital pastors that a purely online approach to pastoral care is inadequate. Despite their varying levels of engagement with digital technologies and their distinct ministerial roles, all the pastors I interviewed emphasised the importance of a hybrid approach that integrates face-to-face interactions alongside online communication. This unexpected consensus contradicted my initial hypothesis that many pastors, particularly those primarily involved in digital ministry, would advocate for an exclusively online model of pastoral care. I had anticipated that the

convenience, accessibility, and potential for anonymity offered by digital platforms might lead some pastors to view online interactions as a sufficient substitute for traditional face-to-face pastoral care. However, the consistent emphasis on the irreplaceable value of in-person connections, even among digital pastors, underscores the enduring significance of physical presence and embodied communication in the practice of pastoral care.

This unexpected finding prompted me to reconsider my assumptions about the nature of pastoral relationships and the role of technology in facilitating spiritual support and guidance. It highlighted the complex interplay between the affordances of digital platforms and the fundamental human need for tangible, face-to-face interactions in the context of pastoral care. This realisation led me to develop a more nuanced understanding of hybrid pastoral care, recognising it as a dynamic and context-sensitive approach that seeks to optimise both online and offline interactions to foster meaningful self-disclosure and spiritual growth. The unexpected consensus among pastors regarding the necessity of a hybrid approach also shed light on the limitations of digital technologies in fully replicating the depth and intimacy of face-to-face pastoral encounters.

While online platforms offer unique opportunities for connection and self-expression, they cannot entirely replace the embodied presence and nonverbal cues that are integral to the pastoral care experience. This insight challenged my initial conceptualisation of digital pastoral care as a potentially standalone practice and instead highlighted its role as a complementary and enhancing component of a more comprehensive, hybrid approach. Moreover, the unexpected agreement among pastors about the importance of face-to-face interactions in pastoral care underscored the significance of contextual factors in shaping the dynamics of self-disclosure. The unanimous emphasis on the need for a hybrid approach, despite the diverse backgrounds and

ministerial settings of the pastors interviewed, suggests that the effectiveness of pastoral care is not solely determined by the medium of communication but rather by a complex interplay of personal, relational, and environmental factors. This realisation reinforced the value of my constructivist GT approach, which allowed for a deep exploration of these contextual influences and their impact on the practice of hybrid pastoral care.

Therefore, the unexpected finding that both district pastors and digital pastors believed in the necessity of a hybrid approach to pastoral care, rather than advocating for an exclusively online model, significantly reshaped my understanding of the complex dynamics of self-disclosure in the digital age. This revelation challenged my initial assumptions, prompted a more nuanced conceptualisation of hybrid pastoral care, and highlighted the enduring importance of face-to-face interactions in the practice of spiritual support and guidance. By embracing this unexpected insight and allowing it to inform my theoretical development, I have constructed a more comprehensive and grounded understanding of the factors that influence online self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care settings.

Practical Significance

The significance of my research lies in the contribution to understanding how self-disclosure occurs in hybrid pastoral care within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. My constructivist GT structures the complex interplay of factors influencing online self-disclosure, bridging the gap between pastoral care, media studies, and psychology. This new knowledge challenges the conventional dichotomy between online and offline pastoral care, highlighting the need for a nuanced and adaptive approach that recognises the value of both modalities of care, discouraging any attempt to substitute face-to-face with digital pastoral care.

The practical contribution of my research extends to pastoral care providers, religious organisations, and individuals seeking spiritual guidance. By identifying factors that encourage or discourage online self-disclosure, my CGT serves as a roadmap for optimising hybrid pastoral care strategies. This knowledge can help the Adventist Church, other denominations, and even non-religious organisations create environments conducive to authentic self-expression and personal growth in digital spaces. The findings of my research highlight several key areas where the Adventist Church can take action to establish a hybrid pastoral care model that encourages authentic self-disclosure among its members.

Firstly, the church should invest in the technological infrastructure and training necessary to equip its pastoral care providers with the skills and tools they need to effectively navigate the digital landscape. This includes providing access to secure and user-friendly communication platforms, as well as offering ongoing education and support in digital literacy, online communication strategies, and the ethical considerations surrounding the use of technology in pastoral care. Secondly, the Adventist Church should develop clear guidelines and best practices for hybrid pastoral care that reflect the unique needs and preferences of its diverse global community. These guidelines should be informed by the insights gained from my research, considering the complex interplay of factors related to the pastors, members, and pastoral context that influence the willingness of individuals to engage in self-disclosure in digital spaces. By tailoring its approach to the specific needs of different demographics and cultural contexts, the church can create a more inclusive and effective model of pastoral care that recognises the diversity of its members.

Thirdly, the Adventist Church should teach hybrid pastoral care to current and future pastors. This should focus on their abilities to listen, build trust, and communicate both online

and face-to-face. Fourthly, the Adventist Church should leverage the scalability and reach of digital technologies to extend its pastoral care services to a wider audience, particularly those who may not have access to traditional face-to-face support. This could involve developing online resources, virtual support groups, and remote counselling services that cater to the unique needs of individuals in different life stages, geographic locations, and personal circumstances. By harnessing the power of digital platforms to connect with more people in need of spiritual guidance, the church can amplify its impact and fulfil its mission of providing compassionate care to all.

However, in pursuing these digital initiatives, the Adventist Church must remain mindful of the enduring importance of face-to-face interactions in pastoral care. While technology can greatly enhance the accessibility and efficiency of pastoral support, it should not be seen as a replacement for the deep, embodied connections that are forged through in-person encounters. The church should strive to maintain a balance between digital and face-to-face pastoral care, recognising that each mode of interaction has its own unique strengths and limitations.

To achieve this balance, the Adventist Church should adopt a hybrid approach that integrates digital technologies into its existing pastoral care framework, rather than treating them as a separate or competing domain. This involves training pastoral care providers to seamlessly navigate between online and offline spaces, using digital tools to complement and enhance, rather than replace, the essential human element of spiritual support. By embracing a holistic and adaptive model of hybrid pastoral care, the church can harness the scalability and reach of digital technologies while preserving the depth and intimacy of face-to-face interactions.

Beyond the close findings, my research yields significant meta-conclusions with broader implications that amount to original contributions to knowledge. Firstly, the unanimous emphasis

on hybrid pastoral care among pastors suggests a fundamental shift in how pastoral ministry is conceived and practiced in the 21st century. This calls for religious organisations and theological institutions to actively engage with the digital age, developing new frameworks, training programmes, and support structures. Secondly, the complex interplay of factors influencing online self-disclosure underscores the importance of a contextualised and person-centred approach to spiritual support and guidance. This insight extends beyond pastoral care, highlighting the need for adaptability and relational sensitivity in various support roles. Thirdly, my findings reflect broader societal implications of the increasing digitalisation of human relationships. The dynamics of self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care serve as a microcosm of larger transformations in how individuals interact, form communities, and seek support in the digital age.

Therefore, the practical significance of my research lies in its contribution to understanding self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care and its broader implications for fostering authentic, supportive relationships in the digital age. The insights and practical applications derived from my findings have the potential to shape how religious organisations, support services, and individuals navigate the complexities of the digital landscape, ultimately promoting personal and community well-being.

Limitations and Further Research

In this study I have articulated a CGT of self-disclosure in hybrid pastoral care, examining the dynamics at the intersection of CMC, self-disclosure, and pastoral care within the context of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Key findings point to a hybrid model of pastoral care as an effective way to nurture self-disclosure among church members. I have identified four principal limitations of my research, each corresponding to an area ripe for further investigation.

Firstly, the study's insights are contingent upon the perceptions of Protestant, specifically Seventh-day Adventist, pastors. This focus has clarified how Adventist pastors view the impact of instant messaging to self-disclosure in pastoral care. However, a more comprehensive understanding of pastoral care should incorporate the perspectives of pastors from other religious traditions within and outside of Christianity as well as their members and their digital pastoral care interactions. In fact, the CGT resulting from this study could be tested and further developed by including multi-faith pastoral care providers, recipients, and their interactions. Thus, a vital extension of this research entails broadening the theoretical sampling to include a diverse array of denominational contexts, traversing Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and other world religions where pastoral care operates under variant theological paradigms. Additionally, expanding the scope to encompass varied pastoral settings such as hospitals and military institutions would add valuable dimensions to our understanding of hybrid pastoral care.

The second limitation, concerning technological bias, both reflects my initial hypothesis favouring exclusive digital pastoral care and the consistent hybrid practice by the pastors interviewed. Recognising my own technological optimist stance and that these pastors, too, are predisposed towards digital and face-to-face intervention strategies, highlights a selection bias intrinsic to the research design. A comprehensive survey of pastoral care demands engaging with pastors and church members who possess a range of attitudes towards technology—some of whom may resist or lack access to digital tools. The pursuit of inclusivity mandates reaching out to communities with limited technological infrastructure, where personal and societal contexts might present barriers to hybrid models of care.

Thirdly, while the qualitative methodology employed has yielded rich thematic insights into the factors influencing online self-disclosure, it did not quantitatively measure the degree to

which each factor alters online self-disclosure. A quantitative exploration, potentially through experimental designs or large-scale surveys, could reveal the empirical weight of each attribute—be it age, technological proficiency, or cultural norms—on the propensity for online self-disclosure. Such an approach would enable a refined calibration of pastoral strategies to the individual needs and preferences of church members.

Lastly, while this thesis has provided an in-depth exploration of self-disclosure within the context of hybrid pastoral care, it gestures toward a broader applicability to other areas of CMC (Hood, 2012). The core principles identified, such as the interplay between technological adeptness, relationship dynamics, and cultural norms, allude to universal processes that could potentially influence self-disclosure in diverse digital spaces. The nuanced understanding of self-disclosure explored here is a theory with the potential to stretch across various sectors, from health services to customer support.

To mature into a formal middle-range theory, as advocated by Hood (2016), it is crucial to bridge beyond the confines of pastoral care into a wider array of CMC and self-disclosure scenarios. Further research should involve theoretical sampling aiming to validate the identified factors within different populations and situations, thus evaluating the theory's resonance beyond the original Seventh-day Adventist context. Such studies could yield a multi-dimensional framework that assists practitioners in encouraging self-disclosure not only in pastoral settings but also in broader societal interactions facilitated by digital technologies. The transition from substantive theory, grounded in specific instances, to a formal theory of broader relevance necessitates this additional layer of empirical scrutiny as a convergence of technology, psychology, and communication theory.

Concluding Statement

This research was prompted by a transformative experience in my own ministry and a recognised gap in the literature at the intersection of CMC, self-disclosure, and pastoral care. I was compelled to understand how Seventh-day Adventist pastors perceive online self-disclosure within the practice of digital pastoral care, particularly in a hybrid model that amalgamates digital and face-to-face interactions. Through the CGT methodology I engaged with 30 Seventh-day Adventist pastors via semi-structured interviews to explore their perceptions and ethical considerations of instant messaging as a channel for self-disclosure in pastoral care.

The culmination of this study is a detailed Constructivist GT of Self-Disclosure in Hybrid Pastoral Care. It explains how hybrid pastoral care optimises the self-disclosure process by balancing digital and face-to-face interactions. This optimisation is intricately influenced by characteristics and circumstances involving the pastor, the member, and the context. The theory presents a nuanced understanding of these dynamics and proposes a pragmatic framework for pastoral caregivers and organisations to affect online self-disclosure through the temporal and atemporal factors identified by this research. Finally, the CGT methodology has helped me develop the abductive thinking process which can be tremendously helpful in many areas of my professional life.

When I reflect on my own development because of this research, three areas can be highlighted: knowledge, beliefs, and abilities. First, I now have a significantly better understanding of digital communication and pastoral care. I have also become familiar with personality and culture studies and how all these factors directly or indirectly influence hybrid pastoral care. Additionally, this study has reshaped my belief that digital pastoral care can be offered without a plan for face-to-face interactions. Finally, as a result of spending years focused

on this GT research, I now have a refined ability to recognise complex patterns and think abstractly about pastoral care, especially in a digital context.

Looking ahead, I am hopeful about the potential applications of this research in diverse pastoral contexts, extending beyond the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the pastoral care environment itself. The aspiration is for these findings to contribute to a more effective, inclusive, and adaptable model of hybrid pastoral care, one that resonates with the evolving needs of congregations in our digital age. Furthermore, the utility of the insights gained through this research are not limited to religious organisations as they have the potential to inform and transform other sectors where digital communication plays a critical role in facilitating self-disclosure and community engagement.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

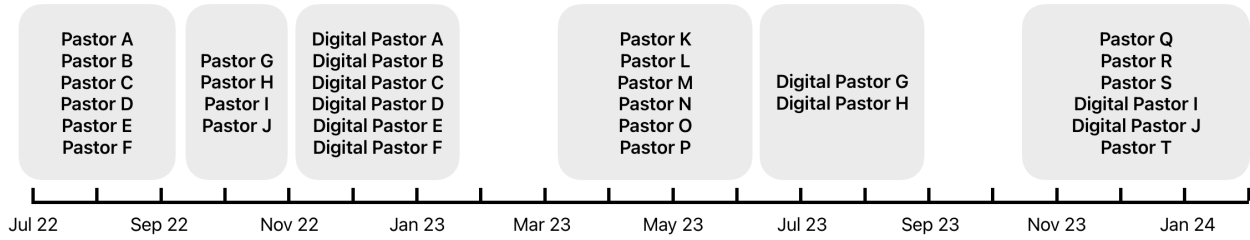
General Information on Pastors Interviewed

Interview Number	Participant Pseudonym	Estimated Age	Gender	Countries Served	Summary of Pastoral Experience
1	Pastor A	31	Male	Philippines	10 years as a local church pastor, currently a hospital chaplain and head chaplain at Adventist Medical Centre Valencia.
2	Pastor B	38	Male	Australia, UK	Focuses on youth engagement and integrating digital tools in pastoral care.
3	Pastor C	65	Male	India, Jordan, Lebanon, United Arab Emirates	Over 30 years of experience, currently engaged in community and pastoral work in UAE.
4	Pastor D	48	Male	Romania, United Kingdom	11 years as a local church pastor, involved in multicultural and community work.
5	Pastor E	43	Male	Philippines	Over a decade in local church ministry and chaplaincy, currently a behavioural management officer at a university.
6	Pastor F	32	Male	Philippines	Over 10 years in various pastoral roles including district pastor, associate pastor, and senior pastor. Currently teaches at Mountain View College.
7	Pastor G	39	Male	Germany, Netherlands	18 years as a local church pastor, extensive use of digital platforms for pastoral care. Currently ministering in Hamburg, Germany.
8	Pastor H	48	Male	Philippines	27 years of pastoral experience, served in multiple roles including church pastor and communications director at a union.
9	Pastor I	53	Male	Germany	28 years in pastoral roles, focused on family ministry and counselling, started a counselling centre four years ago.
10	Pastor J	49	Male	China, Philippines	Started as a youth pastor in 1997, served in China for ten years, now works in radio ministry and oversees multiple church districts.
11	Digital Pastor A	28	Female	Primarily Africa	Since 2020 involved in digital evangelism and managing online small groups, emphasizes personal connections.
12	Digital Pastor B	41	Male	No specific countries mentioned	Twelve years of online pastoral care, focusing on interactions through church pages and personal outreach.
13	Digital Pastor C	45	Male	No specific countries mentioned	Since 2014, combining communication skills with pastoral care, focusing on personal engagement and prayer.
14	Digital Pastor D	27	Male	No specific countries mentioned	Almost three years in online pastoral care, began with social media team, now leads online pastoral care.
15	Digital Pastor E	23	Male	No specific countries mentioned	Two years in the Digital Evangelism Initiative, engages in community outreach and evangelism.

16	Digital Pastor F	24	Male	Philippines	Nearly three years of online pastoral care, previously pastored local churches for three years.
17	Pastor K	51	Male	Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey	Started ministry in 1996; various roles including president of Azerbaijan Mission and pastoral roles in multiple countries.
18	Pastor L	67	Male	Ghana, UAE	21 years in ministry, including roles as district pastor and departmental director in Ghana, now serving in Abu Dhabi.
19	Pastor M	34	Male	Brazil	Started ministry in 2010, has served in various pastoral and educational roles, currently in Curitiba managing online and face-to-face pastoral care.
20	Pastor N	43	Male	Philippines, Saudi Arabia	Over 20 years in ministry including chaplaincy, legal advisory, and multi-congregational pastoral roles in Middle East.
21	Pastor O	68	Male	New Zealand, Pacific Islands	Over two decades in ministry, roles ranging from local church pastor to union president, focusing on youth and family ministries.
22	Pastor P	33	Male	USA (New York)	Started pastoring in 2018, manages four churches, focuses on combining face-to-face and digital pastoral care.
23	Digital Pastor G	39	Female	Not specified	Started in 2020, leads a team for online pastoral care, involving prayers and community management.
24	Digital Pastor H	29	Female	Not specified	Nearly three years of online pastoral care, integrates personal devotion in care.
25	Pastor Q	42	Male	Philippines, Mauritius	Started ministry in 2009, various roles including youth director and personal ministry director, strong focus on digital evangelism.
26	Pastor R	40	Male	Portugal, USA (California)	Began ministry in 2004, served in various church roles, strong digital engagement especially during COVID-19.
27	Pastor S	55	Male	USA (Georgia)	Pastor in Atlanta, oversees a large church with traditional and young adult groups, uses digital tools for member engagement.
28	Digital Pastor I	22	Female	Not specified	Emphasizes personalized care, detailed documentation of interactions, and building trust online.
29	Digital Pastor J	48	Male	Not specified	Focuses on bridging online interactions with physical church visits, emphasizes rapid response and personal connection.
30	Pastor T	58	Male	USA (Indiana)	Transitioned from publishing director to pastor in 2021, manages multiple congregations with a focus on unity and digital outreach.

Appendix B

Timeline of Interviews and Coding Analysis



Appendix C

Sample Transcript of Interview with Pastor D

Sam Neves

Let's start with your ministry. So, your previous experience. Tell me about where you graduated, where you studied to be a pastor. Let's start there.

Pastor D

Yes, I did my undergrad studies in Romania. I studied both Adventist theology and Romanian literature and letters. And then I did my masters in pastoral ministry at Newbold College in England exactly 13 years ago.

Sam Neves

Cool. And tell me about where you pastored and how many years have you been a local church pastor?

Pastor D

I've been a local church pastor for eleven years. The first five years I've spent in a large church, college church at Newbold. Five, six years. And then I moved into London, a very affluent area, Hampstead, Camden town area. I pastored there for three years; I think. And then I moved to Wimbledon in South London. Also, very affluent area, very diverse, and a large community of Christians. I am partnering in that town with a lot of Christian churches, Anglican churches, Methodist churches, in doing community work.

Sam Neves

Okay, what's the cultures that you have worked in?

Pastor D

I have been fortunate or blessed if you wish to work with a wide variety of cultures where I pastor now, we've documented 48 nationalities. It is an extremely diverse culture, which has advantages and challenges. I'm not saying disadvantages because then there's no such thing. Challenges and opportunities, better world opportunities. Prior to that, again, I've pastored only in multicultural environments, both the society and the community in which I've operated, and the composition of my congregation. Just to give you an example, my previous church, Hamstead, was in the same neighbourhood with Roan Atkinson, A-K-A Mr. Bean, Jude Law. I have seen on the street American actors who own property in that area. They say that especially Camden Market is the capital of the hipster community in London. The hipster. So, I have to confess, I would be curious to see how pastoring in a monocultural society would work. However, I don't think there is such thing. Unless you go to an isolated tribe in Africa, in the Amazon, where you come from, or in Asia, in cities, it's almost impossible to find monocultural communities. Even in the east of Europe, where I'm from, Romania, Ukraine, you would not believe how diversified the church and the society is.

Sam Neves

Okay, let's talk about your current assignment. How many churches are you taking care of? Tell me about you.

Pastor D

I have an associate, an experience elderly gentleman, he's a retiree, and together we look after three churches, two small churches, and the larger one, Wimbledon, which I said last we checked, there were about 48 nationalities worshiping under the same roof.

Sam Neves

Tell me about the members, how many members altogether? That is.

Pastor D

If I go by the books, they're about 250 in our church records. However, every single weekend the church is filled about 40% with visitors. And many of these visitors choose to make Wimbledon their home. So, to answer to your question, I look after about 200- 250 individuals, both church members and visitors. They are members elsewhere, but because they are from Wimbledon, I invited them to consider themselves part of the family.

Sam Neves

Fantastic. So, you've been offering pastoral care in various congregations for over a decade now. What is your view of Pastoral care? There are no right or wrong answers. We all create our own version of what it means. But how would you describe pastoral care? What's your current understanding of it?

Pastor D

This is my own personal understanding. One of the most rampant diseases, social diseases, if you wish, because it's not an illness, although it can turn into a physical illness, particularly in big cities. Loneliness. People have absolutely no one, which for me is a strange concept, honestly, because I come from a pretty large family. I have my blood family. And also, being part of this Adventist community never made me feel alone. I never felt alone. But I meet more and more people that are basically alone. And to me, pastoral care is being there for them, being present in their life at any given point, when they have a struggle, when they have reasons to be joyful and becoming the family that they wish they had. This is the number one reason for which I am in ministry. I want to be there for people. The other definition, if you wish or reason, is that people are looking for not only a spiritual, but for a moral compass, compass situation. And oftentimes the need is not necessarily I've just got diagnosed with cancer, what do I do? But I really don't know which direction to take in life.

Pastor D

I'm confused with what's going on. Being present there and lending a listening ear, listening and sharing your own experience makes me very happy. And in my mind, I know I am offering pastoral care also. In addition to this, I'd like to say that from the very beginning of my employment, or paid ministry, if you wish, or fulltime ministry, but particularly in the last five, six years, I am thinking of myself as a minister or as a pastor of the community. I've developed relationships with the neighbours, where the church is. I go in town where people know me, and

I've created relationships with the community. Same with the other ministers. So, they know that there is a place where they can come for spiritual advice, for comfort, for help, if needed. The homeless in Wimbledon, they know there's a guy in my church that takes them to church, to shower. They know that's a place of refuge for them.

Sam Neves

Okay, excellent. Let's talk about two different kinds of pastoral care. First is about face-to-face pastoral care, and then we'll talk about online pastoral care. You filled your survey showing that you do both. So, let's talk about face to face. What are some of the activities that you would associate with face-to-face pastoral care? And you talked about the service that you offer people. Right. The pastoral care that you offer people activity is how you do that. How you know, give me some ways in which you practically do that.

Pastor D

I'm going to give you quick examples. During the winter, we are part of the winter shelter for homeless people. And I put myself on the rotor in the afternoon or in the evening. And being there with these people that have no shelter created for me an opportunity to sit down and talk to them. And I cannot tell you the joy that these people experience when somebody listens to them, shares with them not only a sandwich, not only some food, but their heart, their soul opening up. That is one example with disadvantaged people. Another example.

Sam Neves

This was a public meeting.

Pastor D

It was in a night. I would not call it a public meeting, but it wasn't private either. It was something in between in a public space, but quite private. I have regular meetings with people in the community. We have a very consistent communication with the local council. So, trust us and they consider us partners when it comes to community service of many kinds, the one thing that we also offered was counselling. The light side of it. We cannot get into specialized counselling, but the light side of counselling pastoral counselling, yes. Not psychological. You're absolutely right. I'll give you another example. I had a meeting with a police officer. This police officer is assigned to look after faith communities. We went out to a cafe in Wimbledon, and we were talking. She was doing her job, and I ended up praying with her. In the conversation, we got to a point where I knew I felt that she needed someone to share with. It was a professional meeting where she was doing her job, and then it turned into a professional meeting where I was doing my job for her without her knowing. It started as a one-way conversation, and it ended up as a both ways conversation where she told me what she had to share. And then I offered her not only pastoral counselling, but even a prayer in the end.

She was a Christian, of course, and she was very happy. When I opened my eyes after the prayer, she was in tears. And you might say, oh, she was using the time she's paid for to receive possible counselling. No, neither of us were wasting our employer's time. We were connecting and we developed a good relationship, and we are constantly in touch via email.

Sam Neves

Excellent.

Sam Neves

One of the keyways pastors are encouraged to offer face to face pastoral care is visitation. Pastoral visitation. Tell me about your practice of face-to-face pastoral visitation. Let's start with and I have here a list that you can touch on any of these frequency preferred locations, the duration, if you visit mainly families or individuals, what's your routine inside a visitation and what kind of sensitivity of information do people share? So, let's go through this. Tell me more about your visitation process and schedule.

Pastor D

Let's make it clear we are coming out of a pandemic and the news are not very positive for the future. However, I believe that the post that we took in meeting with people face to face physically will never come back. In other words, we will learn to live with whatever virus will be around and we'll be able to interact. However, this created a huge barrier, if you wish, between me and people meeting face to face. Nevertheless, I've done face to face pastoral visits when there was no lockdown.

Sam Neves

Yeah, and you can draw on your whole, you know, decade, more than a decade experience, not just what you do now, because very few people are visiting constantly now. So, let's go back. It's not a problem.

Pastor D

Because of my personality, I like to be amongst people. I love going to their homes and listening to their stories. So, we have face to face online. The face to face is also divided in two major parts the elderly, the families where I go to their homes. I go to their homes, sit down with them on their couch or around their table and just talk and share and open hearts. Oftentimes I find myself singing with them. Those that like to sing. I even have videos I used to visit the lady, and her daughter was playing the piano and I was singing with her, and she played the video at her funeral when she passed later on. So, the elderly or those that are sick, I'm going to visit them into their home. The second section is those young adults or young people or teenagers, if you wish, over 18 or females that are single with them. I meet in public spaces, in public places like a cafe or a little place. It's not a lunch, it's not a date. It's simply a meeting around the table with tea or coffee. And if they have to share confidential information, I make sure that it is the most discrete way so people around cannot hear it.

Pastor D

So, these are the two big parts of pastoral visits. There is a special one that I want to mention here, and I'll get back to the first two when I take trips. I go, for example, to a Pathfinder camp, scouts camp, however you want to call it, and I drive the van, and I have a few teenagers with me and then we discuss general things about their own issues. So, there's a trip, but I have a certain category of people with me, and they talk about specific issues, how the church can improve, not spirituality, but how can the church be more open to their needs, things like that. So, these are

special, and they're not very often, but the first two, when I go to elderly or to the sick, into their homes, I make sure that it's either a family or if it's a single person, I go with someone else, an elder or a deacon. And more than often, that person that I go with is a trusted person of the one that I'm visiting. And many times, they open their hearts. My children don't come to church anymore. My daughter is going through a divorce.

Pastor D

My son has been diagnosed with cancer. And I spend most of the time listening to them, praying for them, and basically missing their need to be with someone other than the immediate family.

Sam Neves

Okay. How long does it last on average?

Pastor D

On average, 45 minutes. Sometimes I indulge myself to stay a bit longer because you cannot say, oh, I'm sorry, Sister. When 93 years old, prepared something special for you, especially for you,

Pastor D

I go back into their time, and I stay a little bit longer, get a biscuit, a tea or something for them not to feel like I'm rushing or I'm there just as a professional and also as a pastor who cares about their life.

Sam Neves

What's your general routine when you come in? Do you generally talk about the weather then? Do you read Scripture, or you ask them how it's going on? How do you structure your visits?

Pastor D

Most of the time, the job is very easy because the people that I'm visiting are eager to share, to talk. So, I let them lead in the first part of the conversation. Those that are a little bit more shy or that I've never met in person before. They knew me from Zoom service, or they went online. I share a little bit about myself with them first, who I am, about my wife, about my daughter. Oftentimes, I show them photos with my wife, with my daughter, with my son in law. I show them photos with my parents. If they are about around my parents age, yeah, early eighties. I show them photos with my parents, share with them. Many of them ask me where I come from. They're not sure where Romania is. I share a little bit about myself, about my culture, about my Christian upbringing. And then they open up. And then I asked them about their story. Something that I'm very curious myself to learn is how they came to faith. So, this is a question I always ask people, tell me your story. How did you come to faith? And from there, this is the bridge.

Pastor D

We get into spiritual things, and then we read scriptures. As I said, every now and then we sing, we pray, and I promise to go back and off I go. Okay, but this is within a 45-minute window.

Sam Neves

Let's talk about the sensitivity of the information that they share. You mentioned they share sometimes, you know, their family struggles and so on and so forth. What other sensitive information did they share with you in the context of a pastoral visit? Face to face.

Pastor D

Most of them share their health issues that they think nobody else knows about. Now, I have to confess to you, there is no such thing. It has to be something very special not to be known by others in the church. Often times I already know about those. From what I hear from other people, it's about health and family or personal struggles. Personal struggles are mainly with young adults and teenagers struggles with their own sexuality, with addiction, smoking, with drugs, with other things. And I'd like to believe I didn't do a survey, but I'd like to believe that I am one of the pastors that are trustworthy because I have even teenagers from other congregations approaching me, coming to me to talk about sensitive issues, right? So, if we want to be very specific, the elderly, family and health, young adults and youngsters' relationships and addictions struggles that are more specific to their age.

Sam Neves

Okay. Do you find that the more you visit somebody or the more you talk to them frequency of time they share with you more sensitive information? Or is it generally the case that they share it from the moment you arrive at the church, the first visit, they're already opening up and they share whatever it is that's really going on. Tell me about that progression of trust, if you will.

Pastor D

Let's lay the foundation. I operate in a culture that is very private, as you know probably better than I. British people are very private. They tend not to share a lot of personal things. Although I work with sometimes the elderly are first generation immigrants and they come with the heritage of the culture. People from Africa. People from the Caribbean. I relate easily with them because my culture of origin is similar. And with these people, I know them from the beginning. I am not surprised when they get into details and when they open their heart with a very wide-open door, if you wish. When I deal with second generation immigrants or their children, for example, they are even more private. They don't share. They keep it very distant in the beginning. And this is, I think, a disadvantage because if they don't share, you cannot extract. And oftentimes it's too late when they share, and they do so only because there is no other option. Hence, I hear about family relationships that are being destroyed when it's too late because they shared only when it became unbearable. Okay.

Sam Neves

Give me an example of the kind of information that people. The more private ones that you mentioned. The kind of thing that they would share on a visit in the first year that you arrived at the district. Compared to the fifth year that you're there at the district.

Pastor D

The first year they would say. Oh. We have been struggling in our marriage like in any other marriage. And then later down the road, that struggle was actually the man beating the wife.

Sam Neves

I see. So, if I understood it correctly and in a first instance. They will share the broad scope of what a problem may be correct without identifying marks and without that vulnerability of sharing what's really going on that takes and let's say you talked about domestic violence. Which is a problem for too high percentage of the population in general and that would be the same in the church. In any given church. How many years before a face-to-face visit, they can let's take a generally reserved culture. How many years until they can share that information in your experience in a local church as their pastor? And does it matter how many times you visited them in that process or not?

Pastor D

It's a very complex question and the answer is sometimes never, sometimes I hear from other people, from their friends because they never ever come to me to open up. And this is a twofold problem because our trust in the church and in the community is quite low compared to other times, compared to the times when I was a kid. The trust in the clergy in general, not only in me, but this reserve culture. There is another challenge that we face. If there is a health problem, the state, the national health system takes care of it. So, they don't want the church or the pastor to know about that because there is an institution that is taking care of them. And more than often both domestic violence and health challenges come to my attention too late. Too late because it ends up in divorce or the person is already on a hospital bed in a coma, and I cannot provide that uplifting pastoral care to them. So, this is one of the challenges. In terms of the time, it depends on the culture, where they come from, their original culture. Although we are all in Britain, we are all British, depending on where they come from, south Americans, Latinos, Spanish, Portuguese people, they open up quicker, they share oftentimes even at the first meeting, they spill it all out.

Pastor D

Others, it takes years. And for some they never ever share the real problem or the magnitude of the problem. So, I have to use my discernment because I don't want to be intrusive. I don't want people to feel pressure and I don't want them to lose trust in me because I am too inquisitive.

Sam Neves

That's very insightful. Let's talk about online pastoral care.

Pastor D

24/7 well, it's an exaggeration, but basically, I don't have a time schedule for it and I'm intentional about it because I make myself available for them when they need it. If you would like me to give you an example, is mainly late in the evening. The teenagers, the young people, is late in the evening when they open up and they send me a text or a WhatsApp message or something. Why? Because that's the time when they are probably at home having time to reflect, having time to think about important issues in life. I would say eight out of ten times this is only a casual conversation whereby I listen, I read what they have to say, I give them a word of encouragement and I say, what if we talk on the phone or we have a zoom meeting or a video chat on FaceTime or what a video the next day? So, I try to keep some sort of boundaries. I communicate silently. And then if the issue

Sam Neves

by silently, you mean instant messaging, right?

Pastor D

Instant messaging? Yeah, instant messaging. Instant messaging where whether it's messenger, whether it's WhatsApp? I'm on any known instant messaging platform, telegrams, signal, all of them. And I keep the lines open for them to use the one that they wish.

Sam Neves

Okay, and do you find that have you initiated these conversations with them? On WhatsApp or any of these messages that platforms that they're used to, or do you always wait for them to contact you?

Pastor D

I think it's a 70/30 split. 70, I am available for them and 30, I take the initiative. One that I take the initiative are those that I've already had a conversation with prior, either online or face to face in church. And it's 100% follow-ups. I do not take initiative to approach people I've never met or that I've never communicated with in person online. I might be wrong, but for me, I don't want to come across as one that is invading their privacy. So, I always get some sort of I would not say approval, but I know that I'm sending a text to someone that knows who's sending the text or the message or the instant message. This relationship is pastoral care is not evangelism. So, I'm talking to people that I would like to trust, and I would like them to trust me. I don't know if this is something common that you found in people, pastors, colleagues that are doing pastoral ministry online, but yeah, this 30% of the whole digital communication, if you wish that I have is entirely with people that I previously met. That's not the first encounter.

Sam Neves

Okay, tell me about the kind of information that people share with you on instant messaging when you are chatting with them. In a context of pastoral care office.

Pastor D

We are dealing with a different generation with a different mindset, different culture. And oftentimes I get messages, by the way, I'm getting married, or they are quite direct. Yeah, straightforward, direct. By the way, my boyfriend has been arrested. I'd say that basically there's no boundaries or my mom passed away. It's as direct, as simple as that. Communicating with me is no different than communicating with anyone else on that platform except the topic, I would say, except the spiritual death. But it's very direct. I had to learn all the abbreviations, all the emojis, what they mean, what they say. Oftentimes we communicate through emojis, both joy, sadness, crying. And to me, that's enough. And I would like to believe that I know how to translate them in feelings. When I see something, I kind of know how they feel.

Sam Neves

What's your instinct about how much they share about what's really going on in their lives? Are they more likely to share on Face to Face or are they more likely to share what's really going on instant messaging? What's your instinct about that?

Pastor D

I don't want to be extreme here, as you said, I don't want to generalize. But to me, there is no difference between them too in communicating with this generation. It is exactly the same. And the characteristics are they are straightforward. They are not political; they don't beat around the bush. They are sincere, they open up. It's simply amazing. You don't have to and in your instant messages, they're not like those devotionals that you have to click, see more to read the content, simple short sentences. That's the communication. And in that kind of communication, there's no room for political statements, for trying to employ strategies to say something that you don't want to say or I'm telling you something, but you don't have to understand what I'm saying. You have to read through the lines. No, there is no such gains when it comes to instant communication on whatever platform. So, from that perspective, I believe that our job is easier than dealing with someone of an older generation that they have to do introductions, conclusions, set up the stage, so on and so forth. Instant messaging means that they say what they have to say there and then, and they expect an answer.

Pastor D

Such answer, you know, not long passages from the scripture, not long theories, theological concepts. No. They want an answer that will match their problem. I thought about this am I watering down the gospel or the message or the scripture? Am I being too journalistic? Am I being too shallow when I try to give answers that can fit into one sentence? Time will tell. I don't know. I don't feel uncomfortable by doing so because again, I have already had some sort of a relationship with that person. I am not building a relationship online. Online is only the tip of the iceberg under the water. I'm able to communicate on that superficial level because I know what is underwater.

Sam Neves

Okay, excellent. You mentioned that one of the key functions of the pastoral cares you see it off pastoral cares, you see it is being there for people, so they don't experience loneliness. How does that happen? How does that differentiate between the online pastoral care and face to face when it comes to the pastoral care function of alleviating loneliness?

Pastor D

I believe that the two work well together simply because we have the expectation, an elderly person that would like to see the pastor just to share something special. If I see them twice a year face to face, that's good enough. I meet sometimes with them in church. Good morning, good afternoon. How are you doing, sister so and so? How are you doing, brother so and so? Are you keeping well? To them that's enough. I meet their expectations. That's how they operate in the life. The younger ones that whom I keep in touch more often the encounter is more superficial. If you look from the other perspective, from the other shore on this one it may seem like a shallow, like a very simplistic, incomplete sometimes communication but it meets their expectations and it answers their questions. So, I find myself having to navigate in two different worlds, two different spaces of what is the expectation here? So, if I go to do a 45-minute visit and the family invites me to have lunch with them I'm going to stay another half an hour. But if I am on the chat with someone that is on a lunch break or on a bus and the communication ends abruptly because they lost signal or they have been called to the office. That's it. That's fine. It's not a big deal. We pick up in a few hours or tomorrow or in two days from where we left it. It's like there is no interruption in their mind. We continue the same conversation. So, these are the differences, and

I think that we as pastors need to be aware of their expectations. I'm there to serve. I want to be there for you. I'm here for you on Telegram, and I don't have to bother you every morning to how are you doing. Have you had your breakfast? Did you do your devotion? No. It's just an open line that they know, and that in itself is a comfort, knowing that at the other end there's someone that will reply to your message, if that makes sense.

Sam Neves

Yes, it does. Have you ever thought of the privacy issue, the ethical issues of talking to someone, say, on Facebook Messenger or other platforms that may or may not sell their data? Has that ever occurred to you or not at all?

Pastor D

It did, and I thought long and hard about it, and I came to the conclusion that there's nothing I myself can do about it. As long as the Internet hosts recipes for taking your own life, pornography, all kinds, and basically any atrocity under the sun is found online in the digital space. I said, you know what?

Somebody shared with me that they struggled with crack. It's nothing. It's not at that level. Nevertheless, I do trust the instinct of this generation because it's them sharing, not me. If at all, I am giving them encouragement. If I think they go too far, then I immediately say, can I call you right now? Even if it's 11:00 p.m. Or 01:00 a.m.? I'm not awake at 01:00 a.m. But, you know, I do have my own boundaries, and if I see that it's going too far, I move the conversation on a different platform that can accommodate such. I'm a little bit more relaxed than others when it comes to this data protection. People stealing your data, your information, and using it against you at some point, yeah, I don't believe that there is an institutional or conspiracy, government conspiracy, or I'm trying to find out if I like cocaine or if I'm about to go on heroin.

Sam Neves

That's something that I'm not a fan of, and I don't care.

Sam Neves

Okay, what about the future of pastoral care? What's the future of face-to-face pastoral care? What's the future of online post or care?

Pastor D

I believe that they will have to cohabitate. They will live together forever. They will never be a digital only customer care, and we will never go back to face to face only care. We'll have to work with both and make use of both. Now, what I've noticed in Gen Z, for example, so not the millennials, the younger ones, those under 20, they already live in a dual world. Yeah, they appreciate digital, but they are craving for meetings in person as well. So, none of these two will be able to survive alone. We'll have to employ both in order to be efficient, because we live in a dual world. We are real. We eat food, we cry with tears. We get baptized into the water. We take communion. We will have to live in both. Now, I'm going to share something with you. There's been a study, there's been a research, recent research, few months, I think 2022, at the beginning of the 2022 that revealed that 60% of the people that have been interviewed would not mind going to church and to listen to a sermon delivered by a robot, by a machine in a world where there are no churches offering such service.

It was a conceptual question. Yeah, it's coming. But they said that 60% would not mind. And I have been asked by people, do you think that we ministers, elders, people, the church will become redundant? And my answer is, and will ever be, not at all. I think it helps us tremendously because it frees us to do what we are supposed to do in the first place. Imagine yourself, you have to work on a sermon a day or two or more, sometimes weeks, to deliver a sermon. And you deliver 45 minutes, half an hour, 45 minutes, one day a week. And you have, let's say, 200 people in the room and another 100 online. And this is it. And you spend all that time delivering a sermon. Imagine that we would spend that time meeting with people or conversing with people one to one. Because when you preach, you preach to a multitude. It's a one-way communication, two ways communication, making disciples. To me, I'm passionate about this. Let's make disciples. You cannot make disciples, preaching only. You have to sit down with them. We have to eat with them, to spend time, to chat with them, to pay attention to what they post online, to pay attention to how they feel. They send you an emoji. Sometimes I get messages that are only emojis, and I have to translate them to understand how they feel. And I have to respond like, for like. So, if I get the message with five emojis, I cannot send them links to five scriptures.

Sam Neves

No, you have to speak their language. Billy, any other consideration about anything that we talked about?

Pastor D

I'm an optimist. I see more and more of my colleagues adopting this message, this methodology, if you wish. My father-in-law is 85, going 86, the retired pastor. He has Facebook and WhatsApp. More than often, he tells me about his communication with former members on those platforms. It's possible. Nothing is too much, nothing is impossible. And I am, I am proud to say that the vast majority, if not all of our colleagues are doing their best and are making efforts. If in the past you would sell everything and you would take a boat to go to a far place, Africa, and then walk and get at the back of a truck or on a donkey to reach people that were not reachable otherwise. I think getting an account on any social media platform, it's million times easier than that and more efficient. One thing, though, I want to say is that we ought to be as personal as possible. We don't want to change the multitude. We preach in church, the morning service and move it online. It has to be a two-way conversation. It has to employ a lot of listening and connecting. My goal is if I meet people online is to go to visit them at least once in a lifetime so they can see me.

They can spend a little bit of time in my presence. Not that with that doubt that I'm real or not, but okay, let's say this is my I don't know what word I'm looking for. I know it's in my language. I'm not trying to be picky but take that as one of my experiences. If I've met you online, I'd like to meet face to face at least once in a lifetime.

Appendix D

Sample Transcript of Interview with Digital Pastor I

Sam Neves

Well, let's dive in. I'm going to ask you some questions that have to do with digital pastoral care, okay? Imagine you're describing to me a person who tends to write, to share details of their life, they prefer doing so through instant messaging, like WhatsApp, rather than face-to-face. So, what kind of person, how would you describe the people who prefer digital pastoral care over face-to-face? Their age, whether they're male or female, if it makes no difference, personality, where they live, everything. Describe to me what would lead a person to prefer sharing on the internet?

Digital Pastor I

I imagine... Both profiles, men and women, but within those, it's kind of different. I believe that women generally need to express themselves more, need to talk more and need to fit this into their routine. So, those who would seek online pastoral care in this regard need to be anywhere, there with their cell phone, talking to their children, running back and forth or coming out of a university, so the age range also widens quite a bit.

Digital Pastor I

Now the husband is resting, he has no one to talk to, he needs that prayer, the husband is not a believer. So, I believe that this case fits well. And men too, because they open up a little to someone, they're not going to have that eye-to-eye contact with, who won't feel that direct judgment, who doesn't have a strong emotional bond. So, it's easier to open up on the internet in an almost anonymous way, right, to share more and even take the first steps in faith often. So, I imagine very broad profiles like this, because it's already happened in more than one case for us, so I think it fits in a very broad way.

Sam Neves

I like that, nice. More about these people, what's the personality of the people who prefer to share online rather than face-to-face?

Digital Pastor I

I think there are two very distinct profiles. There's the profile of people who are already more connected to technology, and they like to maintain those contacts, they like to be in that dynamism, and they are usually the ones who share much more. We see even the elderly ladies who like to put everything in as many groups as possible, seeking a bit more attention, getting that affection back, someone is actually praying for me, someone is responding to my gif, like, how so?

Digital Pastor I

And they like to put their stories out there, even the profile of people who are reclusive and find there the first place where they can actually be heard, without having to deal with all the social pressure of actually being in a physical church, talking to people who perhaps don't give that first clear attention, or sometimes even within the family cycle, where, I don't know, the person has

five siblings and the parents can't divide their attention with everyone. So, it's quite easy to find the profile from the most reclusive to the most extroverted, but the recluses I feel that it's stronger, because the extroverted get distracted more easily, they can stay for a while and then they go to another place, but the reclusive really feel embraced and want to stay, they feel safer and protected.

Sam Neves

Okay, you started to mention something about their relationship with technology, those who prefer to share on the internet. How would you describe their relationship with technology?

Digital Pastor I

Those who like to share usually already have several relationships that occur more online than in person. So, they range from younger people who frequently share with friends and other things, sending posts, if it's on social networks, or sharing messages. To those who are older and use this means of communication more for closer circles, such as family, like actual close friends. So, it's usually their main source of information. Not that everyone has excellent command of technology, but they use it as a tool as their main form of communication today. So, these are people who are already accustomed to it. I know people who are not of this profile and at most, they know how to open audio. But when they are present, they feel completely loved and noticed by those who will respond to those audios that were sent with great effort.

Digital Pastor I

Others who send two hundred things and are just more there in the mix, but that's where our role comes in to make the highlight. Why don't we want to quote more in the million messages that the person already sends and receives? And that's what makes the difference.

Sam Neves

Tell me more about that.

Digital Pastor I

About the differential?

Sam Neves

Yes.

Digital Pastor I

First, because, really, in an internet flow, where everyone is sending messages to everyone, 200 reels are being passed around all the time, and sometimes there is no dialogue, it's just about sharing that, what's missing is that conversation of I wanted to know how you really are. It's not just 'was everything fine, how are you', or 'everything's fine, how are you'. It's really... I remember you commented on x subject, I know you talked about your grandmother that day,

wow, I remember that story of yours. Your baptism was this month, wasn't it? And things like that. And for the person to feel that someone is really, in the midst of this sea of things, paying attention to my life. And not only paying attention to my life but also influencing it. They're praying, they're worrying, they're inviting me.

Digital Pastor I

Even though I don't know them or am not close to them, they want me to go somewhere that's similar to where they go. So, I think the difference is that it's being very personalized in what we do. To call by name, not as a user, not as a number, like when we respond to comments, the rule was, don't use the little name that comes from Facebook. Personalize it, edit it, put it there in the middle of the message that I really didn't care to describe what your name is here, I'm going to call you by it. It's things like that, I think it always stands out. There are many influencers that people don't message because they know it will get lost in a sea of messages.

Digital Pastor I

But when they stop and respond, and not just send a message, but send an audio, send a video, people are impacted, they stop everything, share that, So-and-so with 300 thousand followers answered me. And we want to do that. We don't need to be a celebrity, man. Representing the king. That's a lot already, isn't it?

Sam Neves

Tell me more about the type of... You've served for a long time now as a digital pastor, let's say. How would you describe it? The digital pastor, in the same way as you did with those receiving pastoral care, with those now offering pastoral care. What is this person like? What's their relationship with technology? Is it better to be male or female? Is it better to be older or younger? Not just better to be, but in which... Of these factors would you find people who would naturally do it better, who could elicit a genuine response from people receiving pastoral care?

Digital Pastor I

In my experience, I see that it's important to always have a very dynamic team, you can't just have one type of person on the team, because we need younger people, who will communicate and identify more easily with the problems of younger people, who are in the same phase of life, who go through the same difficulties, as well as older people who have had other experiences and have a different view of life, they can share that more easily too. So, for example, I'm 24 years old, I'm not married yet, I haven't had children. Here comes a mother talking about her concern for her son who has left home and is taking hours to return. It's hard to convey the same feeling of a mother who knows when her child really leaves the house and is worried.

Digital Pastor I

So, my concern will be different from hers, my words may not be different from hers, but still, the Lord uses it in the same way. But I believe that to be very effective we need to have very broad profiles. So, mothers, fathers, people who are from super affectionate to those who are more serious, because there are also people who don't accept that super affectionate contact, they need someone who speaks more seriously or who speaks more directly. I see that this is very important, right? We want to standardize, but it doesn't work. People are very dynamic. So, I believe that the profile of pastoral care, in general, now thinking broadly, needs to be someone empathetic, in all ways. No matter the communication they bring in that aspect, they have to be empathetic with the person.

Digital Pastor I

They need to have good Portuguese, because depending on how the other person responds, you have to be representing the Seventh-day Adventist church. So, still, you have to keep that as important. It has to be someone who can have quick responses, because we don't know people's timing and how the Lord wants to use that moment, so someone attentive enough, both to keep contacts always active, and to respond at the same time, practically. And it has to be someone available and willing, but mainly with a lot of the Lord in their heart, because He will use it all the time, He will speak all the time, one must be really attentive to Him, to what He says.

Sam Neves

And what other skills do you think are essential in pastoral care for the person who is providing digital pastoral care?

Digital Pastor I

Regarding more hard skills in life, I think it's important for the person to be very organized because this work requires organization, it requires the person to understand well the flow they must follow. They need to type something, send something, they have to report back to us, they have to record information somewhere, and it has to be clear because if they stop this work, another person can continue understanding it just as if they had started from the beginning. So, it is essential that the person is really organized and makes an effort to stay that way from start to finish.

Digital Pastor I

They need to be a person who really has this breadth of thought to be able to talk to different people; they can't be someone who has reservations due to biases, sometimes biological or cultural barriers because it has also happened in our team that people got stuck talking to people from Africa who didn't understand how to talk to them and did not seek to understand, which delayed the process of the person being able to manage, so it needs to be someone who is more open-minded, even more flexible in that sense.

Digital Pastor I

And also someone who, in any case that happens, when it becomes difficult, doesn't act impulsively; you really need to have calm, patience, tranquillity, and know how to communicate with leadership because if that case happens and the person can't attend, or really wasn't supposed to attend at that time, to immediately know how to speak with the leaders so that it can proceed. So I think those are important skills, knowing how to communicate with the team, with leadership, with the contact broadly.

Sam Neves

And if... Let's go back to talking about the person receiving pastoral care. How do you think the crisis they are going through will define whether they will seek a pastor face-to-face or if they will prefer digital?

Digital Pastor I

It will depend on the phase of life they are in and where they are in terms of religion, involvement. If it's someone who has never been to a church, digital pastoral care is always

easier because it's someone new, there's no way to judge the person, they feel more comfortable sharing, and if everything goes wrong they disappear, but it might be that it doesn't go wrong, they manage to return and it's always there for them. If it's someone who already knows and is aware, maybe they also feel apprehensive first until they can go there. So it enters the question, should I go? They communicate more in doubt, right? Should I go? Is it worth it? Better I stay at home? Stay in my corner? No, I talk to the pastor. What's he going to do? Will he judge me? Will he help me? Will he welcome me?

Digital Pastor I

Will the community find out? So, I believe that we enter more as removing the fear, removing the apprehension, and giving that hug that the person needs at that moment. And it can be extended or indeed shared with the local pastor. So it takes the person to their first safety.

Sam Neves

Now imagine that you're not part of a worldwide project like you do, imagine that you're an associate pastor in a regular church. So you're the digital pastor of a church that has several pastors. And then you meet the members, there are people who watch online and don't go to church every week, and others who go every week. So you're in that context now. And you have members who prefer to get in touch with the same pastor, it could be the senior pastor, face-to-face or online, digitally. What kind of crisis is the person going through to prefer face-to-face and what kind of crisis, in your perspective, would they prefer digital?

Digital Pastor I

I think it's difficult to classify because it really depends on the individual's personality. Some people will find it much easier to look eye-to-eye than to type, perhaps because they have problems expressing themselves enough. And vice versa. So there are people who will express themselves more easily in writing than face-to-face. There are people who will freeze up, people who will have difficulties or need closer support.

Sam Neves

What kind of person will have more difficulty face-to-face?

Digital Pastor I

Face-to-face? Generally, more introverted people, generally those who can't even maintain very close eye-to-eye contact, or people who will feel embarrassed, will think more about the social aspect than what's happening at the moment, maybe people who won't understand well that it's a confidential and secure conversation, people who can't express themselves so well with words, or are very emotional as well, feel that maybe they'll be at a disadvantage, or cry a lot, or not say what they want, or say wrong what they want. Maybe they need to think a little more about the process of writing, right? Maybe they don't know what I can write. A letter that the professor gives in the hand and keeps looking. But they'll find it strange, so. Generally, it's that profile of people. So, online gives you a range of options, right?

Digital Pastor I

That you can do differently. And depending on whether it's a local church where I am, I can open up that flexibility to really try to talk eye-to-eye, even at a distance. And going levels with the

person, let's talk by text, let's talk by audio, let's talk by call, let's talk by video, until the person feels comfortable coming in person.

Sam Neves

So you see a progression of... And what you said about comfort? Tell me more about comfort. It's trust and this progression of how you go from the minimum exposure, threat, to total trust. Tell me more about that process.

Digital Pastor I:

To converse with anyone, it is always very important for us to gauge their level of comfort. So, this level of comfort is important. For instance, there are people who are comfortable from the start with what we would call a higher level... truly eye-to-eye. I believe it's quite intimate to talk to someone like that. So, not everyone will be so open right away. That's why the internet usually helps us by allowing us to talk little by little. I think it's really about testing and trial and error. Just like with postural care, sometimes when we sent the first audio to someone, they would start a flood of audios, like, "I didn't know I could do this, I didn't know I could receive this," so now I'm going to send audios, I feel closer, even better. So it happens.

Digital Pastor I:

I think it's really about testing and seeing where the person feels better. For others, it might not be audio; maybe people around them are listening, and they don't want anyone to hear their private conversation, so let's keep it in text. So, it varies quite a bit depending on the profile.

Sam Neves:

What skills or techniques do you use to generate enough trust in a person for them to open up to you?

Digital Pastor I:

The main one is talking about ourselves. Whenever we bring a personal story, something that happened, not always directly related to what the person is saying, but the fact that we have opened up something about ourselves to show that we are also human. I know the symbol here is of the church, but I am a person. This makes people feel more comfortable and opens up many dialogues from there. So, that's the main thing. The second is precisely trying to get to a closer level. It's trying to apply the five languages of love from a distance. Since I'm someone who also has many long-distance relationships, most of my friends are far away. My engagement was also long-distance, sort of weird. It's something I've been practicing for a long time.

Digital Pastor I:

So, I like to be able to convey as much as I can, really, affection through a screen. So, using that with people, with contacts, whether it's a message where I again write the person's name, which already makes it a closer contact, I use emojis, which show expression, the person already sees that it's not a dry message, that you can't read the tone of it. An audio makes the person feel the tone I'm speaking with. A good morning is a good morning, but "Good morning, John, how are you today?" I'm speaking to you, it's another story. So, bringing in a bit of these issues and examples from the person's life and other details to show that we are close to that, for immediate trust for the person to say, remember me.

Sam Neves:

You said that you are in constant contact with the person. Tell me about the frequency of these contacts. Do you wait for the person to contact you? Do you continue the relationship with them? How does that work?

Digital Pastor I:

It depends a lot. It depends on each contact. Normally, there is a priority scale. If there are people who are already directly interested in doing something, they have this more intentional contact first. That is, I will get closer to them, I will send messages three to four times a week, depending on what they are bringing back to me. If she takes two days to get back to me, I wait for her first return, like that. If she takes longer to return, I start insisting a little more until she sees that I really want close communication with you, it's not just an automated message. If she continues, then we continue. If she stops, then I keep another level of conversation until I see if she will open up again.

Digital Pastor I:

For people who are no longer interested but have not yet opened up enough, I give them a little space so they can see me again. I'm here, I'll continue to be here. So, we play around with messages that are more general. So, I'll send a Bible verse, I'll send a reminder, until messages like... I specifically remembered this with you. So, two general, one specific. Three general, two specific. And we play around like that with this account. But it's very different for each contact. So, it makes sense. Once we put it in, it makes even more sense. But that's it.

Sam Neves:

Wow, cool! I didn't know any of this. Tell me about, we are going to change the subject completely now, we'll talk about the institution that is sponsoring the pastoral care of people. In your case, the World Adventist Church, but it could be an association, a hospital, pastoral care in a hospital, which is chaplaincy, pastoral care in the military, which is chaplaincy, you have several... Now I want you to imagine this very broadly. What kind of thing does an institution need to do to be able to encourage digital pastoral care? If you had, for example, the president of an association there in Rio de Janeiro came to talk to you and said, I have here 120 churches, 120 districts, 120 pastors, and I would like, in the next few years, to increase their ability to effectively offer digital pastoral care.

Sam Neves:

What do I need to do here at the association for this to happen? What would you say to him?

Digital Pastor I:

The first step is to have that desire in the heart. From there, we can start a lot. The second step is really to talk to these leaders, the pastors, and see if they also have this interest. Because each church that has this interest to talk, from there we can really start to talk and sit down and put this into practice. The third step is to understand which volunteers would be willing to help. At least by church, that's already a lot, but the more, always better. Because then again, the dynamism of people, etc. And from there, see where they would apply this pastoral care. Would it be in churches digitally as well, because our focus has active social networks, there is already

some, there are already people on these networks. Those who only attend locally, have other people from other places.

Digital Pastor I:

For whom do you want to reach people who are nearby to go to your church, or do you also want to talk to contacts in general, regardless of whether they are there or not. Offer other projects, digital things, churches, which are also digital, for those who cannot travel there, or who do not want to go to a physical church, but can learn that it's possible and transition to where they are. So, understanding what their goals are and what they have at their disposal today, what tools they can use and how we can also train them to use these things and these tools. Will they use ads? Will they use it organically? Do they want to do

Digital Pastor I

Alright, we'll wait for that, list what the requirements are. Of course, it has to be a church that has this desire, right? That is aligned with this and the Lord is burning in their heart, here it will make sense. And from there, gather those who can and those who want to and have a meeting and explain. Pastoral care is this, it has been done in these places, it made sense for this purpose here. And we've had these testimonies, these answered prayers, these people who have been baptized, and now you can have this result with you. So, let's apply, let's be close, let's train, and throughout the process, you'll see that this will make sense and you will refine it. So, I would give them roughly this direction.

Sam Neves

I see. And if the churches were not interested, if there weren't many churches interested, how would you start this interest?

Digital Pastor I

So I would ask that the same list that he could send out, being a person who could be in maximum contact, already include what this pastoral care is, all this part of the presentation in a more summarized form, with this data, with this focus, with this importance and with this requirement, so that they could perceive, perhaps, even without our direct contact, that this is a differentiated project and that it can make sense for their church. And if really after that it does not make sense, then it is because it did not make sense indeed.

Sam Neves

Okay. What would you say about the impact of fast internet access in a region on pastoral care? Does it make a big difference to have only fast access or actually no because it's just instant messaging and WhatsApp is easier. What would you say would be the impact of the internet and more modern technology? Can someone with a cell phone from 10 years ago still receive pastoral care? And if the internet is not so fast, will it also work? Do you think this has an impact or not?

Digital Pastor I

It will depend from region to region, it will depend on case by case, but it does have an impact, yes. If they are people who will need close care, that we have to be there talking every day, at

some point it will be detrimental if the person does not receive our messages or they cannot return them. There have been people who lost their cell phone, had to swap with someone else, did not know how to contact back. There are people who really do not know how to use their own device or cannot click on materials, links, etc. And that's where our part comes in, to adapt and also try to transition to another form. So sometimes, as you said, if it's a social network and the person cannot speak there, we have WhatsApp, if WhatsApp is available, which can be faster.

Digital Pastor I

Sometimes it's the other way around, people cannot access WhatsApp, but they can access social networks, by computer, sometimes, or at an internet cafe, there are still people who go to internet cafes, so, it also happens in cases like this, at work, sometimes, only with the work network. I believe that the impact comes from both sides, both from the person actually receiving and from us sending, but for those who are working on postural care it is essential that they can always communicate at all times with their contacts. Whoever receives will depend on the case, but we do our part, the person at some point will receive the message and will also try to give us that return. If not, we adapt.

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