

*Article*

## **Faith-based Humanitarian Aid and Evangelism in Newer Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in South Africa**

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**Abstract:** The newer Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in South Africa has been experiencing numerical growth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. One of the reasons for the development and expansion of this movement is its ability to evangelise and win souls as part of spreading the gospel to the ends of the earth. Contrary to traditional evangelism, these churches utilise humanitarian aid as one of their evangelism strategies. This kind of approach is conceptualised here as holistic evangelism, which is a mission approach that balances the material, financial, social, spiritual, and psychological needs of the potential converts. This article works within the theoretical frameworks of humanitarianism, holistic evangelism, and literature review in qualitative research to develop a Pentecostal holistic evangelism approach in the context of humanitarianism. This is done by first unpacking holistic evangelism as a theoretical framework that is relevant in the study of the intersections of faith-based humanitarian aid and evangelism in the broader Pentecostal movement. The current practices on the intersections of humanitarian aid and evangelism are highlighted using the selected newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches, such as the 3C-church, Christian Revival Church, and the Rhema Bible Church. The finding is that newer Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches can enhance evangelism by considering different aspects of human beings, including the material, financial, social, spiritual, and psychological needs, through a holistic approach to evangelism.

**Keywords:** Faith-based humanitarian aid; humanitarianism; holistic evangelism; newer Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity; Pentecostalism

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### **Introduction**

The newer Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity is discussed as part of the broader Pentecostal movement. These are churches that have grown out of the classical Pentecostal churches but maintain the fundamental teachings of the Pentecostal movement, such as holistic salvation, Spirit baptism, divine healing, and eschatology (Anderson, 2005a; Anderson, 20005b). Most of the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches were started by African leaders as opposed to the classical Pentecostal churches that were started by Western missionaries (Anderson, 2005b:77 cf Tsara & Mudimeli 2024). The newer Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity is very strong on the aspect of evangelism, which, unlike in the mainline Christianity, is done by ordinary believers in local congregations (Anderson 2005a, 2005b).

The local congregants, including children and women, are taught the strategies of evangelism in the quest to reach out to the unchurched. These churches are good at turning an ordinary member of the local congregation into a soul winner through discipleship programs and evangelism activities. This has led to the

planting of the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches in the South African context. Among the evangelism strategies used by newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches is the faith-based humanitarian aid, which is accompanied by the handing of food parcels and other charitable items to potential converts.

The relevant research question is how the faith-based humanitarian contributes to a holistic evangelism in newer Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity. To answer this main research question, this article is divided into four main sections. In the first section, holistic evangelism as a theoretical framework for the article is unpacked, looking at the relevant literature on the same. Second, the writer unpacks the intersections of humanitarian aid and evangelism in the broader Pentecostal movement. The third section will highlight the current practices of humanitarian aid and evangelism in newer Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity. The important section in this article is the development of an African Pentecostal holistic evangelism approach in the context of humanitarianism.

### **Literature Review**

The mission of God includes the activities of evangelism as believers endeavor to fulfill the great commission in the teaching of all nations (Matthew 28:19). Therefore, evangelism is deeply rooted in the propagation of the gospel of Jesus Christ as mandated in the biblical text. The making of disciples is understood in Christian mission in the context of evangelizing the unchurched and or non-believers. In simple terms, evangelism involves the preaching of the gospel to the unbelievers in the quest to convert them to Christianity (Balog & Tesija, 2007:68; Beougher, 2021). Evangelism, to a certain extent, involves conversion to Christianity within the context of Christian mission, particularly for potential converts who belong to other religions before their conversions. The missional church engages in the evangelism activities as a way of connecting humanity to their God in the context of the mission of God. Traditional evangelism focuses on activities such as preaching and teaching about the gospel in organised events such as mass crusades and other mission programs. However, the intersections of evangelism and faith-based humanitarian aid depart a bit from this traditional way of doing evangelism, into the combination of preaching and social action. In this way, evangelism goes beyond the conventional ways of just sharing the gospel to considering the social factors faced by the recipients of the same gospel (Green, 2023).

The newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches have grasped the great commission by involving all believers in the activities of evangelism. Anderson (2005a:13) explains that “Most forms of Pentecostalism teach that every member is a minister and should be involved in mission and evangelism wherever they find themselves”. In addition, the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches have also mastered the use of humanitarian aid in the concept of evangelism. Anderson (2005a:37) explains that newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches demonstrate commitment to the work of missions, as seen in how they conduct evangelism. They found ways to engage in evangelism effectively, including humanitarian aid. The main purpose of evangelism is to reach many souls through the preaching of the gospel on one hand, but also to plant as many churches as possible. These are the reasons for engaging in evangelism within the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches.

The use of humanitarian aid becomes one of the ways in which the church engages in evangelism in an effective way that reaches potential converts (Wagner, 2010; Thaut, 2009; King, 2012; Richardson, 2025). This is done when evangelists and missionaries seek to propagate the gospel not only through preaching but also through humanitarian aid, including material, financial, spiritual, and psychological aid. Consequently, while presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ, these evangelists and missionaries also engage in various projects and programs of humanitarian aid. In this way, the humanitarian aid in the context of evangelism, according to King (2012:923), is also understood as a social action in the spreading of the gospel. Therefore, there has been a shift in recent times away from just the mere preaching of the gospel to include humanitarian aid in responding to various challenges faced by society. King (2012:924) continues to say that this introduced a form of outreach that appeals more to both the church and the society since churches have defined their evangelistic activities beyond preaching in what King calls “evangelical humanitarianism”.

It must be pointed out that newer Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity is one Christian stream that is very much involved with this idea of an evangelical humanitarianism, as its outreach programs also include

humanitarian aid. However, this approach receives criticism as some view it more as departing from the fundamental preaching of the gospel into humanitarian aid. In this article, humanitarian aid is seen more as playing a complementary role to the evangelistic activities within the context of the mission of God. It is up to evangelists and missionaries, or any other ordinary believer in the context of newer Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity, to be true to the core of evangelism, which is reaching out to the lost through the gospel of Jesus Christ. In this way, humanitarian aid does not become a replacement for the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, but rather becomes a necessary strategy, particularly in reaching the poor, the marginalised, and the devastated in the context of wars and environmental crises. Humanitarian aid does not in any way compromise the preaching of the gospel as long as it is known that the gospel is primary to any social action to the unchurched or non-believers. Therefore, prioritising evangelism remains a boundary-setting separating ordinary humanitarian aid from the evangelistic activities accompanied by social action. This helps the church in avoiding the promotion of humanitarian aid over evangelism. This distinguishes the church from the ordinary humanitarian organisations.

The humanitarian aid is also seen particularly during the time of crisis, where churches engage in various activities and programs to help those who are devastated, beyond just preaching the gospel to them (Myers, 2007; Balog & Tesija, 2007; King, 2012; Richardson, 2025). It is for the same reason that Myers (2007) calls it a “humanitarian response”. Balog and Tesija (2007:22) explain that “Throughout the years of war, many new humanitarian organizations emerged offering urgent humanitarian and welfare assistance to endangered individuals, families, and certain target groups (such as refugees, the displaced, war sufferers, and others)”. Now, churches would be among these organisations in the quest to help victims during disastrous events, including wars and environmental crises. This is one of the reasons the church emerges, or revival emerges, amid crises such as wars and environmental crises. Therefore, the humanitarian aid, according to King (2012:939), affords the church an opportunity to look at the issues facing society and address them without losing the essence of the gospel.

As stated above, this should not in any way be seen as weakening the efforts of the church in evangelism, but rather as a way in which the church’s mission activities are made visible before the world. Therefore, the intersections of evangelism and humanitarian aid produce a holistic approach to missions that is not only based on preaching the gospel but also on social action in helping those who are in need. This holistic approach perceives the recipient of the gospel as someone hungry for both the spiritual food and the physical food. Therefore, help cannot only come through the ministration of the spiritual food but also the physical food in the intercessions of humanitarian aid and evangelism. The next section looks at the current practices of evangelism and faith-based humanitarian aid among the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches.

## Methodology

Data was collected among the three newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches using primary sources such as official websites of these churches and a literature review. The first church is the 3c-church, which was founded and led by Pastor Bert Pretorius and his wife, Charné. According to the church website, 3c-church (2025:1), this church is “a dynamic, multi-racial, multi-site, vibrant and fast-growing church with over 30,000 members in the City of Tshwane, South Africa. The ministry has since expanded into multiple cities, including the United States of America”. The motivation for this choice is that 3c-church operates in South Africa and has been involved in humanitarian aid for many years.

The second church is the Christian Revival Church led by Pastor AT Boshoff, which was started in 1994 with a clear mandate of winning many souls to Christ (Foster, 2024). According to Maritz and Stoker (2016:1), in 2015, it was estimated that this church had more than 50,000 members. This church is situated in Pretoria East and is very much closer to the shopping malls and townships such as Mamelodi, hence it can attract large crowds (Van Eck, Renkin, and Ntakirutimana, 2016:3). The interest in this church for this study is its involvement in humanitarian aid. The last church is the Rhema Bible Church, which was founded by pastor Ray McCauley, but is currently pastored by Pastors Joshua and Tara McCauley. The Rhema Bible Church is one of the earliest Pentecostal and charismatic churches, which was started in 1979 (Anderson,

2005b; Kuperus, 2011). Kuperus (2011:278) explains that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this is one of the influential churches with thousands of members and one of the proponents of the prosperity gospel. Similar to the other two churches, Rhema Bible Church is chosen due to its humanitarian aid programmes and activities, and its connection to evangelism.

This article uses holistic evangelism as a theoretical framework for the study. Holistic evangelism is an approach that looks at the individual holistically in reaching out to them for the gospel of Jesus Christ, as opposed to traditional evangelism that only focuses on spiritual salvation. Heldt (2004:151) says that holistic evangelism is that one that bridges the gap between “advocates of evangelism, aimed at conversion and salvation of souls, and advocates of social action, known for its focus on social transformation and political involvement”. In the quest to reach out to an individual holistically, holistic evangelism considers the different dimensions of a human being, such as material, financial, spiritual, and psychological. In simple terms, holistic evangelism deals with the whole person and different aspects of their life as explained by Gustafson (1998:136). Schüler (2013:1) explains that this approach is seen as a “way to holistically integrate spirituality, creativity, social engagement, and missionary efforts into everyday life”. According to Elisha (2014:432), this approach is to convince the evangelists and missionaries that evangelism exceeds the narrow thinking of just presenting the word of God to the potential converts. Elisha (2014) continues to say that the primary purpose of this approach is to bring the word and the actions together as opposed to the traditional evangelism approach. Elisha (2014:434) says that holistic evangelism promote a manner of evangelical social engagement that, while rarely conducive to radical social reform, transcends the moral individualism usually associated with evangelical theology, in favor of practices that carry broader implications and presuppose larger religious, political, and cultural transformations.

Therefore, it is clear that holistic evangelism does not only focus on the spiritual but also considers other aspects of human life, including the political, as argued by Elisha (2014). In this way, those engaged in evangelism seek social engagement so that the traditional forms of evangelism are renewed through the holistic evangelism approach. This is an important matter as the church is facing various challenges in society that might impede the evangelism if not addressed in conjunction with the preaching of the gospel. Ma and Ma (2020:279) explain that holistic evangelism seeks to make the mission of God more holistic by addressing these societal challenges. In this current study, holistic evangelism is used as an approach to study the intersections of faith-based humanitarian aid and evangelism to develop an African Pentecostal evangelism approach in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## The Findings

Many newer Pentecostal and Charismatic churches conduct their evangelism using the strategy of faith-based humanitarian aid. Burchardt (2013:14) explains that this is how Pentecostals have been able to revitalise evangelism activities by responding to challenges faced by society. In a way, an approach that has helped Pentecostals to make a transition from a traditional evangelism to a more holistic evangelism. This is done by supplying, for example, groceries to the poor and marginalised as part of evangelism activities. The selected newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches are engaged in activities of faith-based humanitarian aid as part of their evangelism strategies. In the 3c-Church, pastor Bert Pretorius, through his foundation, the *Mahlasedi* Foundation, distributes food to the needy (3c-Church 2025:1). According to their website, 3c-church (2025:1),

*In the last two years, over R240million worth of food was distributed, equating to 60 million meals, feeding over 600,000 people from every province in South Africa. Other specialist areas include education, crime prevention (including Gender-Based Violence), the empowerment and development and care of women and children, small business development, including agriculture, and youth development.*

Christian Revival Church, which is led by Pastor AT Boshoff, continues to make an impact in local communities through its community projects, including our feeding projects, community upliftment, baby homes, Creches for Africa, and skills development (CRC Church, 2025:1). The Rhema Bible Church has various programs of the humanitarian aid, including the Rhema recovery program, which is a halfway house

for recovering substance abusers (Kuperus, 2011:278). This is more like a drug addict's recovery program for those addicted to various drugs. The Rhema Bible Church has a disaster relief program that takes care of the victims of disasters in times of crisis (Maphosa, 2014:114). The Rhema Bible Church has a soup kitchen where there are about 70 feeding projects located in various disadvantaged areas in Gauteng province, which are run by members and leaders of the church (Oosthuizen, 2013:83). The church also runs Hands of Compassion at the Church, where there is interaction between the members and the needy while sharing a meal.

The selected churches have also been involved in responding to various disasters. During the height of covid-19, the 3C-Church not only helped the ordinary members but also about 300 pastors in Finetown, Johannesburg (3C-Church, 2021:1). Through their *Mahlasedi* foundation, food parcels that could feed each pastor's family for a month were distributed to the various pastors. The recipients were very grateful, citing that to be hungry in the midst of a pandemic like covid-19 is not an easy thing. However, this was not the only relief offered by Pastor Bert Pretorius and his team; he also helped families in KwaZulu-Natal province who were in the mud, water, and debris from their homes after the recent flooding (3C-Church, 2021:1). Pastor Bert Pretorius said that:

*Our mahlasedi foundation team visited the Qedumona, Amaotana Area in Kwa-Zulu-Natal on the 2nd and 3rd of December 2021. Poverty and youth unemployment, resulting in hunger, are some of the major pressing issues in Qedumona.*

*Our team had to climb the steep mountainous landscapes to reach every house to register and deliver food hampers. For Mrs. Ntombikayise Sithole, a 65-year-old granny living in Qedumona with her grandchildren, this was unbelievable.*

Therefore, the 3C-Church is too involved in offering relief to the people during disasters and pandemics like covid-19. Similarly, during the floods in KwaZulu-Natal, the Rhema Bible Church partnered with other charity organisation in and outside South Africa to help the victims of the floods in that area (Timeslive, 2022:1). During this period the drop centres were opened in Kwa Zulu Natal and Gauteng provinces where the public was also encouraged to drop off essential products such as clothes, non-perishable foods, mattresses, blankets, clothes, buckets, baby food, pet food, nappies, sanitary pads and other toiletries (Timeslive, 2022:1). Therefore, it can be summarised that these churches are involved in disaster relief programs where they can respond immediately during the times of natural disasters and pandemics.

The programs mentioned above by the selected churches have implications for the evangelism approach of the churches. Let's take, for example, the "hands of compassion at the Rhema Church" directly contributes to the evangelism strategy of the church since members and church leaders conduct bible study with the recipients of the humanitarian aid. In addition, during the interactions with the recipients of food parcels and other necessities, the church leaders have an opportunity to share the word of God with individuals. The writer has also observed that in most of the relief programs by the 3C-Church, there are spiritual services before the distribution of the food parcels. This, too, presents an opportunity for the ministering of the word to the recipients of relief. Moreover, the various humanitarian aids offered by churches such as 3C-Church, Christian Revival Church, and Rhema Bible Church give these churches a kind of publicity whereby the public is able to know about the churches and visit them on Sundays.

Therefore, in one way or another, these humanitarian aid approach contributes to evangelism in the newer Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches. The humanitarian aid by the selected churches has contributed to the growth and expansion of these churches. When looking specifically at the 3c-church and the Christian Revival Church, they would also send buses of the churches in the same communities where they offer humanitarian aid. This allows ministering the gospel to the same audience that has received the humanitarian aid. This does not necessarily mean that the churches expect the people who received help to come to church, but rather to minister to them spiritually since they have ministered physically. There is, therefore, a need to develop an approach theologically that will look at the intersections of faith-based humanitarian aid and evangelism in the context of the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches.

## Discussion

An African Pentecostal holistic evangelism approach recognises the balance between humanitarian aid and evangelism. This is the possibility of finding an equilibrium between human spiritual needs and human physical or material needs, as they are both very important. To maintain a balance between humanitarian aid and evangelism, the evangelist and missionaries are expected to know about the ministry of the word, but also be well conversant with other approaches to evangelism. Evangelism ministers are expected to be actively involved in the knowledge of humanitarian aid so that their evangelism strategy is effective and relevant to their communities. This also calls for the training and development of evangelists and missionaries on how they should approach holistic evangelism. This, in a way, helps the ministers to move towards an integration of both the humanitarian aid and evangelism to produce a more holistic approach.

The humanitarian aid or any philanthropic approach to evangelism does not compromise the evangelistic aspect of this approach. As discussed in the preceding sections, the aspect of evangelism remains the core in the intersections of humanitarian aid and evangelism. In a way, there must be a difference between an evangelism ministry and an ordinary humanitarian organisation. In the South African context, there is a difference, for example, between the gift of the givers and the newer Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. While non-governmental organisations such as Gift of the Givers focus purely on humanitarian aid, churches, on the other hand, conduct humanitarian aid to preach the gospel. Thus, an African Pentecostal holistic evangelism approach is cognizant of this difference; hence, the need to never lose the mission. An African Pentecostal holistic evangelism approach does not dissociate with the mission of God aspect of their humanitarian aid.

An African Pentecostal holistic evangelism approach considers the various aspects of a human being, rather than a focus on the spiritual alone. An African Pentecostal holistic evangelism considers the material, financial, spiritual, and psychological aspects of a human being in ministering the gospel to them. A human being is not just a human spirit but is a spirit that lives in a body and contains a soul. Addressing the physical aspect of human life, for example, is important in the same way as reaching out to the human spirit for salvation. Therefore, an African Pentecostal holistic evangelism approach is the one that recognises all the different aspects of the human being. This is a possibility of ministering a holistic salvation that looks at the body, soul, and spirit. African Pentecostals, particularly in newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches, are good at the ministration of a salvation that touches various aspects of human life rather than just focusing on the spiritual aspect.

This is the rationale for the preaching of healing and deliverance by African Pentecostal preachers since their salvation is not only of a human spirit but includes the human body and human soul. To a certain extent, their preaching also includes prosperity to touch the finances of their followers. In this way, a holistic evangelism approach is relevant to the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches that seek to reach out to the human being in totality rather than focusing on the spiritual aspect alone. An African Pentecostal holistic evangelism is very much concerned with the social ills in the community and endeavors to address them rather than ignoring them through the preaching of the gospel. This is another way in which an African Pentecostal holistic evangelism approach is material, financial, spiritual, and psychological. This is a kind of evangelism that takes place while taking care of the needs of the people.

An African Pentecostal holistic evangelism approach is based on social action rather than preaching alone. This is well captured by James 2:14-17:

*What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

This text speaks directly to the concept of holistic evangelism, which is an approach that combines the preaching of the word and social action. James is saying that it does not help to only preach without addressing the needs of the potential converts. Therefore, the preaching of the gospel should be accompanied by providing homes to the homeless, by dressing the naked, and giving food to the hungry in the same way that churches such as 3c-Church, the Christian Revival Church, and the Rhema Bible Church are doing. Evangelism in action is the one that helps in terms of need and engages in good works towards the poor and the marginalised. A human being with an empty stomach cannot hear the words of the evangelist or any other preacher; hence, James suggests that we should first minister with food, clothes, and homes before the preaching of the word. Another way to look at this holistic evangelism approach is that when providing food, clothing the naked, and providing a home, that on its own is preaching. Therefore, an African Pentecostal holistic evangelism is based on actions more than words, as opposed to traditional evangelism that is more focused on the words of the evangelist or missionary. In this approach, the words of the preacher and the social actions in the quest to help others are brought together.

## Conclusion

This article discussed an important matter of evangelism in newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches, which, over the years, has contributed to the growth of the movement. Previous studies were only interested in the development of the Pentecostal movement due to evangelism. This current study was interested in the intersections of faith-based humanitarian aid and evangelism within the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches. The article found that the humanitarian aid does not impede the core functions of the evangelistic ministry. Or put differently, that humanitarian aid given to the poor and the marginalised benefits them in various areas of their lives. Indeed, the gospel of Jesus Christ cannot be ministered to someone with an empty stomach. This necessitates a need to first address the immediate need of the potential convert, even before the preaching of the word.

Therefore, this article calls for a holistic evangelism that considers the material, financial, spiritual, and psychological needs of converts. This kind of evangelism should take cognizance of the possibility of offering faith-based humanitarian aid when ministering the gospel of Jesus Christ. In other words, this article proposes that faith-based humanitarian aid must be done holistically by offering the poor and the marginalised aid within the main areas of life, such as material, financial, spiritual, and psychological. Therefore, newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches need to conduct faith-based humanitarian aid holistically, as discussed through the aspects of holistic evangelism. This challenges the traditional forms of evangelism that only look at the spiritual needs of the potential converts at the expense of other needs, such as material, financial, and psychological. Further studies can look at the practical solutions that can be brought by the holistic evangelism when preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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