

Shepherding Through Storms: A Practical Theology of Pastoral Ministry in Seasons of Crisis

Abstract

Pastoral care is often conducted in environments characterized by trauma, institutional instability, and societal upheaval. In Rwanda, modern pastoral care operates within a multifaceted context influenced by the lasting repercussions of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, shifting church-state dynamics, and recent legislative changes leading to the closure of numerous churches. These trends have transformed the church ecosystem and heightened pastoral uncertainty, economic vulnerability, and spiritual pain among both clergy and congregations. The paper analyzes how pastors manage these intersecting pressures and investigates the theological resources that support ministry during periods of crisis. This study posits that resilient pastoral care arises from a revitalized theology of hope, suffering, and spiritual endurance, informed by biblical reflection, especially Pauline teachings on perseverance in ministry, and ideas from practical theology. The paper situates pastoral experience within Rwanda's socio-historical setting, contributing to broader discussions of ministry in post-trauma cultures and providing a contextual framework for maintaining pastoral leadership amid ongoing institutional and cultural transformation.

Introduction

Pastoral ministry is often misunderstood as a vocation of comfort and reward, yet Scripture portrays it as a costly participation in Christ's shepherding, marked by sacrifice and faithful service. On the other hand, history indicates that the church's greatest formative periods do not occur during times of ease but rather during times of upheaval.¹ Crisis situations, whether social, political, or institutional, shed light on the theological foundations that underpin pastoral care. The church in Rwanda is notable for being situated at a historical junction. Despite Christianity continuing to play a significant role in national life, some churches have been forced to close due to recent regulatory reforms that mandate compliance with established construction requirements and theological education standards.² Despite the fact that these closures were intended to improve accountability, they have resulted in pastoral difficulties, including the relocation of congregations, financial instability, and questions about ministerial identity.

¹Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical and Global Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 36.

² <https://www.gov.rw/blog-detail/frequent-questions-on-inspection-and-closure-of-prayer-houses> (Accessed, February 15, 2026)

The apostle Paul's declaration in 2 Corinthians 4:1, "Since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart," provides a compelling theological lens for interpreting pastoral endurance. Written out of conflict and vulnerability, the letter reframes ministry not as institutional success but as faithful participation in God's work despite adversity.³ This paper explores how Pauline theology, read within the Rwandan context and alongside insights from persecuted churches globally, offers a robust foundation for pastoral ministry in seasons of crisis.

The Rwandan Church Landscape: Crisis and Opportunity

The Rwandan church embodies a complex legacy marked by both moral failure and redemptive possibility. Scholarship has demonstrated that Christian institutions were deeply embedded within the socio-political structures that shaped ethnic tensions prior to the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, raising enduring theological and ethical questions about complicity, silence, and prophetic witness. Rwandan theologian Tharcisse Gatwa argues that the church's historical proximity to state power has weakened its moral voice at critical moments, underscoring the need for ongoing self-examination by the church.⁴ Similarly, historian Jean-Paul Kimonyo highlights how institutional narratives and social identities intersect with religious life, shaping the moral imagination of communities and continuing to influence contemporary ministry.⁵

At the same time, the post-genocide period has witnessed the church emerging as a significant agent of reconciliation, trauma healing, and social reconstruction. Faith-based initiatives have played a central role in community dialogue, forgiveness processes, and psychosocial support, often working alongside national reconciliation mechanisms. Practitioners such as Antoine Rutayisire emphasize that grassroots Christian movements have fostered spaces within local congregations where confession, repentance, and restorative justice can be practiced.⁶ These contributions demonstrate that, despite its ambivalent history, the church remains a vital moral and social actor in rebuilding trust and cultivating a culture of peace.

³ Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 7.

⁴ Tharcisse Gatwa, *The Churches and Ethnic Ideology in the Rwandan Crises 1900–1994* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2005), 120.

⁵ Jean-Paul Kimonyo, *Rwanda's Popular Genocide: A Perfect Storm* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2016).

⁶ Antoine Rutayisire, *Faith Under Fire: Testimonies of Hope in Rwanda* (Kigali: African Enterprise Rwanda, 2013), 80.

Consequently, pastoral ministry in Rwanda is intrinsically shaped by the interwoven dynamics of collective memory, lament, and restoration. Ministers serve communities where remembrance is not merely historical but lived, requiring pastoral practices that hold together truth-telling, theological reflection on suffering, and hope-oriented discipleship. This context calls for a pastoral theology attentive to trauma and resilience, integrating liturgical remembrance, communal healing practices, and a robust theology of reconciliation.⁷ In this sense, the Rwandan church carries both a sobering responsibility to learn from its past and a hopeful mandate to embody a reconciled and restorative Christian witness in the present.

Church Closures and Regulatory Reform

Recent regulatory enforcement by the Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) concerning minimum standards for infrastructure, leadership qualifications, and institutional governance significantly reshaped Rwanda's religious landscape. Beginning in 2018, inspections conducted in collaboration with local authorities resulted in the closure of several thousand places of worship that did not meet legal and safety requirements.⁸ While these reforms were framed as efforts to enhance accountability, public safety, and theological integrity, they simultaneously disrupted established congregational life and introduced new layers of uncertainty into pastoral practice.

The immediate consequences of these closures were both structural and pastoral. Many congregations lost access to recognized worship spaces, leading to fragmentation as members dispersed to other churches or gathered informally. Clergy who depended on congregational support experienced heightened economic precarity, particularly in independent and Pentecostal contexts where pastoral livelihoods are closely tied to local giving patterns.⁹ Beyond material implications, congregations reported significant emotional and spiritual strain as communities navigated displacement, identity disruption, and questions about continuity of ministry.¹⁰

⁷Wim Dreyer, "The Real Crisis of the Church," *HTS Theologies Studies/Theological Studies* 71, no. 3 (2015): Art. #2822, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i3.2822>.

⁸ <https://worldmediation.org/the-necessity-for-regulation-of-faith-based-organizations-in-rwanda/> (Accessed, February, 10, 2026)

⁹ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 118.

¹⁰ Peter Safari, "Church, State and the Rwandan Genocide," *Political Theology* 11, no. 6 (2010): 873–93, <https://doi.org/10.1558/poth.v11i6.873>.

These developments also generated deeper theological and vocational tensions among pastors. The sudden loss of institutional recognition prompted reflection on the nature of calling, legitimacy, and ecclesial authority within a regulated religious environment. John et al contend that when external pressures constrain institutional expressions of faith, pastoral identity often shifts from programmatic leadership toward more relational and adaptive forms of ministry.¹¹ In Rwanda, this has meant that pastoral care increasingly occurs in informal, decentralized, and resource-constrained settings.

In many respects, these dynamics parallel experiences in contexts of restriction or soft persecution, where ministry persists despite fragile or contested institutional structures.¹² The Rwandan case, therefore, offers an important lens for practical theology, illustrating how churches negotiate the tension between state regulation and spiritual calling while seeking to sustain communal worship, discipleship, and care. Rather than signaling church decline, these pressures may also catalyze new expressions of resilient and contextually grounded pastoral ministry.¹³

Crisis as a Theological Moment

Moments of crisis often function as critical theological junctures in which the church is compelled to reexamine its identity, mission, and sources of authority.¹⁴ Rather than merely representing disruption, crises can expose the underlying assumptions that shape church life and invite renewed reflection on the nature of ministry itself. Practical theologians argue that periods of instability frequently catalyze deeper discernment regarding vocation, compelling the church to reconsider what constitutes faithful presence in contexts marked by uncertainty and suffering.¹⁵

¹¹ John Anthony Berry and Viorel Coman, eds., *Living Tradition: Continuity and Change as Challenges to Churches and Theologies*, vol. 140 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2024), 30.

¹² Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, *World Christianity: The Global Religious Landscape* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2019), 12.

¹³ Philippe Denis, *The Genocide against the Tutsi, and the Rwandan Churches: Between Grief and Denial*, vol. 25 (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2022), 25.

¹⁴ Vhumani Magezi, "Pastoral Care in Post-Conflict Africa," *HTS Theologies Studies/Theological Studies* 72, no. 2 (2016), 8.

¹⁵ C. M. Peterson, *Who Is the Church? An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 38.

In the Rwandan context, crisis has repeatedly prompted such theological reassessment. The historical memory of national trauma, combined with contemporary institutional pressures, has challenged churches to move beyond programmatic expressions of ministry toward relational and incarnational forms of pastoral care.¹⁶ Scholars note that when institutional stability is threatened, ministry often becomes less dependent on formal structures and more grounded in community, accompaniment, and spiritual resilience.¹⁷ This shift underscores the importance of understanding pastoral work not merely as organizational leadership but as a vocation rooted in presence, solidarity, and hope.

Consequently, crisis reframes ecclesial priorities by redirecting attention from institutional preservation to theological fidelity. Pastoral ministry becomes an embodied witness in which care, lament, and proclamation are integrated within the lived realities of congregations. In Rwanda, this reorientation has fostered renewed interest in practices such as communal lament, reconciliation rituals, and trauma-informed discipleship, all of which reflect a church seeking to embody the gospel amid ongoing social and institutional change.¹⁸

Viewed through this lens, the Rwandan experience offers fertile ground for articulating a theology of resilient shepherding grounded in Scripture and attentive to context. By foregrounding calling over structure and presence over program, crisis becomes not only a challenge but also a generative space for theological creativity¹⁹. Such a framework contributes to broader practical-theological discourse by demonstrating how ministry can remain faithful and hopeful even when institutional forms are fragile or contested.

Historical Context of 2 Corinthians

Second Corinthians is widely recognized as one of Paul's most autobiographical and pastorally revealing letters, written in the mid-50s CE, likely from Macedonia, following a period of strained relations with the Corinthian church. The correspondence reflects a relationship shaped

¹⁶ Matthias Mulumba Wamala, "An Incarnational Mission of Mercy: A Hermeneutical and Praxis-Based Criterion for Social Reconciliation" (PhD diss., Boston College, 2022), 76.

¹⁷ Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 64.

¹⁸ Rutayisire, "Faith Under Fire," 105.

¹⁹ Nik Ripken with Gregg Lewis, *The Insanity of God: A True Story of Faith Resurrected* (Nashville: B&H, 2013), 13.

by conflict, reconciliation, and contested apostolic authority, as indicated by Paul's references to a "painful visit" and a "tearful letter."²⁰ Situated within the socio-cultural environment of Corinth, an urban center shaped by honor-shame values and rhetorical expectations, Paul's defense of his ministry subverted prevailing notions of leadership by emphasizing weakness, suffering, and divine empowerment.²¹

This historical setting provides essential interpretive context for 2 Corinthians 4:1–7, where Paul frames ministry as a gift sustained by divine mercy: "Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart." His metaphor of "treasure in jars of clay" encapsulates a theology in which human fragility becomes the locus of God's power, reinforcing that apostolic authority rests not on social status or institutional strength but on God's sustaining grace.²² Read against the backdrop of pastoral crisis, this passage offers a paradigm for resilient ministry, demonstrating how perseverance, transparency, and reliance on divine agency enable faithful service amid hardship and ecclesial instability.

Exegetical Locus: 2 Corinthians 4

The purpose of this exegetical engagement is not to provide an exhaustive treatment of 2 Corinthians 4 but to establish a theological locus that grounds the argument of this paper. Paul frames ministry as a gift sustained by divine initiative, declaring, "Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart" (4:1). The participial construction (ἔχοντες) underscores reception rather than achievement, while the verb οὐκ ἐγκακοῦμεν conveys perseverance rooted in divine mercy (ἐλεος). Wright notes that Paul situates apostolic endurance within the sphere of grace, emphasizing that calling is sustained not by human competence but by God's initiative.²³

Verses 2–6 further define ministry through integrity and transparency. Paul renounces "the hidden things of shame" (τὰ κρυπτὰ τῆς αἰσχύνης), rejecting manipulation (πανουργία) and instead commending himself through "the manifestation of the truth" (τῇ φανερώσει τῆς ἀληθείας). This

²⁰ Scott J. Hafemann, 2 Corinthians (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 17.

²¹ Ralph P. Martin, 2 Corinthians, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 69.

²² William H. Willimon, Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 104.

²³ N. T. Wright, Paul and the Faithfulness of God (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 9.

language reflects a pastoral model grounded in authenticity before God and others. The passage culminates in the imagery of divine illumination, God shining “in our hearts” (ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν), which indicates that ministry participates in God’s revelatory action rather than relying on rhetorical or institutional authority.²⁴

The central metaphor of the chapter appears in verse 7: “we have this treasure (θησαυρός) in jars of clay (ὀστράκινα σκεύη).” The juxtaposition of gospel power with human fragility highlights that the “surpassing power” (ἡ ὑπερβολὴ τῆς δυνάμεως) belongs to God. Paul’s descriptions of affliction, “perplexed but not driven to despair,” “persecuted but not forsaken” interpret suffering as participation in the death of Jesus (τὴν νέκρωσιν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ). Paul Barnett observes that Paul reconfigures weakness as the arena in which divine life becomes visible, thereby redefining the nature of apostolic authority.²⁵

The concluding verses (16–18) orient ministry toward eschatological renewal. The repeated affirmation “we do not lose heart” (οὐκ ἐγκακοῦμεν) frames present suffering within a future horizon of glory. Paul contrasts the decay of the “outer person” (ὁ ἔξω ἄνθρωπος) with the renewal of the “inner person” (ὁ ἔσω... ἀνακαινοῦται), interpreting “momentary affliction” (παραυτίκα ἐλαφρόν τῆς θλίψεως) as producing an “eternal weight of glory” (αἰώνιον βάρος δόξης). The passage thus presents ministry as grace-initiated, weakness-embodied, and hope-oriented, offering a theological framework for perseverance amid hardship.²⁶

Read within the broader Pauline corpus, this passage articulates a theology of ministry in which suffering, transparency, and hope are not peripheral but constitutive of pastoral vocation. Paul’s refusal to ground authority in strength or status resonates with his wider theology of power perfected in weakness (cf. 2 Cor 12:9), suggesting that resilience in ministry emerges from participation in Christ’s death and life. Consequently, 2 Corinthians 4 provides a scriptural foundation for understanding pastoral endurance not as stoic perseverance but as grace-enabled faithfulness sustained by divine presence.²⁷

²⁴ Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 55.

²⁵ Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 64.

²⁶ Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 132.

²⁷ Andrew Root, *The Pastor in a Secular Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 16.

This Pauline vision offers a critical lens for contemporary pastoral contexts marked by instability, including the Rwandan church landscape explored in this paper. By framing ministry as a participation in God's sustaining work rather than a function of institutional security, Paul's theology invites a reimagining of pastoral leadership that prioritizes presence, integrity, and hope.²⁸ In this way, the text serves as both a theological anchor and an interpretive guide for articulating a model of resilient shepherding that sustains the church amid crisis.

Toward a Practical Theology of Resilient Shepherding in Rwanda

Building on the Pauline vision of ministry articulated in 2 Corinthians 4, a practical theology of resilient shepherding in Rwanda must begin with the conviction that ministry is fundamentally sustained by divine mercy rather than institutional stability. The Rwandan church context, shaped by historical trauma, regulatory restructuring, and ongoing social transformation, mirrors the dynamics of fragility and perseverance reflected in Paul's metaphor of "treasure in jars of clay." In such a setting, pastoral resilience emerges not from structural strength but from a theological imagination rooted in grace, calling, and dependence on God's sustaining presence. This perspective reframes crisis not as a negation of ministry but as a context in which the authenticity of pastoral vocation is clarified and deepened.²⁹

A second dimension of resilient shepherding involves recentering pastoral ministry around presence, accompaniment, and communal healing. In communities where memory, lament, and reconstruction remain part of daily life, pastoral care extends beyond proclamation to include practices of listening, trauma awareness, and reconciliation. Michael emphasizes that ministry in post-conflict societies requires integrating spiritual formation with psychosocial sensitivity, enabling congregations to interpret suffering within a redemptive narrative.³⁰ Within Rwanda, this

²⁸ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as an Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 23.

²⁹ Michael Moynagh, *Church for Every Context: An Introduction to Theology and Practice* (London: SCM Press, 2012), 17.

³⁰ Michael Moynagh, *Church for Every Context: An Introduction to Theology and Practice* (London: SCM Press, 2012).

has taken shape through liturgical remembrance, community dialogue, and discipleship models that prioritize relational restoration alongside theological instruction.³¹

Third, resilient shepherding entails a reconfiguration of pastoral authority. Paul's refusal to ground ministry in status or rhetorical power invites a model of leadership defined by integrity, transparency, and service. In contexts where institutional trust may be fragile, credibility is cultivated through relational faithfulness and ethical consistency rather than solely through positional authority. This aligns with broader African theological perspectives that view leadership as communal and participatory, emphasizing the pastor's role as a facilitator of spiritual growth rather than merely an organizational head.³² Such an approach strengthens church communities by fostering shared ownership of ministry and encouraging collaborative expressions of discipleship.

Finally, a practical theology of resilient shepherding must remain oriented toward hope. Paul's eschatological vision, holding present suffering in tension with future glory, offers a theological grammar for sustaining ministry amid uncertainty.³³ In Rwanda, hope is not an abstract concept but a lived reality expressed through testimonies of reconciliation, community rebuilding, and renewed church life.³⁴ By integrating biblical theology, contextual awareness, and pastoral praxis, resilient shepherding becomes a witness to God's redemptive work in history.³⁵ This framework not only illuminates the Rwandan experience but also contributes to global conversations on ministry in contexts of crisis, demonstrating how the church can remain faithful, adaptive, and hopeful amid profound change.

Parallels with Ministry in Persecuted Contexts

Patterns observed in churches operating under conditions of restriction or persecution offer illuminating parallels for understanding the Rwandan church experience. Bonnie notes that when

³¹ Rutayisire, 2013.

³² Joseph Ebot Eyong, "Theorizing Collective Leadership: Lessons from Ekpe, an Indigenous African Institution," *Africa Journal of Management* 10, no. 4 (2024): 434–63.

³³ Wright,

³⁴ Felix Bigabo, Emmanuel Biracyaza, Clementine Kanazayire, Jeannette Kangabe, and Darius Gishoma, "Reconciliation Villages in Post-Genocide Rwanda, Beyond Rhetoric to Practical Reconciliation and Psychosocial Reintegration," *Discover Social Science and Health* 5, no. 1 (2025): 60.

³⁵ Patrick Nanthambwe, "Public Theology as a Theology of Resilience in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Public Pastoral Care Contribution," *Religions* 15, no. 10 (2024): 1213.

institutional stability is disrupted, communities often adapt through decentralized gatherings, informal networks of leadership, and intensified relational bonds that sustain communal identity.³⁶ According to Elaine, such adaptive practices reflect a shift from programmatic models of church life toward embodied and participatory forms of faith, where belonging is reinforced through shared vulnerability and mutual support³⁷. In Rwanda, similar dynamics have emerged as congregations navigate regulatory pressures and social change, demonstrating how ecclesial vitality can persist beyond formal structures.

These parallels also underscore how theology itself is frequently reshaped in contexts of adversity. Elaine further argues that lived experiences of marginalization and suffering tend to produce theological reflection that emphasizes perseverance, hope, and the presence of God amid hardship.³⁸ In this sense, the Rwandan context resonates with broader patterns in persecuted churches, where adversity becomes a crucible for refining Christian witness rather than extinguishing it. Such insights suggest that resilience is not merely a sociological phenomenon but a theological one, revealing how the church's identity is continually rearticulated through faithful practice amid constraint.³⁹

Toward a Practical Theology of Crisis Shepherd

A practical theology of crisis shepherding begins with a reorientation of pastoral identity away from institutional validation and toward divine calling. In contexts of instability, clergy are compelled to anchor vocation in God's initiative, cultivating a mercy-centered understanding of ministry that sustains resilience amid uncertainty. Patrick contends that identity rooted in vocation enables leaders to maintain coherence and purpose even when organizational structures are fragile.⁴⁰ Such an approach reframes pastoral authority as a function of spiritual fidelity and

³⁶ Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, *Christian Theology in Practice: Discovering a Discipline* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 115.

³⁷ Elaine Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 89.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ David G. Horrell, *The Social Ethos of the Corinthian Correspondence* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 44.

⁴⁰ Patrick Nanthambwe, "Public Theology as a Theology of Resilience in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Public Pastoral Care Contribution," 1214.

relational presence rather than institutional status, providing a theological foundation for enduring ministry in seasons of disruption.

A second dimension involves integrating trauma-informed care into pastoral praxis. Ministry in crisis settings increasingly requires attentiveness to the psychological and emotional realities of congregants, combining spiritual disciplines with insights from trauma studies. Practical theologians note that healing-oriented ministry fosters spaces where lament, narrative reconstruction, and communal support can facilitate both spiritual and psychosocial restoration.⁴¹ This integration reflects a holistic vision of care in which pastoral work attends to the full complexity of human suffering while embodying the church's role as a community of healing and reconciliation.

Finally, crisis shepherding calls for adaptive ecclesiology and the intentional formation of eschatological hope. As congregations reimagine gathering practices, often prioritizing relational networks over physical infrastructure, the church's identity becomes increasingly defined by shared faith and mutual participation rather than institutional form.⁴² Within this adaptive framework, preaching and worship play a formative role in cultivating resilient hope, enabling communities to interpret present hardship within the horizon of God's future. Together, these elements, mercy-centered identity, trauma-informed care, and hope-oriented ecclesial adaptation, constitute a practical theological paradigm for faithful ministry amid crisis.

Implications for Theological Education

The realities of ministry in contexts marked by instability and social disruption call for renewed approaches within theological education. Institutions are increasingly tasked with preparing leaders who can navigate crises with theological depth, pastoral sensitivity, and adaptive capacity. Practical theology emphasizes that ministerial formation must attend not only to doctrinal competence but also to contextual discernment, enabling students to interpret complex social

⁴¹ C. B. Manda, "Healing and Reconciliation as a Pastoral Ministry in Post-Conflict South African Christian Communities," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 38, no. 1 (2017): a1562, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v38i1.1562>.

⁴² C. M. Peterson, *Who Is the Church?* 67.

realities through a theological lens.⁴³ In Rwanda, where church life continues to unfold amid historical memory and institutional change, theological schools play a strategic role in cultivating leaders capable of faithful, reflective engagement in uncertain environments.

A key implication is the need to integrate crisis leadership into ministerial training. Pastoral formation programs should equip students with skills in navigating conflict, making decisions under pressure, and accompanying communities during seasons of disruption. Scholars in ministerial formation argue that leadership education must move beyond managerial models toward practices that foster theological reflection in action, preparing leaders to respond creatively and faithfully to emergent challenges.⁴⁴ Such preparation strengthens the church's capacity to remain missionally engaged even when traditional structures are strained.

Equally important is incorporating trauma-informed care into theological curricula. Practical theologians highlight the importance of equipping ministers with competencies in listening, narrative reconstruction, and pastoral presence, particularly in societies where collective and personal trauma shape congregational life.⁴⁵ By integrating insights from pastoral care, psychology, and spirituality, theological institutions can form leaders who minister holistically, addressing both spiritual and emotional dimensions of suffering. This approach also contributes to the formation of spiritually resilient leaders whose personal disciplines, communal practices, and theological convictions sustain long-term ministry.⁴⁶

Finally, theological education must foster the development of sustainable ministry models that emphasize adaptability and contextual relevance. Research in practical theology underscores the importance of cultivating ecclesial imagination, encouraging future leaders to experiment with new forms of community, collaborative leadership, and resource stewardship.⁴ In the Rwandan context, such formation enables graduates to envision ministry beyond traditional infrastructure, grounding pastoral practice in relational networks and missional creativity. Together, these

⁴³ Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 77.

⁴⁴ Jaco Beyers, "Recontextualising Theology: A Challenge for Theological Training," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 46, no. 4 (2025): 3454.

⁴⁵ Alex R. Wendel, "Trauma-Informed Theology or Theologically Informed Trauma?: Traumatic Experiences and Theological Method," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 16, nos. 1–2 (2022): 3–26.

⁴⁶ Elaine Graham, "Transforming Practice" 180.

priorities, crisis leadership, trauma integration, spiritual resilience, and sustainability position theological institutions as vital catalysts for equipping the church to flourish amid uncertainty.

Conclusion: We Do Not Lose Heart

Paul's assertion encapsulates the core of steadfast pastoral ministry. Crises, including persecution, institutional reform, or social upheaval, do not invalidate the church's mission. Rather, they disclose the profundity of its theological underpinnings. In Rwanda, pastoral service is continually adapting to evolving circumstances. Nevertheless, the church's testimony is firmly rooted in the belief that God's strength is fully realized in vulnerability. Guiding through adversity becomes not only a survival tactic but also a significant engagement in God's redemptive mission. When pastors adopt mercy as their identity, view suffering as membership in Christ, and regard hope as their horizon, they exemplify a theology that can sustain the church in any crisis.

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