

# Pastoral Care to Migrants as Care at the 'In-Between': Reflections on Pastoral Care within Congregational Ministry

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This essay attempts to reflect and develop some guidelines on how to assess and develop pastoral care guidelines for migrants, drawing examples from the lives of African migrants. The author seeks to address the following question: How can pastoral care to migrants be provided within a congregational ministry context? In responding to this question, the essay proposes an understanding of migrants' 'in-between' life as an assessment model that should be complemented by an awareness of potential pitfalls that may arise within congregational ministry to migrants, which should inform attitude change among both migrants and host nation people.

## MIGRATION AND AFRICAN MIGRANTS' RESPONSES

Migration is a problem that all countries are experiencing. The International Organization for Migration vividly described the situation of migration in 2014 by stating that "approximately one in seven people is migrating

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every day.”<sup>1</sup> Migration has local and international dimensions. Local migration refers to the movement of people from one place to another within their country of origin, whilst international migration refers to movement to a foreign country.<sup>2</sup> Local and international migration are categorized as ‘internal and international’ migration respectively.<sup>3</sup> The reality of migration presents nations with the challenge of living in a global world. Migrants’ challenges include restrictions and onerous visa requirements (harsh immigration controls), very little protection, limited access to regular channels (which leads migrants to resort to dangerous routes), poor control of asylum seekers resulting in exploitation, exclusion from the workforce, poor integration with host communities, and many others.<sup>4</sup> Host countries’ responses have been diverse, ranging from accommodation and integration on the one hand and apathy, exclusion, and outright violent reception on the other. For instance, immigrants in South Africa experienced extremely violent xenophobic attacks in 2008 and 2015. As Vick Oluoch observes, discrimination against immigrants is also rife in the United States.<sup>5</sup> However, it is important to note that the responses by host countries or cities to migrants may not necessarily be deliberately inhumane but rather may indicate a struggle to embrace foreign people, a struggle to cope with the dynamics of embracing other human beings who are different. Viewed this way, the responses of host countries may reflect their mechanisms for coping with foreign people.

To cope with the challenges of migration in a foreign country, migrants have developed systems to mitigate the impact of the challenges they encounter. Some mitigatory responses established by migrants include forming separate communities and foreign churches in host countries. Members of these churches are migrants from the same country. They use their native language during church services. Activities in the church resemble those in their country of origin. The churches provide members space for being “home while away from home” as well as support for one another in practical life issues that are necessary for surviving in a foreign land. Hirschman states that religious beliefs and practices serve as ballast for migrants as they struggle to adapt to their new homeland.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, religion cannot be considered from a spiritual dimension alone but should be viewed from a community support perspective as well. Hirschman notes that some Korean ethnic churches in New York City offer language classes (both Korean and English), a full Korean lunch after services, and seminars on practical

as well as spiritual topics. Migrant ethnic churches make major efforts to serve the social and economic needs of their congregants, including providing information about housing and social and economic opportunities that facilitate their adaptation to their new community and society. This indicates that there are many social and economic benefits to participating in an immigrant church. Religion can maintain a community as well as offer continuity.<sup>7</sup>

My focus in this paper is on African migrants. In his chapter on African migrants and their religious communities, Afe Adogame presents the reasons for the existence of ethnic churches in the diaspora. He states that Christianity is a religion and belongs to people's cultural heritage. Religious conviction can be a central motive for migration or a support for organizing refugees in exile.<sup>8</sup> Religious identity can be a crucial resource for decision-making processes in the host country, for vitalizing the culture of origin, and for action within the integration processes in a host context. Also, religious institutions provide migrants with vitally important opportunities to mix with people from different cultural backgrounds under the umbrella of a common religion.<sup>9</sup>

Many Africans who undergo these complex forms of migration largely carry traits of their religious and cultural identity with them. As a matter of fact, their sojourn in new geocultural contexts enlivens these migrants to identify, organize, and reconstruct "their religion" both for themselves and their host societies.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, African churches in the diaspora have largely remained the locus of identity, community, and security, primarily for African migrants.<sup>11</sup> Thus, churches in the diaspora have become magnets that attract people from various settings. The churches provide connections and representations. They provide soul care for migrant communities in the face of escalating xenophobic tensions and discrimination. They address the quest for identity, security, and spiritual satisfaction in a hostile environment. Adogame therefore concludes that African churches in the diaspora have come to fill a spiritual vacuum and offer "a home away from home" for many disenfranchised Africans.<sup>12</sup> The churches have also become avenues where people can feel important and valued. As well, irrespective of members' cultural backgrounds, a sense of belonging and community is rekindled in the church through the members' shared religious and ethnic identity.

Within this context, what should be the role of pastoral care?

LIFE AT THE 'IN-BETWEEN' AS A MIGRANT:  
A FRAMEWORK FOR PASTORAL CARE ASSESSMENT

The challenges of migrants are complex, and thus no single approach is best.<sup>13</sup> Hence, theological reflection on migration is being done from various perspectives: biblical studies, ecclesiology, missiology, spirituality, contextual theology, pastoral theology, and interfaith.<sup>14</sup> Church as a space of social convergence in communities and pastoral care as a frontline ministry are challenged to intervene. Importantly, effective pastoral intervention is informed by proper assessment and understanding of the situation. Pastoral assessment is an attempt to interpret the situation surrounding an individual in order to develop an understanding to enable relevant intervention.<sup>15</sup> Assessment models are used to guide the hermeneutical process during a pastoral intervention. A model helps to widen one's perspective and clarity on the complexity of the situation.<sup>16</sup> Thus, a diagnostic model helps to interpret and understand people's situation. Yolanda Dreyer, in her essay "Reflections on Donald Capps' Hermeneutical Model of Pastoral Care", usefully explains:

Hermeneutics forms the heart of the theological enterprise and is therefore interdisciplinary by nature. All theology, also practical theology and pastoral care, is a hermeneutical activity since it is about *how* one should understand and how one should communicate in order for the recipients to best understand what is being communicated.<sup>17</sup>

To understand the complexity of migrant challenges and possible care interventions, a framework informed by the notion of migrant life as an 'in-between' life is proposed. The notion of in-between as a model attempts to present and reflect on the different areas of life, including the physical, social, emotional, relational, and spiritual. It conceives the life of migrants as lived in an in-between space. There are multiple dimensions of life at the in-between, but all point to one aspect—a life lived between spaces, whether physically or metaphysically. The concept of in-between has physical, metaphoric, spiritual, emotional, and theoretical and conceptual dimensions.

Physically, life at the in-between entails physical movement or the shifting of an individual from time to time from the homeland to a new location and back, particularly for economic and professional migrants. For instance, a Kenyan migrant working in the United States moves in between these two countries. One has to set aside financial resources to meet these travelling costs. Metaphorically, life at the in-between is a state of existing

between two forces of influence pulling a person in two directions. It denotes a space of tension where allegiances, commitments, investments, and the entire being is neither here nor there. It's a space of 'I don't belong permanently to either'. At a spiritual and emotional level, life at the in-between is a state of emotional tension where the individual is torn between embracing the new culture, practices, and norms of the host country and 'letting go' those of the country of origin. This is characterised by spiritual confusion, dissonance, and grief as spiritual being and values are confronted, challenged, and altered. Just like the metaphor of life at the in-between, the metaphysical world of the individual is thrown into turmoil. This particularly happens for adults, especially men who, in most cases, are from patriarchal cultures such as Africa and are cultural custodians. At a theoretical and conceptual level, life at the in-between denotes the life here in the new environment competing with previous life experiences and foundations. As in the metaphorical in-between, life's 'force field' is sustained by the existential pressure and competition between two influences in life, resulting in the formation of new cultural blend. It is a space of 'liminal existence' where something new is forming but is characterized by uncertainty. Dinesh Bhugra calls this "biculturation".<sup>18</sup>

So, how is this life at the in-between lived, and what are the issues that pastoral care providers should pay attention to when caring for migrants?

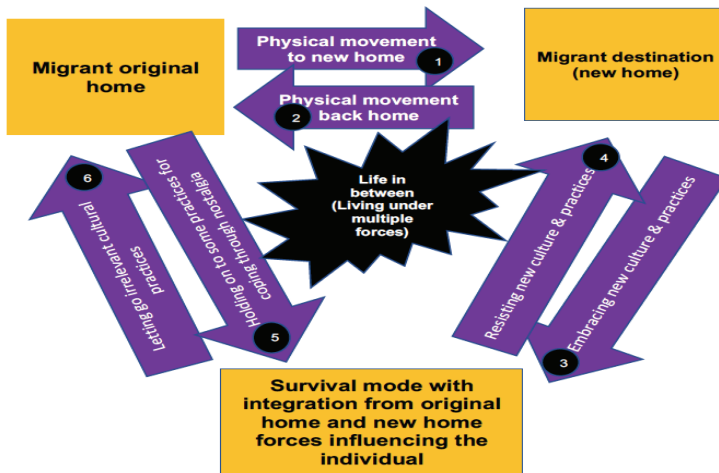


Figure 1. A diagnostic and hermeneutical proposal for understanding migrant challenges related to life at the in-between

In figure 1, arrow 1 indicates the directional movement of migrants from their country of origin to their new destination. When they arrive, they exploit the opportunities and seek a meaningful existence in the new country. However, periodically these people travel back to their countries of origin (arrow 2). This is particularly the case with professional migrants who emigrate to seek better opportunities. While in foreign countries, people sometimes engage in investment and construction projects in their countries of origin that they travel back home to oversee. Physically travelling to new destinations (arrow 1) and back to the home country (arrow 2) is in most cases expected by migrants' extended family members. Failing to travel back from time to time can be construed as uncaring and as a betrayal of the extended family, particularly among African migrants, and this causes emotional pain, dissatisfaction, and despair. At the same time, the moving back and forth is expensive for the migrant, which puts the individual under immense economic pressure. What role then can pastoral care play in such a case? In most cases, migrants move without having been adequately made aware of the challenges, expectations, and responsibilities awaiting them in a foreign land, particularly overseas. Catholic pastoral letters encourage migrants to continue looking back to support their people. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' "Pastoral Letter Concerning Migration" states:

Special encouragement should be given to migrants to be faithful to their spouses and families and to thereby live out the sacrament of marriage. Support of the family that is left behind is also needed. Migration under certain conditions can have a devastating effect on families; at times, entire villages are depopulated of their young people.<sup>19</sup>

In such a case, pastoral care should perform a preparatory role. In the countries of origin, pastoral care would entail equipping and empowering migrants with information about the realities of being a migrant. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops recommends that "as migrants leave their homes, pastoral counselling should be offered to help them to better understand these realities and to consider alternative options, including the exploration of available legal means of immigration".<sup>20</sup> Therefore, moving back and forth is an aspect that pastoral caregivers should anticipate and address.

Arrows 3 and 4 in figure 1 denote migrants' interaction with their new environment to cope in the new situation. Arrow 3 is an individual's re-

sponse to the new environment, including personal aspects such as dressing, employment, diet, and child raising; social aspects such as acculturation and assimilation; and cultural aspects such as family values and status.<sup>21</sup> Arrow 4 indicates migrants' responses to the new environment. These responses may cause anxiety and depression due to, among other things, attempts to push back against new norms and values, struggling to adapt, and efforts to reinterpret life experiences in light of the new environment.

Arrow 5 denotes spiritual norms, values, and experiences imported through nostalgia to create an emotional buffer. There is often constant communication and connecting with people in the country of origin. The individual keeps up on trends and developments in the country of origin through the news to maintain an emotional and relational connection with the homeland. Arrow 6 indicates communication and feedback to relatives in the country of origin. This includes feedback on progress, achievements, and challenges.

The arrows in figure 1 indicate the interactions that happen as a migrant tries to relate and adapt to the new environment. When people migrate, they take with them their culture, which in turn influences the way they live in their new environment. It is a kind of coping mechanism in a new environment. Bhugra explains that when individuals migrate, they do not leave their beliefs or idioms of distress behind, no matter what the circumstances of their migration.<sup>22</sup> Their beliefs influence their idioms of distress, which influence how they express symptoms and their help-seeking behaviour. However, with acculturation, some aspects of these beliefs and practices change, including the concept of the self. When two cultures of people come together, which is called acculturation, both of the cultures change.<sup>23</sup> The cultures interact with one another to create a new one that is unique, one that borrows from both cultures. A person then redefines himself or herself based on their past and current experiences and interactions. In this process, some of the treasured things are lost, which sometimes causes pain, because in reality one culture will dominate the other. Gary Younge sums up the situation succinctly as follows:

Migration involves loss. Even when you're privileged, as I am, and move of your own free will, as I did, you feel it. Migrants, almost by definition, move with the future in mind. But their journeys inevitably involve excising part of their past. It's not workers who emigrate but people. And whenever they move, they leave part of themselves behind. Efforts to reclaim that which has been lost results in something more than nos-

talgia but, if you're lucky, less than exile. And the losses keep coming. Funerals, christenings, graduations and weddings missed—milestones you couldn't make because your life is elsewhere.<sup>24</sup>

Life at the in-between, as indicated in figure 1, suggests that migrants' lives are lived under several forces of influence that should be understood. There is an interaction and merging of the person's old and new life experiences. The individual experiences new situations and environments, including buildings and infrastructure, relationships, acquaintances, and a new economic system, which renders learned skills obsolete, the inversion of roles through children adapting quickly and teaching parents, the need to quickly learn new skills for survival, and many others. A person 'see-saws', i.e. swings between the new and the old life physically, spiritually, emotionally, and relationally.

The pressures exerted on the migrant should be understood by the pastoral counsellor. The situation is a 'human web' that needs to be viewed at multiple levels. Figure 1 thus indicates some of the issues to explore in pastoral caregiving. The interplay of these forces in the lives of migrant people should be understood to provide meaningful care. Church as a space of convergence in society and a subsystem of society. The question is, What can be done to provide effective pastoral care to migrants? As Union Chapel of London puts it, "Theologising on migration is at the service of both the church and the wider society. It should inform Christian praxis".<sup>25</sup> Theology places God and God's relationship with humanity and therefore the relationships of humans with other humans at the centre. Pastoral care as practical theology should develop strategies and approaches that address people's challenges in a holistic way.

#### THE INTERPLAY OF LIFE AT THE IN-BETWEEN AND CONGREGATIONAL CARE RESPONSES

The in-between experiences described above indicate existential space that migrants find themselves in. However, efforts to support and embrace migrants within churches have not been consistent. Congregations have been encouraged to embrace migrants. Within pastoral caregiving, this embrace needs to be understood from a pastoral theology and ecclesiological perspective. A theology of embracing migrants as well as a theology of em-



bracing one another needs to be equally developed and understood, just as does life at the in-between. In this process, Louw advises that one has to be vigilant and be cognizant of the risks and pathologies that may arise and exist.<sup>26</sup> He developed a model (figure 2) and usefully explains that one has to consider different possible *danger zones* linked with various responses to migrants.<sup>27</sup> The danger zones J, K, L, and M (see figure 2) are linked inevitably to any of the good intentions corresponding to the bipolar directions. For instance, goal-setting and values motivate action but can easily develop into the power play of enforcement and violent oppression (J); inclusivity runs the danger of an underestimation of cultural complexities and a kind of romanticising attempt at integration and assimilation (K); commitment can derail into the politics of manipulation and emotional stress and pressure (L); and the necessity of differentiation can lead to discriminatory exclusivity based on prejudice and xenophobia (M), which has tended to fuel ethnic and exclusive host nation churches.

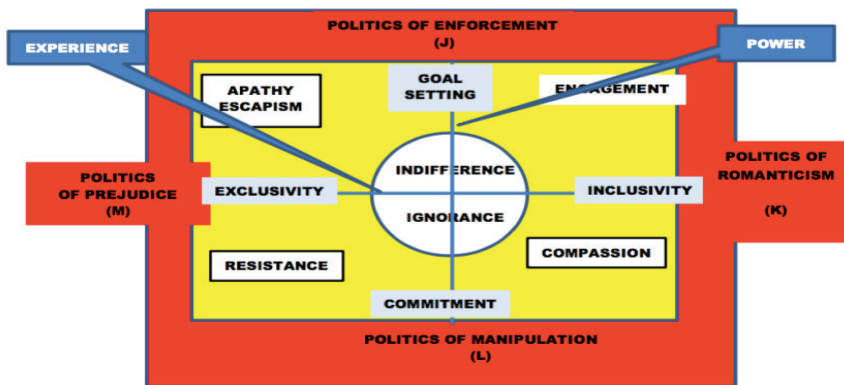


Figure 2. Possible danger zones in a systemic understanding of migrants (Louw 2016, unpublished conference paper)<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, to go beyond the possible danger zones in a systemic understanding of migrants, I propose an additional diagnostic chart, which I call 'a hermeneutics of migration attitude change within a practical theological imagination of home'<sup>29</sup>. The diagnostic chart indicates possible pathologies in migration response (as well as views) and the dynamics of shifts in posi-

tions that are recommended for constructive and effective migrant ministry and attitude change towards migrants and among migrants themselves.

The diagnostic model has four positions (called zones) where both migrants and host individuals can place (locate) themselves (see figure 3). The word 'zone' indicates demarcations that have obvious overlaps. An individual cannot be caged in one zone but easily moves in more than one zone in a fluid manner. Zone A (victim zone) represents a displaced individual, a migrant or refugee who is now resident in a host country. Zone B (complacency zone) represents individuals in migrant countries. Zone C (wishful zone) represents a wishful mindset of migrants that is unrealistic in the host country. Zone D (eschatological home zone) represents a constructive position, a mindset, and responsive action possessed by both migrants and host nation individuals (and communities). All of the zones represent mindset and resultant actions and responses by both migrants and host individuals. At any given point, an individual could locate him or herself within the quadrants (zones) to map out their mode of thinking and actions.

Double arrow 1 shows the back-and-forth (A to C to A) thinking of migrants. It indicates a trap, the reality of the situation in a host country that results in wishful thinking (i.e. I wish I was home in my home country). The migrants keep oscillating between these two zones. Double arrow 2 shows the wishful thinking of migrants who wish to be host people (B) with full rights (i.e. I wish I was a citizen of the host country). At the same time, the arrow shows host country individuals' possible attitude of looking down on migrants and viewing themselves as better and superior. They look at migrants and say, I am glad I am not them (A). Arrow 3 shows the recommended direction of movement for both migrants (A) and host nation individuals (B) as well as the change from wishful thinking by migrants (C) to zone D (a constructive zone).

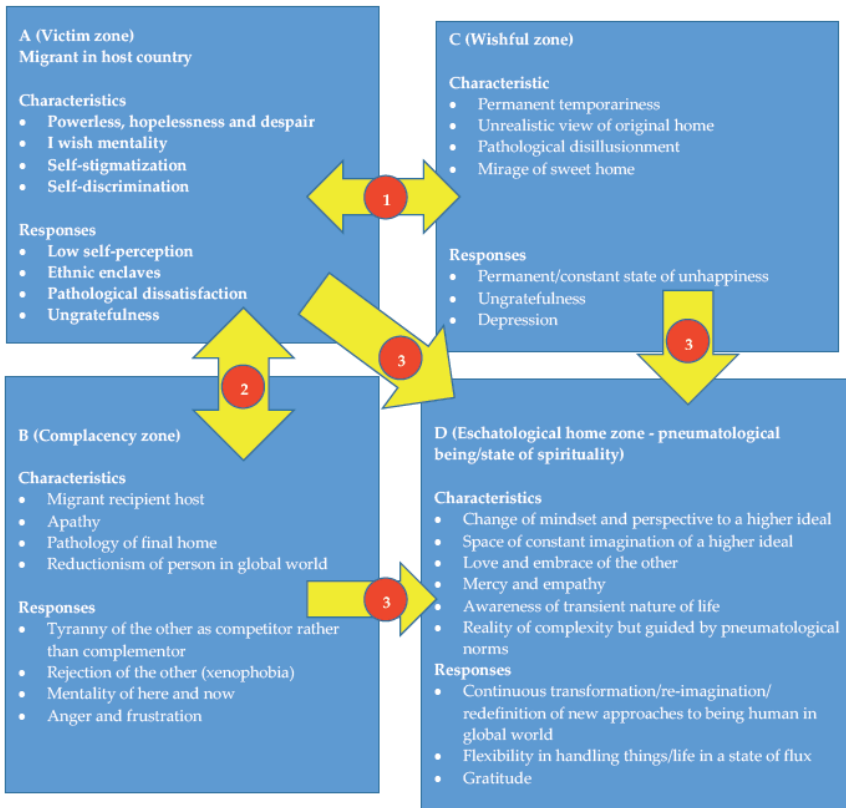


Figure 3. Hermeneutics of migration attitude change within a practical theological imagination of home<sup>30</sup>

The advantage of a graphic design is that it points out the different positions. It shows the big picture. It widens the horizon of one’s perspective and perception; it illuminates the complexity of the migration crisis. Seeing the big picture creates an awareness of the complexity of the situation and the paradoxes involved. The diagnostic framework also helps one to understand that in the migrant and refugee crisis, an either-or-approach is inappropriate and virtually impossible. Not even the simplistic option of and-and is possible. As Louw notes, the complexity of paradox is about a zig-zag spiral of networking. Due to systemic interconnectedness and networking dynamics, caregivers, social helpers, and politicians as well as mi-

grants should be understood within their own dynamic positioning in the complexity of the migration crisis. Orientation and disorientation are simultaneously at stake.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, the eventual outcome of applying the diagnostic chart should be reorientation and re-imagination. An awareness of the complexity of systemic positioning and repositioning creates the insight of seeing life differently within the migration situation. A positive and constructive response entails change and insight in the different intentions and paradigms that inform repositioning across the zones.

Zone A indicates that migrants are victims of displacement (from their countries of origin) and victims of exclusion (in the host countries). They feel powerless, hopeless, and in despair. In addition to their exclusion by host communities, they self-exclude and self-discriminate. This gives rise to ethnic enclaves through church groupings of people from the same country as social networking spaces.<sup>32</sup> Because of their self-excluding nature, these networks fan low self-esteem and ungratefulness and create pathological dissatisfaction due to grumbling and failure to realize the benefits of being in a foreign host country.

Zone B (complacency zone) represents some individuals and communities in migrant recipient countries. This zone depicts people who view their home country as a heaven on earth. These people demonstrate a diminished view of what it means to live in the global village. They are inwardly focused. Their life is characterized by complacency. They view other people, particularly migrants, as competitors who have to be resisted rather than viewing them as complementers. Migrants are viewed as people who are going to deplete the resources meant for the nationals. These individuals have a mindset of here and now. Therefore, this often results in rejection of migrants and xenophobic tendencies. Migrants trigger anger and frustration in these people. In this zone, national pride and love for one's country unfortunately sometimes leads to overprotection and the exclusion of other people, such as migrants.

Zone C (wishful zone) indicates an in-between mindset among migrants. That is, while migrants are resident in a particular host country, they are always wishing they were in their homeland. They wish to be in their homeland, and yet the people in their country of origin wish to migrate to the same foreign land they are living in. The wishful thinking zone results in an ongoing state of temporariness among migrants, even if they are granted full citizenship. They are forever engaged in an unrealistic view of

their original home, a mirage of home sweet home. They hold on to an illusory homeland that doesn't exist anymore, whether due to war, conflicts, or economic turmoil. Such people sometimes find themselves in a perpetual state of unhappiness, ungratefulness, and depression. These people are reminiscent of the prophet Jeremiah's letter to the exiles in Babylon in which he charged the Israelites to build houses and live in the cities, plant gardens and eat the produce (Jeremiah 29:5). Stated differently, Jeremiah was telling the exiles to realize that they would be in Babylon for a long time if not permanently, hence they should change their mindset. Thus, constant thoughts and memories of one's homeland makes one unable to cope in a foreign land.

Zone D (eschatological home zone) represents a progressive and constructive mindset that emerges from a pneumatological state of being, a state of spirituality where home is both a state of being (realized eschatology) and an anticipated 'still to come' home or place (unrealized eschatology). People's actual home and citizenship (Philippians 3:20) are found in the place of dwelling with Christ (John 14:1–4) in heaven (Revelations 21:3). However, home is here and now by virtue of union with Christ (realized eschatology); it is not necessarily geographical or only in the future. In this sense, as indicated above, both host country people and migrants are strangers on a migrating journey to their real home (unrealized eschatology). They are *homo viator*, pilgrims, people on their way towards a final home. This mindset challenges individuals to be in a continuous state of transformation and re-imagining of what it means to live in a global village where migrants are a key part of that life. It helps people to redefine and explore new approaches to being human in the global village.

Zone D enables one to be flexible in handling life in a state of flux, where people such as migrants find themselves in in-between situations. The realization that humans are *homo viator* evokes gratitude in a person. To the migrant, gratitude arises, among other things, from appreciating provisions in a foreign country, and for the host, the peace enjoyed in the host country should also arouse gratitude. Therefore, Louw rightly states that this calls for a compassion motif as an empowering category in the way that the citizens of a country should view the migrants in their nation.<sup>33</sup> This should result in mercy, empathy, love, and the embracing of other people.<sup>34</sup> Operating in zone D leads to the establishment of contextual churches (operative ecclesiology). This challenges migrants to shift from separate

churches and enclave communities to integrated churches. Similarly, exclusive churches of host communities are challenged to integrate migrants. Operative ecclesiology entails establishing churches that respond to concrete contexts of people's lives, such as migration. This transcends narrow denominational traditions and dogmatic confessions in a way that responds to communal life systems. In this way, theology imparts life and well-being. Pastoral care and ecclesiological care become life care. This makes people face and cope with practical life challenges by drawing from the theological and spiritual 'well' and also develop new imagination that leads to exploring new options of being human within complex situations.

### CONCLUSION

Pastoral care of migrants is not a straight-forward ministry. Pastoral care provided to migrants should incorporate a strong congregational ministry. In such cases, a ministry of individual care should be supplemented by a systemic approach (i.e. congregational enrichment). Individual migrants who are trapped in a life in-between need to be understood as 'human documents' within their struggles, and yet the notion of the human document should be supplemented by the notion of the 'human web'.<sup>35</sup> Also, pastoral interventions should not only target host churches or communities but also focus on migrants themselves to change their attitudes towards the host people as well as their perceptions of themselves. The ministry entails sacrifice and disturbance of people's comfort. It's a ministry of discomfort, both for the migrant and for host individuals. And in the discomfort emerges healing and deep understanding of our differences and our humanity. The Christian virtue of unconditional love is enacted. In this process, compassion and empathy should remain the undergirding principles that challenge people to action and the embracing of the other. Miller-McLemore insightfully advises that the three major shifts in present times of pastoral theology to public theology, congregational studies, and decolonial issues only point to different strategies of pastoral care. In this shift, one fundamental aspect of the discipline of pastoral care, empathy, which she calls its trademark, remains constant.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, empathy is the undergirding attitude and skill required to effectively provide care within complex situations such as migration.

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