

# ***The Lived Experiences of Filipino Pastors in Online Ministry Amidst COVID-19 Pandemic: A Phenomenological Study***

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## **Abstract**

A ministry is not a job but a privilege. Many researchers have been interested in identifying the concept and significance of church ministry in pastors' lives. It has been widespread since the beginning of Christianity throughout the whole world. Thus, this study aims to explore Filipino pastors' lived experiences in the Christian online ministry during the pandemic, specifically: (1) to describe the lived experiences on their online ministry; (2) to describe the different challenges on their online church ministry; and (3) to describe their coping mechanisms and attitude towards shepherding the community. Utilizing the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the study findings are the following: (1) Pastors are mostly challenged by emotional, mental, and physical problems due to isolation and the online ministry's weight. They experienced much stress, exhaustion, loneliness, depression, anxieties, and fear. (2) Most of the pastors are challenged by slow internet access and limitations of assistive gadgets and other technologies. Most of them struggled to preach the Word through online meetings and live-streams and experienced a lack of materials and equipment for the online ministry. (3) Pastors need healthy social and financial support. (4) Most pastors gained positive and new experiences in the online ministry.

Keywords: *Filipino Pastors, Online Ministry, Christian Pastors, COVID-19*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

A ministry is not a job but a privilege. Many researchers have been interested in identifying the concept and significance of church ministry in pastors' lives. It has been widespread since the beginning of Christianity throughout the whole world. According to Lee's (2010) previous study, the internet has dramatically dominated every aspect of people's lives in the twenty-first century. It has brought together various communities and groups on the online platform, overcoming time, space, and cultural obstacles. In addition to the author's information, churches are unexempted. They are taking the initiative of those at the early stage, enjoying the benefits of their rapid response to the new trend. According to Hazell (2019), church participation is diminishing, in the traditional sense, thereby significantly impacting conventional forms of Christianity ministry. Before, the Traditional Service Ministry (2020) defines direct conventional worship services that primarily emphasized singing hymns and enjoying the more pensive and reflective time of silent prayers and meditation together. But today, as generations change, churches are searching for means to change with them, and the allure of communicating online rather than the direct traditional way has become too familiar for church leadership to

disregard (Conrad, 2019). In addition to Conrad's statement, churches need a way to include individuals who are physically unable to attend traditional services, more significantly because of sickness, injury, or distance.

Including the printed materials at the church, the brochures being distributed, and displaying posters to engage people to join the church community are useful ways to create value by bringing people together at the church before. It is doubtful that the world would return to a period in which formative information was absorbed mainly by written text, especially when the printing press' age is already gone (Dandridge, 2019). Historically, it has primarily been by tradition and word-of-mouth the way churches have extended their influence (Small, 2020). Now with interactive talk, devoted online pastors, and a web ministry willing to serve their cyber-congregation, today's online churches perceive the internet as a campus all of its own (Conrad, 2019). According to Shellnutt (2020), the technology was taken advantage of by churches across traditions and met via YouTube, Facebook Live, Zoom, and outlets like Church Online, which in the past days saw 8,800 new congregations connect. The author indicated this as a free platform that adds a typical video stream to church-specific functionality so congregants can engage in gospel discussions. Leaders can also interact with people who need prayer through this.

As the community's online ministry grows, the Philippines does include affecting millions of citizens worldwide because of its rapid reach. Pastors and the church are becoming more active and recognizable, and they aim to make the Gospel heard even in a digital way. According to Flores (2019), based on the Philippine Trust Index (PTI) conducted by EON Party, the church and academia are the most trusted by Filipinos. Despite the 9.7 percent who mistrust the organization, the churches still obtained the highest trust levels from Filipinos online at 86 percent (Flores, 2019). Encountering the current ministry in this modern era and how it works through the pastors and other evangelicals ignited the researchers to make people, especially the Filipinos, understand the context better. For this reason, the researchers chose this particular study to give light to the lived experiences of pastors in online ministry, specifically in the Philippines.

New controversies in recent years, such as the 2019 novel coronavirus or the COVID-19 pandemic, are now escalating. One of the longest lockdowns globally has been imposed by the Philippine government, especially in Metro Manila and neighboring Luzon provinces. Quarantine procedures are implemented heavily to stem the widespread epidemic, like having online or live-streamed worship services instead (Rappler, 2020). The country is embittered and undergoes unprecedented quarantine, seclusion, and irresolution; analysts have predicted a nationwide psychological health crisis. The National Center for Mental Health reported a spike in Filipinos with psychological health issues because of the pandemic in June (Rappler, 2020). Attempts to provide fellow believers with advice and encouragement to relieve their fear and help save them from self-destruction adds to pastors' responsibilities in ministry (Rappler, 2020). In general, pastors and other leaders are motivated by a sense of responsibility to answer calls for help. In this case, research indicates that they barely make time for themselves in many situations and suffer from higher rates of depression, obesity, high blood pressure, and burnout (National Public Radio [NPR], 2010). Pastors' stress today is massive and supported by the 2013 Schaeffer Institute, whose study estimates that 1,700 pastors quit the ministry each month, citing depression, burnout, or being overworked as the primary reasons. Ninety percent of the pastors reported working 55 up to 70 hours a week, and 50 percent feel incapable of satisfying the workloads (Fickel, n. d.).

With the entire state shuttered, most of the pastors are still thankful for the technology for making it possible for online services. As Yun (2020) stated, reruns are accessible for those distant, and the internet indeed brought comfort to many pastors to connect with their flocks. A great example is the launching of Bible Study among Philippine senators, including Manny Pacquiao, and outreach online to touch millions of people (Haywood, 2020). However, indicated that technology could bring significant collateral damage, and every time a pastor talks, preach, teach, tweets, blogs, or comments, he may be at risk of offending someone seriously (Pavlovitz, 2013). The content of any readable post and mainly words are plenty considered the church's voice. It highlights the importance of setting boundaries and safety practices, like not allotting conversation alone with youth and not having a non-public chat on Facebook or any other social media accounts (MinistryTech, 2018). However, the task is to ensure that each sentence is correct theologically and logically and keeping the content informative and encouraging (Yun, 2020).

Another study indicated that church leaders use technology to perform more effectively and facilitate contacts with church members (Cai, 2016). The author mentioned that over 200 dedicated software platforms in church help leaders handle activities and automate them. However, most of the pastors and administrators do not understand how to adapt the media technologies today effectively, thus lacking a vision of appropriately adapting those resources for ministry delivery (Wellington, 2017). It had been a challenging process for pastors who have not been video editors, experiencing failures in audio, poor lightings, buffering video streamed into many homes, and no other alternative existed (Jackson, 2020). Correspondingly, there are arguments, such as the church is not "tech-savvy" and lacks effective community internet services, so there is no reason for any pastors to attempt moving the church within the digital age (Jackson, 2020).

Several studies have been conducted on the perspective of pastors and the factors closely associated with them. However, these studies remain minimal and inadequate to ensure pastors' overall lived experiences, primarily Filipino pastors, with the varying dynamics within the different life contexts of pastors and the ministries. This study sought to ascertain those existing gaps and produce results by determining Filipino pastors' positive experiences and online ministry's challenges. The researchers also aim to define the current state of the church ministry online in terms of Filipino pastors' leadership, outreach, and discipleship and consider the online platforms they implemented during this period of the global pandemic and their perspectives on ministry in a digital age.

This study aims to contribute to the developing body of literature on pastoral psychology, evolving in the Philippines and worldwide. This research can also improve online ministry theories, structures, and further studies that are responsive to our particular social and cultural context through Filipino pastors' experiences. Finally, this research can be an essential resource for the growth of church congregations and those concerned with the pastors' psychological well-being or welfare, providing them with support and benefits amidst pandemic.

### **1.1 Research Questions**

This study aims to explore Filipino pastors' lived experiences in the Christian online ministry during the pandemic. Specifically, this sought to answer to the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of the respondents on their online ministry?
2. What are the respondents' different challenges on their online church ministry, and why do they consider those challenges?



3. What are the coping mechanisms of the respondents and their attitude towards shepherding the community?

## **2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **2.1 *The Lived Experiences of Pastors***

In an individual's heart, there is a void that can only be filled by God, but few understand the true meaning of it. Over the years, we often heard the statement "obedience to the call" but lack understanding of why certain people should obey that calling. According to Tkach (n. d.), it is a privilege, blessing, and obligation to be called by God. To serve as a pastor is a call that comes to various people in various forms, sometimes quietly over some time, sometimes abruptly and unexpectedly. An example is Paul on the road to Damascus in Acts 26:12-14 (Tkach, n. d.). As defined by Prime and Begg (2013), Christian pastors hold the significant center of people obligation in all creation. They are the ones preaching the Word, instructing the truth to God's people, leading individuals to reverence and worship, tending the flock as mindful shepherds, and activates the church for Christian ministrations and witness. The authors also mentioned that pastors' ministry is not merely a job, but the highest calling in Christian service, a vocation of answering a specific call from above.

According to Ministry Magazine (2017), two views can be considered relatively extreme regarding the ministry's divine call. One is a liberal view that attempts to deny the divine call's existence and considers embracing the full-time ministry as a professional's choice rather than a divine call. Another is mystical, where the preacher hears voices and sees literal visions. But, since ministry requires both the divine call and human stewardship, neither of these views justify the call to ministry. There include four fundamentals for a call to full-time ministry. First is the general or the public invitation where everyone is encouraged to take up Christ's cross and start on a life of evangelism, hearing and doing God's Word of repentance, faith, and so on. The second is the secret call or personal conviction. There is an inner conviction or encounter whereby an individual feels specifically summoned or encouraged by God to take full-time ministry work by himself or herself. The third is the providential call or the assurance that comes in all situations by the spiritual providence of one's life and equipping an individual with the skills necessary for exercising the office. Last is the ecclesiastical call or the invitation given by an agency of congregation to a person to participate in full-time ministry. Among these four fundamentals, the key guiding principle is that any reasonable idea of what makes up a call to ministry should understand the means for adequately ordering all these and their relationship (Ministry Magazine, 2017).

Aside from being called by God, to have its purpose for doing so is also expected. According to Croft (n. d.), it is the only way for pastors to escape life's many distractions and stay steadfast throughout their lives. The calling is not to merely manage services for the masses nor is doing whatever required to satisfy everyone in the congregation. On behalf of the Chief Shepherd, the real purpose for the divine calling of pastors is to humbly, freely, eagerly shepherd the souls of God's people. This context was the call for those in Peter's day, which led the local church, and it is the same call for the busy pastors of the twenty-first century (Croft, n. d.).

In the perspective of Challies (2017), there are things that the Bible says regarding pastors' duties with the various practical necessities of the flock. Defending the congregation is the primary obligation of pastors. The Holy Spirit has made them the overseers and protects them by keeping them away from dishonoring actions to God and calls them toward activities that are pleasing to Him. Second, the pastor cares for the flock by nourishing them with the spiritual

drink and food, which is the Word of God. Third, they lead the congregation, so they would not wander and meander out of security and in all kinds of danger. Lastly, when the people of God are anxious or uncertain, pastors are to care for them, bringing solace, wisdom, and offer prayer (Challies, 2017). These are not just about the job, but the heart of a shepherd to possess these ministry characteristics.

A ministry is a way for the church and society to be served (Palmbly, n. d.). Serving as a pastor is the most well-known form of ministry, and there are many other ministry opportunities for people. To get active in a church group and improve the faith, people can use talents and interests to find a form of ministry that suits their personality (Palmbly, n. d.). One of those popular ministries is the online ministry. It is any and every way that the church can or may meet members, tourists, seekers, and leaders through a range of web and internet technology resources (Resource UMC, n. d.).

According to Digital Evangelism (2018), there are reasons why churches need online ministry. Primarily, half of the population in the world is already online. At this present time, 3.8 billion and more is the number of people who have internet access. This fact means that churches have access to people all over the world when online. It doesn't mean it's easy to meet all of those individuals. Yet, because of the internet, the world is a much smaller place. The mission to "go into the whole world" given to every church, and wherever people are, there are efforts to make God's presence known. In terms of discipleship, the online ministry provides a chance for the whole church to get involved. There is a private screen for most of the people in the church. At least one device is accessible to nearly everybody. It could be an iPad, smartphone, tablet, laptop, or desktop, and people have a chance to share Christ every time the members of the church open or turn on their devices.

Not everyone can be on a mission trip abroad, be a volunteer in a shelter, or preach an evangelistic series, but God's love is still possible to be shared online. Even by just typing and having connections online can share Christ's effect on one's life. The last one, humans resort to online websites, such as Google, for answers. Many questions may occur to one's mind, whether God is real or not, what ministry is, etc. Queries are answered by simply typing in the search box. However, the answers do not appear magically, for it has to be published online. In connection to this, churches can provide solutions to problems people face with an online ministry (Digital Evangelism, 2018).

On how the online ministry works, the primary aim to start is the value of using technology to reach a broad spectrum of people, Christians and non-Christians (ChurchPad, 2020). Online, there exist billions of people; for this digital age is an excellent tool for evangelism. A perfect way to address the members' needs unable to attend services and significantly improve churches' future outreach is having sermons accessible online (Ankers, 2015). The internet will disperse the Word of the church into the world and cross unthinkable boundaries. According to Ankers (2015), online ministry commonly works through audio or video and streaming. To record a sermon can be as complicated as using a soundboard, microphone, and sound technician, or as simple as putting a digital recorder or smartphone near the speaker. It's fast and straightforward to use a digital recorder with a USB connector or mobile phone. Still, whatever method used there is, the recording is made sure that it is clear and loud to be heard by those with different hearing abilities. Uploading the record to a website that hosts the files is next once there is a satisfactory recording of the sermon or letter. This website can be the church's very own website or an alternative website that works in audio file hosting. Contacting the church's web host is to see if hosting the audio files on the website will increase monthly

payments or fees. If interested in hosting audio files somewhere outside of the website, trying out one of the sites mentioned in the resources section will do. After deciding on the hosting of the audio files, providing links on the website will take place. People should be able to use a phone, tablet, or personal media player to quickly download or stream the sermons (Ankers, 2015).

Aside from using audio, people can either view the sermon live or choose an archived speech on their phone, tablet, or video streaming device to watch. This medium could make individuals feel like they are more in contact with the church, as they can see who is communicating. Some additional equipment is required to create a professional-looking video. Stuff like HD cameras or a good webcam, computers for streaming, audio equipment, a secure internet connection, and streaming service is needed. Streaming video is the right choice for making people feel like they're attending services by watching them at the same time it is happening. Considering someone who can link the video and audio to a computer and connect the computer to the provider of streaming services is required. It could be a cheaper way to use a newer smartphone as the camera, then another smartphone near the speaker to capture the sound to record the video and put it online. Someone who knows how to use software for video editing and someone who has experience working together to match audio and video, it is also a helpful way to manage. These are just a few ways one can put ministry out there on the internet. Planning and a little bit of tech, one can offer members the chance to participate in the church ministry from the comfort of home, in the car, or while working out (Ankers, 2015).

Advances in digital technology provide the church with ministry resources that have not been possible with conventional print media and its associated costs and limited distribution (Simpson, 2010). It is possible to create a digital presence on today's World Wide Web practically for free and make the church available to a global audience.

Many platforms emerged and are still developing in this modern, digital period. One is a Facebook live stream or the watch party. This platform is common among those live broadcasting from a church building before, with a small team leading usual worship (Paul, 2020). More churches prefer Facebook Live than ever, especially with the current COVID-19's social distancing edict (Dougherty, 2020). According to Dougherty (2020), Facebook Live provides a reliable way to put a coronavirus contingency plan in place for churches.

As stated in a research article conducted by Brubaker and Haigh (2017) on the religious experience, the uses and gratification of faith-based content, there are 1.79 billion monthly active users and an average of 1.18 billion regular active users based on Facebook Newsroom in 2016. To determine their study's answers, they figured out the uses and gratification, motivations, religiosity, frequency, and intensity of Facebook users to engage in faith-based content. They resort to survey methodology to answer their research questions (Brubaker & Haigh, 2017). They concluded that Facebook is an expressive platform where users can both offer and receive spiritual encouragement, express opinions, and educate others about Christian traditions and viewpoints while receiving spiritual advice, religious services, and entertainment at the same time (Brubaker & Haigh, 2017). The latest results indicate that Facebook is an expressive medium that offers an outlet from which online religious needs and aspirations are shared and met. The results reveal the relationship between belief, spirituality, and Facebook, demonstrating the reciprocal and mutually beneficial partnership Facebook enables. Being more religious influences outreach and giving support that preserves strong relationships, faith-based relations that allow users to fulfill needs that result in tangible and intangible benefits (Brubaker & Haigh, 2017).



Another platform used in online ministry is YouTube. According to Clifford (2018), it is an excellent operation. With YouTube, hosting many videos for free, and even the usage of Google's live-streamed servers is possible. A missionary concern for YouTube is that the primary place where millennials and Gen-Z go for utilizing the content is their site (Thompson, 2020). Also, it offers much simpler on-ramps to discover the live-stream for non-Christians. YouTube's live-stream operation enhances the features (Clifford, 2018). Organizing and embedding a live-stream, week-in, and week-out are becoming more superficial, but at the same time, other aspects are getting worse too. For most churches, songs available for monetization are not a big deal but struggle when YouTube does not permit the music, especially in a country where live-stream is making an effect. Even if there is a right to manage an upload, a chance for the video to vanish, be muted, or the emergence of copyright assault is possible (Clifford, 2018).

Twitter is one of the leading and most significant social networks, with more than 335 million monthly users (Tate, 2019). There are 500 million tweets every day, and since 2016, the number of daily users has been growing. For any form of organization, including churches, Twitter has many easy and efficient resources. It is a great way to inspire the social media audience and spread God's Word and the church through the social media reach by tweeting inspiring quotes or Bible verses, adding a way to share them. Such tweets tend to acquire more engagement and retweets than other posts (Tate, 2019).

In the journal article of Horner (2014) on how Christian leaders interact with Twitter, the conclusion is that pastors were most concerned with getting across Christianity's fundamental message while adapting strategies that include the modern medium of Twitter. To support the research, it was through the study of 30 diverse leaders' tweets and numerous blog posts, articles, and interviews detailing various approaches to Twitter and other social media. Pastors and other Christian leaders seem to be hesitant to change their message. However, they are more than willing to adjust to social media's rise to reach people with convictions, as seen by the 30 leaders studied. There were 9,100 tweets per second and 222 million users who did not tweet but watched others tweet, as of July 2013, of the 241 million monthly active users. Considering the dates in joining Twitter, the 30 leaders are not distant behind the times. Rick Warren joined in the earliest April 2007, on May 2012 was Kevin DeYoung, and 23 joined from May 2008 to June 2009 (Horner, 2014).

According to Conner (2014), Instagram has proven to be a significant social media player and a handy ministry platform. Living in a visual community, Instagram is a perfect way to share churches' stories beyond conventional text posts. Instagram has expanded to include more than 300 million active monthly users since its launch in 2010, including celebrities, professional athletes, brands, and even churches (Lundy, 2015). The effects, filters, and borders of Instagram boost images and make them more visually appealing. These things promote user engagement, and individuals who follow the church's account may comment on the pictures. Instagram is also used to direct traffic to the website of the church. It includes the URL in the church website's photo and the explanation of the picture so that people can acquire information about service times and locations. Also, a perfect way to aggregate related images is via hashtags. If a significant event or sermon series is hosted by the church, creating a hashtag will do. Once the Instagram users search the photo or videos with other images or videos tagged with that hashtag, more people can see posts with relevant hashtags (Lundy, 2015).

This year, on social media, one of the hottest trends is TikTok. It derives its origins from Musical.ly, a social media software that allows users to make 15-60 second videos as a lip-sync style video with either original audio or current audio (Reed, 2019). TikTok is a website with 1.2

billion downloads and 500 million active users. Those churches who choose to jump on the TikTok bandwagon, in a generation that is looking for answers, will expand the faith scope but possibly will not penetrate a traditional church's doors. An increasing amount of Christian content is present. Contents may vary from anyone sharing an inspirational word or scripture to rewriting popular secular songs based on a Christ-centered way (Reed, 2019).

Besides these online ministry platforms, there are still more to explore, like Zoom, WordPress, and YouVersion. According to Paul (2020), Zoom is a video conferencing community app, which allows everyone to see everyone else. When one person leads the conversation or event, people may opt to mute their sound. This platform works for congregations of up to 100 members, and in larger churches, it was a standard option for smaller communities and small groups. WordPress creates a church website and an essential platform for advocating the ministry (Vaters, 2019). It has a wide selection of templates and set up a website without difficulty. YouVersion has many resources to help the congregation sustain God's Word at the core of the church's life. A daily devotional comes with a graphic ready for social media to send out to church members daily. To study together for a week, a month, or any other time, there is also a biblical devotional that church members can learn together. The sermon notes are uploaded too for everyone to benefit from them (Vaters, 2019).

Often, it becomes an opportunity to mourn when pastors gather to discuss what is happening in the ministry (Wilson & Martin, 2020). It may be exhausting, frustrating, and disappointing, but it can be enormously rewarding as well. According to Barna (2015), as the world is continuously changing, leading to a more digital era, pastors and other church leaders are not exempted from significant internet use over the past 15 years. They have come to accept it as an essential tool for ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

According to Jones (2020), online pastors experience preparing weekly online services alongside worship, production, and stage teams. Physical locations are where most weekend preparation teams could understand conducting more efficient worship services. Online pastors experience multiplying themselves through hiring and educating online volunteers, such as hosts for engaging and following-up viewers and online community leaders to run other online groups. Another critical aspect of an online pastor's lived experience is determining, encountering, and engaging the individuals watching online. They are to connect people to the church's online discipleship pathway. A productive online pastor experiences portraying liaison by allowing others to see how the online ministry can assist the church. Pastors even research ways for the advancements and development of the online church (Jones, 2020).

A study by Crumpton (2018) claimed that the church's online pastor performs weekly posting, written blogs, and vlogs. With systematic spiritual material, there are weekly devotional messages. The online pastor makes a rundown of the sermon viewed by the online congregation every Sunday immediately after the service. And this pastor is the point of contact, as the online congregants reach for other services, such as generosity, grief, weddings, etc. This pastor has the responsibility in all delegated areas, as the division of duties among all the associate pastors occurs. Other than that of the lead pastor, this online pastor becomes the face with which the online congregation is familiar.

Gjelten (2020) stated that despite the pandemic and changes, it still gives way to pastors to intensify efforts and concentrate on communicating with people. Every couple of weeks, they check on every older person in the church to see what they need and how they can help. So, there are ties that are hopefully stronger now than they were before.



The Philippines prides itself on being happy and pleasant, tempting the churches with shallow, comfortable solutions (Litonjua, 2016). But churches are gaining modest, careful pastors who are seriously instructing their people in the joy of the Lord. The seeker-sensitive churches are one of those that have been emerged, especially around Manila. Church services are designed primarily for non-Christians, and the primary purpose is conversion. One minister clarified that a church needs to keep the sermons deliberately short, appropriate, and realistic. To keep the people involved, these seeker-sensitive churches are particularly vigilant, never to offend the non-Christians. Besides, the logical ways of rounding out their services with video clips, theatrics, and contemporary music, especially among the younger generations, have gained popularity. According to Litonjua (2016), their church has built strong relationships with pastors over the past few years, who welcome training and mentorship. These pastors preach the Word confidently and spread the Gospel in their communities to understand the need for more training and equipment. Despite having no formal biblical training, many of them are already leading growing congregations and planting churches zealously. They take every opportunity to engage in any free churches offering conferences or equipping classes that are willing to invest in them (Litonjua, 2016).

In Every Nation Philippines, churches, leaders, and ministries continue to proclaim and demonstrate God's Word (Foliente, 2020). There are individuals rescued, reached out, and growing profoundly in their relationship with Christ. Online, relational discipleship is also active and healthy. People worldwide meet online with their Victory groups and leader, start new Victory groups with relatives and friends, do One-2-One, worship God, hear His Word weekly, pray for each other, and intercede for the nation. They get linked to a church community, hang out in a smaller online group after the service, engage in Victory Weekend and Purple Book classes, and soon ready to minister too. Online, discipleship is also rising among children. In the Philippines, churches and leaders have demonstrated the Gospel via #GoodNews2020 to impacted families, stranded students, Overseas Filipino Workers, and frontline workers in forty provinces. Leaders continue to fund and give scholarships to more than 600 talented and worthy underprivileged youth through the Real Life Foundation. With monetary support, relief products, and coaching, the scholars and their families are taken care of by the Victory churches; they have launched ten new centers this year and will have 350 scholars. Leaders remain committed to church planting, campus outreach, and world missions no matter what exists (Foliente, 2020).

## **2.2 Challenges in Online Ministry**

According to Earls (2020), some believe that the pandemic brings long-term changes and challenges, altering the church for months or years to come. Eight percent of the churches claim that there is pressure to delete a ministry. Overall, two percent of pastors claim they cut their ministry outreach; two percent got rid of the ministry of children. Two percent cease Sunday school or small groups, one percent stopped the students' ministry, and one percent delete other hours of service such as Wednesday and Sunday nights (Earls, 2020).

Live-streaming services were only an alternative for congregations before COVID-19 but have now been mandatory for church survival since the beginning of the pandemic (Cook, 2020). From accustoming to merely trying to collect tithes and offerings, live-streaming affects church leaders' persuasive methods. Through the ministry, they must ask the online audience to assist the church's non-profit efforts and care about the needs of those on staff (Cook, 2020). Specifically, in the United States, the latest coronavirus is painfully pushing on the church's soft underbelly, their finances (Boorstein, 2020). According to the author, to the 2018-2019 National

Congregations Survey, about a third of all the congregations have no savings. The study found that only 20 percent are streaming services, and 48 percent are willing to receive donations online, making it more challenging to serve the faithful and collect donations. According to the survey conducted by the Lutheran World Federation (2020), a lack of internet access, electricity, online services, and smartphones are present, leading to a disconnection from the congregation. Church members cannot afford the internet or cell phone service in some regions because money is now allotted more for food. It was difficult for pastors to keep in touch with the elderly and people living in remote and rural areas with mandated physical distance. As church members are heavily affected by the loss of livelihoods, churches also face financial uncertainty.

According to Campbell (2020), A survey published at the end of March of 1,500 church leaders in the United States showed that 41 percent are grappling with change's technical side. According to Robbins (2020), two standard demographics are a tremendous challenge for churches and leaders. One is the young tech-savvy individuals that are more likely to try new things but less interested in the church's traditional version, and the older ones that are more difficult to reach. While recent technological innovations naturally appeal to more than one younger congregation, older audiences may also be alienated (Slingshot Group, 2016). It can lead to significant losses if not considered this thing. It is sure to miss out on the wisdom, knowledge, and experience of older generations has to bring to the church. According to Villarreal (2020), when churches discuss switching to digital services, pastors must not neglect those in their church who can't afford technology or lack access to it and are not tech-savvy.

Thirty-five percent of church leaders believe that churches are too dependent on technology (Conrad, 2017). According to Tyndale University College and Seminary survey in 2011, 13.6 percent believe that there are more critical things to concentrate on than technology, and 11.5 percent believe that technology distracts individuals from worship. Technology may cause problems with communication, both inside and outside the church. Incorrect use can severely detract from service aspects such as prayer and waning focus levels regarding church services. Social media can harm churches and widely publicizing errors when people instantly post impressions and thoughts to their social media accounts. This issue can lead to disseminating false doctrine and tattle and distortion of the truth (Conrad, 2017). According to Vogels et al. (2020), some have said that technology produces more issues than it addresses. Some have said that emerging fears about the effects of digital life are likely to be at least somewhat mitigated as humans adapt. Some specified that any solutions could generate a new set of problems. Others stated that the use and misuse of emerging technology by humans is causing social damage that is unlikely to be overcome.

In the Philippines, Dr. Bautista stated that it is a challenge for leaders to know how to build awareness of mental well-being and inform members about the importance of mental health in their church's online practices (Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches [PCEC], 2020). Organizing members to be mental health workers is a challenge too. It is a challenge to incorporate the Gospel in solving mental health concerns and create an outlet of lament for those dealing with emotional problems. As ministry front-liners in the Philippines, leaders can factually view how the landscape of pastoral ministry is shifting (Asian Access, 2020). The health pandemic leads to an end of the traditional church model's age, and it is fast being substituted by the house-church model. Challenged by the swiftly altering landscape, 40,000 small church pastors have had no salary for the past two months. To provide financial assistance to these pastors, the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches (PCEC) has implemented an "adopt-a-pastor" initiative. For the majority of church members, there is little or no access to a

secure internet link. One pastor-friend testified that over 50 percent had no access to the internet in his church of 1,500 members in Metro Manila. They use pre-paid information, which is very limited and depends on how much information they have purchased. The vast majority of pastors have scant social media technology expertise, far less any live-streaming experience in their preaching or church worship services. The vast majority of churches pay monthly rentals that can fit less than 80 individuals at a time. But significantly, it drops to 20 people per operation with the physical-distancing steps, making it a massive mental and unfair burden to retain the land (Asian Access, 2020).

According to Reyes (2012), pastors in the Philippines' urban locale face many challenges, starting with the planning and delivering sermons. They think of the various groups of people in their congregations as they research and plan for their weekly sermons. Pastors generally ponder how they can clearly express the message and contextualize it to their conditions before they preach. For most pastors who do not have the opportunity of going through formal seminary training, a challenge to conquer is to exegete challenging Bible passages. Another obstacle is finding time to research, together with their obligations, families, and churches' demand for their time. Every week the urban pastor serves a variety of different people. Metro Manila's churches are rich and poor, single and married, old and young. In terms of contextualization and implementation of God's Word, it is difficult to strike a balance. In short, urban pastors are facing a two-sided challenge: the textual challenge and the contextual challenge (Reyes, 2012).

Facing such challenges could lead to an extra challenge of experiencing pastoral burnouts and stresses. Pastors are experiencing those by being on call 24/7, criticisms, poor dispute resolution skills, and trying to fix everybody's problems. It also includes the inability to assign tasks, poor internet connection, and not prepared for ministry in all aspects. Even the limited out-of-church social life is considering a reason (Fickel, n. d.). Symptoms involve feeling exhausted, inadequate, isolated, less empathy, insomnia, relational problems and withdrawal, anxiety and depression, and more. Recent figures indicate that some 1,500 pastors leave the ministry each month (Billy Graham Evangelistic Association [BGEA], 2016). Around half of them feel unable to fulfill the ministry's demands, 70 percent say they have no close friends they can trust, and 80 percent say the church ministry negatively impacts their family. In the mainstream media, several Christian ministry books suggest that burnout in ministry is a fact for many, such as Wayne Cordeiro's *Leading on Empty: Refilling Your Tank and Renewing Your Passion* in 2009, 2003's *Pastors at Greater Risk* by H. B. London, Jr. and Neil Wiseman, and Clay Werner's *On the Brink: Grace for the Burned-Out Pastor* in 2014 (Burnette, 2016). These and other books encourage pastors, those working in service, and their families, and pastors who have fought with burnout and fatigue have written. Moreover, recognizing insecurities, low self-esteem, poor self-image is the start of seeking healing that will encourage oneself to conquer the "lids" of leadership in life that restrict effectiveness (Bergeron, 2017). One must be self-aware, not only of the talents and abilities but also of who the self is as a leader's "shadow side."

### **2.3 Coping Mechanisms of Pastors**

Mindfulness and Christian spirituality are helpful instruments for avoiding and dealing with burnout and compassion fatigue (Frederick et al., 2017). Since mindfulness and Christian spirituality are related to the management of personal achievement loss, emotional exhaustion, and depersonalization, Christian human services personnel who participate in these practices can stave off burnout and revitalize their work. Under the definitions of calling, apathy, and indifference, for Christians, a better way to conceptualize burnout and compassion exhaustion is



to accept them. Preventing and dealing with burnout in this way becomes a spiritual revitalization project, reconnecting with God's inspiring, living Spirit. The prayer services, regular study, and the prayer of concern are valuable instruments to do this.

The Philippines is facing perhaps the most massive and daunting challenge posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, affecting Filipinos physically and spiritually (World Vision Philippines, 2020). In helping people respond and cope with a crisis of this magnitude, the church could play an important role, considering the country to be the most Christian nation in Asia. In a recent webinar entitled *"The Role of the Church during the COVID-19 Pandemic"* organized by the World Vision last June 19, Rev. Umali and Rev. Father Emanuel Mijares discuss how the church can be a spiritual guide. A brochure entitled 'Gabay para sa faith leaders sa panahon ng COVID-19' (Guide for faith leaders at the time of COVID-19) was also published by the World Vision, which advocates the essential role of the church in helping its leaders, congregations, and communities cope with the crisis of COVID-19. Many churches resort to corporate worship that reminds them that there is power for being united. Even during their circumstances, they still chose to lift the name of God and worship. The online benefit worship concert called *"Songs of Hope"* was attended and sponsored by several churches last May 17. Christ Commission Fellowship (CCF) Exalt Worship, Favor Church, Living Word Churches, Union Church of Manila, Victory Worship, and Victory Christian Fellowship (VCF) Katipunan were among the church worship groups who joined the initiative (World Vision Philippines, 2020).

A journal article highlights the Philippines' religious sector initiatives (del Castillo et al., 2020). The Philippine church's contributions are illustrated in these sacred and moral interventions and play an essential role in assisting in public health crises. Studies have shown the significance of spirituality in health care, bringing peace and meaning to people. People, including leaders, struggling with mortality, coping, and recovery issues, are given foundational counseling and pastoral support online. In addition to these spiritually uplifting services, the church has also equipped health workers with personal protective equipment and face masks, initiated feeding programs for the needy, and opening their doors to the homeless to cope together amidst the crisis. According to Romero and Crisostomo (2020), Guevarra encouraged churches and spiritual leaders to offer guidance. Also, to advise their followers who suffer from depression because of the loss of jobs or livelihoods, fear about the possibility of coronavirus catching or dying, loneliness resulting from isolation, and hopelessness in returning to their everyday lives. The Caloocan church's social media ministry has strengthened its online presence to help provide pastoral care, such as through psycho-spiritual webinars and online counseling (Gomes, 2020).

Studies found that the most commonly used coping methods for stress are praying and reading the Bible, weeping, resting and sleeping, and talking to others (Edara, 2020). Religion and prayer are known to be resources used to cope (Edara, 2020). This coping style is mainly due to the deep and positive sense of spirituality of the Filipinos, which regards a person's strength. The author indicated that in van der Ham et al. (2014a, 2014b) studies, the participants further stressed family as an essential source of dealing with their issues (Edara, 2020). The participants clarified that engaging with their families saw them through tough times and gave them pleasure and happiness. Research subjects from Ujano Batanga in 2011 also stated that thinking about their relatives, engaging with them, and getting emotional support enabled them to go through tough times. When working, supportive friends, romantic partners, and other social networks often become supporting and coping links (Edara, 2020). In a study about pastors' management of stress in their work, Pastor Bill Westafer said that pastors at their churches with the extensive

length of service employed at least nine coping mechanisms and appeared better prepared to cope with the job's tension (The Courier, 2010). Westafer's study uncovered the five coping mechanisms most commonly discussed, including the following: ministry call, family support, meditation, relationships inside and outside the church, and retreats. Scripture reading, recreational reading, seeing a professional, exercise, taking a daily day off, and leadership training were other coping mechanisms. One participant in the study highlighted the value of coping efficiently and that self-care is paramount. It is the idea that if one doesn't take care of himself, then no one can take care of him. There are five ways of relaxation (Saddleback Church, 2017). This coping mechanism involves remembering one's worth to God, loving and being happy with what one has, restricting working days to six days a week, adapting values to what is necessary, and exchanging one's restlessness for the peace of God.

Another effective coping mechanism for most churches is adjusting to whatever needs development and changes due to the current pandemic. According to Schmidt (2020), every church needs a plan B. Long before it's even spring, most churches start preparing for Vacation Bible School programs. Some start collecting supplies right after Christmas, and as soon as the school year begins, some might even look at making plans for the summer ahead. According to the author, it is more than possible that the program managers already chosen a theme, opened registrations, lined up volunteers, and maybe even ordered supplies, even before the pandemic occurred. For both children and adults, summer programs are a significant highlight. Re-imagining how to plan and run stuff artistically, especially for a meaningful and unforgettable Vacation Bible School, makes the show go. However, considering the size and the desired number of the audience is necessary to perform the best methods.

Another thing to consider as a coping mechanism is apology and restitution. According to Goop (2018), there are five apology languages, and it includes the following: showing remorse, acceptance of liability, making restitution, sincere apology, and asking for forgiveness. Showing remorse means using the words "I'm sorry," but it is never appropriate to utter those words alone. If one only uses the word "sorry," one doesn't even admit that he knows what he has done wrong. Demonstrating regret means telling why he is apologizing. Accepting liability is what they consider to be a genuine apology because if one does not acknowledge his wrongdoing, he is not sincere in people's eyes. A third apology language is a restitution. The apology is pointless if one doesn't even attempt to repair the relationship and situation, and it will be a hard time to forgive him. Another is demonstrating a desire to change the act or behavior. The genuine apology leads a person to convey how badly he felt about what he did wrong and the desire not to do it again. Last is asking for forgiveness. However, there are some things to consider when dealing with the congregation. According to Exline (2014), it makes one happy to light up someone's day. In relationships, one aims for peace and harmony and considers others first before one's self. But then, pleasing people doesn't end here. According to the author's claim, there are lots of negative feelings hidden. Not only does a person want to satisfy individuals, but when he can't, he experiences excessive shame and anxiety. There's the fear of rejection; one stops the confrontation, avoidance to go through any trouble, and it can be downright frightening to get someone mad at him. In short, this coping strategy crosses a line from being merely kind and encouraging to being hampered by fears of interpersonal conflict. One accepts responsibility for the thoughts and responses of other people, trying desperately to keep everyone happy.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The research is a qualitative study, and the researchers used the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). In several qualitative research studies, the IPA approach analyzes and interprets the 'lived experiences' of individuals who have encountered similar or common phenomena. This approach is a participant-oriented approach that encourages the research participants to articulate themselves and their lived experience' stories as they see fit without distortion and indictment.

According to Alase (2017), the purpose of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is to carry out a detailed analysis that allows the articulation of experience, as far as possible, in its own words rather than following predefined category structures.

As it involves a detailed analysis of the respondent, the approach is phenomenological; it seeks to analyze the personal experience and concerns the perception or explanation of an entity or phenomenon by an individual rather than an attempt to make an objective assertion of the item or event itself.

### **3.1 Participants**

Likewise, with the phenomenological research methods, the number of participants may range between 2 and 25 in the IPA approach. Meaning, there are only limited sample sizes. The choice of these participants reflects and exemplifies the homogeneity that occurs within the sample pool of participants. In a phenomenological approach, the researchers ask the participants to remember, reflect on their lives, and explain and interpret these recollections. The study's purpose is to gain a comprehensive, holistic, and more in-depth understanding of the respondents' lived experiences.

The research participants have encompassed the Filipino pastors from the Province of Bulacan, Quezon City, Valenzuela City, Caloocan City, and General Santos City. Specifically, these participants are categorically males and those who have experienced the online ministry. Due to the limited sample sizes, the researchers selected only nine (9) respondents from the Filipino pastors' community, using the purposive sampling technique. Utilizing this sampling technique, the researchers focused on their judgment to identify and select participants to contribute to the study. The researchers ensured the availability and willingness to engage and the respondents' capacity to convey experiences and views in a coherent, expressive, and reflective way. These means were noted by Bernard (2002) and Spradley (1979) as essential to expertise and experience (Palinkas et al., 2015).

### **3.2 Instrument**

The study used the Qualitative interview or the in-depth interview. Considering that this interview is a semi-structured interview, the researchers utilized an interview guide to stimulate accurate and efficient data collection. The interview guide questions have been checked through the validation process to verify their reliability. These questions include the main question and several similar questions related to the central question, further improved by the interview guide's initial testing. The questions are open-ended, asked by the researchers that do not include options for answering them. These questions are more demanding for participants because they encourage participants to respond with their own words, phrases, or sentences. Furthermore, the in-depth interviews were done only once with individuals, though a group will do. Typically, every interview lasted from 30 minutes to more than an hour.

### **3.3 Procedures**



The study has taken effective procedures to come up with successful data collection. The primary process was to ensure the research design and instruments' approval or validation, the interview guide questionnaires. After the validation process, the researchers then asked for permission to conduct the study. Considering the respondents' availability and confirmation to engage in the research, the researchers scheduled each respondent based on their preferred time and date. Beforehand, the researchers implemented the initial testing of the questionnaires before proceeding to the next interviewees. The one-by-one interview process assured the respondents of confidentiality and made them feel at ease answering the prepared questions and sharing their stories.

The researchers utilized social media via messenger calls and video calls to distribute research instruments or questionnaires. This manner became more convenient and accessible to gather essential data for the study, despite the current pandemic and difficulty in propinquity. Moreover, because of some limitations upon using the said social media platform, the researchers used mobile phones to record the conversations. After that, the researchers proceeded to transcribe interviews and interpreted the texts many times to develop accurate and essential points needed from the respondents' viewpoints and shared experiences. These steps allowed the researchers to gather data regarding the Filipino pastors' lived experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms.

#### 4. RESULTS

The summary of the respondents' demographic characteristics involved in the study is shown in Table 1. The selected nine (9) pastors residing in the Province of Bulacan, Quezon City, Valenzuela City, Caloocan City, and General Santos City completed the study. Due to the advent of the global pandemic, COVID-19, the location varies, contributing to the researchers' online data collection. The ages of the respondents were between twenty (20) and fifty (50) years old. For the years of service at church, most of the pastors are currently serving six to more than eight years now. Two pastors are just newbies in service, and the same number of two is currently serving two to five years.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants**

Variable	Frequency
Age	
20 – 30	5
31 – 40	3
41 – 50	1
Years of Service	
0 – 1	2
2 – 5	2
6 – 8+	5

##### 4.1 The Lived Experiences of Pastors in Online Ministry

Being a pastor amid a pandemic is not easy. However, people look upon pastors as vessels of hope, faith and are passionate to serve. Table 2 shows the different themes specified from the data: accessible evangelism, division of labor, rapport and connection, leaving a legacy, intimacy with God, joy in the ministry, and discovering new skills.

This subordinate theme presented the lived experiences of pastors in online ministry amidst pandemic. The various themes involved nine participants who enjoyed the accessible evangelism, seven participants who experienced division of labor, and seven participants who encountered establishing great rapport and connection. Moreover, six of the participants have valued the legacy they leave. Two experienced intimacy with God, two have found joy in the ministry, and two discovered new skills brought by the digital age.

**Table 2: Lived Experiences Themes**

Lived Experiences	Frequency
Accessible Evangelism	9
Division of Labor	7
Rapport and Connection	7
Leaving a Legacy	6
Intimacy with God	2
Joy in the Ministry	2
Discovering New Skills	2

#### 4.1.1 Accessible Evangelism

The current pandemic, COVID-19, and quarantine opened excellent opportunities for the churches to do community outreach and spread God's Word. Thousands of churches have now effectively moved into broadcasting pre-recorded weekend worship services or live-streaming and have discovered that this is a great Gospel proclamation medium. Churches used social media platforms, applications, and streaming sites primarily for preaching, meetings, Bible studies, and discipleship. It helped the Christians to enlighten and encourage one another easily. This is reflected in the response of Pastor 2, he said:

*“Siguro yung advantage nun ay mapapakinggan nila paulit-ulit yung tinuturo mo, kasi nakarecord ganun. Nandyan na sa Facebook yan. Pwede nila ivisit again. Ngayon, paulit-ulit nila mababasa, kasi nandyan nga lang. Yun ang isa sa mga advantages ng online ministry. Pangalawa syempre yung bilis na ng komunikasyon natin. Imbis na pupunta ko dun sa kanila para kausapin sila, dito ay andyan na agad-agad. Makakausap ko sila. Advantages, siguro yung mga games di ba. Sa mga Zoom, may games ka dun, para maenlighten yung oras. So, marami kang resources kumbaga, sa online ministry. “*

The online ministry has brought advantages and accessibility for evangelism, especially in conducting cell groups and church classes. One participant, Pastor 3, stated:

*“Kagaya ng sinabi ko, in my Victory group, I can meet them easily. But isang factor naman, for example the Purple Book class, people who don't have enough time and if you don't have a location also for classes, I think online ministry can give solution to that problem. So nakakapagmeet discipleship classes, so that's why it's an advantage pa rin. There's an advantage of having an online ministry. “*

According to Digital Evangelism (2018), primarily half of the world's population is already online. There are 3.8 billion and more people who have internet access. Due to the internet, the world is a much smaller place. Likewise, with what the pastors experienced, the online ministry in their churches and the internet opened access and opportunity to meet people. Wherever people are, churches are still on a mission to go into the whole world, making efforts to make God known. For virtually all, at least one computer is available. It may be an iPad, mobile, tablet, laptop, or desktop, and any time the members of the church open or turn on their computers, and individuals have a chance to share Christ.

#### 4.1.2 Division of Labor

Division of labor is of great help, primarily when focusing on each other's specializations and strengths in particular tasks. The participants experienced having a support group and assistance in church administration, ministry programs, and gatherings. It made them recognize the essence of teamwork in the ministry, even when it was still in the traditional system and now in this digital age. Some helping hands supported the participants, and this made the development possible and burdens to be lighter. Pastor 1 stated:

*“Yan, so napakahalaga niyan ng pagkakaroon ng co-leaders and co-members, lalo na in doing ministry. Uhhh dito na lang ako magbase sa ano sa CM online ko, since almost mag-one year na rin to. Magiging magaan yung trabaho. Mas magiging maganda yung kalalabasan ng ministry, mapapadali, yan magiging advantage ng pagkakaroon ng co-members and co-leaders. Mas nag-iimprove at nagdedevelop ang ministry. “*

One participant, Pastor 4, has the same sentiment, and he said:

*“For one, masyadong malaking help na meron akong mga co-leaders and members dahil talagang nag-aadjust pa ko sa full-time ministry. Madami pa kong di alam, and I really need mentoring. I need guidance. So naging very helpful yung mga pastors ko, and we meet regularly. Namementor ako one on one, and yung mga members naman they're very supportive sa pastoral team. I'm very glad na merong mga tao that surrounds me. Maraming pastors nun, lone ranger sila. Di masyadong supportive yung church. Wala silang co-pastors, so talagang nahihirapan sila. For me, I'm really blessed. Meron akong mga kasangga sa ministry. “*

According to Jones (2020), online pastors experience organizing weekly online services alongside worship, production, and stage teams. In connection to the participants' statements, through recruiting and training online volunteers, such as hosts to interact and follow-up viewers and online community leaders to manage other online communities, online pastors seemed to experience multiplying themselves, making the work easier.

#### 4.1.3 Rapport and Connection

Rapport and connection play a vital role in evangelism, discipleship, prayer, etc. Connection occurs when one clicks with someone, and the relationship develops. However, rapport is not just about building relationships, though it is the foundation for significant, healthy, and harmonious human relationships. Developed rapport with people, one is best positioned to influence, learn and teach, especially when the trust he accumulated means that other people are more likely to embrace his ideas, share knowledge, and build opportunities together. This is reflected in Pastor 1's statement below:

*“Siguro ano, relationship. Ko-connect ka, tapos eempower mo yung mga tao. Mag-add value ka sa kanila, helping them na mabago yung buhay nila. Yung relationship, magbuild ng relationship, touch their lives na lumapit sa Panginoon, that's one thing that I love in the ministry. “*

Some of the participants stated that building relationships with people are what they love about pastoring. It was their way of touching people's lives to bring them closer to God. Being a people-oriented pastor is one of the significant characters a pastor should possess. This is supported by Pastor 3's statement below:

*“First and foremost, I'm a relational person. I love connecting to people. So, being a pastor siguro that's one of the character that we need. We need to be people-oriented*



*pastor, so that you can really love what you're doing. Being a pastor, you need to connect with people.*“

According to Challies (2017), there are things the Bible says about pastors' responsibilities with the flock's different practical necessities. That is why connection and rapport are essential, for it is the primary responsibility of pastors to protect the congregation. They are the ones who nourish the people with the Word of God, leading them not to danger, and the ones taking care of, bringing warmth, understanding, and offering prayer to the people. Without building relationships, pastors can't demonstrate care, protection, and responsibility towards the people. These things will not be possible.

#### **4.1.4 Leaving a Legacy**

Leaving a legacy is more than just the possessions passed down to the younger generation. According to the participants, it's the lives changed by God that leaves a real legacy. It was evident that pastors' passion for studying, preaching, sharing the Gospel to people, and even praying for the lost souls and the brokenhearted ones created a significant impact on the younger generation and the next. Pastor 4 shared:

*“First and foremost, siguro it's being able to preach the Word, being able to get privilege to study the Word, and to proclaim the Word, to teach the people. Ayun, yung preaching. Number one preaching, being able to study the Word and proclaim it to the people, and to point people to Jesus Christ despite yung inadequacy ko, yung sinfulness ko. Yun yung pinakanaaenjoy ko. Another is seeing people having transformed by the Word of God, being able to help them know Jesus Christ. Yun yung pinakanakakatuwa, and fulfilling na may natututunan yung mga tao and naggogrow sila kay Lord, at ikaw yung ginagamit ni Lord. Yun yung pinakanakakatuwa for me.*“

With the same sentiment, Pastor 6 briefly said:

*“Being able to touch lives and leave a mark and a trail where other people can follow. It's about leaving a legacy to this young generation.*“

According to Foliente (2020), churches, leaders, and ministries in Every Nation Philippines continue to preach and exemplify God's Word. In their relationship with Christ, there are people saved, reached out, and deeply developed. There is also active and safe online, relational discipleship. People worldwide meet their Victory groups and leaders online, start new Victory groups with family and friends, do One-2-One, worship God, hear His Word weekly, pray for each other, intercede for the nation. Via Real Life Foundation, pastors and leaders continue to finance and award scholarships to more than 600 talented and deserving underprivileged youth. The Victory churches take care of the scholars and their families with monetary assistance, relief goods, and coaching; they have opened ten new centers this year and will have 350 scholars. Likewise, to the participants' passion for serving, they never stopped leaving a mark, especially to the younger generation.

#### **4.1.5 Intimacy with God**

What God prioritizes is intimacy. It is to have a deeper personal relationship with God. Some participants emphasized that it was their heart to know, love, and serve God that motivated them to agree to God's calling. There were doubts, but as they were deeply rooted in their faith in God, they developed strong convictions to go, become vessels of God's Word and revelations. It was their intimate relationship with God that made them love their ministry and become influential leaders. This is reflected in Pastor 2's response below:

*“Isa sa mga nagustuhan ko talaga sa pagpapastor yung makilala mo si God through studying God's Word. Una syempre as a pastor, parang meron pa kong resistance sa calling ni God. Ako ba talaga ni-call Mo? Am I qualified? Ang sagot ko syempre, hindi ako qualified. Parang at first, di mo magugustuhan yung pastoral work or pastoral calling. But God, He proves na ni-call Niya talaga ko by the fruit of my ministry, by my personal devotion or conviction ko, by the advices ng mga matured leaders na kakilala ko, at provision ni Lord. So ang first talaga, what do I love as a pastor is that I am knowing God and I am loving God and I am serving God.”*

One participant, Pastor 7, also showed his devotion to God, and he said:

*“Serving God, I believe it is a wonderful privilege to serve him and to share His Word. I really love studying the Bible and sharing it to His church.”*

Relating participants' statements, according to Ministry Magazine (2017), there are four fundamentals in connection to their call to full-time ministry. Their call may link to how deep their relationship to God. These fundamentals include the public invitation where one takes up Christ's cross and starts a life of evangelism, hearing and doing God's Word of repentance, faith, etc. It also includes the personal conviction, similar to what Pastor 2 felt and experienced when God called him. Another fundamental is the providential call that comes in all situations. Last is the ecclesiastical call provided to an individual by a congregational agency to engage in full-time ministry.

#### **4.1.6 Joy in the Ministry**

Pastoral ministry, specifically the online ministry, is still an incredible privilege and joy, as daunting and crushing as it can be at times. Because of the joy from the Lord and the fulfillment of their purpose, many pastors continue to work for God's Kingdom as they walk in God's will. This is reflected in Pastor 5's response below:

*“Lagi itong sinasabi rin before rin ako magpastor. Ito rin yung bagay na hanggang ngayon parang nasa akin, I love being a pastor. Yung makita mo yung mga young people, kasi yung heart ko talaga ay nasa next generation ng church. So makita mo yung mga young people na next generation ng church na lumalago at nananampalataya na nagbubunga, kumbaga nag-eengage sa ministry, that is what I love the most yung lumalago sila. Alam mo na kumbaga nakakatuwang mo na sila sa ministry, parang yun yung di mo matatawarang joy pagdating sa ministry, yung fruits ng labor. With regards to the Word of God naman, yung paano ka nagsasaliksik sa Salita ng Panginoon, alam mo yun kahit na naipreach mo na itong topic na ito or verse na ito pero pag nagsaliksik ka pa, magiging enrich yung experience or yung knowledge mo about that verse and that's amazing experience sa being a pastor na talagang nakakatuwa.”*

One participant, Pastor 6, also shared his joy in the ministry, and he said:

*“Since I am a youth pastor, it is being able to meet different kinds of youth with different backgrounds and behaviors. My greatest joy during this online ministry is to uplift the soul of the younger generation during this difficult time.”*

According to Litonjua (2016), churches are gaining respectable, cautious pastors who are exceptionally instructed by their people in the joy of the Lord. As the Lord's joy bestowed upon the leaders and pastors, the joy also flows among the leaders and pastors. In addition to Litonjua's (2016) statement, some churches also established good relationships with pastors who welcome training and mentorship. To recognize the need for more preparation and equipment, these pastors preach the Word boldly and spread the Gospel in their communities. Many of them

are already leading growing congregations and planting churches zealously, despite having no formal biblical training. This fact is another evidence of pastors' joy in the ministry.

#### 4.1.7 Discovering New Skills

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, many churches are embracing new visions. The traditional system may stop for a while, but personal growth, learning, exploration, and discoveries for relevant new ideas and new skills to make the services and preaching much better than before continues. Many pastors learned to use cameras to preach. Staff members and volunteers learned new technology skills. Churches have efficiently set up or updated their platforms for online services and giving. With innovative ministry efforts, small groups and individuals have been responding to ministry needs. This is reflected in Pastor 1's response below:

*“Yung advantage sa kinang yung nadevelop yung skills, another talent or skills sa video editing. Then sa church din, natuto sila. Akala kasi nila nung una ano eh, hindi kakayanin dahil nga ang hawak ko is children online. I'm the one who encouraged them na gawin natin to. Ang naging advantage nun, uhmm, hindi naset aside yung CM, mga kids. So ngayon, mas natuto rin sila, tinulungan nila ko mag edit. Tinulungan din nila ko na gumawa online events, arts, yan. Nagbenefit yung church, dahil yun nga naabot yung mga kids through online na akala nila hindi kakayanin. Then, nachallenge rin sila. “*

Moreover, many people are now concerned with what the pastors and staff are doing in online ministry. The online ministry became an open door for discovering new talents. Pastor 5 said:

*“Nagbukas siya ng new opportunity or new ministry for those people na may talent or merong inclinations dito. Like for example nung hindi pa online, hindi sila nagseserve kasi parang, "Okay, andito lang kami. Nandyang lang kayo at kayo na gumagawa jan. Kayo na yung magaling, so jan lang kayo." Pero nung nag-online ministry, parang nagkaroon ng ministry, nagkaroon ng multimedia ministry, ng editing team, and that means an advantage kasi nakikita rin namin ito na pagpapatuloy ng ministry even pag nagkaroon na tayo ng new normal. “*

Likewise, with what Crumpton (2018) claimed, there were church's online pastors who performed weekly posting, written blogs, and vlogs. They even implemented systematic spiritual material and weekly devotional messages. Every Sunday straight away after the service, the online pastors make a rundown of the sermon watched by the online congregation.

#### 4.2 The Challenges of Pastors in Online Ministry

This superordinate theme elucidates the challenges pastors encounter in online ministry. Listed in Table 3 are the subordinate themes identified: emotional problems, internet connection and provision, technical problems, physical and mental breakdowns, time and commitment, non-tech savvy, financial problems, performance problems, diffidence, and age gap. Seven of the participants have experienced emotional problems in times of hardship. Six of the participants have experienced internet connection problems and lack of provision of it. Also, six participants have struggled with technical problems. Five have battled with physical and mental breakdowns.

Moreover, four participants were concerned with time and commitment, four participants struggled with being non-tech savvies, and four participants also struggled with financial problems. Three of the participants have faced performance problems. Three participants have concerned with diffidence, and one participant struggled due to the age gap.



**Table 3: Challenges themes**

Challenges	Frequency
Emotional Problems	7
Internet Connection and Provision	6
Technical Problems	6
Physical and Mental Breakdowns	5
Time and Commitment	4
Non-tech savvy	4
Financial Problems	4
Performance Problems	3
Diffidence	3
Age Gap	1

#### 4.2.1 Emotional Problems

Emotional problems are common issues, especially during this global pandemic. The pastors have encountered these problems, and it includes the following: exhaustion, frustration, disappointment, loneliness, lack of patience and understanding. This is reflected in Pastor 2's statement below:

*“Sa personal experience ko syempre yung napapagod ka. Napapagod ako. So yung exhaustion as pastor is really tiring talaga. Sometimes, it really hurts sa ministry kasi maraming tao syempre di mo mapiplease yung iba, kaya magagalit sila, magtatampo sila, so parang di nila nagustuhan yung ginawa mo, sinabi mo sa preaching. Ano pa? I think yung expectation ko. Di namimeet. Yung pangangailangan ko, parang di rin nasusustain through the ministry sa family, parang ganun needs namin sa family. Pero si Lord naman, di naman kami pinabayaan, so I think yan yung mga reasons why I thought of quitting. Yun nga, yung hirap sa ministry kasi talagang di biro ang ministry. Di siya para sa mga batang naglalaro lang. Kaya yun, yung tiredness, frustration, disappointments, even yung wala kang mapag-openan. So parang pag pastor ka, sino na ngayon ang kakausapin mo? Unless na lang kung meron kang kasamahang mga pastor or member ka ng isang denomination. So yung hirap din na ikikeep mo lang sa sarili mo yung nararamdaman mo, at di mo pwedeng ishare sa mga members eh. “*

Another participant, Pastor 4, had the same issue, and he shared:

*“Yung feeling of isolation siguro yung pinakanakabother sa akin, dahil for the most part nasa bahay lang. Mag-isa lang. Di namin nakikita yung members. Di ko nakakafellowship yung youth, and sobrang emotional ako na person. So, talagang malaki naging effect sa akin. Sobrang inatake ako ng loneliness, yung anxiety of ano bang mangyayari. Kaya ko ba to? Magpapatuloy ba ko as a pastor? “*

Facing such challenges could lead to an extra challenge of experiencing pastoral burnouts and stresses. In connection to this, according to Burnette (2016), many Christian ministry books encouraged pastors who have struggled with burnout and exhaustion, those in work services, families, etc. These books include Wayne Cordeiro's *"Leading on Empty: Refilling Your Tank and Renewing Your Passion"* in 2009, 2003's *"Pastors at Greater Risk"* by H. B. London, Jr. and Neil Wiseman, and Clay Werner's *"On the Brink: Grace for the Burned-Out Pastor"* in 2014.

#### 4.2.2 Internet Connection and Provision

A powerful, quick internet connection is more vital than ever in conducting online ministry because pastors and ministers are now using social media platforms to preach the Gospel. Live-streaming and other online meetings will not be possible without the provision of strong data and internet connection in church. There were instances in which the internet connection is not working or fluctuating when needed, one of the challenges pastors find challenging to deal with. This challenge also affected the online gathering and meetings. Pastor 4 narrated:

*“Merong isang beses na ano nasa Zoom kami, and I was preaching na sa youth, youth gathering yun. Yun, nagpipreach lang ako for like 20 minutes or 10 minutes lang, for 10 minutes. Pagcheck ko ng phone ko, nawala na pala ko sa Zoom. So 10 minutes akong dumadaldal, so wala na pala ko dun. Yun lang, yun yung mga challenges pag nasira yung connection. Kagaya nung ngayon, paputul-putol ako. So, may mga ganyang problema and ayun yung mga di ko makakalimutan. “*

Pastor 2 also had the same issue regarding those church members and attendees who can't provide enough data and a strong internet connection. He stated:

*“Sa church namin, isa sa mga challenges ko talaga nung nag-online ministry kami yung wala silang wifi. Meron sila data lang. So, nagloload lang sila. Ang members ko na may wifi lang, yung assistant pastor lang namin. The rest, wala na. So pag nag-Zoom ako, hindi siya kinakaya. Kaya nagfe-Facebook ano kami, tulad nito. Ito lang ginagawa namin. Ang hina pa ng signal sa kanila, kaya nawawala sila. Di nila ko marinig masyado. Yung problema namin, sa wifi. Yung problema namin, sa internet. “*

According to Asian Access (2020), just like what the participants experienced, there is little or no access to a secure internet connection for most church members. Moreover, one pastor-friend attested that in his church of 1,500 members in Metro Manila, over 50 percent had no internet access. They only use pre-paid data, which is very limited and depends on the amount of data they have acquired.

#### **4.2.3 Technical Problems**

Since most of the pastors are implementing the online ministry, technical problems are prevalent with the use of various social media platforms. Most of the participants struggled to operate online services, prepare online meetings, and handle digital life groups. It was because of some common issues like the following: choppy video from a poor connection to the internet, problems operating with the platform for streaming, the audio works but not video and vice versa, issues on getting feedback, people are unable to access the feed, or the video is too high quality to be viewed by viewers. This is reflected in Pastor 1's statement below:

*“Oo, marami. Ayun struggle ko nga minsan dahil ahh, tawag dito, student din ako at the same time nagpapastor. Ummm, nadedelay yung ano minsan yung video. Nalalate yung pagcreate nito, ang nangyayari, hindi siya napipremiere or nalalive-stream ng tamang oras. Tapos minsan walang ano, yung una kasi ano eh di ko pa kabisado. Kailangan ng credits, nawawalan ng sound, mga technical problems. “*

Another participant, Pastor 8, also struggled with the technical problems, and he shared:

*“At first, there were a lot of technical problems that we have to overcome. To cite some: HD cameras, streaming platforms, and high speed internet. “*

In connection to these statements, Vogels et al. (2020) claimed that some believed that technology creates more problems than it solves. Some specified that any solutions produce a new collection of issues, and human use and misuse of digital technology is causing social

damage in everyday life. However, some believed that adaption could lessen the emerging concerns about the technology's impact.

#### **4.2.4 Physical and Mental Breakdowns**

Due to the participants' devotion and responsibilities in online ministry, there is no exemption from experiencing exhaustion, sickness, and mental breakdowns such as the following: anxiety, depression, fear, and uncertainties. This is reflected in Pastor 3's statement below:

*“Sometimes kapag nararanasan mo yung mga challenges na yun ay nararanasan mo na sumama rin ang loob kahit papano. Sometimes, you are not expecting people to act like that, like that way or respond that way. Kaya minsan, uncertain ang mga bagay. Kaya minsan, there are times na maaapektuhan ka rin. But being a pastor, syempre kailangan maging firm pa rin kahit papano. So yun yung mga bagay that affects us physically and psychologically. Kasi kapag masyado mong inisip, syempre minsan magkakasakit ka rin, madedepress ka, pero sana hindi.”*

Furthermore, Pastor 5 also shared his problems physically and mentally. He said:

*“Physically, nakakapagod. Then of course, you need to do this on your own. Though kahit na nakaupo lang ako rito, nagtatype ng mga lahat ng mga forms, etc., saka yung sa ministry, parang nakakapagod kasi. Nakaharap ka sa computer, and you're doing everything. Then, nagfofollow-up ka rin sa online. Parang nakakapagod din siya. Sa psychological naman na sitwasyon, ano rin siya very nadedrained. Kasi ako lang mag-isa eh dito. It's very hard to face everything. As a single person na mag-isa ka lang talaga.. I mean, malayo ako sa family eh. So, ang daming thoughts din na pumapasok sa isip ko. Then yun, problema pa sa family. Kumbaga nadadagdag siya sa psychological.”*

According to the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches (PCEC, 2020), Dr. Bautista reported in the Philippines that it is a challenge for leaders to know how to raise awareness of mental well-being and remind members of the value of mental well-being in their church's online activities. Supported by Asian Access' (2020) claim, it is really a challenge to integrate the Gospel and create an outlet of lament for those who deal with emotional issues in solving mental health concerns. As ministry front-liners in the Philippines, leaders can factually see how the pastoral ministry landscape is changing.

#### **4.2.5 Time and Commitment**

Each pastor had seasons when they felt like they were drowning from the job's expectations. Two of the main reasons are the time and commitment of people. Commonly, there were fluctuating attendance, inconsistent weekly giving, and problems with staff. There were also different agendas and excuses of members and comparison with other successful committed ministries. In online ministry, the pastors were having a hard time bringing back their people's commitment because of the crisis. Moreover, the time between their family, quality time alone, and the ministry were significant challenges for the participants. Pastor 3 responded, and he said:

*“Another thing siguro yung time because there's a lot of situations na pwedeng hindi regular ang programa ng simbahan. Sometimes, may mga tao na kinakailangang puntahan, kinakailangang dalawin, and mga bagay na di mo inaasahan. I think, one of the greatest struggle for us is yung time. Sometimes, you are juggling the time for your family, at the same time, to the ministry.”*

Related to the youth's commitment to the ministry, Pastor 5 narrated his encounter below:



*“Even in the time of face to face, ang struggle ko talaga sa church ay commitment. Though of course ay marami tayong program, so marami tayong gustong gawin sa loob ng simbahan or gustong implement, gustong buksan na mga ministry, but the thing is the commitment ng mga members or even leaders. Sometimes, dahil nga meron din naman silang kanya-kanyang trabaho rin, and yung requirements din ng pag-aaral ngayon di katulad ng dati na wala pang K-12. Ngayon kasi, pagkanag K-12 na, particularly sa young people, mas bumibigat yung load and then nagkakaroon sila ng pasok this time. So, nagkakaroon ng agawan sa time. Then pag naman inadjust, masyado naman silang pagod. So, you need to understand that ako, as a pastor, yun yung struggle ko. Pangalawa pagkagraduate na nila, commitment ahh yung work nila may Sunday, may Sabado pa. Kumbaga yung potential leader mo, nainvest-an mo na ng training, etc., and the heart is there. Kaya nga sinasabi nila sakin, “Pastor, gusto ko talagang ganito, walang Sunday at Sabado na pasok.” So, you need to understand that. “*

Likewise, with what Reyes (2012) said, it was an obstacle for most pastors to find time to research, together with their obligations, families, and churches' demand for their time. The churches of Metro Manila are rich and poor, single and married, old and young. However, in terms of interpretation and implementation of God's Word, trying to strike a balance is difficult.

#### **4.2.6 Non-tech savvy**

Some pastors hardly adjusted in this digital age. Some were not skillful and literate enough about the technicalities and upgrades of different social media platforms used as mediums in spreading the Word of God. Others were not good at navigating technologies such as laptops, mobile phones, cameras, and others. This is reflected in Pastor 4's statement below:

*“Mas nahirapan ako sa Friday namin, dahil yung Friday fellowship namin sa bahay ko lang ginagawa and hindi ako masyadong techy. So, yung pagset up ng Zoom, minsan nahihirapan ako sa simpleng pagshare screen lang ng powerpoint ko mga ganun. Yun, hindi kasi ko techy. Medyo nangangapa ako, but when it comes to live-streaming, yung worship services, meron kaming tech team. “*

Focusing on live-streaming, Pastor 6 briefly shared:

*“Yes, especially in editing the live-streaming. There are some editing tools or apps that I am not still familiar with. “*

According to Villarreal (2020), for those in churches who can't afford technology or lack access to it and are not tech-savvy, pastors mustn't neglect them. Also, there are two typical demographics supported by Robbins (2020): difficult feat for churches and leaders. One is the tech-savvy young people who are more likely to try new stuff but less interested in the conventional version of the church, and the older ones who are harder to reach.

#### **4.2.7 Financial Problems**

Most pastors live simple lives and give their time and financial resources to support others sacrificially. But some pastors are suffering under the weight of financial burdens that few people know about in the church. Such personal financial problems also harm the church, and unfortunately, an increasing number of pastors are leading them to leave the ministry. Most of the time, it was only through love gifts and offering to earn some money. But as time changed due to pandemic, lots of people cannot give their tithes and offerings. This is reflected in Pastor 8's statement below:

*“As a young pastor, it is really my personal struggle on whether I will pursue my secular dream to be a lawyer and pastor at the same time, or just follow and pursue my calling. It is undeniable that though we are working, pastors do not have salaries. We mostly depend on love gifts and offerings. That being said, finances are also a constant struggle of a pastor. “*

Moreover, together with the financial problem, pastors struggled with a lack of materials and equipment for the online ministry. It was a great struggle for Pastor 2 as he frequently stays at home, and he narrated:

*“Siguro yung problema ko nun, wala kong space for recording. Kaya yung kuya ko, may church sila. Maganda yung pagrerecord. Maganda yung background ko. Maganda lahat. So at least, nakatatlong beses ako doon na nakapagpreach na narecord namin. Ang challenge ko, yun wala akong space. Sa bahay, wala akong ano yun, tripod? As in manu-mano lang ako. Ilalagay ko lang sa libro. Papatong ko lang yung cellphone, ganun lang. O kaya naman laptop, pero parang kalahati lang ng katawan makikita. So siguro nakulangan ako sa mga gamit ko. Pagdating sa mga pagrerecord, sa ganitong online ministry. Kulang ako sa mga materials and equipments. “*

There is a lack of internet connectivity, electricity, online facilities, and smartphones that contributes to disconnection from the congregation, according to a survey conducted by the Lutheran World Federation (2020). Similar to the participants' struggle, most church members in certain areas cannot afford the internet or mobile phone service. It is because they are more into food than technology. Churches often face financial instability as the loss of livelihoods heavily impacts church members.

#### **4.2.8 Performance Problems**

Factors including failure while preaching, mental blocking, stuttering, and noise, affected the quality of the pastor's performance. These problems made them face awkward and uncertain situations. This is reflected in Pastor 5's statement below:

*“Meron, kasi may mga times na talagang namemental block ako. May mga times na nag-istutter ako. Meron akong mga.. pag pinapakinggan ko ang sarili ko ay yun, parang ang awkward. Then isa pang nawitness ko rin yung pagconnect sa mga tao. Kasi I like face to face conversation. Gusto ko yun eh kaya lang dahil sa ganito, kaya ko sinabi kanina na parang nakakatamad kasi andyan naman na sila sa Facebook. Parang nakakatamad lang na ifollow-up parang ganun. So yun yung weakness na nakikita ko sa sarili ko, then yung pagstutter ko. “*

Another struggle was the noise that Pastor 2 experienced regarding the ongoing church service or the pre-recording. He stated:

*“Siguro ano kung meron, kasi pag nagrerecord ako, minsan sumisigaw yung kasama ko sa bahay, ganun. Parang nasama sa record, nasama sa preaching yung sigaw. Narinig pa yung pangalan di ba? O kaya yung kapitbahay pa naming, nagmura. Yung ganun. Kasama yun. Minsan, sa church ng kuya ko. Ang lakas ng ingay ng jeep, harurot ng motor. So, yun yung mga naranasan ko na. “*

Another participant, Pastor 3, shared his thoughts regarding preaching. He said:

*“As a pastor, in preaching, all of us naman pastors sometimes we struggle in some points, in some part of preaching. Talagang dapat pag-aralan. Sometimes for us, we need to really study hard para matutuhan yung ipipreach, para mas malinaw, mas clear ang ibabato mo sa tao. “*

According to Conrad (2017), technology can cause communication issues, both within and outside the church. When it comes to church services, incorrect usage will severely distract from service elements such as prayer and deteriorating concentration levels. When people immediately post impressions and thoughts to their social media profiles, social media can damage churches and widely publicize errors. This problem will contribute to the propagation of false doctrine and the tattling and distortion of the truth.

#### 4.2.9 Diffidence

Some participants experienced a lack of self-confidence to share their status for being pastors. They became insecure and compared themselves to the successful work that others have. This is reflected in Pastor 7's statement below:

*“At the beginning of my call as a pastor, I struggled with sharing it to my relatives who are successful in their perspective fields. Nahihiya ako noon kasi mababa ang tingin ko sa ginagawa ko noon, but by God's grace I understood that it is a high calling and now my relatives recognise it as well. “*

Concerning preserving their reputation and power, to at least motivate themselves, pastors struggled with pressure in handling the church members online. They also grappled with a lack of self-confidence in approaching the members and leaders. This is reflected in Pastor 1's statement below:

*“Number one yung ano, yung pagmaintain ng.. lalo na ngayon online. Sa online na lang uli, yung pagmaintain nung weekly cell group kasi struggle talaga. Ang hirap nila hulihin, hirap nilang abutin. Online, kailangan mo maging creative sa pag-abot sa kanila, sa pag-approach sa kanila. Yung number two yung sa CM online naman, bale challenge na nahihirapan din ako.. pag-approach sa mga leaders. Minsan, pinanghahinaan sa pag-approach ng co-members and co-leaders. Challenging kung paano iaapproach at ieempower. “*

Some were not comfortable doing livestreaming, which affected their performance and confidence in preaching the Gospel. Pastor 2 shared:

*“Psychologically, parang nahihiya ako. Dati, di ko magpost sa mga ganun, kaso wala eh. Kailangan ko gawin eh. Parang di man ako mapost na tao, basta pagdating sa pagrerecord ng video, hindi ako yung mala-artista na kailangan nakasmile ka, buhay na buhay ka. Syempre minsan, nilalagyan mo ng ganun eh para man lang umayos yung presentation. So parang psychologically, nahihiya ako. Parang yung self-esteem ko uhhh parang di ako katulad ng iba. Parang ganun na lang, pero I need to adjust. Siguro, di ko na lang din inisip yun, but naovercome ko na parang okay lang din pala kasi parang wala lang din namang pumapansin, parang ganun naiisip ko. Yung iba, ganun din naman. Ang mahalaga, yung message. Kinocomfort ko na lang yung sarili ko. Yun, psychologically ganun. Pangalawa, nakikinig pa ba yung members ko? Nakikinig pa ba yung mga kausap ko? Yun kapag ganito, naka-close yung camera natin, tapos yung iba nakamute pa, kumusta na kaya to? Ano kaya ginagawa nila? So psychologically, nakaapekto yan kasi parang bababa yung confidence mo. “*

According to Bergeron (2017), the acceptance of insecurities, diffidence, poor self-image is the beginning of the quest for healing that will enable oneself to overcome the "lids" of life leadership that hinder performance. One, including pastors, is to be aware of the abilities and skills and who the self is as the shadow side.



#### 4.2.10 Age Gap

There were churches that most of the members are either adults, young or older people. Pastors tried their best to connect with people and relate with them, although their approach and strategies are sometimes far from what others expected. Also, the age gap became one of the struggles of Pastor 4, and he stated:

*“Pinakanaging struggle ko siguro yung age ko. Ang congregation namin is a Filipino-Chinese congregation. Ang demographic namin ay matatanda na members ng church. Yun yung pinakanaging struggle ko. Medyo intimidated ako sa mga members ng church, like natatakot ako. Are they going to listen to me? Are they going to respect me? Mga ganun. “*

Supporting this statement, Slingshot Group (2016) claimed that while more than one younger congregation inevitably attracts new technological advancements, there may be an alienation of the older audiences. Overlooking this factor may lead to significant losses. It includes the insight, understanding, and experience that older generations essentially brings to the church.

#### 4.3 The Coping Mechanisms of Pastors

This superordinate theme shows the coping mechanism of pastors in times of difficulty in online ministry. The table contains subordinate themes observed in the interview. Consequently, eight participants resorted to prayer and devotion. Eight participants stated that they are asking for help in times of hardship. Despite failures in online ministry, five participants chose to adjust things and pressed on. Three participants spent time alone and used their leisure time to unwind.

Furthermore, one participant chose to praise and worship God. One participant calmed and relaxed in unexpected circumstances. One participant answered that he resorted to apology and restitution, and one got used to pleasing people to make things lighter.

**Table 4: Coping mechanism themes**

Coping Mechanism	Frequency
Prayer and Devotion	8
Asking for Help	8
Adjustment and Pressing On	5
Leisure	3
Praise and Worship	1
Relaxation	1
Apology and Restitution	1
Pleasing People	1

##### 4.3.1 Prayer and Devotion

Prayer is the powerful, accessible way to communicate with God. Reading His Word is the daily bread that one must take to renew and revive the soul and mind. Many participants resorted to prayer and devotion. They coped up by crying out to God in prayer, and even implementing daily journals for the people to refresh in the ministry. This is reflected in Pastor 2's statement below:

*“Unang una syempre si God. Through prayer, sasabihin ko sa Kanya yung struggles ko, sa ministry, and even I cry prayer to God, one way para sabihin ko sa Kanya yung struggles ko. “*

Pastor 4 also said the following statement:

*“Another is gumawa kami ng devotional journal, and we check up on them din kung naprint ba nila, ano ba insight nila dun sa journal namin daily. “*

Moreover, Pastor 1 also shared his way of coping with his burdens. He said:

*“Then, pinagkakatiwala ko sa Panginoon and hinahayaan ko si Holy Spirit yung kumilos. Ang ginagawa ko para ano macope up mga yun, yun lang prayer and devotion, relax, then iisipin na hindi ako superhero para magampanan ang mga bagay na ito. Gagawin ko lang yung best ko, kung ano yung pinapagawa ng Panginoon.*

According to Frederick et al. (2017), for Christians, a better way to conceptualize burnout and compassion fatigue is to embrace them under the concepts of calling, apathy, and indifference. In this way, avoiding and coping with burnout becomes a spiritual revitalization project, reconnecting with the empowering, living Spirit of God. Valuable resources to do this are prayer services, daily study, and prayer of concern.

#### **4.3.2 Asking for Help**

To ask for help, especially when sources of support are present, is okay. God has given pastors a very distinct perception of what it means to have needs. It comes to the end of their means. The beginning and cornerstone of the Christian life are acknowledging the need and asking for support. Most of the participants were comfortable coping with their accountable people. These people include the following: God, co-pastors, family members, friends. This is reflected in Pastor 3's statement below:

*“Syempre, unang una kay God. With us pastors, we normally ask accountability with other pastors. So kung saka-sakaling dumarating kami sa mga struggles of life namin, for example in finances, in relationship, physical, and even spiritual, we need someone who will, who should be accountable with you. Ibig sabihin, hindi lang siya kasama sa ministry but he is also someone who will help you. Aside for my wife, I need an accountability with other people. Hindi lang naman ako ang humihingi, but even other pastors also are asking for the accountability so that we can walk together, even though we are facing struggles. “*

Likewise, Pastor 5 shared that having someone to support him, even their counselor at church makes the feeling more joyful, lighter, and relieved. He specifically said:

*“Nagcocommunicate ako to people kapag may mga times na parang sobrang bigat na ng problem. I talk to people, people I trust and people kung kanino talaga makakatulong sakin to process. Kasi parang with regards to family, dahil ako rin yung breadwinner, parang you need to be strong in your family. Parang ikaw yung pinaglalaman nila ng mga problema, then of course, may problema sa estudyante, may problema sa church. Parang, medyo it comes all together. Coping mechanism, I talk to people. May guidance counselor kami rito. Nagtatanong din ako sa kanya. May mga tao na ano pa rin confidant. Dun ako naglalabas din ng mga bagay na kailangan kong ilabas. I feel released, lalo na pag mabigat yung pakiramdam ko. Narerelease ko ito. I feel unburdened. Mas magaan na alam mong may nagdadalangin sayo. Alam mo na meron kang malalapitan in times of kabigatan sa buhay. May feeling of relief. May feeling of joy, kasi naencourage ka. “*

Connected to Pastor 3's statement regarding his wife and accountable friends, Edara (2020) stated that participants emphasized family as an essential source of coping with their problems in a study. The participants explained that interacting with their families saw them

through stressful times and gave them happiness and pleasure. Moreover, in 2011, Ujano Batanga research subjects reported that thinking about their family, communicating with them, and receiving emotional support helped them go through tough times. Supportive friends, intimate partners, and other social networks commonly become support and coping ties while working.

#### **4.3.3 Adjustment and Pressing On**

The most potent and common coping strategy used by the participants was a positive attitude. Through this positive attitude, despite failures and problems, participants were able to adjust and pressed on. Considering the people's financial status, Pastor 2 demonstrated this adjustment for the people to still press on in ministry and receive God's Word. Pastor 2 stated:

*“Yung sa church namin, nagtry ako dun kasi di ba syempre nahihirapan sila dun. Basta mahirap kalagayan pag online samin. Yung members namin, hindi mayayaman, hindi nasa middle class. Mostly, nasa ano eh nasa poverty line ganun. Ginawa ko, nagprint ako ng mga messages ko. Meron akong printed messages at yun yung ibinigay ko sa mga members. Messages, printed discipleship teaching, yan. And then, ginawa ko, pinupuntahan ko sila kasi di nga magwork yung online. Then, I tried na magturo physically kasi hirap sa online. Of course with the protocols, may alcohol, may face mask, although yung iba hindi naman naggaganun na kasi kulang sa loob ng bahay. Magkakamag-anak yung mga yun eh. So, yun ang ginawa kong strategy. Nagprint ako, then pangalawa nagturo ako physically. Meron akong online. Meron akong physical preaching sa kanila. “*

Furthermore, Pastor 1 also shared his coping strategies and adjustments when it comes to the Kids ministry. He stated:

*“Ito, sabi ko nga rin kanina, challenging yung sa kids kasi ano eh kailangan mo maging careful sa mga bibitawan. Then, kailangan mo pababawin yung words, yung mga paano mo icommunicate yung sermon o yung message sa mga bata. Paano ko ginagawa? Yun, nagiging careful tapos ahh outlining. Gumagawa ako ng outline, then pumipili ako ng mga words na tingin ko maaabot o maiintindihan ng kanilang pag-iisip or lelevel dun sa kanilang understanding. “*

Each church needs a plan B (Schmidt, 2020). Regarding the Kids ministry during this pandemic and connected to Pastor 1's adjustments, many churches started to prepare for Vacation Bible School programs long before it's even spring. Some started gathering supplies right after Christmas. As soon as the school year began, some even looked at making plans for the summer ahead. According to the author, well before the pandemic happened, it was more than likely that program managers already selected a theme, opened registrations, lined up volunteers, and even ordered supplies. Besides, the Vacation Bible School went on, made possible by re-imagining how to organize and run things artistically.

#### **4.3.4 Leisure**

During stressful moments, three participants indicated leisure as their coping mechanism. It includes enjoying their time alone, going out, going to a coffee shop, read books and articles. This is reflected in Pastor 4's statement below:

*“I usually go out, tapos nagcoffee ako. So yun yung pinakacoping mechanism ko. Lumalabas ako ng bahay. I walk around. Ayun, nagcoffee shop ako and I bring a book with me. So, I read. Yun yung ginagawa ko ngayon actually. “*



Likewise, Pastor 2 also shared that going out is the best option to cope up. He said:

*“O kaya naman, kapag hindi nangyaring ganun, tahimik ako and then I will go out. Ganun ako. Parang kumbaga, hindi mo mararamdamang umalis na ko. Walang bakas. Ganun ang aking coping mechanism. Tatahimik na lang ako, ganun lang. “*

Like in Westafer's study, leisure was one of the uncovered coping mechanisms (The Courier, 2010). Others include the ministry call, family support, meditation, relationships, retreats, Scripture reading, leisure reading, seeing a therapist, workouts, daily day off, and leadership training. One pastor in the study also emphasized self-care as paramount to cope up.

#### **4.3.5 Praise and Worship**

Praise is an endeavor to cope with the abundance of God's love. Praise and worship will take one's attention and realign it on God, away from the self and problem. How Pastor 9 coped up was because the music calmed his spirit. With praise and worship to God, his problems suddenly seemed insignificant in the light of God's glory. He briefly answered:

*“I sing songs of praise. “*

Likewise, many churches turned to corporate worship, reminding them that unity is robust (World Vision Philippines, 2020). They nevertheless chose to raise God's name and worshipped, even during their conditions. Several churches attended and funded an online benefit worship concert called "Songs of Hope." Christ Commission Fellowship (CCF) Exalt Worship, Favor Church, Living Word Churches, Union Church of Manila, Victory Worship, and Victory Christian Fellowship (VCF) Katipunan were among the church worship groups that joined the initiative.

#### **4.3.6 Relaxation**

During stressful, undesirable situations, one participant turned to relaxing or calming himself. It was his tactic of coping and thinking of a more effective way to solve a particular problem. Pastor 1 stated:

*“Hmm, relax lang. Kasi, wala naman akong magagawa kapag may mga ganun na. Kapag nataranta ka, talagang mas magkakaroon ng problema. Relax, then pray, mga ganyan. Then, find a solution kung paano macope up o paano masosolusyunan yung problema, yung technical problem lalo na di mo siya control, katulad ng wifi. Relax, then think of a possible way kung paano ba. “*

According to the Saddleback Church (2017), there are five ways to relax. This coping mechanism includes recalling one's worth to God, enjoying and having contentment with what one has, limiting workdays into six days a week, adjusting principles with what's significant, and exchanging one's restlessness for God's peace.

#### **4.3.7 Apology and Restitution**

Pastors tend to become the peacemaker, knowing that they can avoid any conflict in the ministry and church as much as possible. However, the battle was still there. A participant experienced many misconceptions online, but he apologized, clarified things, and made restitution as his coping mechanism. This is reflected in Pastor 3's statement below:

*“First siguro for handling misconception online, wag tayong mahiyang magsabi ng apology if there are some misconceptions. Alam mo na nagkamali ka, then wag mo na panindigan yung pagkakamali mo. Just apologize. Then pangalawa, clarification. Clarify kung ano yung tinutukoy mo, para sa ganun ay hindi na magtuluy-tuloy pa yung*

*misconception. Pangatlo, siguro just humble down. Wala namang namamatay kapag nagpapakumbaba ka. So, that's how we should handle misconception, even online. “*

According to Goop (2018), five apology languages consist of showing remorse, accepting liability, making restitution, a genuine apology, and asking for forgiveness. Restitution is the third language of apology. It was one of those coping mechanisms that the participant experienced. It is necessary to fix the relationship and circumstance for someone to accept one's apology as genuine. A genuine apology is also to demonstrate that the behavior can change and there will be no repetition of mistakes.

#### **4.3.8 Pleasing People**

Pleasing people and altruism are the best options to get through hard times. It makes one forget about the problem for a while; it is a great joy making people happy that it uplifts one's mood and motivation. This is reflected in Pastor 2's statement below:

*“Ahh okay. Pag may problem, ang usual na ginagawa ko, ako kasi yung klase ng tao na parang I tend to please everybody. Yun ang coping mechanism ko. “*

Pastors will ultimately deal with disappointments, setbacks, mistakes, and even disappointment and trauma, no matter how wonderful life might be. Pleasing individuals do not end up just making individuals happy to light up their day (Exline, 2014). If one does not show such a mechanism, one experiences excessive guilt and anxiety. The fear of rejection, avoiding confrontation, and going through disagreements is there, and having someone angry at a person can be downright terrifying. Still, there will be an interpersonal dispute as one takes responsibility for other individuals' feelings and responses, seeking desperately to keep everyone happy. It is something that the participant must consider.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

This study aims to explore the lived experiences of Filipino pastors in online ministry amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. In conducting the study, the researchers divided the concept or idea into three categories: the lived experiences of Filipino pastors, the challenges they faced, and their coping mechanisms. The data collected was completed by utilizing the in-depth interview. Furthermore, the three existing themes consisted of the subthemes to further discuss the topic.

Regarding the participants' lived experiences, it was evident that the online ministry, during the pandemic, caused them to experience such positivity and challenges. However, despite the occurrence of the change in the ministry's system, the sense of fulfilling their purpose for God's glory alone remained the same and continued. Most of the participants experienced the same things happening in the traditional system. These experiences include accessible evangelism, division of labor, rapport, and connection to people, leaving a legacy primarily to the younger generation, enjoying their intimacy with God, and the joy in the ministry. One thing significant and notable was the discovery of new skills. The participants' responses proved that there were open opportunities in the online ministry, especially for those who have hidden talents, skills, and capabilities in handling, operating, and facilitating the ministry.

Aside from the lived experiences, various challenges made the online ministry amidst pandemic uneasy and apprehensive. The study revealed that most participants struggled with emotional problems because of too much stress and weight of the online ministry, isolation, disappointments to people, and others. This challenge made the pastors experience burnouts, loneliness, exhaustion, and some even had an idea of quitting before. Related to this problem is

the physical and mental issues that pastors faced in the ministry. Some participants experienced resentment, saturation, isolation from families, and draining situations. Therefore, it led them to depression, anxieties, uncertainties, fear, and physical sickness.

Moreover, many struggled with the internet connection. Slow internet connection became a struggle for most pastors, for they experienced disruption in the ongoing online services, online meetings, and life groups. Some participants encountered church members who could not afford such mediums and gadgets for their online ministry due to lack of finances. Financial problem was also one of the main challenges pastors faced. A participant indicated that he lacks materials and equipment, and therefore utilized manual set-ups for the online service. Some participants were not tech-savvy enough to handle online platforms. They grappled with how to navigate things, how to post or do a shared screen. In technicalities, many also wrestled on premiering a video or live-stream. A participant experienced several delays, struggled with putting credits and operating sounds. Also, lots of misconceptions while preaching the Word became a challenge. Some factors hindered their effective preaching of God's Word. One attested that noise was one of it. It led him to some epic fail moments while pre-recording or live-streaming.

Regarding the congregation, time, people's commitment, and age gap were also significant challenges to pastors. They wrestled on the differences between the older and younger generations and their different agendas that sometimes hindered them from serving in the ministry. There were expectations and ideas from the older ones that were hard to meet and understand by the younger ones. Also, one specified that most students are just staying at home during pandemic and difficulty in propinquity. Same with the professionals, they were more likely to stay at home. A significant challenge was the busyness of people. Some lacked time to pursue the online ministry. Some got tired of synchronizing tasks and juggling time for their families and the church. Personally, pastors also experienced diffidence, especially on discipleship and empowering members and leaders. Some doubted themselves, and it was a great challenge for them as well.

Participants' heart for the online ministry didn't stop. There were coping mechanisms that helped them developed a sense of optimism despite challenges. First and foremost was the prayer and devotion to God. Most of the participants utilized prayer and devotion as their way of releasing and surrendering the burden to God. Some cried out in prayer, and some implemented the devotional journals for the church members to have insights into the Word. Having accountable people became one of the essential coping links for the participants. They chose to ask for help, whether to their family, confidants, co-pastors, and others, whenever they face challenges like finances, relationships, physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual problems. In terms of the difficulties in the online ministry, participants applied adjustments to press on. There were instances where pastors distributed printed materials and preached in a face-to-face manner despite the pandemic to feed the people with God's Word. Some also adjusted some ways for the Kids church for them to better understand the message. Whenever there were misunderstandings, pastors chose to humble themselves, relax, and focused on apologizing and restitution of the relationships and circumstance as their coping mechanisms. Personally, pastors enjoyed their quality time alone. Some got used to singing praise to God. Some coped up, having their leisure time. They enjoyed reading books and articles, going out alone, going to a coffee shop. However, one intriguing coping strategy of a participant was his way of pleasing people. This coping strategy could somehow cause excessive guilt and anxiety with an unnecessary application of it.

Overall, each subtheme of this study served as a preview of Filipino pastors' lived experiences in online ministry amidst pandemic.



## 6. CONCLUSION

This study emphasized the affirmative sides of being a Filipino pastor in online ministry, which is rarely studied. Based on the study's findings, four major conclusions were derived: (1) Pastors are mostly challenged by emotional, mental, and physical problems due to isolation and the online ministry's weight. They experienced much stress, exhaustion, loneliness, depression, anxieties, and fear. (2) Most of the pastors are challenged by slow internet access and limitations of assistive gadgets and other technologies. Most of them struggled to preach the Word through online meetings and live-streams and experienced a lack of materials and equipment for the online ministry. (3) Pastors need healthy social and financial support. (4) Most pastors gained positive and new experiences in the online ministry.

Furthermore, the researchers recommend that the government provide better assistance and funding for the churches. This assistance includes providing necessary gadgets and technologies for the churches that can't afford such means for the online ministry. This assistance will easily give churches access to people to continuously share the Word to them and reach them out in a broader range, despite pandemic. Technology assistance and funding will make pastors, leaders, and members well-educated on utilizing online platforms and systems. Pastors must provide a more supportive online ministry environment that will benefit them, to the co-leaders, members, and the whole church. It will help create and maintain healthy relationships that encourage a sense of belonging and purpose, mental, emotional, and spiritual security. It may help to build strong communication to establish an understanding of relationships. Church members must also provide time, care, and financial support to their leaders and pastors to sustain their personal and family needs, knowing that they do not receive large finances from their jobs. Supporting the leaders will also lead to the improvement of their church. Consequently, future researchers can use these findings to reinforce their future researches, particularly in Filipino pastors' lived experiences in online ministry amidst a pandemic.

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