

**THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 TO THE SPIRITUAL
WELLBEING OF THE EFKS IN AUCKLAND,
AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND**

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Bachelor of Divinity with Honours

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents Rev. Livigisitone and Limasefulu Fiavaai. My siblings Lupesina Melisa, Charlie and Helen Petersen, Taupaopao Lilly and Rev Alesana Tuamu, Elisapeta Sifatuvalu and Vaelua Saio, Hoko Junior, Joyce Satalo. Also dedicated to my nephews, Cruz, Jayvee, Zane and Reginald.

I also wish to dedicate this thesis to the memories of my late grandparents, Rev Fiavaai and Elisapeta Tuivasa, Falepulega P. Patolo and Mauosamoa Mālo, all my aunties and uncles as well as my extended families. *Alofa tele atu mo outou uma.*

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“Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness”. Psalm 115:1

“Aua ne’i ia te I matou, le ALII e, aua ne’i ia te I matou, a ia tuuina atu le viiga I lou suafa, ona o lou alofa ma lou faamaoni”. Salamo 115:1

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ABSTRACT

Christian worship for the *Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa* church also known as the Congregational Christian Church Samoa, has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This study investigates such impact, through conducting a review of literature and interviews, together with my personal experience in relation to lock down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The methodology of *Talanoa* was used to draw data from my participants to inform my study. Various impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic include challenges upon the spiritual wellbeing of participants, affecting how Christian worship is carried out during such difficult times. A Practical Theology model framed on the Normative approach is proposed and concludes this study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 TO THE SPIRITUAL WELLBEING OF THE EFKS IN AUCKLAND, AOTEAROA New Zealand	i
CONSENT FORM FOR THE RETENTION AND USE OF THE THESIS	ii
DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
ABSTRACT	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii
GLOSSARY	x
CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Aim of this Research	4
1.3 A Personal Experience of COVID-19.....	5
1.4 Focus Questions	5
1.5 Scientific Definition of COVID-19.....	6
1.6 Development and Spread of COVID-19	6
1.7 COVID-19 Pandemic in the Oceania Region	8
1.8 COVID-19 in Auckland	8
1.8.1 <i>Government's Response</i>	9
1.8.2 <i>Alert Level system</i>	9
1.8.3 <i>Social and Physical Distancing</i>	10
1.9 Methodology: <i>Talanoa</i>	11
CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW AND INTERVIEWS	13
2.1 Literature Review	13
2.2 International	13
2.3 New Zealand	15
2.4 Interviews.....	17

CHAPTER THREE SPIRITUAL WELLBEING & HOLISTIC APPROACH	23
3.1 Spiritual Wellbeing	23
3.2 Nourishment of Spiritual Wellbeing	25
3.3 Holistic Approach	27
CHAPTER FOUR IMPACTS OF COVID-19.....	32
4.1 Spiritual Wellbeing	33
4.2 Other Impacts	34
CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSION	37
5.1 A Practical Theology Model as a Response to COVID-19 for the EFKS in Aotearoa New Zealand.....	37
5.2 Concluding Thoughts	39
BIBLIOGRAPHY	40

GLOSSARY

<i>Aiga potopoto</i>	Family, Kin and relationship network
<i>Alofa</i>	Love; also refers to money that is being donated toward the church ministers.
<i>Alofa fetufaai</i>	Mutual love
<i>Alo mai alo atu</i>	Face to face
<i>Aoga Aso Sa</i>	Sunday School
<i>Aoga Faifeau</i>	Christian/Pastoral Education
<i>Aoga pese</i>	Choir/Hymnal practice
<i>Aoina ole sene</i>	Collecting of donation for the development of the local church
<i>Aufaipese</i>	Church choir
<i>Au Saili/Faaaofia</i>	Christian Initiation
<i>Fa'aāloalo</i>	Revere/respect
<i>Fa'afaletui</i>	Council or caucus meeting
<i>Fa'aipoipoga</i>	Wedding
<i>Fa'amanatuga</i>	Eucharist/Holy Communion
<i>Fa'avae</i>	Foundation
<i>Faiga Taulaga</i>	Annual financial contribution towards the operation of the EFKS church
<i>Fale</i>	House
<i>Faleoo</i>	Samoan open thatched house
<i>Faletalimalo</i>	Samoan open guest house
<i>Fetu'utu'una'i muniao</i>	Navigating relational space

<i>Filifogava'a</i>	Discussion of an agenda
<i>Gagana Samoa</i>	Samoan language
<i>Kanohi ki te kanohi</i>	Face to face (Maori)
<i>Lauga</i>	Sermon
<i>Lauga faa-Samoa</i>	Samoan oratorical speech
<i>Lauga ole aganuu</i>	Cultural speech
<i>Loto faatasia</i>	Collaborative approach
<i>Lotu</i>	Church/worship
<i>Lotu a tamaiti</i>	Children's service/worship
<i>Mafutaga Autalavou</i>	Youth Fellowship
<i>Mafutaga a Tamā</i>	Men's Fellowship
<i>Mafutaga a Tinā</i>	Women's Fellowship
<i>Maliu</i>	Funeral
<i>Mana male mamalu</i>	Maintaining honour and dignity
<i>Marae</i>	Maori meeting house
<i>Matagaluega</i>	Diocese
<i>Meaalofa</i>	Gifting process
<i>Ola Faaleagaga</i>	Spirituality
<i>Ola Faaleloto</i>	Social Wellbeing
<i>Ola Faalelagona</i>	Emotional Wellbeing
<i>Ola Faalemafaufau</i>	Psychological Wellbeing
<i>Ola Faaletino</i>	Physical Wellbeing
<i>Palapala mālo</i>	Cattles, pigs, cartons of poultry and corned beef
<i>Pale</i>	Floral arrangement; wreath
<i>Pese</i>	Hymn/song

<i>S'ii alofa</i>	Monetary gifts and fine mats
<i>Soālaupuleina o mataupu</i>	Discussion of the existing matters
<i>Taha Hinengaro</i>	Mental and Emotional Wellbeing
<i>Taha Tinana</i>	Physical Wellbeing
<i>Taha Wairua</i>	Spiritual Wellbeing
<i>Taha Whanau</i>	Family and Social Wellbeing
<i>Talanoa</i>	Converse/dialogue
<i>Tapuaiga</i>	Worship
Tapuaiga faa-Kerisiano	Christian Worship
<i>Tatalo</i>	Prayer
<i>Taualuga</i>	Roof
<i>Tausi tuaoi</i>	External boundaries
<i>Tautua</i>	Service or to serve
<i>Tofa liuliu</i>	Negotiation
<i>Tulituli matagau</i>	Working towards a resolution
<i>Tu ma aganuu faa-Samoa</i>	Samoaan customs and traditions
<i>Whakatauki</i>	Maori proverbs
<i>Wharenuui</i>	Meeting house

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter firstly explores what Christian Worship is and its correlation to how the *Ekalesia Fa'apotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa* also known as the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (EFKS/CCCS) conducts its worship, both before and during the current COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose and aim for this thesis will also be discussed as well as giving a brief account of my personal experience to the COVID-19 pandemic while on lock down in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. The research question and a short scientific definition of COVID-19 will also be presented, in addition to a discussion on the development and spread of COVID-19 and the responses by the Government of Aotearoa New Zealand in terms of the alert level systems. Finally, this chapter will discuss the *Talanoa* methodology that I used for the data collection for this study.

1.1 Introduction

Although there was a time when the Government of Samoa declared a State of Emergency order (SOE) which resulted in *lotu* (worship) on Sundays being initially prohibited due to the global threat of the pandemic, regular services resumed shortly after since there were no confirmed cases in Samoa. Despite this, the effect that COVID-19 had on worship practices in Samoa was noticeable due to the disruptions on its normal operations and proceedings.

According to Martin Luther, as quoted in James F White's "Introduction to Christian Worship", the concept of Christian worship or *tapuaiga faa-Kerisiano* is a collective ritual whereby people congregate to communicate (*rede/reden*) with God (White, 2000). It involves various aspects pertaining to worship such as *pese lotu* (church music/hymns), *tatalo*

(prayers), *lauga* (sermon), practices such as *Au Saili/Faaofia* (Christian Initiation), *Faamanatuga* (Eucharist), as well as occasional services like *Faaiipoipoga* (Christian Marriage), *Maliu* (Funerals) and others. Likewise, Christian Worship also entails the languages of time and space which alludes to the Christian calendar and the significance of liturgical space.

The same principle of communal worship every Sunday is followed by our EFKS churches here in Samoa and abroad in accordance with the Constitution of the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa 2001 (CCCS/EFKS), 12th revision, signed by the General Assembly at Malua in 2006. This is also stated in Section 3.3 of the aforementioned Constitution whereby the Congregational Christian Church in each village, in Samoa and overseas countries, is the fellowship of Church members who have covenanted to live together in Christ.

Prior to the arrival of the LMS Missionaries in 1830 that brought along Christianity, Samoa had its own form of *tapuaiga* (worship) whereby the people often revered Tagaloa-lagi¹ (Tagaloa-of-heaven) as well as various objects and idols. In addition, the concept of *tapuaiga* (worship) also extended to other activities such as sporting events or competition between two villages hence the Samoan expression “*E le sili le ta’i nai lo o le tapuai*” translated as being a competitor does not surpass being a supporter, an expression that emphasize the supporting role of the spectators as being more significant than the players or performers.

There is also a general belief among the Samoan people that preceding the arrival of Christianity, a belief system had already existed in Samoa concerning the conviction that

¹ According to Samoan mythology, Tagaloa-lagi, also known as Tagaloa dwelt in space and created the universe. Before the arrival of Christianity to Samoa, Tagaloa-lagi was generally believed to be the Supreme ruler and chief of all gods.

there is a higher and Supreme Being. One evidence of such is when Nafanua² (Samoan prophetess/goddess) prophesied to Malietoa “*Faatali i lagi se ao o lou malo*” translated to “Wait on the heavens for a crown for your kingdom” which many people believe to have been the foretelling for the arrival of Christianity to Samoa.

Thus, when Rev John Williams and the LMS Missionaries arrived, the people were receptive of the Gospel and the Christian God. Since that time, the Samoan people were being ‘Christianised’³ and adapted to the concept of Christian worship while still upholding the same or higher level of reverence towards the sacredness of *tapuaiga*.

The onset of the pandemic of COVID-19 and the strong guidelines by the World Health Organization about how to respond to the pandemic however, have caused major disruptions to this normal practice of EFKS worship. Religious leaders, faith-based organizations and communities of faith were implored to utilize other means of communication such as video or audiotape, phone, as well as remote or virtual meeting platforms to conduct their worship to observe health and safety protocols such as social and physical distancing. Therefore, rather than congregating to worship or *tapuai*, the EFKS and other denominations have had to improvise and adapt by utilizing virtual or online platforms such as Facebook⁴ and other means to ensure the continuation of *tapuaiga*.

As a collective community, the EFKS promotes cultural notions of *soālaupule*⁵ (discussion), *tofāliuliu* (negotiation), *faafaletui* (council or caucus meeting), *filifogāva’a* (discussion of an agenda), *fetuutuunai muniao* (navigating relational space), *tulituli matāgau* (working towards a solution) and many more which highlight the communal operation of

² Nafanua was a warrior princess, prophetess and chief who claimed four distinctive district titles (*pāpā*). As per Samoan tradition, prior to the arrival of Christianity, Nafanua had already prophesied this significant event onto Malietoa Fitiseanu when he sought Nafanua’s help in uniting Samoa and bringing an end to the warfare and bloodshed. The arrival of Rev John Williams and the Missionaries in 1830 was a sign of the fulfilment of Nafanua’s prophesy when Malietoa Vainuupo, heir of Malietoa Fitiseanu was given the Bible.

³ Rev John Williams and the Missionaries converted the Samoan people to Christianity.

⁴ Since the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic and the reinforcement of the alert levels system, Facebook and other social media platforms have been widely used to transmit worship.

⁵ These Samoan terms reflect the relational facets of the Samoan culture.

Samoan people. These practices are transferred to the church context incorporating cultural values of *alofa*⁶ (love), *faaloalo* (revere) and *tautua* (service). Opportunities to virtual worshipping using online platforms whilst it promotes safety, it impacts on the Samoan cultural practice of *alo mai, alo atu* (face to face) and the infamous Maori *whakatouki* (proverb) of *kanohi ki te kanohi*⁷ (face to face).

1.2 Aim of this Research

The aim for this study is to explore the impact of COVID-19 to the Spiritual Wellbeing of the EFKS in Auckland, Aotearoa NZ. The interest in the topic stemmed out of a curiosity to study the impact that several health and safety measures such as social and physical distancing rules in Aotearoa New Zealand, have made upon the normal worship and operation of the EFKS Church. The question of whether the doctrines and principles of the EFKS Church are maintained through this new form of virtual worship is vital in my research. Interactive worship using reciprocity of engagement is rewarding and is a normal customary practice for Samoan people as a collective society.

The impact upon the communal element of *faasamoa* during a pandemic in how communal conditions are constrained by social and physical distancing, is of interest at different Alert Levels given by the government of New Zealand. It is also of great interest to identify the depth of participation with efforts to sustain engagement in worship through the use of several digital and online platforms. The quality of participation is also questionable as often engagement is not monitored, and its genuineness is reliant on an effective monitoring process. Unraveling resilient determinants in enduring COVID-19 and in the context of the EFKS Church in Aotearoa New Zealand is also important in my study given that a significant proportion of Samoan youth have moved to charismatic churches (Tima, 2013).

⁶ These terms reflect many Samoan social and relational values

⁷ A Maori expression which translates to “face-to-face or eyes-to-eyes communication.

1.3 A Personal Experience of COVID-19

I have experienced for the first time the impact of COVID-19 on the EFKS in Aotearoa New Zealand when I returned to New Zealand from Samoa, in the latter part of 2020 for medical reasons. Upon arrival, Auckland was undergoing alert level 3 due to four new community cases of COVID-19, while the rest of New Zealand remained at alert level 2. Social and physical distancing as well as other health and safety protocols such as the maximum number of people per gathering were enforced at the time, and virtual platforms such as Facebook Live was predominantly used by most EFKS churches in Aotearoa New Zealand for their normal *tapuaiga/lotu* (worship service) on Sundays. This practice lasted a whole month until the alert level for Auckland was lowered, and the lockdown was lifted which then allowed the normal *lotu* to resume as before the restrictions. I experienced the impact of COVID-19 upon worship practices of the EFKS for the second time at the beginning of 2021, when Auckland underwent another lockdown that led to the same precautions and protocols as before being enforced.

1.4 Focus Questions

To unpack the overarching topic of the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic to the Spiritual Wellbeing of the EFKS church in Auckland, Aotearoa NZ the following questions are asked:

- 1) What are the impacts of COVID-19 on the life of the EFKS in Auckland Aotearoa New Zealand and its people?
- 2) How can the EFKS in Auckland Aotearoa New Zealand cope with the ongoing threats of the COVID-19 pandemic?

1.5 Scientific Definition of COVID-19

The Coronavirus disease or COVID-19 is... “an enveloped and single-stranded ribonucleic acid named for its solar corona-like appearance due to 9-12-nm-long surface spikes. It is a highly contagious and pathogenic viral infection caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV2) which developed in Wuhan China and then spread around the globe” (Journal of Advanced Research, 2020).

Based on current data, it appears that the virus may have been initially hosted by bats then transmitted to humans by way of pangolin (scaly anteaters) or other wild animals that were sold at the Huanan Seafood Market which later spread by means of human-to-human transmission.

1.6 Development and Spread of COVID-19

According to the World Health Organization⁸, the coronavirus pandemic widely known as COVID-19 was firstly identified on December 31st 2019 in China, when a mass case of viral pneumonia was reported by the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission in China. Immediately, the WHO requested more information regarding this ‘pneumonia of unknown cause’ from the Chinese officials and on the 9th of January 2020, it was established that the outbreak is caused by a novel coronavirus.

The first death from COVID-19 was reported on the 11th of January 2020 by the Chinese media and on the 13th and 15th of the same month, the first and second confirmed cases were identified outside of China. This prompted the World Health Organization to

⁸ World Health Organization. Situation reports. Available at <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports/> Accessed 21 January 2021.

advise that additional cases in other countries were likely due to the global travel patterns. Although it was earlier determined by the World Health Organization based on the information and analysis that there was evidence of limited human-to-human transmission, on the 21st of January 2020, it later revealed that there was “at least some human-to-human transmission”.

On the 7th March 2020, the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases exceeded 100,000 globally. The World Health Organization reacted to the alarming levels of spread and severity of the COVID-19 by characterizing it as a pandemic.

On March 13, 2020, it was found that with the exception of China, Europe had become the epicenter of the pandemic with more reported cases and death than the rest of the world combined. The rapid global widespread of the pandemic was revealed in the report by the World Health Organization on April 4, 2020 whereby it stated that over 1 million cases of COVID-19 had been confirmed worldwide, a more than tenfold increase in less than a month. As of April 2021, the total number of cases is 133 million worldwide while the total number of deaths is 2.89 million.

USA: The first confirmed case of the novel coronavirus in the United States of America was reported on the same day, 21st January 2020.

European Union: On January 29, 2020, France advised the World Health Organization of three confirmed cases.

Eastern Mediterranean Region: The first reported case of COVID-19 in the region was reported by the United Arab Emirates on January 29, 2020.

African Region: The first case in the region happened in Egypt on February 14, 2020. On the 25th February 2020, a second confirmed COVID-19 case was reported in Algeria.

1.7 COVID-19 Pandemic in the Oceania Region

Australia: The first confirmed case of COVID-19 in the Oceania Region was reported on January 25th, 2020 in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia where a Chinese citizen who arrived from Guangzhou was infected with the SARS-CoV-2.⁹ Three other patients who returned from Wuhan China were tested positive in Sydney, Australia on the same day. (Australia Government Department of Health, 2020). As of April 2021, the total number of cases in Australia is 29,393 with 909 deaths.

Fiji: As of March 2021, Fiji has a total of 66 COVID-19 cases and 2 deaths.

Papua New Guinea: The first case of COVID-19 in PNG was reported and confirmed on March 20, 2020. As of April 2021, the total number of cases is 7,635 and the number of deaths is 68.

Samoa: There are 4 confirmed COVID-19 cases in Samoa and no confirmed deaths according to the latest updated report as of April 2021. **American Samoa** has the same number of confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths.

Vanuatu: The small island nations has three confirmed cases and 0 deaths.

There have been no confirmed COVID-19 cases in the Pacific Islands of **Tonga, Cook Islands, Tokelau** and **Niue** as of April 2021.

1.8 COVID-19 in Auckland

The first case of COVID-19 in New Zealand was reported to the Ministry of Health on February 28, 2020 from a citizen who had returned to Auckland from Iran on the 26th of the same month. The first local transmission happened on March 4th, 2020 and the first death was a woman in her 70s from the West Coast region in the South Island on the 29th March 2020.

⁹ Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2; name given to the novel coronavirus which caused COVID-19. Information available at <https://emedicine.medscape.com/article/2500114-overview>
Accessed 18 January 2021.

By the end of March, the combined number of confirmed COVID-19 cases reached 647. According to the latest and updated report released by the Ministry of Health on April 2021, the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases is 2555 while the number of deceased is 26.

1.8.1 Government's Response

In response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of New Zealand started the National Health Coordination Centre (NHCC). In early February 2020, the Government closed its borders to most people travelling from China, and several repatriation flights were sponsored by the Government for returning citizens, residents and their family members.

In addition, the Government closed the country borders to non-citizens and non-residents on March 19, 2020 as a response to the rising number of COVID-19 cases traveling from overseas and within the country. The government also introduced Genome sequencing a tool that would inform the government and health officials about how the outbreak started.

1.8.2 Alert Level system

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern introduced an alert level system¹⁰ whereby strict health and safety protocols are to be observed depending on the severity of COVID-19 cases, with level 1 being the least risk of infection and the level 4 the highest. Whilst the alert level system affects the whole country, different alert levels are individually assigned for each region within New Zealand based on the level of severity of their own infections.

Different descriptions are given to underline the expectation associated with each of the alert levels and a set of health preventive protocols are listed under each level which the whole country must adhere to.

¹⁰ Information available at <https://covid19.govt.nz/alert-levels-and-updates/>
Accessed 18 January 2021.

Level 1 is the Preparatory stage on which no restriction is placed on personal movement or gatherings unless feeling unwell with flu-like symptoms then they are advised to stay home. Schools and workplaces are open although they must operate safely, and good hygiene is also advised for all people.

Level 2 is the Reduction stage whereby several preventive measures such as physical distancing of two meters from people outside of your own bubble must be observed at all times. Strict public health measures are also advised to be strictly followed such as face covering on public transport and aircraft as well as the number of people per gathering being limited to 100 only.

Level 3 is the Restriction stage and people are instructed to stay home in their own bubble and essential personal movement is only allowed. Physical distancing is also required and gatherings of only up to 10 people are allowed but only for special occasions such as weddings, funerals and tangitanga. People are also advised to work from home and only schools from years 1 to 10 and Early Childhood Education centers can be opened provided they can operate safely.

Level 4 is the Elimination stage is the highest risk and people must stay at home other than for essential personal movement. Gatherings of any sort are not allowed, and all public venues and educational facilities must be closed.

Isolation is common across all alert levels as a requirement for those who are residing in New Zealand if or should they experience any flu-like symptoms and for the people arriving in New Zealand whereby they must go into a managed isolation facility for at least 14 days upon arrival.

1.8.3 Social and Physical Distancing

In the context of COVID-19, the World Health Organization detailed social and physical distancing as a health and safety measure which aims to slow the spread of disease

by stopping chains of transmission of COVID-19 as well as blocking new ones from developing. To observe this health and safety measure, a distance of two meters between people must be kept at all times as well as avoid coming into contact with contaminated surfaces. In addition, virtual and online social connections with other people especially large gatherings are encouraged and recommended.

1.9 Methodology: *Talanoa*

My main data collection methods for this study are individual *talanoa* (Vaioleti, 2006) with family members who attend an EFKS Church in New Zealand. Opportunities to *talanoa* as a family and individually for confidentiality. Another method is observation at the families' church services.

Samoa is an oral society, so it is important to use a method that not only complements my study, but more importantly captures the depth of Samoan cultural knowledge. My study will benefit from this balance by using a qualitative focus. Zanutto (2013) argues that qualitative design allows for many perspectives and opinions. Although the study is based in Samoa while the focus group is based in Aotearoa New Zealand, semi-structured¹¹ interviews will be carried out with the selected participants via Zoom.¹²

To ensure impartiality while at the same time maintaining a manageable scope of data collection, two members of different genders will be recruited from each segment of the two selected churches such as the youth between the ages of thirteen and twenty-five, two representatives from the *Mafutaga a Tinā* (Women's Fellowship), two from the *Mafutaga a Tamā* (Men's Fellowship) as well as the Church Ministers of both EFKS Churches.

¹¹ This research method is generally used in qualitative research whereby the interviewer does not have to use a strict set of questions.

¹² A video teleconferencing software program that has been widely used for virtual face-to-face communication since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I will also be able to source printed and online resources from the Malua Library as well as the National University of Samoa library. Online access to university database in New Zealand is significant to get a global overview of my topic. New Zealand has a Pacific Medical Association to get a spiritual wellbeing perspective. Some of the churches in our *matagaluega* (diocese) have well established online platforms for worshipping and those who don't will be important to know if, and how they were able to continue their worship without the aid of online or virtual platforms.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND INTERVIEWS

2.1 Literature Review

There is a dearth of literature on the topic particularly in Samoa as it has largely been unaffected by COVID-19, however, there is enough material to attempt a review from what is available in New Zealand and globally.

2.2 International

The new norm that is becoming a quick trend in worshipping according to the international literature is internet ministry. Publications from the Western European countries and those heavily impacted outnumber the absence of literature from the Pacific let alone Samoa.

A preference for a face to face type of worshipping remains the popular option for many denominations. Afolaranmi (2020) conducted a research of church pastors in Nigeria (both young and old) as to how their 'pastoral care' role in preaching can be continued during COVID-19. Majority of the pastors still preferred the face to face worshipping with WhatsApp as the most popular platform. However, Koenig (2020) argues that lockdowns during COVID-19 is an opportunity to concentrate on nurturing and strengthening one's relationship with God.

On a different focus, Sulkowski and Ignatowski (2020) explored the impact of COVID-19 on how religious behaviour is organised in different Christian denominations in Poland. Using a qualitative paradigm, in-depth interviews were used to address the research focus. Interestingly, the research took place during the early emergence of the COVID-19 in Poland which led to the churches taking security measures upon their congregations before the

government introduced their safety processes. Great church leadership in times of pandemic is truly highlighting the work of the Holy Spirit.

Running parallel to this notion of divine support is the Somalian experience where faith becomes a healing intervention for the Islamic believers (Bentley, J. A; Mohamed, F; Feeny, N; Ahmed and Musa; Tubeec, A. M; Momin Hussein Egeh, A. H; Abu-Bakar Borama, Angula, D; Zoellner, L. 2020). With most Islam communities in the low-middle class families, faith serves ‘as first-line coping pathways’ to endure stress presented by COVID-19. Bentley (2020) further elaborated on the strong sense of communal solidarity to stay connected and support one another.

Addo (2020) discussed ‘affordance and affect’ as advantages of worshipping online during COVID-19 whereby offline liturgical practices are translated into virtual platforms such as Zoom and Free Conference Call. While conducting a digital ethnographic research on African Pentecostal communities in Northern Italy, it emerged that the believers use the chat box and emojis to communicate affective moments during worship services, while the leaders of the service remain in control by activating the mute button if and when necessary.

Martin (2001) writes about the connection between an individual worshipper and the congregation whereby the functional theology of a congregation at worship is shaped both by the received theological tradition in which it stands, and by primary theology as experienced by the worshippers.

Stijnman (1981) in an attempt to improve worship participation of Seventh Day Adventists in Africa discussed that Christian worship must be seen as transcending ethnic and cultural barriers to allow both to flourish and influence the worship patterns of the church in Africa.

Dr Faleolo (2020) also documented the responses of Samoans and Tongans living in Australia to the changes and uncertainties in relation to the effects of COVID-19. Despite the

health and safety regulations such as social distancing, borders closures and travel bans that were put in place to minimize the spread of COVID-19. According to her research and *talanoa* (dialogues), it has been found that communication is more robust through the use of social media and other means of virtual communication. It demonstrates the responsiveness of Pacific Islanders, especially Samoans and Tongans, to maintaining communication as well as maintaining their collective wellbeing.

An article by Carey, Swift and Burton (2020) which aims at analysing the response of chaplains from various countries in the first six months after the onset of COVID-19. Of the many countries in the world where the study was conducted, New Zealand is one of the successful countries due to its swiftness in enforcing health and safety protocols.

2.3 New Zealand

The genuineness of engaging online church services is questionable. A survey on the impact of providing professional development workshops for teachers online (Professional Learning Association of New Zealand, 2020) discussed the wavering impact of this delivery method. Using 12 questions the survey operated for two weeks where 25 organisations were involved. The survey received 55 responses of which relationship building was highlighted as important to ground first, before any virtual interaction takes place.

With over 50 years in existence in NZ and particularly in Auckland, relationship building is a strength of EFKS church. Relationships and collaboration are fundamentally the pillars of operation in EFKS with the support of Samoan cultural values of *alofa* (love), *tautua* (service) and *faaaloalo* (respect) (Tagoilelagi-Leota, 2017). Kesi (2014) affirms the importance of face to face or physical interaction through conceptualising *alo mai alo atu* to build trust in relationships. The question then is how sustainable these relationships are in a digital era with the presence of COVID-19.

Solomon (2020) reported in Religion Unplugged the collective efforts of Maori and Pacific in ‘crushing’ COVID-19 through faith. The article explored the arduous determination by Pacific churches with a mention of Reverend Victor Pouesi’s online programmes from Mangere East EFKS in Auckland. The vast increase of his audience from the initial 500 members of his church to 10,000 has been a phenomenal shift in online worshipping.

In the same article, an Anglican archdeacon highlighted a significant feature of Maori and Pacific people which is their ‘Spirituality’. He claims that Pacific and Maori commitment is evidence in their pursuit of God through online services. That ‘Spirituality’ is a normal part of their cultural attunement. Solomon further elaborated on the ‘*alofa*’ or tithing responsibilities that Reverend Pouesi encouraged his congregation to halt this practice due to COVID-caused unemployment.

Whilst, we pursue God on these platforms, EFKS’s strength in maintaining Samoan language in its programmes could become vulnerable given that our *gagana Samoa* (Samoan language) may not cater for the linguistic demands of technology. While our Samoan language has managed to cope by transliterating some technological terms thus far, (i.e. *technology/tekonolosi*), more terms are emerging that may eventually have an impact on our language especially for our future generations. Especially as a diaspora community, Lesa (2009) reported the importance of Samoan churches in Hawaii in supporting young children’s cultural identities. Such an issue is paramount as it is mainly the young millennials who are well-versed in modern technology. *Aoga Aso Sa* (Sunday School) and *Aoga Faifeau* (Christian Education) are the most prominent avenues our Samoan people have been using to educate our young Samoan children overseas about our Samoan language. Thus the effect as a result of introducing these new terms to our Samoan language is of great concern.

Liuaana (2013) further supports the need for young children’s ‘Spirituality’ to be nurtured so online worshipping could support this however, online worshipping could work

as a contributing factor to either strengthening or weakening *gagana Samoa* (Samoan language).

2.4 Interviews

In addition to literature review, the methodology of *Talanoa*¹³ was also used to collect data whereby a questionnaire was designed and given to selected participants for the purpose of gathering information regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic to the Spiritual Wellbeing of EFKS in Aotearoa.

Although a set of questions were given prior to the interviews, the concept of *Talanoa* (conversation) was predominantly used whereby the participants were given the opportunity to freely respond without being constrained by the questions. This underlines one important aspect of *alo mai alo atu* (face to face), a principle or tradition that is very significant in both the Samoan culture and *tapuaiga* (worship).

Likewise, from a Practical Theology perspective, *Talanoa* (Vaioleti, 2006) is an important and effective means of engagement with other people in relation to *soalaupuleina o mataupu o loo tulai mai* which is the discussion of existing matters, thus, great emphasis was placed on it.

As mentioned earlier, the participants were selected from two different Samoan EFKS churches in Auckland whereby an approval by the ministers of both churches was sought in relation to approaching the members of their churches for the interviews. The questionnaire and consent forms were sent via email and the interviews were conducted online via the Zoom platform.

Participants were informed of their rights to choose whether to answer or decline any questions and confidentiality was also explained prior to starting the interviews which lasted

¹³ *Talanoa* is a research methodology that was developed by Timote M. Vaioleti in 2006 that can be referred to as a conversation, a talk, an exchange of ideas or thinking, whether formal or informal.

40 minutes each. Due to various factors such as age and language the questionnaire was designed to include five focus questions; both in English and Samoan, and it was left to the participants to choose whether to respond in Samoan or English. Most of the responses were in Samoan.

In one case, an elderly participant asked if they could be assisted by someone during the interview due to being unfamiliar with technology. Both the participant and assistant were informed of confidentiality which they both agreed to. Of the questions asked, most of the answers given included answers to the other questions. For example, the first question and the second question, could be answered together; again, this reflected the *Talanoa* nature in which the interviews were conducted. Thus, I will combine the responses to those questions based on the information provided by the participants.

To ensure confidentiality and privacy of the participants is being upheld, their gender, age and identity will not be revealed. The youth members between the ages of 13 and 25 will be referred to as Participant 1 and Participant 2. The representatives from the *Mafutaga a Tinā* (Women's Fellowship) will be referred to as Participant 3 and Participant 4. Representatives from the *Mafutaga a Tamā* (Men's Fellowship) will be referred to as Participant 5 and Participant 6. Finally, the church ministers will be referred to as Participant 7 and Participant 8.

To avoid confusion, I have divided the participants from the two selected churches into odd and even numbers. For example, the first church consists of Participants 1, 3, 5, and 7 while the second church consists of Participants 2, 4, 6 and 8. The response provided by one of the participants who was assisted by a family member will also be compiled as one to avoid impartiality.

The findings or data that was collected from the interviews are as followed:

Q1. How was worship conducted before COVID-19 and why?

Q2. What forms of spiritual engagement or practice were made available during COVID-19 or continued?

The response of every participant to both questions were similar whereby they were able to name the programs that were made available before COVID-19 such as *Aoga Tusi Paia* (Bible studies) on Sunday evenings (Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 7, Participant 8), *Aoga Pese* or Choir practices according to Participant 1, Participant 3, Participant 4, Participant 6, Participant 7 and Participant 8. Participants 2, 4, 6 and 8 also mentioned *Mafutaga Autalavou* (Youth Fellowships) night as a weekly event before COVID-19.

Choir Practice and some other programs such as Youth Games Nights (*Po o Taaloga mole Autalavou*) were all stopped when the alert levels were being enforced. *Aufaipese* (choir) is one of the most important aspect of worship. As per one phrase I often hear which underlines the significance function that the choir performs in worship “*E mafai e le pese ona lauga, ae le mafai e le lauga ona pese*” translated as “A song (hymn) can preach, but not the other way round”.

Such phrase underlines the importance of incorporating music in our act of worship, and echoes White’s (2000) view whereby he states that “the chief function of church music is to add a deeper dimension of participation to worship”. Unfortunately, due to the restrictions and closure of large gatherings in congruent with certain alert levels, choir practices much like the other programs were suspended.

Youth fellowship (*Mafutaga Autalavou*) is also one important aspect of EFKS spiritual programs that has been greatly impacted since the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic. This program is very important not only for those who were born and raised in New Zealand, but equally important for the young people who were born in Samoa but migrated abroad at a young age. This is largely due to the reason that the *Mafutaga Autalavou* caters to both

Spiritual and Cultural teachings, whereby certain aspects of *tu ma aganuu Faa-Samoa* (Samoan customs and traditions) are being taught and observed by the elders. Learning the facets pertaining to the *tu ma aganuu Faa-Samoa* such as *lauga faa-Samoa/lauga ole aganuu* (Samoan oratorical/cultural speech), *folafola male tufaina ole ava* (the proclamation and distribution of *ava/kava*) and others are considered to be of utmost importance in ensuring that our language and culture are being preserved.

While the *Mafutaga Autalavou* organization focus its afore-mentioned agendas to the teenagers and young adults, the *Aoga Aso Sa* (Sunday School) and *Aoga Faifeau* (Pastoral/Christian Education) on the other hand caters to the much younger children. The *Aoga Aso Sa* aims at primarily teaching the children how to read and understand the Bible in its Samoan translation, and the children are also encouraged to memorize and recite various Biblical verses which they get to perform at the *Lotu a Tamaiti*¹⁴(White Sunday).

Whilst the *Lotu a Tamaiti* still proceeded in 2020 when the lockdown alert level dropped from 3 to 2 at the time, most children were not able to attend due to their parents and family being concerned about their safety.

All participants responded *sa masani ona faia tapuaiga ile falesa I taeao o Aso Sa* (Worship was usually held in the Church on Sunday mornings) before the arrival of COVID-19.

It also came about in the comments and responses of all of the participants, that traditional elements associated with EFKS worship such as *aoina o le sene* (collecting of donation similar to tithing which helps the development of the local church), *faiga taulaga* (financial offering for the development of the EFKS church), *alofa mo faifeau* (money given

¹⁴ *Lotu Tamaiti* is literally translated “Children’s Service”. Also known as *Aso Sa Paepae* (White Sunday) it is a special occasion that occurs every second Sunday of October in which the parents and communities gather together to commemorate and acknowledge the children. It is perhaps the only day when the children are afforded the royalty treatment usually reserved for the elderly members of the family, such as being the first to be served food during the family *toonai* (feast).

or donated to assist the ministers) were either put on hold or stopped during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

Lotu a le Mafutaga Tina (Women's Fellowship monthly worship), *Aoga Aso Sa* (Sunday School) and *Aoga Faifeau* (Christian Education) were also affected, however unlike the other practices that continued on through means of Facebook live and Zoom, they were stopped altogether.

Likewise, other special events in the yearly calendar of the EFKS Church such as *Faamanatuga* (Holy Communion) which takes place every first Sunday of every month and *lotu aofai a pulega* (Combined services of each EFKS Diocese) were also suspended during COVID-19.

However, despite the difficulty as a result of the normal worship services being suspended, social media such as Facebook Live was mainly used to relay the *lotu* on Sundays to its members while other online platforms such as Zoom was predominantly used for meetings and other programs such as Bible studies.

The third question which is in relation to identifying the people who are engaged in these worships also underlay another question regarding the genuineness of participating the virtual worships and programs. Interestingly, the young participants found it hard to be fully engaged both to the *lotu* and *Aoga Tusi Paia* (Bible studies) because there was no structure and no supervision from either the Church minister and his wife or elder members of the Youth.

According to Participant 1 response, "*E ese a le lotu I le facebook male alu I le falesa, e faapena foi le auai I aoga Tusi Paia*" (Attending church is different to watching it on Facebook, and it's the same as attending our (Youth) Bible Studies). When asked to explain further, the participant stated that it does not feel the same due to distractions at home.

The participants also indicated that they were able to access other church services on Facebook live and some were not EFKS churches, but they watched it anyway. It is a concern as noted in Tima's (2013) article that young people are starting to move away from the EFKS church to charismatic churches.

When asked about the effectiveness of virtual worship compared to the traditional way in which worship was usually conducted, the participants indicated the advantages and benefits of using social media to broadcast church services. One of the benefits according to some of the participants is that they were able to worship with other family members who seldom attended church before COVID-19.

Another participant stated that one advantage of social distancing being enforced in churches during lockdowns is that families are able to stay in their own bubbles thus creating a sense of worshipping together as a family. The same participant added that before COVID-19, the spouse and some of the children usually sat with the choir in their allocated seats while their other children sat with the Sunday school.

Collectively, the common problem about not physically attending church services is the lack of regard that the people (family members) have in ensuring that they are being Mentally, Physically and Spiritually prepared for the sacredness of worship. However, staying at home and watching the *lotu* being broadcasted via Facebook live and other online platforms has taken away the sacredness of worship and people have a tendency to 'normalize' it as if they are watching a movie at home. This often leads to people doing what they normally do at home under such circumstance whereby they would just lie in bed or eating while watching the service.

CHAPTER THREE

SPIRITUAL WELLBEING & HOLISTIC APPROACH

In this Chapter, I will define Spiritual Wellbeing firstly in the Samoan context as well as considering the perspective of other worldviews. In addition, I will explain how to ensure that the Spirituality is being nourished in order to maintain a person's well-being.

Since my stance and emphasis is on Spirituality in relation to religion, in particular the EFKS church, I will be referring to the Book of Isaiah chapter 41:10, and Paul's Epistle to the Church in Rome chapter 12:12 to describe an approach that I believe is important for the sustenance of one's spiritual wellbeing. The third part of this chapter I will attempt to describe the significance of the holistic approach in relation to the 'Spiritual, Mental, Physical Wellbeing' of a person.

For the last part, I will discuss some of the methods or approaches by some of the prominent *Pasifika* scholars including Fuimaono Pulotu Endemann, Dr Byron Malaela Soliata Seiuli as well as Sir Professor Mason Durie to help illustrate the Holistic approach that I refer to in this study.

3.1 Spiritual Wellbeing

The term Spiritual on its own most definitely has many different meanings and interpretations and for some people including myself, Spiritual or Spirituality is a term that simply applies to a person's Spiritual life. This meaning or interpretation is quite literal and very narrow in the sense that other aspects in relation to Spiritual or Spirituality are being overlooked. On the other hand, Wellbeing is defined by the Holman Bible Dictionary as "the state of being or doing well in life; happy, healthy, or prosperous condition; moral or physical welfare (of a person or community).

There is a significant array of literature that defines the term Spiritual/Spirituality from the Samoan and Pasifika perspectives. The diverse definitions of Spirituality according to the literature seem to consider everyday life, human beliefs and worldviews, as well as its relation to the Spiritual realm or Spiritual world.

Betham (2008) stated that Spirituality is how a person lives in respect to the gods or spiritual world. Similarly, Toso (2011) alludes to the connection that links Spirituality and connections whereby cultural values such as *fefaasoai* (collaboration), *fetausia* (reciprocity), *alofa* (love), *va tapuia/va fealoai* (sacred space) and others are observed. Toso's definition of Spirituality reflects the importance of how one lives in relation to others and encompasses both the Spiritual and Cultural values, both are important aspects of Samoan life and worldview.

Sauni (2011) describes two areas in which Spirituality is linked to the Samoan people. Firstly, Sauni describes Spirituality as *mana* (power) a Samoan person acquires that reflects his/her leadership within his/her family circle, village, community etc. Secondly, Spirituality according to Sauni is the *mana* that an individual obtains as a result of his/her connection with the Christian faith, Cultural beliefs and values as well as Spiritual ancestors.

Parallel to my belief in spirituality that has been expressed before, Sheldrake's (2007) cited in Dr Lomas article entitled The Dynamics of Spirituality (2017) describes Spirituality as an adjective that signifies being with or of the 'spirit of God.'

Thomas (1999) also mentioned that although Spirituality may carry different connotations to different people, to many, it probably insinuates something sacred or ecclesiastical and is religious by nature.

A study was conducted to investigate the link between Spiritual Wellbeing and quality of life in elderly people living in south-eastern Iran in the area of Zahedan City. From this survey of 117 elderly people, Spiritual Wellbeing was highly recommended due to its

importance in the process of caring for the elderly. In addition, it was also found that those who reach advance age are the people who have higher spiritual wellbeing compared to others who have been involved in these studies (Seraji et al, 2016).

As mentioned earlier, although there are many definitions and interpretations of Spirituality, however the essence of the thoughts and ideas from the aforementioned literatures still point towards the relationship of Spirituality to human life. Therefore, Spirituality plays an important role in the Wellbeing of an individual.

3.2 Nourishment of Spiritual Wellbeing

How can we ensure that our Spiritual Wellbeing is being sustained as we continue to face the challenges associated with COVID-19? This question arises as a result of what is currently happening in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic that is affecting the Spirituality of worshippers around the globe including members of the EFKS denomination. I will attempt to answer this question from my point of view and belief as stated earlier, in addition to a Biblical passage to support my stance. A well-known children Christian song goes:

Read your Bible

Pray every day

And you'll grow

Faitau le Tusi Paia

Ma tatalo I aso uma

Ona e tuputupu ai lea

Without a question, the lyrics of this popular Christian song may be simple, nevertheless, it contains a powerful and compelling message regarding the importance of reading the Bible as well as praying on a daily basis, in order for the person to grow. One may wonder though how such acts could possibly make a person grow, particularly in the physical sense, thus my understanding and stance that the word ‘grow’ is primarily referring to Spiritual growth. It is also evident in Jesus’ proclamation in Matthew 4:4 “It is written, One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God”.

In addition, Jesus’ response to a Pharisee named Nicodemus (John 3:6) “What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit”, He (Jesus) distinctly separates Physical and Spiritual. In view of this, one’s flesh cannot be fed by consuming the word of God so to speak, neither can a man’s spirit be nourished by eating physical food.

As researchers and physicians continue to search for medicines and medical drugs to help alleviate, and hopefully impede the COVID-19 pandemic, it is undeniable that our Spiritual being and faith have been tested to the point that some people have even began to question God’s existence.

Understandably, it is human nature to be feeling anxious, hopeless and overwhelmed when encountering adversity and facing tough times such as what we are facing today in the form of COVID-19. Despite this, we as Christians must not only remain vigilant during these troubled times, but we must also persevere in seeking the will of God through the Bible, so that our Spirituality and faith can be sustained.

The Bible is without any doubt inundated with passages regarding the will of God, however, in congruence with the above, I have considered the theme of Hope as the central and appropriate message during these challenging times, hence, why I have selected Isaiah 41:10 and Romans 12:12.

Isaiah 41:10 reads: “Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand”. In addition, Romans 12:12 reads: “Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer”.

Both Biblical passages underline similar messages of trusting God and remain steadfast in our faith as we experience hardships and challenges in life. In Isaiah 41:10, God is urging His people not to fear because He is with them. It is also a reminder to the Israelites of God’s powerful and authorizing presence even in times of strife and challenges; therefore, they must be courageous and fearless in spite of the dissention that they may be encountering.

In Romans 12:12, Paul wrote this epistle under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of preparing the church in Rome for his anticipated visit there. He was hoping and had foreseen Rome to be the ideal center of operation for his pioneer missionary work, thus the contents and full exposition of his epistle would have laid a strong basis for the partaking of the churches that have yet to be evangelized (Constable, 2012).

3.3 Holistic Approach

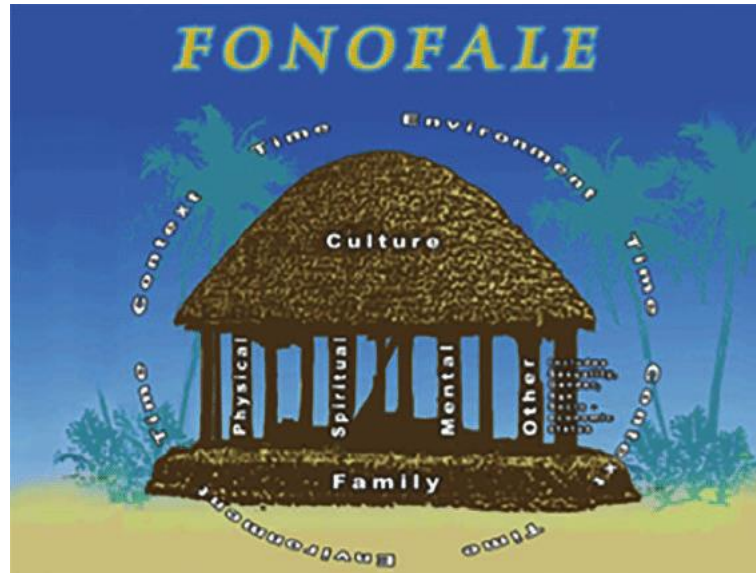
At first glance, while it may be easy to define Holistic approach, that may not necessarily be the case hence why I have considered using the frameworks and approaches that were developed by some of the Samoan and Pacific scholars as mentioned earlier in relation to the classification of various elements which impacts a person’s Wellbeing.

These approaches have similarities and differences as well however, they are all developed for the purpose of identifying areas that are contributing to a person’s Wellbeing to ensure that everything is well-balanced.

There are numerous ‘Wellbeing’ models, but I have chosen these approaches not only because they were created by Samoan and Pacific scholars, but I am also familiar with the models such as the use of the *faleoo* (open thatched house) and *faletalimalo* (open guest

house) by Pulotu-Endemann and Seiuli respectively, as well as the *marae* (Maori meeting house) by Durie.

The Fonofale Model: Dr. Fuimaono Pulotu-Endemann



This model was created by Pulotu-Endemann (1982) and uses the design of the Samoan *fale* or *faleoo* to depict an individual person. The *faavae* (foundation) of the *fale* symbolizes the individual's immediate and extended families as well as other people such as partners.

The *taualuga* (roof) of the *fale* embodies the person's cultural beliefs and values and encompasses important facets such as one's identity. Between the *faavae* and *taualuga* are four pillars connecting and supporting the upper and lower sections of the *fale*. These columns are labelled and categorized into other important aspects in relation to a person's overall Wellbeing such as Spiritual, Physical, Mental and Other aspects that may include Sexuality, Socio-economic status and Gender. Every component of the *fale* supports and also depend on each other in order for the *fale* to be robust and healthy similar to a person.

There are other elements outside and around the *fale*, considered to be social determinants that can also have profound effects on the Wellbeing of the person such as the environment which refers to the stability of the physical setting regardless of where an individual is located.

The other element refers to the time and events that affect the building or the person to whom it relates. These experiences may include the Socio-economic, Political, Legal and other factors that make up your personality and your beliefs.

Uputaua Therapeutic Approach: Dr. Byron Malaela Soliata Seiuli.



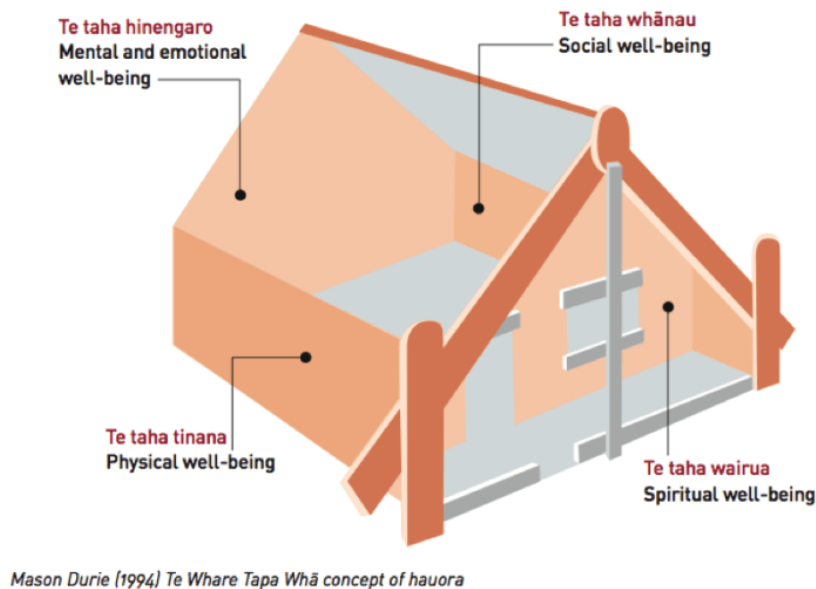
Designed and invented by Seiuli, the model is similar to Pulotu-Endemann's Fonofale model but there are also many notable differences between the two. Seiuli's model or *fale* is divided into 12 sections which includes the surrounding fence, a walkway, steps and four pillars which supports the roof of the building. Likewise, when comparing both models, Seiuli's *fale* represents a modernized contemporary Samoan *fale* in terms of its design and the inclusion of other elements that are excluded in Pulotu-Endemann's Fonofale model.

Similar to Pulotu-Endemann's Fonofale model, the *faavae* or foundation of Seiuli's Uputaua Therapeutic Approach consists of Aiga Potopoto (Family, Kin and Relationship network). One significant difference between the two models is the *taualuga* (roof) of the *fale*, whereby in Pulotu-Endemann's Fonofale model, the *taualuga* represents an individual's cultural beliefs and values, however, in Seiuli's framework, *Ola faaleagaga* (Spirituality) is the roof of the *fale*.

Other components that are included in Seiuli's framework are the *Siosiomaga/eleele* (land) which contains Samoan customs and traditions as well as *Va fealoaloai* (mutual/relational space).

Akin to the Fonofale model, the *faletalimalo* has four pillars however they depict different characteristics of an individual's Wellbeing. The two frontal pillars represent *Ola Fa'aletino* (Physical wellbeing) and *Ola Fa'aleloto* (Social wellbeing), while the rear pillars symbolize *Ola Fa'alemafaufau* (Psychological wellbeing) and *Ola Fa'alelagona* (Emotional wellbeing). The fence (neighbourly boundaries) which surrounds the *faletalimalo* epitomize *Tausi Tuoai* (External boundaries). The final three components of the *faletalimalo* comprises of three steps, the first being *Meaalofa* (Gifting Process), the second is *Loto Faatasia* (Collaborative 'we' approach) and lastly, *Mana ma le Mamalu* (Maintaining honour and dignity).

Te Whare Tapa Wha: Dr Mason Durie



Leading Maori health advocate Durie developed this Wellbeing model a *wharenui* (meeting house) with four walls in 1984. Each of the four walls symbolize *Taha Wairua*

(Spiritual Wellbeing), *Taha Hinengaro* (Mental and Emotional wellbeing), *Taha Tinana* (Physical wellbeing) and lastly, *Taha Whanau* (Family and social wellbeing), *Whenua* (foundation) connects the four walls of the *Wharenui*.

Seiuli (2012) states that it is the ‘totality of the person’ with the emphasis on maintaining the person’s Spirituality as well as the sacredness of one’s customs and traditions. Such is reflected in the three wellbeing models or conceptual frameworks whereby; Holistic approach is not restricted to the person’s Spiritual, Physical, Mental and Emotional Wellbeing. Rather, it is a broad discipline that involves other elements that could have implications on the person’s overall wellbeing, such as, family /kin, relationships and networks, socio-economy, environment as well as age, gender and sexuality among many others.

To ensure that the person’s Wellbeing is being upheld, all of the contributing factors or components must be well-balanced. From this perspective, it is apparent that the impact of COVID-19 to Spiritual Wellbeing of the EFKS Church not only in Aotearoa New Zealand, but across the board is of grave concern. By the same token, this would have a profound impact on other aspects that contribute to an individual or peoples’ overall Wellbeing such as Physical, Mental and others which I will attempt to identify in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

IMPACTS OF COVID-19

As mentioned earlier, the COVID-19 pandemic has a wide range of impacts on the Spiritual, Physical, Mental and other facets such as the Social and Economy to name a few. The aim of this chapter is to identify and recognize the effects of COVID-19 on various aspects of Wellbeing in relation to the EFKS Church in Aotearoa NZ. I will start off this section of the thesis by exploring the impact of COVID-19 on the Spiritual wellbeing in relation to *maliu* (funeral) within the collective Samoan *aiga* (family) and Christian context before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. An example will be given to illustrate the magnitude of such impact to the Spiritual Wellbeing. Likewise, I will also attempt to identify areas that the COVID-19 pandemic may have impacted our Physical Wellbeing particularly the closure of large gatherings that prevented other physical activities such as youth games/sports.

COVID-19 has also caused major interference and disruption to our normal routines and for some people, this may have a huge impact on their Mental Wellbeing particularly when the government issued a mandatory for all people except the essential workers to stay indoors. In some instances, these lockdowns have extended to three or four weeks, thus for most people, they may feel as though they were being ‘imprisoned’ in their own homes.

In the final section of this chapter, I will explore other areas that COVID-19 may have affected the Wellbeing of the EFKS Church including Social and Economy. The EFKS Church like every other organization relies on the financial backing and support of everyone involved in order to continue its day-to-day operation. One major impact of COVID-19 involves the loss of jobs as well as various means of livelihood which has an ensuing effect on the financial aspect of the EFKS Churches.

4.1 Spiritual Wellbeing

There is a Samoan proverbial expression that goes “*E tofu le tagata ma lona faasinomaga*” (Every person has a unique identity) which not only points to his or her individuality, but it also alludes to the collective relations and affiliations of each person.

Since Samoa is a communal society, funeral is an integral part of its cultural and Christian traditions as it is a crucial time in which the extended families of the deceased, village as well as the church communities come together in order to support the grieving family. It is also perhaps the only time whereby family members who have long been separated are often reunited for the same reason; that is to care for and support each other.

There are many different elements pertaining to Samoan cultural and Christian traditions that are often being observed during funerals that reflects the value of *alofa fetuفاai* (mutual love) between the grieving family and other concerned parties. This is often depicted through the carrying out of *sii alofa* (monetary gifts, *ie toga*/fine mats), gifting of *pale* (floral wreaths), *palapala malo* (cattle, pigs, cartons of poultry and corned beef etc.) towards the affected family.

Before the health and safety protocols were being enforced which prohibits the number of people per gathering, funeral used to be a crowded affair whereby extended families, church and community congregated to acknowledge and celebrate the life of the deceased as well as to comfort and offered their condolences. However, the restrictions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic stopped all those things from happening. The church also plays a significant part by providing Spiritual care and support through prayer, hymns and words of comfort towards the bereaved family as they experience grief and sadness.

This tradition is accentuated in one of the phrases that is often uttered during these times which is “*Tuu atu o matou tauau e tauave faatasi le tatou avega*” (Let our shoulders bear our burden together). Moreover, whilst the coming together of both the extended

families and church to a funeral is to provide support towards the bereaved family, ultimately it is also a celebration to acknowledge the life of the person who had passed away.

This is reflected in a survey that was conducted to investigate the impact of COVID-19 restrictions whereby it was revealed that certain funeral practices such as hugging, handshakes and even sitting alongside each other during funerals can no longer be performed (Burrell and Selman, 2020).

I have stated that an example will be provided to illustrate the magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on the Spiritual Wellbeing of those affected due to the loss of a loved one. On September 2020 while I was in New Zealand, a close relative died as a result of a tragic work-related accident. It was a very difficult time due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions which prohibits the number of attendees and strictness around the social and physical distancing. On top of that, there was genuine fear about possibly coming into contact with an infectious person. All these factors contributed to the lack of physical presence at the funeral.

4.2 Other Impacts

A survey that was conducted by Colmar Brunton¹⁵ in collaboration with Tupu Toa¹⁶ to identify the impact of COVID-19 on Pacific peoples living in South Auckland revealed that over a third of Pacific household have been impacted financially due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of various factors such as loss of employment and being laid off work, it was estimated that nearly one in five Pacific households have lost half or more of their income. Moreover, 25% of Pacific households have someone who has experienced reduced

¹⁵ Colmar Brunton is New Zealand's most recognized market and social research and insights agency with international awards for public sector research.

¹⁶ Tupu Toa is a New Zealand company which aims at developing and empowering its people as well as building the cultural capability of others.

pay or hours and this population is more than likely to have struggled to pay for basic household costs.

The EFKS church both in Samoa and abroad relies on money being donated by its members in order to finance its expenses such the EFKS Schools in Samoa, pensions for the retired church ministers, development and sustaining of Malua Theological College. This money is also distributed and given to various dioceses and churches to assist them with any outstanding expenses relating to their development that they may have been unable to pay due to any circumstance.

As mentioned earlier, the expression “*E tofu le tagata ma lona faasinomaga*” is an allusion to signify one’s connection with his or her immediate and extended families. Likewise, church is another very important component of a Samoan person’s identity. As such, there is a great expectation on an individual to fulfil his or her obligation to each of these units. So the reality is, for most families in Samoa they rely on remittance provided by their families that are living abroad (New Zealand, Australia etc.) thus, the financial impact of COVID-19 in New Zealand to the Pacific peoples is significant. In addition to giving money for their families here in Samoa, they also have their financial obligations and expenses to fulfil in their respective countries of residence. These include household and utility expenses as well as money being donated to the church. While they may have been able to manage and cope with the financial demands prior to the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, the impacts on the economy as per the findings of the survey would surely present ramifications.

Correspondingly, a research that was conducted by the Ministry of Social Development focuses on the immediate impacts of social isolation and crowding as contributing factors to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, stress and anxiety. The alert level 4 system which prohibits any form of social and physical contact with people outside your own

bubble could lead to loneliness which then can increase other health factors such as morbidity and mortality, depression and anxiety, as well as affecting cognitive performance. In like manner, people that are living in crowded households during these lockdowns may also be at risk of mental health outcomes and possibly increased family conflict and violence.

The report also reveals that there are evidenced links between cultural and religious identities and mental wellbeing which stresses that the inability to carry out these practices (funerals, worship) during social isolation may negatively affect individual and collective mental wellbeing. According to Hawkely and Cacioppo (2020) noted in this report:

One of the consequences of loneliness...is a diminished capacity for self-regulation. The ability to regulate one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviour is critical to accomplish personal goals or to comply with social norms. Feeling socially isolated impairs the capacity to self-regulate, and these effects are so automatic as to seem outside of awareness.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.1 A Practical Theology Model as a Response to COVID-19 for the EFKS in Aotearoa New Zealand

There are four paradigms in relation to the pastoral and ecclesial practice in relation to practical theology (Osmer, 2008). Firstly the descriptive-empirical which is asking about what is going on, by the gathering of information to gain a better understanding of particular episodes, situations or contexts. The second one is the Interpretive which finding the reason why certain actions and patterns are taking place, by way of engaging in dialogue with the social sciences for the purposes of interpreting and explaining those areas. Thirdly is the Normative which is asking ‘what should be going on’ instead of the current situation by raising normative questions from the perspectives of theology, ethics as well as other fields. Lastly, the Pragmatic which looks at how we might respond by forming an action plan as well as undertaking specific responses in light of guiding the current episodes and situations towards an ideal and desirable direction.

This research has highlighted the Normative Paradigm, to propose a resolution that could perhaps assist the EFKS in Aotearoa New Zealand during this time of crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There is no doubt whatsoever of the impacts and disruptions that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused to the worship practices of the EFKS Church which in turn has made an impact on the Spirituality Wellbeing, which have been mentioned in the previous chapters. The question of what ought to be going on may generate a wide range of responses. Perhaps one resolution could be for the church leaders to come together in order to achieve a desirable outcome through an Ecumenical movement by the World Council of Churches (WCC).

Historically, this movement came about in 1948 not long after the Second World War as has been a common feature during times of notable crises. I believe that we are currently undergoing a time of crisis in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic thus the significance for this movement to occur. Equally, there are a number of reasons why an Ecumenical movement is necessary at this time such as, identifying areas that could help minimize the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and any similar threats that may cause disruption to the worship life and Spiritual Wellbeing of the people in the future. In addition, it could also be an ideal forum to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using virtual platforms such as Zoom and Facebook Live in relation to the Christian worship and liturgy.

I believe that The Ecumenical Review Volume XIII supports this view whereby it states that:

We live in one of the great dynamic and creatives times of history...the frantic attempts of us men to seek inadequate places of refuge and shelter rather than taking the challenge of God to fly and being willing in faith to trust the “eternal pinions” of His wings to bear us up. (p.387)

In regard to the use of various social media platforms, there are some evidence that certain countries and places have already begun this process of accepting and incorporating the use of online platforms as the new norms in their worship.

Barney Pityana (2020) talks about establishing a new normal for society by accepting and upholding the new rules. These include new rules of social intercourse and adapting to a different way of conducting human affairs than what we had been used to. I agree with Pityana’s view that the church should also perhaps consider the use of social media platforms as the new norm, given that the COVID-19 pandemic is inevitable to stay with us for the foreseeable future. Pillay (2020) echoes the same sentiment whereby he states that the church needs to show flexibility by adapting and embracing the new ways of doing things and of being church.

5.2 Concluding Thoughts

To conclude, the current use of social media such as Facebook Live and other virtual platforms as the means of broadcasting worship will be the new ‘norm’ for the foreseeable future. Considering the unpredictable nature of the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to the recent emerging variants, it is possible that worship may never be the same as how it used to be. This is evident as most of the EFKS churches are continuing to transmit their Sunday worship on Facebook Live despite the fact that New Zealand is not on lockdown at the moment, presumably to accommodate those who are unable to attend *lotu* due to various reasons.

Overall, the findings from this research reveal that the Spiritual wellbeing of the EFKS church in Aotearoa New Zealand is growing despite the threats and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Likewise, in spite of the fact that more people have either lost their jobs or work short hours, and the fact that some of the church ministers have insisted on suspending monetary donations, there is also strong evidence that people have contributed more than previously.

As far as the use of online platforms as the avenues on which to transmit worship is concerned, there is a strong belief that the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. Most of the elderlies have been unable to physically attend *lotu* in a long time as well as those who usually work during the weekends. Thus, the use of social media outlets is an opportunity for them to worship at their own convenience. It is also an occasion whereby the whole family can actually congregate within their own homes and worship together.

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