

Effectiveness of Mass Media Campaigns on Adherence to Covid-19 Protocols among Pentecostal Churches in Benin City

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effectiveness of mass media campaigns on adherence to COVID-19 protocols among Pentecostal churches in Benin City. The objectives of this study were to determine the extent to which Pentecostal churches in Benin City are aware of COVID-19 campaign protocols for churches; find out the degree of adherence of Pentecostal churches to COVID-19 campaign protocols and find out the perception of Pentecostal churches on COVID-19 campaign protocols for churches in Nigeria. The Source Credibility Theory was the theoretical framework. Survey served as research design while questionnaire was the research instrument. According to the study's findings, mass media campaigns led Pentecostal churches in Benin City to implement a number of protocols that led to a high degree of knowledge on COVID-19 preventative measures. However, the media campaigns were not effective enough to make Pentecostal churches practice COVID-19 protocols objectively. It is therefore recommended among other things that appropriate sensitisation should be carried out before implementing protocols that may affect Christians' devotion to God. It was also recommended that clergies and high-profiled members in Pentecostal churches should always adhere to COVID-19 protocols. This is because, as models, when they adhere to the protocols, other members would imitate their steps.

Key Words: COVID-19, Pentecostal churches, Protocols, Mass Media, Campaigns.

INTRODUCTION

The infectious illness known as COVID-19 is said to have first surfaced in Wuhan, China's Hubei province, in December 2019. Since its onset, it has expanded to almost all nations, prompting the World Health Organisation (WHO) to designate it a pandemic and raised worries about it for global public health in January 2020 (WHO, 2020; Nwaoboli, 2021).

With symptoms ranging from fever, coughing, and moderate breathlessness to severe desaturation leading to respiratory failure, the illness predominantly affects the respiratory system. There have been reports of the new virus generating a thromboembolic state in the body, leading to myocardial infarction and pulmonary embolism, despite the fact that it causes Adult Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS), which causes lung damage in the form of pulmonary embolism. Droplets, the air, faeces, and touch transmission are all possible modes of transmission of the illness. According to reports, the virus may survive on surfaces for many hours or even days (Roberto, Mongeau, Liu & Hashi, 2019). This unsettling broad range of illnesses is one of the causes of the disease's rising mortality rate. Additionally, it raises public concern and compels people to turn to the most convenient channels of support.

Controlling the transmission of illness is a fundamental necessity during an epidemic or pandemic. Early symptomatology detection, quick diagnostic procedures, efficient home and hospital care and suitable preventative actions are all necessary. The government, the healthcare system, the media, the general public and the church must all play a part in this, among other sectors. Every time a new viral or bacterial illness appears, it first experiences limited transmission, amplification in the spread, and then, with effective treatment, remission. Every link in the chain is where the controlling actions are carried out. The last one is eradication. They consist of anticipating the expected widespread infection, early identification, effective containment, control, and mitigation methods (Mbamalu & Ohaja, 2021). The church is a very fertile environment for COVID-19 to breed. This is because of the protocols it often observes such as clustered sitting patterns and handshakes among members which can facilitate the breeding of COVID-19. To curtail this, the media in collaboration with the Nigerian Centre for disease Control (NCDC) and the federal government of Nigeria carried out several campaigns targeted at ensuring the church observe protocols that would help curb the breeding of COVID-19. To study the effectiveness of such media campaigns among churches in Nigeria, four Pentecostal churches in Benin City were selected. These include: The Lord's Chosen, The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Living Faith Church (LFC) and Renewal Evangelical Ministry.

Lazarus Muoka established the Nigerian megachurch known as The Lord's Chosen on December 23, 2002. It is a part of the Lord's Chosen Charismatic Revival Movement. The church, which was founded by a small group of individuals and now has over 300,000 branches worldwide, is headquartered near the Oshodi-Apapa Expressway in Surulere Local Government Area of Lagos State. The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), on the other hand, was founded by the late Rev. Josiah Akindayomi in 1952 as a fellowship known as Egbe Ogo-Oluwa (Glory of God), which subsequently underwent a transformation to become RCCG. Pastor Enoch Adejare Adeboye took over as the General Overseer of the RCCG on January 21st, 1981, when Akindayomi, who was 71 years old at the time of her death on November 2nd, 1980, was consecrated. Additionally, Living Faith Church (LFC), commonly referred to as Winners Chapel, is a megachurch and a charismatic evangelical Christian denomination. The corporate headquarters are in Ota, Nigeria. David Oyedepo began the group on May 2, 1981, and it has since grown into a worldwide network of churches with over 6 million members in 147 nations. On the other hand, Evangelist Kingsley Nwaorgu established Renewal Evangelical Ministry in 2007. The church's headquarters are situated in Benin City's Ikhueniro Quarters on Old Benin Agbor Road.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There is no doubt that the mass media have the capacity to influence people's attitudes be it positively or negatively (Nwaoboli, 2022; Nwaoboli, Ezeji & Osife-Kurex, 2022; Asemah & Nwaoboli, 2022; Asemah, Nwaoboli & Nwoko, 2022). Many researchers have conducted studies relating to the viral illness, COVID-19. For instance, Nwaoboli and Asemah (2021) conducted research on "textual analysis of select online media use of fear appeals in the promotion of COVID-19 vaccination in Nigeria", Omoronyia, Ekpenyong, Ukweh & Mpama (2020) examined the "Knowledge and practice of COVID-19 prevention among health workers in rural cross Rivers State, Nigeria: Implication for disease control in Africa" and Nwaoboli (2021) examined the "perceptions of COVID-19 Infodemic and Conspiracy theories in Africa: Insights from Benin City

Residents in Nigeria". The studies mentioned above show that despite the fact that many researchers have conducted study on COVID-19, none have really focused on media campaigns influence on Pentecostal churches' adherence to the illness preventive protocols. The need to cover the gap is the reason for carrying out this study.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study were to:

1. Determine the extent to which Pentecostal churches in Benin City are aware of COVID-19 campaign protocols for churches.
2. Find out the degree of adherence of Pentecostal churches to COVID-19 campaign protocols
3. Find out the perception of Pentecostal churches on COVID-19 campaign protocols for churches in Nigeria

CONCEPTUAL/LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Coronavirus

Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is an emerging respiratory disease caused by a completely unique Corona Virus and was first detected in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. The disease is very infectious, and its main clinical symptoms include fever, dry cough, fatigue, myalgia, and dyspnea. In China, 18.5% of the patients with COVID-19 develop to the severe stage, which is characterised by acute respiratory distress syndrome, septic shock, difficult-to-tackle acidosis, and bleeding and coagulation dysfunction (Basch Hillyer, Meleo-Erwin Jaime Mohlman & Basch, 2020).

The first infected patient who had clinical manifestations like fever, cough, and dyspnea was reported on 12 December 2019 in Wuhan, China. Since then, 2019 CoV has spread rapidly to other countries via alternative ways like airline traveling and now, COVID-19 (Hua & Shaw, 2019). Multiple epidemic outbreaks occurred during 2002 (SARS) and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome: MERS-CoV with many people losing their lives (Depoux, Martin, Karafillakis, Preet, Wilder-Smith & Larson, 2020).

The Church and Campaigns on Infectious Diseases

Through initiatives, the church actively educates its members about contagious illnesses. In the instance of COVID-19, the church educates the public about social distance, the necessity to cough on elbows, use nose masks, avoid shaking hands, use hand sanitisers, and the significance of "self-quarantine" via Public Service Announcements, programmes, preaching, seminars and other sorts of campaigns. The church's involvement in spreading awareness about COVID-19 via campaigns is growing as instances of the disease rise daily. Because most of the campaigns are open and direct and because the congregation is consistently loyal to its clergy, the church plays a very important role in this situation. They are burdened with the twofold obligation of not only gaining souls for Christ but also imparting accurate knowledge necessary for development (Prati and Pietrantoni, 2016), which includes raising awareness of the necessity for individuals to exercise caution when it comes to COVID-19 viral infection.

The church plays a vital role in establishing any community via its efforts. We are unable to ignore it because of how drastically it has altered the world. Church campaigns are utilised as a source of information during this epidemic since churches are important to everyone, particularly Christians. The primary function of the church in this era, or at any time, is to spread knowledge and win souls to Christ (Prati and Pietrantoni, 2016), but it has since progressed to include initiatives that aim to raise awareness of social issues. The religion has a strong effect over how we see the world since it is so adaptable and may have a significant impact on the populace.

In times of infectious disease, the church is utilised to inform the public about the illness, how it is contracted, what it does, how to treat it, and how to manage it. Through its campaigns, the church expresses its members' views on contagious illnesses, which aids in the formulation of government regulations and television industry best practises (Depoux, Karafillakis, Preet, Wilder-Smith & Larson, 2020). The church is becoming into a legitimate platform for successful campaigns against contagious diseases and a voice for individuals whose voices had previously been silenced.

Campaigns and Responses of Pentecostal Churches to COVID-19 Outbreak

Numerous Pentecostal churches in Nigeria launched big initiatives in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. While some of the initiatives tried to stop the virus from spreading further, others were focused on providing individuals with palliatives so they could continue living in these difficult economic times. Prayer is a typical reaction across all Christian groups. Some Christians think that by praying and putting their belief in God, the virus pandemic in Nigeria may be stopped. During this time, churches all around the nation fixed prayer sessions targeted at curbing the virus.

For instance, the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFM) leadership issued a directive for all members to participate in a 30-day personal prayer retreat which started on March 22, 2020 and ended on Monday, April 20, 2020. Likewise, The Redeemed Christian Church of God, House on the Rock, Word of Life Ministries, among others, joined by DayStar Christian Assembly fasted and prayed for God to save Nigerians from the furious storm. Sensitising churchgoers to COVID-19 prevention measures was one of the first steps that many church leaders took. It was a very important step since there were people who belong to other churches who do not have access to contemporary information sources. Many church leaders did not think twice to provide the fundamental preventative advice with their people throughout both Sunday and weekly activities, such as keeping social distance, refraining from handshakes, and often washing hands. In fact, hardly any church service goes by that their pastors did not remind the congregation of the precautions they should take both at home and in public settings, including church and other gatherings.

The management of churches also created and disseminated handbills, the substance of which is the COVID-19's fundamental preventative measure. Additionally, campaign posters with warnings that COVID-19 is lethal were hung at key locations throughout church complexes. Even church theatre groups performed plays to inform members about COVID-19 prevention strategies. Churches in Nigeria engaged in "social action evangelism," which is often seen as a successful method of disseminating the good news of Jesus Christ via charitable endeavours, despite the financial hardships brought on by the lockdown. Even though home fellowship meetings are constantly emphasised during announcements, some congregations were not completely committed to them before to the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. However, several churches revitalised their home fellowship centres as a result of the epidemic and the ensuing lockdown. Additionally, one of the

initial responses taken by churches to the COVID-19 pandemic was the distribution of sanitary buckets and hand sanitisers. Before entering the church auditorium, the ushers made sure that everyone had washed their hands.

COVID-19 Protocols in Pentecostal Churches

There are various COVID-19 protocols in Pentecostal Churches. They however differ from church to church although the general protocols in line with NCDC (2020) and the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) recommendations are that:

1. Churches should ensure temperature checks at point of entry, persons with temperature over 37.50C should be asked to leave & seek medical attention.
2. Churches should ensure they have hand washing facilities in front of places of worship.
3. Churches should ensure they have separate entry and exit points into places of worship and avoid overcrowding at entry and exit points
4. Churches should ensure they offer alcohol-based hand sanitisers to worshippers as they enter the place of worship
5. Clearly separating and marking areas in place of worship, to ensure 2 metres distance between people
6. Informing worshippers to keep a distance of 2 metres from the nearest worshipper
7. Ensuring adequate ventilation in halls of worship, open windows, and doors for air to circulate in and out freely most especially when using air conditioners
8. Abiding by NCDC guidelines on mass gathering, places of worship may have to hold several worship & prayer sessions in a day with limited number of participants in each service according to available space
9. Encouraging congregating in open spaces.
10. Establishing a regular sanitizing or cleaning routine, surfaces frequently touched must be cleaned at intervals during worship
11. Always ensuring and enforcing the use of facemasks. Notices on use of facemask must be placed at entry points and within premises of places of worship
12. At the beginning of worship, it is advised to give a short reminder on hygiene guidelines to prevent COVID-19, such as advising worshippers to cough into their elbows or tissues which must be discarded properly
13. Use personal religious items in places of worship, limit or avoid the use of shared items for now. Such items include but not limited to Bible, hymn books, etc.
14. Shaking of hands, hugs and all physical contacts that form part of religious rituals are to be avoided
15. Encourage worshippers that are most vulnerable (i.e. adults 60 and over and people of all ages with underlying medical conditions) and those with symptoms of illness to stay at home
16. Encourage electronic means of collecting tithes and contributions to limit contact with possible contaminated cash or cheques.
17. Sunday schools, children Bible classes and all childcare classes are discouraged for now; children should be with their parents.

Other COVID-19 campaign protocols recommended by World Health Organisation (2020)

for churches are:

- a) Before opening, disinfect place of worship by fumigating the entire building, congregation space and car parks. Wipe all surfaces with disinfecting agent.
- b) Disinfect regularly touched surfaces by washing or wiping with disinfectant.
- c) Open windows and doors to enable air in and out.
- d) Make adequate provision for soap, running water & hand sanitiser at entry points.
- e) There should be no entry without face masks, provide disposable face masks where practicable.
- f) To help educate on COVID-19, it is recommended for places of worship to have preventive messages from NCDC posted at entry points and around places of worship.
- g) Holy communion should be packaged in disposable wraps.
- h) Drinking water points, public toilets and sales outlets closed for now.
- i) Religious leaders must maintain 2 metres when praying or counseling and avoid body contact with members.
- j) Places of worship should be free of carpets and rugs to allow easy disinfection of the floor.
- k) Places of worship must open only between 5am and 8pm.
- l) Choristers are to go home with their robes.
- m) Attendance in every service should not exceed 1/3 of sitting capacity of the auditorium to enable physical distancing, all other members should join the service virtually.
- n) The keeping of registers for worshippers and attendees is encouraged at entry points with proper regard for hand hygiene; hand sanitisers should be made available and persons advised to use their personal pen. This makes contact tracing easy should the need arise.

Empirical Analysis

Ebunuwele (2021) conducted a research on belief systems and the receptivity of COVID-19 prevention campaign messages in order to determine how well Edo State inhabitants hear these messages and how they affect the general public's belief systems. To gather existing literature on the topic of discourse, the report used a library research approach. The study's discussion of the importance of health communication in the face of a pandemic was based on the Health Belief Model. It emphasised that health communication has the necessary capabilities to put an end to any coronavirus infodemics or conspiracies. The research concluded that good health communication becomes crucial in the face of infodemics and COVID-19 conspiracy theories and can be depended upon to provide effective communication to vulnerable populations on the risk and risks associated with misinformation. It also showed the importance of communication to society's existence. The people's safety must be protected against unreliable health information that might endanger their wellness in light of the abundance of false information or fake news in the public realm that threatens public health.

In their research, Mbamalu and Ohaja (2021), they looked at the purported suppression of COVID-19 information in Nigeria, which is supposed to be the reason why people there are unwilling to help fight the illness. It draws attention to the differences between information secrecy and data privacy. The scholars examined data from 183 statistically chosen respondents from two states and the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria using Spearman's rank correlation, Chi-square, and linear regression. Additionally, data from a qualitative poll of 12 health editors, 2 analysts of public affairs, and 2 government officials was produced. The findings showed a bad correlation between

public attitudes on COVID-19 information protection, opinions on COVID-19 disputes, and compliance with COVID-19 containment measures. The findings showed that the shortcomings in the reportage of the evolving COVID-19 pandemic could potentially trigger more global health concerns. For instance, the nature of media framing of the pandemic may have accentuated public's fear or lack of it as it were in 2001 when Anthrax health crisis was reported. Similarly, when President Trump tweeted that chloroquine and other related malaria drugs were useful for treating COVID-19, its framing in the media engineered panic buying of the drug in different countries. The Punch reported that hospitals in Nigeria recorded increased cases of chloroquine overdose as a result of Trump's endorsement. The World Health Organisation frowned at this and urged the media to feed the public with only the reports that have medical/scientific evidence. It issued a statement saying that "Hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine are under investigation in clinical trials for pre-exposure or post-exposure prophylaxis of SARS-CoV-2 infection, and treatment of patients with mild, moderate, and severe COVID-19. The study conclude that twitter users to a great extent helped in projecting statistics about COVID-19 and thus influenced people's perception about it.

Nwaoboli, Chukwu, Arijenwa & Asemah (2021) looked at how the mass media's status conferral theory was used in Benin City coronavirus campaign. The study's goals were to determine how much Edo State inhabitants were exposed to coronavirus information in the media and x-ray Coronavirus perception among Edo State inhabitants as a result of the virus's status conferral by the media, as well as the extent to which this status has been granted in Edo State. Surveys were used as the research instrument, while questionnaire served as the study technique. The research's conclusions showed that COVID-19 received considerable prestige in Benin City as a result of the media's frequent coverage of the virus, although some locals continue to have doubts about the virus' veracity. Based on their results, the researchers suggested that Edo State government take more preventative steps with the media and that the mass media make sure their status conferral on the coronavirus is authentic and representative. The findings from the above study are in agreement with those of the current one although they mainly differed based on the research methodology, sample size, scope and research population.

Theoretical Framework

Source Credibility Theory

To theoretically frame this study, the Source Credibility Theory was used. Hovland, Janis & Kelley propounded this theory in 1953. The theory assumes that when an information source is reliable, individuals are more likely to be convinced by campaign messaging. The recipient's capacity to believe the communicator is what is meant by source credibility hypothesis. The idea is a method that enables people to see challenges from their own point of view. The source credibility theory approaches communication as value-laden in this manner, taking individual variances in viewpoints into account.

According to Sandage (2001), a communicator's trustworthiness may be impacted by a variety of factors. The perceived level of competence and the reliability of the source, however, are two factors that are often mentioned. Initially, the source credibility model created by Hovland, Janis & Kelley in 1953 underlined the importance of the source's knowledge and dependability in the transmission of messages. McGuire, however, made improvements to it in 1985 with his Source Attractiveness Model, which may be determined by a source's physical appearance, lifestyle,

attitude, and how comparable, familiar, and appealing the consumer finds the source to be. Credibility of the source is thought to mediate influence and have an effect on the attitudes, intentions, and behaviour of message recipients (Asemah, Nwammuo, & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017).

Since the model's introduction, numerous studies have found evidence that perceived attractiveness can increase attitude changes toward the product, brand, and movements as well as an increase in obedience. For this reason, perceived attractiveness has been important in psychology and attitude change research. Asemah, Nwammuo, and Nkwam-Uwaoma (2017) made the case that sources that are viewed as reliable might inspire a more positive attitude toward their pursuit than those that are perceived as unreliable. Therefore, a source with high credibility would lead to greater attitude change after the promoted message than a source with low credibility. Pentecostal churches are sources through which COVID-19 messages may be disseminated. Since the congregation always believes their leaders to be credible, it follows that they will always consider their COVID-19 messages credible and as such also accept to practice such messages when received from the media.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the survey research design. The population of the study consisted of select churches in Benin City. Four popular churches at least half kilometer geographically distant from each other and in different location in Benin City were selected. The churches and their populations according to their administrative departments were the Lord's chosen, Oweseni, New Benin, Benin City (2, 800), Living Faith Church, Ekewan Road, Benin City (5, 000), Renewal Evangelical Ministry, Ikhueniro Quarters, Old Benin Agbor Road, Benin City (6, 000) and The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Mercy Seat Model Parish, Ebo Quarters, Government Residential Area (GRA), Benin City (3300). Thus, the total population for the study was 17, 100. Using the Taro Yamane Sampling Technique size of 1967, the sample size of this study was 400. More so, the purposive sampling technique was adopted for this study. This was because the study was purposively interested in studying Christians and Pentecostal churches thus the focus was on these categories of people excluding other religions or free thinkers. The researcher utilised a simple percentage approach to analyze the information obtained. Benin City residents were given 400 copies of the questionnaire, 364(91%) were returned and 36(9%) were not.

Table 1: Extent of awareness of media campaigns on COVID-19 protocols among Pentecostal churches in Benin City

Response	Frequency	%
Very High	125	34.3%
High	207	56.9%
Neutral	1	0.3%
Low	19	5.2%
Very Low	12	3.3%
Total	364	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

Data on table 1 disclosed that the extent to which Christians are aware of media campaigns on COVID-19 protocols for churches is high. This connotes that the media extensively carried out campaigns targeted at promoting COVID-19 protocol adherence in Nigerian churches.

Table 2: Degree of adherence to COVID-19 protocols among Pentecostal churches

Response	Frequency	%
Every church service	9	2.5%
Weekly activities only	0	0%
Sunday services only	95	26.0%
Special church programmes	101	27.7%
Situations when I am compelled to obey the protocols	159	43.7%
Total	364	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

Table 2 showed that the degree of adherence to COVID-19 protocols among Pentecostal churches is low despite their high awareness of media campaigns on the need to adhere to such campaigns. As seen on the table, most Christians in Pentecostal churches only adhere to COVID-19 protocols when they are compelled to do so or only in special church programmes.

Table 3: Perception of media campaigns on COVID-19 protocols in Pentecostal churches

Response	Frequency	%
The protocols are too stringent	10	2.7%
The protocols lack biblical injunctions	24	6.5%
The protocols are easy to adhere to	1	0.3%
The protocols help curb the spread of COVID-19	150	41.2%
The protocols were majorly theoretical. They could not help curb the spread of the virus	179	49.2%
Total	364	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

Table 3 showed that the major perception on COVID-19 protocols was that the protocols were majorly theoretical and the people believed the protocols did not help curb the spread of the virus.

However, a significant percentage (41.2%) of the respondents believed the protocols help curb the spread of COVID-19

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study came to numerous conclusions. First, it was discovered that Christians in Benin City, Edo State, highly well aware of mass media COVID-19 campaign protocols for churches. This connotes that Pentecostal congregations had protocols in place to aid their members in containing and preventing COVID-19 and that these protocols may not be unconnected with mass media campaigns, NCDC and the Federal government's directives.

Some of the COVID-19 protocols according to NCDC (2020) include maintaining a distance from others, wearing nose masks, cleaning their hands with hand sanitiser and refraining from shaking hands. Most churches also made sure to have hand washing facilities in front of places of worship, separate entry and exit points, and alcohol-based hand sanitisers.

However, despite the high awareness of media campaigns on COVID-19 protocols for churches, most Pentecostal churches in Benin City still barely observed the protocols. The reason was that some of the people believed the protocols cannot help curb the spread of the virus, lacked biblical injunctions or were too stringent to observe. In fact, majority of the respondents only observed the protocols when they are compelled to do so if they must partake in the church service. This lackluster attitude to observance of the protocols was also observed by Nwaoboli & Asemah (2021) when they noted that most Nigerians do not voluntarily adhere to COVID-19 protocols and this is the reason fear appeals are used to motivate them to adhere to the protocols.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the study's findings, mass media campaigns led Pentecostal churches in Benin City to implement a number of protocols that led to a high degree of knowledge on COVID-19 preventative measures. However, the media campaigns were not effective enough to make Pentecostal churches practice COVID-19 protocols objectively. It is therefore recommended that:

1. Appropriate sensitisation should be carried out before implementing protocols that may affect Christians' devotion to God. In order to avoid violating the COVID-19 protocols, Pentecostal churches' administrative bodies in Benin City should educate their members on the need to adhere to COVID-19 protocols rather than using fear appeals or compelling them to do so.
2. Clergies and high-profiled members in Pentecostal churches should always adhere to COVID-19 protocols. This is because, as models, when they adhere to the protocols, other members would imitate their steps.
3. Mutual understanding between the message sender and receiver is also necessary for effective communication. Therefore, it is proposed that media campaign messages concerning COVID-19 protocols in churches should be supported by biblical allusions in order to encourage churches to follow the COVID-19 protocols.

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