



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Spiritual Care as a Marker of Effective Pastoral Leadership

¹Micky Chantre Laloo

¹Research Scholar

¹Practical Theology,

¹Martin Luther Christian University, Shillong, India

Abstract: Spiritual care has always been central to pastoral ministry, yet pastoral leadership today also includes increasing organizational and administrative responsibilities. This study examines whether Spiritual Care and Growth functions as a marker of effective pastoral leadership by exploring the perceptions of pastors and congregants regarding ministry effectiveness. A convergent mixed-method design was used, involving 28 pastors and 336 congregants through structured questionnaires, together with semi-structured interviews with retired senior pastors. The analysis indicates that Spiritual Care and Growth emerged as the strongest indicator of ministry effectiveness. It also received the highest rating from the congregants and was the only leadership dimension in which congregants rated pastors higher than pastors rated themselves. Taken together, the findings suggest that congregants understand pastoral leadership primarily through spiritual care, guidance, pastoral presence and relational involvement rather than through organizational responsibilities alone. The findings further suggest that spiritual care remains central to effective pastoral leadership, while organizational and administrative responsibilities fulfil their purpose when they support the church's pastoral ministry of nurturing, guiding and caring for God's people.

Index Terms - Pastoral leadership, Spiritual care, Ministry effectiveness, Pastoral ministry, Shepherding, Pastoral presence.

Introduction

Leadership is an essential ingredient in the growth and effectiveness of the church where it is seen as the coming together of believers to form the body of Christ, united in purpose and objective. Its effectiveness and growth rest largely on pastoral leadership, as pastors are often considered natural leaders in the church. Pastoral ministry today encompasses not only the spiritual, sacramental responsibilities but also the administrative and managerial aspects of ministry. However, there must be a fine balance, since there may be a danger that churches grow only in size and numbers, but do not grow in terms of spiritual depths. Hence pastoral leadership is an important element in church for effective ministry and growth.

Pastoral leadership has of late been the focus of many studies because leadership is central to the life and health of the church. Pastoral ministry fundamentally includes leadership responsibility, whether it is spiritual care, administrative direction or relational.

However, in practice, pastoral leadership may sometimes be confined only to ministerial or priestly duties whereas the broader leadership aspects which involve administration, leadership development and equipping others for ministry are given less emphasis.

This study examines how spiritual care functions as a marker of effective pastoral leadership by exploring the perception of pastors and congregants regarding ministry effectiveness.

I. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review focuses on the biblical and theological understanding of pastoral leadership. It begins with the understanding of the pastor and the pastoral office before considering the shepherd imagery, servanthood and the leadership model of Jesus Christ. These areas provide the background for understanding pastoral leadership in the present study.

2.1 Understanding Pastoral Leadership

In understanding the meaning of a 'pastor,' it may be helpful in understanding the leadership role of the pastor as well. The pastor is expected to know the needs of the people and to offer guidance to the congregation¹. The word 'pastor' is a term that is derived from a Latin word which means shepherd, and it is widely used in the Old and New Testament metaphorically.

A shepherd is an apt imagery where his functions are one of leading and walking ahead of the sheep, guiding to a proper grazing ground, and protecting from wild beasts and hazardous terrain. The functions of a shepherd in considering the elements of the geography and topography of the land and the relation that the shepherd has with the sheep call for a shepherd to be adept at handling the sheep. Thus, Timothy S. Laniak affirms that the "movement, the isolation, the variety, the adjustments, the demands—contributed to a knowledge base and 'skill set' that distinguished shepherds as remarkable and broadly capable persons." In other words, "the shepherd metaphor is an appropriate and useful image for depicting the nature, role, and proper functions of faithful leadership among God's people."

Hence, William Still's defines a pastor as a shepherd whose roles are to feed, care for, and seek the sheep when they go astray. Another perspective from Thomas C. Oden's *Pastoral Theology* affirmed that the pastoral office was indeed ordained by God to edify and to proclaim the Word, administer the sacraments, and guide and nurture the Christian community. William Clebsh and Charles Jaekle describe pastoral care or ministry as "healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling of troubled persons whose troubles arise in the context of ultimate meanings and concerns." Further, John Calvin understands the pastor by the roles of the pastoral office, which include proclaiming the Word, teaching, as well as administering the sacraments. Thus, a pastor is one who nurtures, cares for, and spiritually feeds the community to equip them for God's purpose. Pastoral leadership is not accidental but intrinsic to the office of the pastor itself. The imagery of a shepherd signifies direction, responsibility and accountability. It also signifies a ministry of spiritual care in which leading nurturing, teaching and caring for God's people are inseparable responsibilities.

2.2 Role and Task of a Pastor

In considering the role and task of a pastor, one cannot separate leadership from the pastoral office or responsibility. The pastoral office is a divine institution.² It is understood that as a pastor, one must take up the leadership task, and thus no pastor can absolve oneself of that responsibility since the role demands it. But in the view of Alex Shiells, all forms of leadership do lead to and advocate change.³ In the Christian form of leadership, according to Richard McLaughlin, leadership ought to be based on the teachings, character, and priorities of Jesus, since the term 'Christian' itself indicates one who is a believer and a follower of Jesus.⁴

It implies that "every faithful person is a minister,"⁵ and as a pastor, one cannot shy away from the leadership responsibility. This line of thought was affirmed by Kyama Mugambi in his paper that "the life and work of Christ are foundational to a theological engagement with the subject of leadership."⁶ Thus, Christian leadership may borrow certain tools from secular leadership theories however, its principles remain unique. While pastoral leadership may apply administrative and management inputs from leadership theory, its authority and validity do not arise from organizational success but from being faithful to Christ and

¹ Meade C. Williams, *The Pastor* (Princeton: Mercer and Dean, Printers, 1887), 14.

² James Mason Hoppin, *Pastoral Theology* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884), 23, <https://commons.ptsem.edu/id/pastoraltheology00hopp>.

³ Alex Shiells, "A Critical Examination of Christian Leadership in the Light of Recent Trends within the Church of England," *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 39, no. 1 (2018): 2.

⁴ Richard J. McLaughlin, "What Should You Look For In A Christian Leader?" (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2001), 3.

⁵ Hoppin, *Pastoral Theology*, 24.

⁶ Kyama Mugambi, "Leadership Themes from the Gospel of John: A Dialogue with Transformational Leadership Theory," paper presented at African Society of Evangelical Theologians Conference, Nairobi, Kenya, March 2016, 4.

Scripture. As John Stott emphasized, Christian leaders are primarily servants of the Word, tasked with the responsibility of teaching, guarding and living under it.⁷ Therefore, pastoral leadership is rooted in faithfulness to Christ and His Word rather than organisational effectiveness.

2.3 The Pastor as a Shepherd

The pastor, as leader of a congregation, has various tasks and roles to carry out. Much of what a congregation is has to do with the influence or the manner in which the congregation has been led or fed through the pastor. “The power of the pastoral image derives from the many captivating associations it evokes in believers’ lives, e.g., nurturer, guide, disciplinarian, authority, companion, friend.”⁸ It is therefore of utmost importance to understand the role of the pastor because it directly shapes the pastor’s leadership and responsibility towards the congregation.

The Scripture repeatedly uses the metaphor of a shepherd. The Scripture uses the metaphor of the sheep or flock for the people of God, and thus it also implies that they are in need of shepherding.⁹ From the Old Testament to the New Testament, the imagery of the shepherd consistently portrays God’s care and leadership over His people culminating in Jesus as the Good Shepherd (John 10) and the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). Therefore, the imagery of a shepherd conjures a wide array of responsibility that includes feeding and leading.

Generally, the understanding of the term ‘pastor’ brings with it the picture of a shepherd; hence, it is an image of a pastor guiding a congregation towards growth. As Benjamin Schoun suggests, the pastor in shepherding the flock ought to be “understood in a much more comprehensive sense of moving the church and its members forward in a life of health and purpose.”¹⁰ Kennon Callahan added that “whatever type of service, people experience power and movement when the pastor is a shepherd.”¹¹ This view was also supported by Anthony Wayne Adams, who mentioned in his study that “shepherd leadership is not thinking in a specific way or performing in a certain manner; rather, it is a fully integrated life.”¹²

The Scripture uses the imagery of the shepherd and sheep to stress on the importance of the task of pastoral care. The shepherd imagery has always been the “overarching analogy under which all descriptions and functions of ministry tend to be embraced: the good pastor, whose vigilant caring is an expression of Christ’s own eternal caring.”¹³

Therefore, pastoral ministry may be understood as a theological calling has “an effect upon a host of pastoral activities: care of the physically sick, the spiritually depressed, the dying and the bereaved, and the poor.”¹⁴ Generally, the imagery of the shepherd tends to give the impression that it relates to caring, protecting and guiding where the emphasis is on care. However, the pastoral responsibility extends beyond comfort alone to include a ministry of teaching, correction and doctrinal direction as well.

Hence pastoral or Christian ministry flows out of the ministry of Jesus, where he has exemplified both through teaching and example. Derek Prime in *Pastors and Teachers* highlighted that “shepherding and teaching are twin tasks.”¹⁵ He explains that Ephesians 4:11 makes it clear that pastors and teachers are “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Eph 4:12). Therefore, teaching and shepherding are the two sides of the same coin and “should not be separated.”¹⁶

Similarly, Hebrews 13 reminds us of Jesus, who is the ‘great shepherd of the sheep’ who also “equips you with everything good for doing his will” (Heb 13:21). Jay E. Adams further elaborates that “according to the biblical model, the pastor and teacher are just that. He instructs, equips, and inspires the congregation to

⁷ *The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

⁸ Leroy T. Howe, “Pastoral Care in Today’s Church and World,” *Modern Churchman* 26, no. 4 (1984): 31.

⁹ Steve D. Cassimy, Abraham J. Jules, and Nikolaus Satelmajer, “The Pastor as a Shepherd,” in *A Guide to Effective Pastoral Ministry*, ed. Steve D. Cassimy, Abraham J. Jules, and Nikolaus Satelmajer (United States: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2009), 150.

¹⁰ “The Pastor and the Local Church,” in *A Guide to Effective Pastoral Ministry*, ed. Steve D. Cassimy, Abraham J. Jules, and Nikolaus Satelmajer (United States: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2009), 43.

¹¹ Kennon L. Callahan, *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church Second Edition: Strong Healthy Congregations Living in the Grace of God* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 102.

¹² “Shepherd Leadership of Church of God Pastors and How This Relates to Ministerial Effectiveness” (Doctoral Thesis, University of Phoenix, 2013), 29.

¹³ Oden, *Pastoral Theology*, 1st ed., 52.

¹⁴ Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology* (New York: Harper Collins, 1982), 223.

¹⁵ *Pastors and Teachers: The Calling and Work of Christ’s Ministers* (Crowborough: Highland Books, 1989), 15.

¹⁶ Prime, 122.

assume its own evangelistic and edificational ministry.”¹⁷ Therefore, it is evidently clear that a pastor’s role includes equipping and teaching, which resonates with the Great Commission of Jesus to make disciples and to teach “them to obey everything” (Matt 28:20) that he has commanded. This affirms the understanding that shepherding is not only about care, but it is a responsible oversight that is rooted in Scripture. Thus, pastoral leadership carries with it the responsibility of guarding the spiritual health of the community rather than simply maintaining harmony.

2.4 Servanthood and Leadership

The striking contrast between worldly leadership and Christian leadership is the concept of servanthood. Jesus demonstrated the principle of servant leadership, and that is the hallmark of leadership in the Christian realm, where it is not about position and authority. Mark A. Flyod explains in Mark 9:35 where the disciples were debating about who is the greatest among them, with Jesus’ reply that “‘anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all’. That’s what servant leadership is all about.”¹⁸ As Chua in *Learning to Lead* suggests, we need to “ask ourselves whether our pattern of leadership reflects the biblical portrait of servanthood, or whether we are being squeezed in the world’s mould.”¹⁹

The servant leadership that Jesus advocates rest upon the character of a leader who is humble and willing to put others above oneself. Servant leaders “serve first and they extend trust first. Leadership is the by-product and positional authority is, at best, an afterthought.”²⁰ Ken Blanchard strongly asserts that “servant leadership is the only way to guarantee great relationships and results.”²¹ It is therefore about serving and not authority.

Lee GI In states that “In servant leadership, the emphasis is on character and relationship, not position.”²² Oswald Sanders too advocates this strongly, as he observes that “true greatness, true leadership, is achieved not by reducing men to one’s service but in giving oneself in selfless service to them.”²³ Peter Northouse in *Leadership Theory and Practice* also shares the same view where “servant leadership emphasizes that leaders be attentive to the concerns of their followers, empathize with them, and nurture them. Servant leaders put followers first, empower them, and help them develop their full personal capacities.”²⁴ Larry C. Spears asserts that “the servant leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead.”²⁵

This is an attribute that a pastoral leader ought to cultivate to follow the model of Jesus, where the attitude of a servant leader is the key to becoming a pastoral leader.²⁶ Gary E. Roberts in *Developing Christian Servant Leadership* affirms that the key to being a servant leader is to build character, and “one of the main duties of our Christian ‘job description’ is the development of godly character.”²⁷ To be effective in ministry is to be a leader who serves, which is a key element in building a close relationship with the people one is serving. The leadership model of Jesus is rooted in humility, service and obedience to the Father, affirming that effective leadership begins with an inner transformation of the heart.²⁸ This underlines the fact that servanthood in pastoral leadership does not pertain to weakness but rather to strength that is expressed through a surrender to God’s will.

¹⁷ *Shepherding God’s Flock* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), 344.

¹⁸ Mark A. Flyod, “Servant Leadership: What Does It Really Mean?,” in *Servant Leadership In Action*, ed. Ken Blanchard and Renee Broadwell (Oakland: Berrett Koehler Publishers, Inc, 2018), 124.

¹⁹ Wee Hian Chua, *Learning to Lead* (Secunderabad: Authentic, 1987), 23.

²⁰ Stephen M. R. Covey, “Servant Leadership at the Speed of Trust,” in *Servant Leadership In Action*, ed. Ken Blanchard and Renee Broadwell (Oakland: Berrett Koehler Publishers, Inc, 2018), 93.

²¹ Ken Blanchard, “What Is Servant Leadership?,” in *Servant Leadership In Action*, ed. Ken Blanchard and Renee Broadwell (Oakland: Berrett Koehler Publishers, Inc, 2018), 54.

²² GI In Lee, “Pastoral Leadership for Local Church Growth in the Korean Church” (Doctoral Thesis, Liberty Theological Seminary, 2006), 71.

²³ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 20.

²⁴ Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (California: Sage, 2016), 225.

²⁵ Larry C. Spears, “Characteristics of Servant Leaders,” in *Servant Leadership In Action*, ed. Ken Blanchard and Renee Broadwell (Oakland: Berrett Koehler Publishers, Inc, 2018), 61.

²⁶ Lee, “Pastoral Leadership for Local Church Growth in the Korean Church,” 77.

²⁷ Gary E. Roberts, *Developing Christian Servant Leadership* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2015), 42, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137492456>.

²⁸ Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges, *Lead Like Jesus Revisited: Lessons from the Greatest Leadership Role Model of All Time* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2016).

In building an effective ministry in the church, a relational form of leadership is important. Ajith Fernando in *Leadership Lifestyle* reminds us “Christianity is a community religion. And communities exist on relationships. When relationships break, communities break.”²⁹ There can be no effective leadership without good relationship. Walter C. Wright states that “leadership is a relationship that cares enough to walk patiently with people towards a shared purpose. Leadership is not about leaders; it is about the people we lead.”³⁰ Fernando further states that no matter “however talented a leader may be, if he does not work on his relationships, he will not be effective.”³¹ Therefore, a leader or a pastor needs to build one’s credibility, and according to Dan Brown in *The Other Side of Pastoral Ministry*, ‘credibility’ is built through a ‘context of relationship’. He argues that only when the congregation feels that they know the pastor, through the times of fellowship or time spent together, will the pastor be able to influence the congregation as compared to a pastor who is aloof.³²

Moreover, Brown further make a case for the ‘process of credibility’ which involves four key factors, such as “caring about people, trusting people, being a resource to people and being vulnerable to people.”³³ These are all factors that are part and parcel of building a relationship. Relationship in the context of leadership ought to be influential, where according to Wright, a leader is a person who “enters into a relationship with another person to influence their behavior, values, or attitudes.”³⁴ The influence that a pastor has on his congregation is the relationship that leads to an effective ministry and the growth of the church. Henry H. Luckel Jr. writes in his study that pastors of growing churches do see their churches as active members of the community, where they are considered to be the ‘undershepherd’ with God as the shepherd of the flock. He concludes that the relationship of the pastor with the community is one of the major factors that contribute to church growth.³⁵ Therefore, relational leadership is indispensable to pastoral ministry because spiritual care is exercised through meaningful relationships with God’s people.

2.5 Biblical Foundation of Pastoral Leadership

The need for leadership in the church today is of such utmost importance that there is a tendency among churches and leaders to borrow ideas and ideologies from the secular world. There is no doubt that churches do need to be effective and efficient; however, the danger is that the basis for that may be taken not from the Word but rather from the world. Pastoral leadership, if it is to remain faithful to its calling, must be grounded in biblical revelation rather than pragmatic success. Consequently, the proper starting point for understanding pastoral leadership is not managerial theory but the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. The biblical foundation of pastoral leadership is therefore rooted in the person, ministry, and mission of Jesus Christ, who provides the pattern by which pastoral leadership is to be understood and practiced.

2.5.1 Jesus as the Model of Pastoral Leadership

Central to the biblical understanding of pastoral leadership stands the person of Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, Jesus was not presented only as a spiritual teacher, but as a model of leadership that shows what authority, service and mission are. His style of leadership was seen in his compassion towards others (Matt 9:36), in his authority in teaching (Matt 7:29), his intentional discipleship (Mark 3:14) and sacrificial service (John 13: 1-15).

At the core of this leadership model is the identity and obedience of Jesus to the Father. The leadership style of Jesus stems from his identity and obedience. Jesus declares in John 5:19, that “the Son can do nothing of himself, but what He sees the Father do.” This indicates that in his leadership style; he was not independent on his own but rather dependent on the Father. It is evident that the authority that he has flows from his submission to the Father’s will rather than his own ambition. Leadership, therefore, was anchored in obedience before it was exercised and expressed in action. Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges in *Lead Like Jesus Revisited* highlighted this inner dimension, emphasising that Jesus led from the inside out, where the

²⁹ Ajith Fernando, *Leadership Lifestyle: A Study of 1 Timothy* (Mumbai: GLS Publishing, 1988), 128.

³⁰ Walter C. Wright Jr, “Leadership among the People of God,” *Living Pulpit* 9, no. 4 (October 2000): 148.

³¹ Fernando, *Leadership Lifestyle: A Study of 1 Timothy*, 128.

³² Daniel A. Brown, *The Other Side of Pastoral Ministry: Using Process Leadership to Transform Your Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 46.

³³ Brown, 50.

³⁴ Wright, “Leadership among the People of God,” 2.

³⁵ Henry H. Luckel Jr., “Pastoral Leadership Style: Their Effect on the Growth of Southern Baptist Churches in the Western United States.” (Doctoral Thesis, Colorado State University, 2013), 59.

heart, head, hands and habits of a leader ought to be aligned with God's purpose.³⁶ They opined that, at the outset, Jesus knew who he was in relation to the Father, implying that his security in his identity enabled him to lead with authority and humility. This highlights that pastoral leadership does not prioritise technique or strategy, but it is rooted in inner spiritual formation shaped by obedience to God.

First, Jesus demonstrated relational leadership. In Mark 3:14, it was recorded that he appointed twelve "that they might be with Him and He might send them out." To 'be with him' indicates a presence where relationship was established and only then commission took place. The relationship was established first, prior to assigning responsibility. Leadership, as seen in the biblical pattern grew through presence and shared life where life was invested in others through relationship and fellowship.

Similarly, Chua Wee Hian, in *Learning to Lead*, directs attention to the qualities of a leader when he points to Jesus as the Master Trainer.³⁷ He draws from the biblical data to lay down the model of what a spiritual or a biblical leader ought to be like, by elaborating on the methods of Jesus "for the equipping of spiritual leaders."³⁸ One of the qualities of Jesus in leading his disciples was to be with them and among them. Robinson William opines that "the most powerful position of leadership is beside those whom God calls us to lead. Among them."³⁹ Leadership, therefore, is intentional and personal, where conversation, lived experience and shared ministry are elements of a relational approach. It establishes that pastoral leadership considers presence and relationship to be more important than visibility and recognition.

In addition to relational presence, Jesus exercised leadership through authoritative teaching. Matthew 7:29 says "for he taught them as one having authority" unlike the scribes. The teachings of Jesus carried weight as they were rooted in the truth and not merely tradition. The authority did not come from institutional designation but from clarity and truthfulness. Jesus often used dialogue, questions and real-life examples to engage his listeners.⁴⁰ His teachings then were not merely a transfer of information but transformational. Christian leaders are exhorted to be under the authority of the Word before they exercise any authority through the Word.⁴¹ What is evident in Jesus ministry is that authority flowed from being in submission to the Father. Thus, pastoral leadership is expected to hold fast to sound teaching, being faithful to doctrines and yet exercise authority with humility expressed through obedience to God and not through control over people.

Third, Jesus demonstrated servant leadership. Jesus gave a new understanding to the meaning of greatness in service when he washed the feet of the disciples (John 13:1-15). Jesus act of kneeling and service happened in the midst of misunderstanding and betrayal, yet it was not a symbolic act, but was instructional, and he commanded them to do the same. Therefore, service is not a choice or an option, but the norm for leadership that is exercised in his name. What Jesus demonstrated was not weakness but deliberate strength that is seen through humility.⁴² However, the humility and servanthood of Jesus is not to be confused with passive weakness because he still commanded authority and did not hesitate to correct and rebuke his disciples when necessary.⁴³ The servanthood of Jesus did not exclude discipline, rather he balanced humility and correction with accountability and compassion.

As mentioned above, the leadership of Jesus demonstrates identity, relational formation, authority in teaching, servanthood as important dimensions of pastoral leadership. It does include the administrative and inspirational, but it is also deeply theological. From this perspective, Jesus does not offer one leadership model among many, but he establishes the norm by which all pastoral leadership must be understood. Pastoral leadership cannot be reduced to simply the organisational ability or strategic accomplishment, but it must reflect the character, obedience and mission of Christ himself through following his model.

II. METHODOLOGY

A convergent mixed-method design was used, where the quantitative and qualitative data were analysed independently before being integrated during the interpretation stage. Pastoral leadership involves measurable leadership practices as well as lived spiritual and relational experiences. Therefore, both quantitative and qualitative data were used to provide an understanding of ministry effectiveness. The

³⁶ *Lead Like Jesus Revisited: Lessons from the Greatest Leadership Role Model of All Time.*

³⁷ Chua, *Learning to Lead*, 75.

³⁸ Chua, 77.

³⁹ Robinson William, *Incarnate Leadership : Five Leadership Lessons from the Life of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2009), 36.

⁴⁰ Chua, *Learning to Lead*, 84.

⁴¹ Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus*.

⁴² Blanchard and Hodges, *Lead Like Jesus Revisited: Lessons from the Greatest Leadership Role Model of All Time.*

⁴³ Chua, *Learning to Lead*.

quantitative data provide measurable information on the perceptions of pastoral leadership, while the qualitative data provide deeper understanding through the lived experiences of pastoral ministry. The study included two participant groups, pastors and congregants, where the same leadership dimensions were examined from both groups. The findings from the quantitative and qualitative data were then integrated during the interpretation stage.

The participants comprised of two groups: pastors and congregants. The study focused on the urban ministry context where the perceptions of congregants regarding pastoral leadership were examined. The pastoral participants consisted of pastors serving or who had served in urban churches. The congregational participants reflected those directly involved in the same ministry context.

Purposive sampling was used for both groups. Since the study focused on the urban ministry context, participants were intentionally selected because the study focused on the urban ministry. A criterion-based purposive sampling was used for pastors, where all pastors who met the criterion of serving or having served in an urban ministry context were included. A total of 28 pastors participated in the study. A stratified purposive sampling was used for the congregants. The participants represented different groups within the congregation in order to capture the perceptions of the wider church community. A total of 336 congregants participated in the quantitative survey. For the qualitative component, four retired senior pastors with extensive ministry experience were purposively selected for the interview.

Data were collected using both quantitative and qualitative instruments. A structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale was administered to pastors and congregants. The questionnaire was developed to measure the perception of pastoral leadership from both groups. The questionnaire was organized around eight composite leadership dimensions: Vision and Goal Setting, Leading Change, Equipping Members, Delegation and Management, Spiritual Care and Growth, Personal Discipleship and Mentoring, Inclusivity and Participation, Community Building. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four retired senior pastors to provide qualitative insights that complemented the quantitative findings. The interviews provided narrative depth and lived ministry experiences that strengthened the interpretation of the quantitative findings.

III. FINDINGS

The findings indicate that Spiritual Care and growth emerged as the highest-rated dimension in the congregant's perception of pastoral leadership.

Spiritual Care and Growth ($M = 3.98$, $SD=0.69$) received the highest rating from the congregants and falls close to the "Strongly Agree" range in the Likert Scale. This means that the congregants view their pastors as being effective in the areas of pastoral care including guidance, visitation, counselling, being available, teaching and preaching. A relatively low standard deviation also suggests that most of the congregants share this same perception and consider spiritual care as a strong point in the pastoral leadership.

A particular dimension that shifts from the general trend is Spiritual Care and Growth. The ratings show that the congregants rate their pastor higher ($M = 3.98$) than the pastors' rating of themselves ($M = 3.66$), which is the only dimensions in which congregants' rated pastors higher than the pastors rated themselves. This suggests that the congregants experience their pastor's spiritual care, guidance and presence as a strength in pastoral leadership and value these aspects of ministry more highly than the pastors perceive themselves.

Spiritual Care and Growth also demonstrated a strong positive relationship with congregants' perception of pastoral leadership. This implies that positive experience of spiritual care are closely associated with positive perceptions of pastoral leadership. The negative effect size for Spiritual Care and Growth ($d = -0.64$) indicates that the congregants rated this dimension higher than pastors rated themselves. Spiritual Care and Growth emerged as the strongest indicator of ministry effectiveness ($\beta = 0.64$, $p < .001$). This suggests that when congregants perceive spiritual care positively, they are also more likely to perceive the overall ministry as being effective.

Taken together, these findings consistently identify Spiritual Care and Growth as a primary marker through which congregants recognize effective pastoral leadership. The evidence consistently points towards spiritual care as a central aspect of pastoral leadership and an important indicator of ministry effectiveness.

4.1 Spiritual Care as Lived Pastoral Leadership

The congregants understand pastoral leadership primarily through the lived experiences of care, guidance and spiritual presence in the church. This suggests that the congregants believed that the pastor leads them in a meaningful way when they experience the pastor's availability, the concerns for their lives, prayerful guidance and presence in their daily situations.

The findings therefore suggest that pastoral leadership is not understood merely through organizational direction and administration but through visible spiritual care and relational involvement in the congregation.

It is evident that from the perspective of the congregants, leadership is not abstract, but it is rooted in the experiences of pastoral presence, during illness, grief, personal struggle, prayer. They do not identify leadership primarily through plans, systems or ideas but through personal relationships and spiritual care. Therefore, in the eyes of the congregants, ministry effectiveness is measured less by the pastor's plans and intentions than by the availability and presence of the pastor. This may further explain why organizational and developmental aspects of leadership, though important, may not carry the same weight in shaping the congregants understanding of effective ministry.

This understanding of pastoral leadership aligns with the classical pastoral theology that emphasizes the shepherding and caring role of the pastor. Thomas Oden described pastoral work as work as involves healing, nurturing, guiding, reconciling people in their deepest concerns.⁴⁴ Jesus likewise demonstrated pastoral leadership through his presence, care and service among his disciples. These theological perspectives closely resonate with the findings of this study, where congregants recognized pastoral leadership primarily through lived experiences of care, guidance and spiritual presence rather than organizational leadership alone.

When considered together, these findings suggest that congregants do not see pastoral leadership as an abstract ideal but as a practical experience of spiritual presence. The evidence affirms classical pastoral theology by showing that these theological understandings continue to be recognized in the lived experience of congregational life.

IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR PASTORAL MINISTRY

These findings have important implications for pastoral ministry, particularly in the way how spiritual care is prioritized, experienced and sustained within pastoral ministry.

5.1 Prioritizing Spiritual Care

Pastors must deliberately set aside time for spiritual care, particularly for prayer, counselling and guidance. Since Spiritual Care and Growth emerged as the strongest indicator of ministry effectiveness, pastoral leadership must intentionally protect these aspects of ministry from being overshadowed by other responsibilities. Within the present ministry setting where pastors often oversee multiple congregations, spiritual care cannot remain dependent only upon the pastor alone. Therefore, pastoral leadership must guide existing ministry structures and leaders towards congregational care, discipleship and spiritual care.

5.2 Strengthening Pastoral Presence

The findings suggest that congregants understand pastoral leadership primarily through the pastor's presence, care and availability. Therefore, pastoral presence must remain a central responsibility of pastoral ministry, and regular presence and availability – particularly when believers experience sickness, death, personal and family struggles, and major events in their lives – must not be neglected or treated as secondary by pastoral leadership. Although pastoral presence becomes more challenging where pastors oversee multiple congregations, it must remain a ministry priority and must not be displaced by other responsibilities. Rather than limiting pastoral care only to the pastor, pastoral leadership should encourage existing leaders and ministry structures to share responsibility for congregational care, visitation and spiritual support.

5.3 Supporting Spiritual Care through Pastoral Ministry.

The findings indicate that spiritual care should remain the primary focus of pastoral ministry. As churches continue to grow, organizational and administrative responsibilities also increase. Although these responsibilities remain important, they should support rather than replace the church's pastoral ministry of

⁴⁴ Clebsch and Jaekle, *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective*, 4.

nurturing, guiding and caring for God's people. Pastors must therefore ensure that administrative responsibilities do not overshadow the ministry of spiritual care.

Taken together, these implications suggest that spiritual care should remain the defining priority of pastoral ministry. While administration, leadership development and organizational management remain important, they fulfil their proper purpose only when they support the church's pastoral mission of nurturing, guiding and caring for God's people.

V. CONCLUSION

The data from the study reveal that congregants do not perceive pastoral leadership through administrative tasks or organizational structures but rather through their lived experience of the spiritual and relational and spiritual life of the church. Though it is accepted that structures and programs are necessary elements, they are not the main factors by which leadership is identified and remembered. Instead, spiritual care, relational presence emerge as the primary indicators of effective pastoral leadership. From a biblical perspective, leadership in the pastoral context is understood through the imagery of a shepherd, where care, relational presence, guidance and spiritual responsibility remain central to pastoral ministry. The findings of this study affirms this biblical understanding.

Overall, the findings indicate that Spiritual Care and Growth is the central marker of effective pastoral leadership. Congregants understand pastoral leadership through what they experience in the life of the church, particularly through prayer, guidance, availability and pastoral presence during sickness, bereavement, family and personal struggles. These experiences are not peripheral to pastoral ministry but remain central to how congregants recognize effective pastoral leadership. This understanding also reflects the biblical imagery of the shepherd, where pastoral leadership is expressed through care, guidance and spiritual responsibility.

REFERENCES

- [1] Adams, Anthony Wayne. "Shepherd Leadership of Church of God Pastors and How This Relates to Ministerial Effectiveness." Doctoral Thesis, University of Phoenix, 2013.
- [2] Adams, Jay E. *Shepherding God's Flock*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975.
- [3] Blanchard, Ken. "What Is Servant Leadership?" In *Servant Leadership In Action*, edited by Ken Blanchard and Renee Broadwell, 41–58. Oakland: Berrett Koehler Publishers, Inc, 2018.
- [4] Blanchard, Ken, and Phil Hodges. *Lead Like Jesus Revisited: Lessons from the Greatest Leadership Role Model of All Time*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2016.
- [5] *The Other Side of Pastoral Ministry: Using Process Leadership to Transform Your Church*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996.
- [6] *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church Second Edition: Strong Healthy Congregations Living in the Grace of God*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010.
- [7] Abraham J. Jules, and Nikolaus Satelmajer. "The Pastor as a Shepherd." In *A Guide to Effective Pastoral Ministry*, edited by Steve D. Cassimy, Abraham J. Jules, and Nikolaus Satelmajer, 150–59. United States: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2009.
- [8] Chua, Wee Hian. *Learning to Lead*. Secunderabad: Authentic, 1987.
- [9] Clebsch, William A., and Charles R. Jaekle. *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1994.
- [10] R. "Servant Leadership at the Speed of Trust." In *Servant Leadership In Action*, edited by Ken Blanchard and Renee Broadwell, 91–110. Oakland: Berrett Koehler Publishers, Inc, 2018.
- [11] *Leadership Lifestyle: A Study of 1 Timothy*. Mumbai: GLS Publishing, 1988.
- [12] Flyod, Mark A. "Servant Leadership: What Does It Really Mean?" In *Servant Leadership In Action*, edited by Ken Blanchard and Renee Broadwell, 120–34. Oakland: Berrett Koehler Publishers, Inc, 2018.
- [13] Gunter, Nathan H. "The Shepherd-Leader Motif as a Pastoral Model for a Globalizing Church." *Perichoresis* 16, no. 3 (July 2018): 87–105. <https://doi.org/10.2478/perc-2018-0018>.
- [14] Hoppin, James Mason. *Pastoral Theology*. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884. <https://commons.ptsem.edu/id/pastoraltheology00hopp>.
- [15] Howe, Leroy T. "Pastoral Care in Today's Church and World." *Modern Churchman* 26, no. 4 (1984): 31–41.

- [16] Laniak, Timothy S. *Shepherds After My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2006.
- [17] Lee, GI In. "Pastoral Leadership for Local Church Growth in the Korean Church." Doctoral Thesis, Liberty Theological Seminary, 2006.
- [18] Luckel Jr., Henry H. "Pastoral Leadership Style: Their Effect on the Growth of Southern Baptist Churches in the Western United States." Doctoral Thesis, Colorado State University, 2013.
- [19] McLaughlin, Richard J. "What Should You Look For In A Christian Leader?" Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2001.
- [20] Mugambi, Kyama. "Leadership Themes from the Gospel of John: A Dialogue with Transformational Leadership Theory." Paper presented at African Society of Evangelical Theologians Conference, Nairobi, Kenya. March 2016.
- [21] Northouse, Peter G. *Leadership: Theory and Practice*. California: Sage, 2016.
- [22] Oden, Thomas C. *Pastoral Theology*. New York: Harper Collins, 1982.
- [23] Oden, Thomas C. *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*. 1st ed. San Francisco: HarperOne, 1983.
- [24] *Pastors and Teachers: The Calling and Work of Christ's Ministers*. Crowborough: Highland Books, 1989.
- [25] Roberts, Gary E. *Developing Christian Servant Leadership*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137492456>.
- [26] Oswald. *Spiritual Leadership*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1994.
- [27] Schoun, Benjamin D. "The Pastor and the Local Church." In *A Guide to Effective Pastoral Ministry*, edited by Steve D. Cassimy,
- [28] Abraham J. Jules, and Nikolaus Satelmajer, 41–49. United States: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2009.
- [29] "A Critical Examination of Christian Leadership in the Light of Recent Trends within the Church of England." *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 39, no. 1 (2018): 39–47.
- [30] Spears, Larry C. "Characteristics of Servant Leaders." In *Servant Leadership In Action*, edited by Ken Blanchard and Renee Broadwell, 59–72. Oakland: Berrett Koehler Publishers, Inc, 2018.
- [31] Still, William. *The Work of the Pastor*. Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1996.
- [32] Stott, John. *The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002.
- [33] Tidball, Derek. *Skilful Shepherds*. Leicester, UK: IVP, 1986.
- [34] William, Robinson. *Incarnate Leadership : Five Leadership Lessons from the Life of Jesus*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2009.
- [35] Williams, Meade C. *The Pastor*. Princeton: Mercer and Dean, Printers, 1887.
- [36] Wright, Walter C., Jr. "Leadership among the People of God." *Living Pulpit* 9, no. 4 (October 2000): 24–25.