

## Rural Pastors, Family Welfare and Pastoral Care Equity Challenges: The Case of Three Classical Pentecostal Churches in Ghana

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### Abstract

Equity in pastoral care has emerged as a vital aspect of pastoral work, and its importance cannot be overstated, as it ensures the holistic well-being of all pastors and their families. The call to Christian ministry often comes with various challenges, and effective pastoral care is expected from church leadership, particularly in rural mission contexts. There is a prevalent perception that pastors in rural missions receive less financial and social support compared to their counterparts in urban areas. As a result, many pastors in certain churches tend to decline rural assignments and prefer to remain in urban settings. Others, who are unable to refuse rural postings due to the administrative structures of their churches, fulfil their calling out of necessity. This situation has become a significant burden for both church leaders and their pastors. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the challenges faced by pastors and their families serving in rural areas within three classical Pentecostal Ghanaian churches: The Church of Pentecost, The Apostolic Church of Ghana, and Christ Apostolic Church International. The goal is to gain insight into their perspectives on this issue. It is noteworthy that many pastors were hesitant to discuss their experiences due to concerns about potential victimisation or being perceived as 'carnally minded' despite assurances of confidentiality. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of literature addressing this sensitive topic, which has motivated this research.

**Keywords:** Rural Pastors, Pastors' Family, Equity challenges, Policy Generalisation, Spirituality.

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### Introduction

From antiquity to the dawn of humankind, the responsibility of pastoral care equity has emerged as a vital phenomenon that should not be underestimated, as it addresses the holistic needs of individuals. This responsibility has been essential throughout history. Beginning with the Garden of Eden, God, the Creator, has shown a consistent concern for priestly care both before and after humanity's fall (Gen. 3:8). The Creator's concern for sinful human beings was evident when Abel killed his brother Cain, prompting God to inquire about Abel's whereabouts (Gen. 4:9). Throughout human history, God has guided

the course of human affairs in various ways across many dispensations, urging His chosen people to adhere to His paths.<sup>1</sup>

Since ancient times, the role of the priest has been integral in guiding communities in adherence to divine principles and providing solace during periods of distress. The evolution of pastoral ministry across different epochs has significantly enhanced human development across multiple dimensions – psychological, sociological, philosophical, and spiritual. This multifaceted impact highlights the vital function of pastoral care in fostering holistic well-being and addressing the complexities of human experience.<sup>2</sup> Priests existed in ancient times, long before the Old Testament priesthood, and there was always the appropriate priest at any given moment.<sup>3</sup> The institution of the priesthood is sacred, and God, who established it, deeply concerns Himself with its integrity. He demonstrates His pastoral care in various ways, such as by providing a harmonious environment – like the Garden of Eden—for humanity to tend. God explicitly revealed the potential consequences of disobedience, warning against the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17). Furthermore, He showcased His pastoral role through His personal visits to the created beings in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:8).

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

One of the key responsibilities of any religious organisation is to establish policies that foster the spirituality of its members. It is important to recognise that every religious person, particularly Christians, seeks to adhere to the principles of their faith in their pursuit of pleasing God, the ultimate Being. This pursuit is what this research defines as meaningful spirituality. However, what are the consequences when a pastor tasked with guiding his congregation towards this meaningful spirituality is not spiritually oriented due to various human and social challenges?

Churches are known to play significant roles in the Ghanaian community. Most Ghanaians revere their churches and pastors because they occupy a central place in their lives, regardless of the size of the worship venue. However, churches with small populations in rural areas encounter more complex challenges compared to their counterparts in urban settings. This is primarily due to their geographical locations. Pastors in these underprivileged areas face numerous difficulties in their efforts to meet the needs and demands of their families and congregants. In extreme circumstances, pastors, particularly those in full-time ministry, experience high levels of stress that result in “burnout”.<sup>4</sup> A significant number of pastors, particularly in rural communities in

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<sup>1</sup> Carly L. Crouch, “Genesis 1:26-7 As a Statement of Humanity’s Divine Parentage,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 61, no. 1 (April 1, 2010): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/flp185>.

<sup>2</sup> Carl Oslon, *Theory and Method in the Study of Religion* (Holly J. Allen Publishers, 2003), 345; Robert A. Segal, *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion* (Blackwell Publishers, 2006), 180; Segal, *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, 133.

<sup>3</sup> Răducă, “Teologia Pastorală Și Misiunea Bisericii,” 160; Cosmin Santi, “Vocation and Spiritual Qualities of Priest, Canon Condition for the Effective Pastoral Missionary Work,” *Teologia* 61, no. 4 (2014): 138–56, 145.

<sup>4</sup> Arno F. Wittig and Gary S. Belkin, *Introduction to Psychology* (McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 2002).

Ghana, face burnout and often leave their vocation. However, there has been limited research addressing the phenomenon of burnout from the perspective of active clergy.

The classical Pentecostal churches, including The Church of Pentecost (CoP), Christ Apostolic Church International (CACI), and The Apostolic Church of Ghana (TAC-GH), have a commendable history of employing a significant number of pastors throughout the country, in both urban and rural areas. The Church of Pentecost is leading this effort.<sup>5</sup> Personal observations and experiences regarding the phenomenon of continuous classical Pentecostal rural pastoral care in Ghana has highlighted several significant issues. Firstly, many rural pastoral seats are located in areas that lack essential facilities such as healthcare, quality education, market centres, and reliable mobile network communication. Secondly, a substantial number of rural pastors depend on bank loans to support their children's education from basic schools to tertiary education. Those who cannot afford such costs due to financial constraints risk jeopardising their children's futures by providing only a limited education, which often fails to meet the highest standards. Lastly, amidst these challenges, their immediate supervisors – who often lack rural experience – struggle to comprehend the predicaments faced by rural pastors. This leads to unrealistic expectations for performance, akin to that of their urban counterparts, who benefit from a wealth of available resources for minimal effort. Additionally, policies are occasionally crafted with an urban focus, neglecting the unique needs of rural pastors. These factors underscore the urgent need to investigate how classical Pentecostal churches in Ghana fulfil their pastoral care responsibilities. This includes an emphasis on the holistic well-being of their pastors, families, and congregants to foster spiritual growth, particularly in light of God's concern for the priesthood as outlined in the Old Testament.

### **Research Objective**

The primary objective of the study was “to ascertain the level of unequal treatment among classical Pentecostal rural pastors and its possible effect on their meaningful spirituality.” Specifically, the study sought:

- a. To determine the extent to which the existing support system addresses the needs of rural classical Pentecostal pastors and their families.
- b. To ascertain the equitable distribution of resources (financial, human, etc.) among rural Pastors of classical Pentecostal Churches in Ghana,
- c. To find out the effects of periodic generalisation of church policies by church administrators concerning both rural and urban pastors.
- d. To identify the challenges that rural pastors and their families encounter as a result of spending many years in rural areas in Ghana.

### **Methodology**

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<sup>5</sup> The Church of Pentecost, 2019 Chairman's Report.

Dannels has suggested that the design of a research study shapes the selection of participants, the variables considered, and how those variables are manipulated. It also dictates the methods of data collection and analysis, as well as the control of external variables, all of which are essential for addressing the research problem.<sup>6</sup> This study employs a qualitative research methodology. A qualitative study may be characterised as “a systematic empirical inquiry aimed at creating a coherent, essentially descriptive explanation to inform the perception of a social or cultural phenomenon by the researchers.”<sup>7</sup> Qualitative research serves as a valuable approach to understanding the perspectives that inform a given problem while also offering various insights and potential solutions. As an inductive method, it allows researchers to explore the diverse dimensions of a particular condition. Additionally, it encompasses a range of data collection and analytical techniques that use purposive sampling, as well as open-ended and semi-structured interviews.

### ***Data Collection Procedure***

Data for the study was obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The research utilised participatory observation, structured and unstructured interviews, and focus group discussions to collect primary data. The participatory observation method enables researchers to record the natural behaviours of the group being studied, allowing them to gather insights that might not be easily accessible through a detached observational approach. This method creates an opportunity to verify the accuracy of the statements made by the study participants.<sup>8</sup>

With the assistance of other pastors who have primarily served in rural areas of Ghana across various districts within the selected regions, exploratory visits were conducted in the study districts for informal discussions with predetermined stakeholders. Semi-structured interviews, featuring both open-ended and closed-ended questions, were administered to selected respondents. This approach was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of the decisions, attitudes, and opinions of those interviewed.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, the researcher conducted a focus group discussion to gather data. This session was facilitated by a moderator, with the support of an observer responsible for taking notes during the conversation and ensuring that no details were overlooked by the moderator. With the consent of the participants, the discussions were also audiotaped.

To collect secondary data, a comprehensive review and discussion of relevant literature on the subject was conducted. This literature included previous studies, journal and newspaper articles, manuals, statutory tools, policy documents, and management plans

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<sup>6</sup> Sharon A. Dannels, *Research Design. The Reviewer's Guide to Quantitative Methods in the Social Sciences* (Routledge, 2018), 402-416.

<sup>7</sup> Dannels, *Research Design. The Reviewer's Guide to Quantitative Methods in the Social Sciences*, 404-416.

<sup>8</sup> Corrine Glesne, *Becoming Qualitative Researcher: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (New York: Pearson Education, 2011), 131.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis, and Adrian Thornhill, *A Research Methods for Business Students*, vol. 5 (New York: Prentice Hall, 2009).

pertinent to the topic under investigation. It was anticipated that this secondary data would enhance the reliability and validity of the primary data collected.<sup>10</sup> It also offered valuable insight into the field of study and the issues related to the core research objectives, relevant literature, the methodology for the general survey, and the research findings.

### ***Research Sample***

In terms of the data collection procedure, the study was conducted in the Ahafo, Ashanti, and Eastern Regions of Ghana. For this research, three rural districts and one urban district were purposefully selected from each of the regions. A purposive sampling technique, also known as judgment sampling, was employed to select the respondents. This approach was chosen due to the specific qualities possessed by the participants.<sup>11</sup> This sampling method allowed for the selection of respondents who are available, belong to the relevant stakeholder groups being analysed, and best align with the study's objectives.<sup>12</sup>

### **Research Findings**

The respondents interviewed revealed various challenges faced alongside their families as they carried out their pastoral duties in rural areas. Among these challenges, the three most significant are presented as follows:

#### ***a) Falling Educational Standards of Rural Pastors' Children***

Pastors and their spouses unanimously affirmed that they had received a divine calling. They also expressed that they had no authority to share their opinions regarding the church's transfer procedures and were unable to influence or propose their posting locations. Until their transfer was officially announced, they remained unaware of where they would be assigned. Additionally, the availability or lack of certain social amenities was often unknown to the pastor until they arrived at the new location. The problem arose when the standard of education fell short of expectations. The minister, who is also a husband and father, desires the best for his children, hoping they will be able to support him in his old age, just as the Psalmist sang: "And now, in my old age, don't set me aside. Don't abandon me when my strength is failing" (Ps. 71-9 NLT). In the Akan dialect of Ghana, it is said, "*se obi hwe wo ma wo se fifi a, wo nso hwe no ma ne se ntutu,*" which is literally translated as, "If someone takes care of you to grow teeth, you must take care of him or her when his or her teeth are falling out." This is an African concept which

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<sup>10</sup> Burke Johnson and Lisa A. Turner, "Data Collection Strategies in Mixed Methods Research," in *Handbook of Mixed Methods*, ed. A.M. Tashakkori and C.B. Teddlie, 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Ilker Etikan, Sulaiman Abubakar Musa, and Rukayya Sunusi Alkassim, "Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling," *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics* 5, no. 1 (2016): 1-4.

<sup>12</sup> Jennifer Neville and David Jensen, "Relational Dependency Networks.," *Journal of Machine Learning Research* 8, no. 3 (2007).

encourages parents to work hard and secure a brighter future for their wards. Some people go so far as to care for other people's children, following an Akan proverb that states: *obinim nea Dbehwe obi daakye*, which is translated as "no one knows who will take care of someone in the future." Some respondents lamented that their hopes had become a mirage due to their current situation.<sup>13</sup>

It is undeniable that higher education significantly enhances life opportunities. Education cultivates the mind, refines one's thoughts, and strengthens character and interpersonal behaviours. Additionally, it provides valuable knowledge across various fields. Consequently, a lack of education may hinder one's ability to secure a respectable profession. Educated individuals are often considered a vital resource for a nation's development.<sup>14</sup> Given these points, it is clear that every caring parent desires the best for their child. However, this is not always a reality. Many children of rural pastors face significant challenges in accessing quality education.

#### ***b) Pastors Children's Spiritual Formation Decline***

The issue surrounding the education of pastors' children has raised significant concerns, as these pastors often worry about their children being exposed to ungodly environments. To avoid jeopardizing their children's education, many pastors choose to leave them in the care of relatives or friends in towns and cities. Unfortunately, these guardians are often not devout Christians, which can lead to a weakening of the Christian foundation that the parents have worked hard to establish. Consequently, the children may become wayward and difficult to manage, ultimately shaking their spiritual foundations. Paul emphasizes the importance of a church leader's household being above reproach in the book of Timothy (1 Timothy 3:2a,4). It is, therefore, unacceptable, troubling, and contrary to the expectations of a Christian leader for the child of a pastor to exhibit deviant behavior. However, due to various compelling circumstances, some children may find themselves in difficult situations that tarnish their parents' ministerial integrity. This does not imply that children who live with their parents are always exemplary; rather, the likelihood of deviant behaviours tends to increase among those lacking parental care. What benefit does a minister gain from positively impacting the lives of others if it comes at the expense of their own household?

According to the respondents, this issue has persisted for many years, yet there appears to be a lack of systems established by church leadership to address the challenges faced by rural pastors, ultimately making life in rural areas more favourable for them. Given that rural communities will continue to exist, rural pastoral care will remain a vital concern. Therefore, classical Pentecostal Churches, in contrast to Neo-Pentecostal churches that typically prioritise urban settings, should strategically plan their initiatives

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<sup>13</sup> All the ten pastors, Ten pastors wives and some of their children interviewed narrated similar experiences on how they have battled with funding their children's education.

<sup>14</sup> Abdulghani Al-shuaibi, "The Importance of Education, Salala College of Technology," 2014. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260075970\\_The\\_Importance\\_of\\_Education](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260075970_The_Importance_of_Education)

to ensure that pastors assigned to rural areas do not feel neglected or unsupported. It is, therefore, time that classical Pentecostal churches and other Christian organisations address this problem to avoid inequality among pastors.

*c) Generalization of Church Policies on Rural Pastors, their Families and the Church*

Policies serve as vital frameworks for guidance, consistency, accountability, efficiency, and clarity in the operation of any organisation, and the Church is no exception. Policy documents, such as the constitution and related materials, play a crucial role in the daily functioning of the organisation; their absence can lead to significant organisational challenges. The foundation of such policies can be traced back to the Ten Commandments, also known as the Decalogue, which is documented in Ex. 20:1-17 and reiterated in Deut. 5:1-21. These commandments were entrusted to Moses to instruct the people of Israel on how God intended for them to live and behave. The policies clearly addressed a wide range of issues, including those concerning orphans, widows, strangers, and others. Jesus did not abolish the law; rather, he fulfilled it, as stated in Matt. 5:17. Based on findings from interviews conducted, this paper presents various recommendations that, if implemented, could help minimise the challenges of marginalisation faced by pastors, their families, and church congregants, thereby enhancing their holistic development and promoting equitable distribution of resources.

**Recommendations**

The leadership of classical Pentecostal churches in Ghana must address the existing gap to promote the holistic development of all pastors, irrespective of their positions. The churches should strive to support all their pastors in any location. Consequently, ministers would be more willing to accept postings, whether in urban or rural settings. The following paragraphs will present various recommendations aimed at improving the living conditions for rural pastors in Ghana.

*a) The Need for Pentecostal Model Basic Schools in Every Regional Capital*

During the research, it was discovered that most locations visited did not have model basic schools. This creates problems for pastors who are posted to such locations and further widens the gap of equal development. The establishment of model educational facilities would go a long way to solve the burden of pastors finding good schools to educate their children.

All three churches, particularly the Church of Pentecost, have made significant efforts to support their pastors in rural areas. However, there remains ample work to be done to establish model educational facilities at all levels, from basic education to tertiary institutions. Many respondents expressed concern that their children's futures have been

negatively impacted – both physically and spiritually – due to frequent postings to rural areas, compounded by the inadequate educational system currently in place, as indicated by the collected data. It is crucial to address this issue, as a pastor's assignment should not hinder their children's education.

Churches should prioritise alleviating the challenges faced by rural pastors by establishing model schools in every regional capital. These Christian institutions, staffed with dedicated Christian educators, would provide a holistic educational experience aimed at cultivating scholars who are also committed Christians, thereby supporting both the church and the nation. The early missionaries set a standard for classical Pentecostals to follow. Notably, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG), recognised as a leader in quality education in the country, indicates that integrating chaplaincy services – first introduced by missionaries – contributes significantly to holistic educational development across all pre-tertiary levels. The chaplaincy services effectively promoted the development of Christian morality and character in academic settings, resulting in a transformative scholarship that Asare refers to as 'the Presbyterian discipline' in the 19th century.<sup>15</sup> By the close of the 20th century, secularisation eroded the Presbyterian disciplinary scholarship and similar "Christian educational systems in Africa." At the turn of the 21st century, both church and political leaders sought a return to Christian holistic and moral transformational education, recognising that its absence has had a significant negative impact on the moral fibre of society nation.<sup>16</sup>

#### ***b) The Need to Categorise Policies by the Churches***

Instances where a general rule applies universally to all pastors and environments, regardless of their location, often place one group at a disadvantage, leading to feelings of discontentment and potential burnout. In the three churches studied, it became clear that while the Church of Pentecost (CoP) excels in providing accommodation for pastors and church buildings for the community, as well as offering some financial incentives to rural community churches, others are still lagging behind. Thus, additional efforts are needed to ensure equity across the board. The researcher strongly encourages other classical Pentecostal churches to follow the example set by the Church of Pentecost (CoP) in their efforts to improve the quality of life for pastors serving in rural areas. Until the *parousia* (παρουσία) of the Lord Jesus, which represents the hope of the church of Christ, pastoral assignments in rural communities will persist among classical Pentecostal churches. Those affected should embrace these transitions with an open mind, as, in due course, they will

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<sup>15</sup> Bruce Asare, "The Birth and Development of Formal Education," in *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana and National Development*, ed. K. Nkansa-Kyeremanteng (Accra: Presbyterian Press, 1994), 66.

<sup>16</sup> Kofi Sraku-Lartey, "Foreword" to Ebenezer Y. Blasu (Ed.), *Inside Out: A Devotional Guide for PUCG Students and Teachers* (Accra: Presbyterian Press, 2012), i; Esther Megill, *Education in the African Church* (London: Chapman, 1976), 4; Christine Churcher, "Restoring Presbyterian Discipline - The Way Forward," in *Uprooting the Thorns of Indiscipline; The Church's Combat* (Accra: Presbyterian Church of Ghana Public Relations Unit, 2003), Hon. Christine Churcher was a minister of state responsible for basic, secondary and girl child education under the National Patriotic Party's regime in Ghana, between 2001 and 2008.



come to understand the rationale behind such changes, regardless of the circumstances involved.<sup>17</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper has examined the challenges of family welfare and pastoral care equity faced by rural and urban pastors within classical Pentecostal churches in Ghana. Following the discussion and recommendations presented, it is evident that classical Pentecostal pastoral caregivers bear a significant responsibility to critically evaluate the church's periodic policies. This evaluation is necessary to align with general standards that would benefit both urban and rural missions. Addressing this issue will help remedy the tendency to generalise policies that do not adequately address the specific needs of rural pastors and their families, acknowledging that the church serves not only urban centres but also rural communities where these pastors reside.

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<sup>17</sup> Christian Stettler, "Review: The Parousia and Its Rereadings. The Development of the Eschatological Consciousness in the Writings of the New Testament," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 54, no. 1 (April 1, 2003): 268-70, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/54.1.268>.

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