

THE EXPERIENTIAL IMPACT OF PASTORAL SERVANT LEADERSHIP ON PERSONAL AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH OF CHURCH MEMBERS IN NYANZA GOLD BELT FIELD, TANZANIA

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Abstract

This study explores the experiential impact of pastoral servant leadership on the personal and spiritual growth of church members in the Nyanza Gold Belt Field of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Tanzania. Using a qualitative research approach, the study examined how the pastor, a church elder, and two church members (one male and one female) perceive their experiences of pastoral servant leadership. Data were collected through in-depth interviews conducted with four purposively selected participants. The findings were then analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings reveal that pastoral servant leadership fosters spiritual transformation, mentorship, youth empowerment, conflict resolution, church unity, and social care. The pastor perceives his role as a mentor for emerging leaders. The church elder acknowledges the pastor's humility, inclusivity, and leadership development efforts, while church members view his leadership as transformative, empowering, and unifying. The study highlights that servant leadership principles empathy, listening, stewardship, commitment to the growth of others, and community building are crucial for effective pastoral servant leadership. Based on these findings, the study recommends that pastors and church leaders adopt servant leadership principles to enhance mentorship, youth engagement, conflict resolution, church unity, and social care. Additionally, future research could expand the study to a broader setting, such as the Northern Tanzania Union Conference or the entire country, to gain deeper insights into the role of pastoral servant leadership in spiritual and personal growth.

Keywords: Pastoral Servant Leadership, Spiritual Growth, Church Unity, Leadership Development, Youth Empowerment, Collaboration, Social Care

INTRODUCTION

According to the Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (2009), the pastor's interpersonal relationships, saying that "the supreme interest of the pastor must be serving people. As important as study, preaching, administration, teaching, or any other aspect of ministry may be, without each being centered in the service to people, it will

not lead to success as a minister of Jesus Christ. People are a pastor's specialty" (p.23). Northouse (2022) emphasizes that leaders should be attentive to the needs of followers, empower them, and help them develop their full human capacities. This means that if a leader has no one to influence, there is no leadership.

Various leadership styles are widely discussed in the leadership literature. But there is a

leadership model that emerged and has cut across different walks of leadership life. Larry Spears, Executive Director of the Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership, mentions and succinctly discusses servant-leadership as: ...A new kind of leadership model, a model that puts serving others as the number one priority. Servant leadership emphasizes increased service to others, a holistic approach to work, promoting a sense of community, and the sharing of power in decision-making (1996, p. 33). Greenleaf, who is the pioneer of servant-leadership theory (1973), observes 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. The best test is: Do those served grow as people; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants?

Several studies have been conducted on servant leadership as it connects to different fields. For example, research indicates that pastoral servant leadership has a significant positive impact on church members. Servant leadership is associated with increased workplace spirituality and affective commitment among volunteer staff in Catholic churches (Karickal & Richardson, 2023). In Korean Catholic churches, servant leadership enhances leader and organizational commitment, leading to increased member participation in church activities (Joo et al., 2018). Similarly, pastoral leadership significantly influences service motivation among church members in Methodist churches in Indonesia (Dece, 2019). Servant leadership also positively affects human resource practices and church growth in spiritual, numerical, and financial dimensions (Shaasha, 2021). These studies collectively demonstrate that servant leadership in church contexts fosters commitment, motivation, and active participation among members. This

leadership model serves other dimensions. Shaasha et al. (2024) comment that servant leaders can serve as a remedy for poor leadership in Africa, where a servanthood attitude of humility and service for others should replace self-serving governance. Servant leadership is viewed as a remedy to confusion and disunity in society and church today. It cuts across other fields like sports (Westre, 2007) and running businesses.

Servant leadership is observed to be an effective pastoral approach. Mannoia & Walkemeyer (2007) posit that servant leadership is at the core of effectiveness in pastoral leadership. Effective pastors approach every relationship with a mindset of servanthood that asks, "How can I encourage you so that you feel valued and empowered to follow God's destiny for your life? This humility of leadership is bold enough to direct people but is always motivated by God's purposes, not personal gain." Servant leadership is putting on the servant mind of Christ and allowing that nature to influence whatever style of leadership is most appropriate to your gifting.

A lot of studies have been conducted on servant leadership as it relates to employee workplace performance, conflict resolution, church mission, and caring for church members for the success of the church or organization. Moreover, a lot of studies are quantitative in approach. In light of that, not many studies on servant leadership are qualitative in approach, and furthermore, there are not many of them going deeper into exploring the experiential impact of pastoral servant leadership on both spiritual and personal growth of church members. This study, therefore, focuses on drawing understanding from how church members experience, perceive, and make meaning of the phenomenon of pastoral servant leadership to their spiritual and personal

growth. Moreover, no study ... seems to have been conducted in the Seventh-day Adventist church in Nyanza Gold Belt Field under the Northern Tanzania Union Conference on Pastoral Servant Leadership.

Nyanza Gold Belt Field is the organization within the Seventh-day Adventist Church under the Northern Tanzania Union Conference in Tanzania. It is comprised of two governmental regions, namely Shinyanga and Geita. It is made up of 200,112 local church members in 614 local churches who are cared for and led by 71 pastors. With that large size of church membership, there is a need for the application of a rightful leadership approach, which in this study, it is pastoral servant leadership. The Nyanza Gold Belt Field is situated in a society marked by economic adversity and a decline in spiritual well-being, necessitating leaders (pastors) who exemplify the principles of servant leadership to cultivate hope, promote unity, and enhance community resilience, leading people to develop personally and spiritually. When church members are well served, the society around them is well served; for they become better citizens in the society. So, the impact of pastoral servant leadership will reach the society through church members.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding Pastoral Servant Leadership Approach

Pastoral servant leadership is an approach that involves a pastor being a servant leader to the people s/he leads. It carries two concepts, namely pastoral and servant leadership. So, when these two concepts are coupled together, they breed an approach known as pastoral servant leadership. It involves a pastor being a servant leader to the people s/he leads. Resane (2020) and Van Dierendonck (2011) discuss the concept of servant leadership in a pastoral context, where leaders prioritize the spiritual,

emotional, and personal needs of their church members while embodying Christ-like humility, service, and care. This model emphasizes the servant-first mentality, drawing from both biblical principles and servant leadership theories to nurture the spiritual growth and well-being of the community. Servant leaders aim to shepherd their followers through empathy, stewardship, and a deep Pastoral commitment to their development and holistic well-being. Resane (2020) observes that this leadership model reflects the example set by Jesus Christ, who led through humility and service. So, a pastor is expected to lead people as a servant, with humility and service.

Pastoral Leadership

Considering the above, a pastor as a leader has a heart for people. Young and Firmin (2014) comment that successful pastoral leadership is built on relational strengths and personal power. A pastor is a shepherd of the people with the sole duty of serving them. Culhane (2018) observes that the term shepherd needs to be considered from a servant leadership perspective. A shepherd as a servant leader has a responsibility for the sheep as captured in three Ps: provision (to take care of or to furnish or supply the need of another), protection (the act of safeguarding, shielding from harm, or guarding against danger), and presence (at hand, physically and/or emotionally available and engaged). Considering that, a new approach, pastoral servant leadership, emerges.

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership is a widely discussed leadership concept in academia. The concept of servant leadership finds its footing in the research arena after the first discussion by Robert Greenleaf in his essay called, 'The Servant as Leader', which was first published in 1970. Servant leadership is a mindset that reflects a servant-first mentality rather than a leader-first mentality. Greenleaf considered

that a leader-first mentality was often large, complex, powerful, impersonal, not always competent, and sometimes corrupt. To be a servant leader does not mean reducing one's position, but rather, strengthening one's legitimate power through service and empathy towards others (Greenleaf, 1977; Hunter, 2004; Spears, 2010).

Taking the discussion further, Keita (2019), on the other hand, in his dissertation, notes that Pastoral leadership is a Bible-centered ideology, whereas servant leadership centers on an Omni-secular ideology, which Greenleaf (1998) defined as a belief not bound to a certain context or religious influence; rather, it is a person's conscious choice to serve. He further explains that servant leadership is based on the concept that the leader functions best when he or she is serving the best interests of those whom they lead (Greenleaf, 2008).

Jesus and Servant Leadership

Jesus Christ as a shepherd was willing to risk His life for the sheep, as stated in John 10. This illustrates true servant leadership. John 13 shows Him washing His disciples' feet with a bowl and cloth. Jesus publicly stated that He came to serve and sacrifice His life as a ransom (Matthew 20:28). This is true pastoral servant leadership. Bible-centered ideology. (Keita, 2019).

Other writers perceive Servant leadership as a process of influencing others to confront and move towards a shared vision, whereby the interests of people and their common good are prioritized over the personal interests of the leader (Ebener, 2010). According to Liden et al. (2008), servant leadership is about focusing on the needs of others, especially team members, before considering one's own needs. However, servant leadership is practiced through a variety of principles as discussed hereafter.

Greenleaf's study on servant leadership has led to a wider increase in knowledge of the same, as various principles have been identified by other writers like Spears (1995), Hunter (2004), and Blanchard & Hodges (2005). For example, Spears (1995) refines Greenleaf concept of servant leadership as he identifies ten principles of servant leadership, namely Listening (Commitment to actively listening to others), Empathy (Understanding and sharing the feelings of others), Healing (Facilitating emotional and spiritual healing in others), Awareness (General awareness and self-awareness), Persuasion (Convincing others rather than coercing), Conceptualization (Visionary thinking beyond day-to-day realities), Foresight (Learning from the past to anticipate the future), Stewardship (Taking responsibility for the well-being of the organization and others), Commitment to the Growth of People (Nurturing others' personal and professional growth), and Building Community (Fostering a sense of belonging and togetherness).

In summary, Spears (1995) observes, first, listening. Effective servant leaders actively listen to others to identify their needs and the will of the group. This includes attentive listening to what is said, unsaid, and to one's own inner voice. Reflection and listening are essential for growth and well-being. Second, on empathy. Servant leaders strive to understand and accept others for their unique qualities and show compassion, even when addressing performance issues. Empathy fosters stronger, more meaningful relationships. Third, on stewardship. Servant leaders act as stewards, holding their organizations in trust for the greater good. They prioritize openness, persuasion, and accountability while serving the needs of the community. Fourth, on commitment to the Growth of People. Servant leaders nurture the intrinsic value of each person. They invest in the personal and

professional development of their teams through education, involvement in decision-making, and other supportive measures. Finally, on building Community. Servant leaders foster a sense of belonging and connection within their organizations. By creating a supportive community, they promote collaboration and a shared sense of purpose. A pastor who leads on the above five principles of servant leadership will likely become a servant leader: hence, a pastoral servant leader. So pastoral servant leadership is an approach that applies principles of servant leadership in its practice.

The Convergence of Pastoral and Servant Leaderships

The convergence of pastoral and servant leadership is evident in their shared emphasis on ethical, caring, and facilitative approaches to leadership. Servant leadership, when combined with spiritual leadership, enhances leadership effectiveness and integrity (Lynch & Friedman, 2013). Pastoral leaders are called to embody servant leadership qualities, focusing on caring, feeding, and protecting their flock while maintaining integrity (Resane, 2020). Their leadership will result in personal and spiritual growth of church members.

In this study, the researcher opts to couple pastoral and servant leadership concepts, with the emphasis on a pastor leading as a servant, and hence emphasis on a pastoral servant leadership approach. A comprehension of the two concepts that form an approach, pastoral servant leadership, is crucially important to widely set base for this study.

Theories Informing Pastoral Servant Leadership Approach

As mentioned, servant leadership requires leaders to serve first and then lead. After reading the 1932 novel *The Journey to the East* about Herman Leo, Greenleaf formed this idea, which is widespread in academia. According to Heaphey (2006), Greenleaf's belief that great

leaders are servants first was inspired by Leo, a servant who becomes a leader. A story about a company traveling to the East with a happy servant named Leo who uplifted them inspired Greenleaf. The gang became disorganized and couldn't finish the journey when Leo disappeared. Later, the narrator learned that Leo led the Order supporting the voyage. According to Greenleaf (1977), "the great leader is seen as servant first, and that simple fact is seen as the key to his greatness" (Heaphey, 2006, p. 7).

Pastoral servant leadership combines pastoral and servant leadership themes, as stated before. Several theories incorporate spiritual, ethical, and relational factors to inspire faith-based leadership practices that empower, serve, and grow others. In this study, there are three theories that are closely related to informing a pastoral servant leadership approach. These are, one, Biblical Leadership theory. Pastoral servant leadership is deeply rooted in biblical teachings that emphasize humility, service, and self-sacrifice as modeled by Jesus Christ. Leaders are encouraged to prioritize the needs of others and act as servants while guiding their church members toward spiritual growth (Blanchard et al., 2003; Resane, 2020). Second, Shepherd Leadership Theory. This theory likens pastoral leaders to shepherds who nurture, protect, and guide their flock. It emphasizes relational care and responsibility, aligning closely with the servant leadership model by fostering spiritual and emotional well-being among church members (Laniak, 2006; Resane, 2020). Three, Spiritual Leadership Theory. This theory integrates spirituality into leadership, emphasizing purpose, ethical behavior, and a sense of calling. Pastoral servant leaders aim to create faith-driven communities where moral integrity and spiritual growth are prioritized (Fry, 2003; Benefiel, 2005). The above-discussed theories inform the pastoral servant leadership approach and make it viable and relevant.

The Conceptual Framework of the Experiential Impact of Pastoral Servant Leadership

Pastoral servant leadership, when applied through key principles such as empathy, listening, stewardship, commitment to the growth of others, and community building, can

significantly foster personal and spiritual growth among church members. Below is the conceptual framework of the study, followed by an elaboration of the five key servant leadership principles that align with pastoral servant leadership.

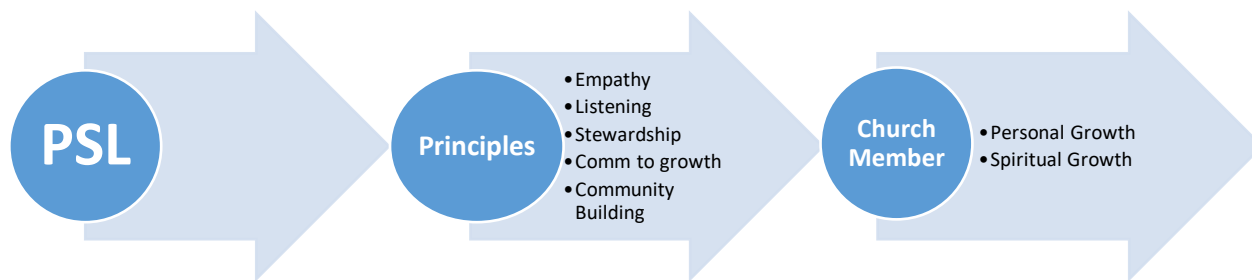


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

Note: PSL=Pastoral Servant Leadership; Comm to growth=Commitment to the growth of people

According to Figure 1 above, the principles outlined work synergistically to create an environment that promotes the wholistic growth of church members, leading them to flourish both personally and spiritually.

Empathy: Pastoral leaders build trust and care by understanding and connecting with churchgoers' emotions and experiences. Empathy helps churchgoers heal emotionally and feel appreciated, which strengthens their religion (Greenleaf, 1977; Spears, 1995).

Listening: Pastoral leaders can identify members' latent wants and concerns through active listening, making spiritual instruction relevant and effective. This strengthens ties and assists members with personal and spiritual issues (Spears, 1995; Blanchard et al., 2003).

Stewardship: Through stewardship, pastoral leaders demonstrate accountability and service over self-interest. This helps church members take responsibility for their duties and contribute to the greater good, improving

personal accountability and spiritual growth (Resane, 2020; Greenleaf, 1977).

Commitment to the growth of people: Pastoral servant leaders' mentor, guide, and promote their members' spiritual growth. This dedication empowers members to achieve their personal and spiritual goals (Greenleaf, 1977; Spears, 1995).

Building community: A sense of belonging and togetherness in the church strengthens emotional and spiritual bonds. Pastoral leaders foster faith growth by stressing community (Greenleaf, 1977; Laniak, 2006).

Research Questions

This study aims to explore the experiential impact of pastoral servant leadership on the personal and spiritual growth of church members in the Nyanza Gold Belt Field of the SDA Church in Tanzania. The study is guided by three research questions:

1. How does the local church pastor perceive and interpret his experience as a pastoral servant leader?
2. How do the local church elders serving under the pastor perceive and interpret

their experience of pastoral servant leadership under the pastor's ministry?

3. How do church members perceive and interpret their experiences of pastoral servant leadership under the pastor's ministry?

Gaps in Existing Literature

The researcher highlighted earlier in the study that a lot of studies, which are mostly quantitative in approach, have been conducted on servant leadership as it relates to employee workplace performance, conflict resolution, church mission, and caring for church members for the success of the church or organization. Although there exists a plethora of studies on servant leadership, there is a paucity of research that investigates its experiential impact on personal and spiritual growth among Seventh-day Adventist Church members in Tanzania.

Relevance of the Study

Considering the reviewed literature, this study is significant as it seeks to add knowledge of the pastoral servant leadership approach to the broader scholarly conversation on servant leadership in church settings. It focuses on drawing understanding from how church members experience, perceive, and make meaning of the phenomenon of pastoral servant leadership in their spiritual and personal growth. It responds to the existing gaps identified in the course of this study. On the other hand, it contributes relevant knowledge about pastoral servant leadership and its primary role in significantly fostering personal and spiritual growth of church members at Nyanza Gold Belt Field of the SDA Church in Tanzania and elsewhere in any given church context.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study explored the experiential impact of pastoral servant leadership on the personal and spiritual growth of church members in the Nyanza Gold Belt Field of the Seventh-day

Adventist Church in Tanzania. It adopted a phenomenological qualitative research design. Phenomenology is designed to explore and understand individuals' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, a qualitative approach attempts to understand complex human behavior in the natural setting of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach was employed with the aim of providing an informed understanding of the study from the perspective of the local church pastor, local church elder, and church members.

Participants

The population for this study was comprised of pastors, church elders, and church members in the Nyanza Gold Belt Field of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The researcher applied the maximum variability sampling technique. Creswell and Poth (2018) describe maximum variability sampling as a strategy to achieve a broad range of perspectives by intentionally selecting participants with diverse characteristics and experiences. Patton (2015) emphasizes that this technique enhances the richness of data, allowing researchers to explore both shared patterns and unique variations in the phenomenon under investigation. Hence, the researcher purposively selected four participants: one pastor, as participant number 1 (P₁), one church elder as participant number 2 (P₂), one female church member as participant number 3 (P₃), and one male church member as participant number 4 (P₄). The selection of the pastor followed the following protocol: out of the nine zones forming the Nyanza Gold Belt Field, one zone was purposively selected; out of the 11 pastors within the selected zone, one was purposively selected after conducting a survey aimed at finding a pastor with perspectives, experiences, and characteristics relevant to the phenomenon being studied. The other three participants, the church elder and two church members, were intentionally selected from the

church the selected pastor is leading. They have a rich background and experience of working with various pastors. They have been under the leadership of their pastor for 5 years. The names of the participants remain anonymous for the sake of confidentiality of information shared by each participant as indicated above.

The Role of the Researcher

In this study, the researcher played a central role as the primary instrument for data collection, interpretation, and analysis. The researcher collected data by conducting interviews with the pastor, church elder, and two church members (male and female) so that they could share their experiences, perceptions, and how they make meaning of the phenomenon under study. Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasize that qualitative researchers must engage directly with participants and act as the primary tool for collecting meaningful data. The researcher observed ethical practices, such as preparing and having participants sign an informed consent letter, maintaining confidentiality, and respecting participants, as the American Psychological Association (2020) emphasizes.

The researcher received verbatim reports from participants, which gave strength to the study. Data analysis was conducted and interpretation carried out by identifying patterns and themes in the data, interpreting them to answer the research questions. The analysis and interpretation helped in showing how the themes align with servant leadership principles and how that contributed to the researcher's understanding of the experiential impact. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe that the researcher is involved in interpreting and organizing data into coherent themes while staying true to participants' voices. Moreover, the researcher shared with each interviewee (participant) the transcript of the interview conducted just to confirm that their shared views were accurately

captured. Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlight that the researcher is responsible for ensuring the trustworthiness of qualitative findings by adhering to rigorous methods.

Setting of the Study

Nyanza Gold Belt Field is an organization under the Northern Tanzania Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. This church has a formal organizational structure in the order of local church, Field/Conference, Union, and General Conference. Nyanza Gold Belt is at the Field level, which is comprised of united churches in Tanzanian government regions, namely, Shinyanga and Geita; and Sengerema District-Mwanza. It is made up of 200,112 local church members in 614 local churches who are under the leadership of 71 pastors. It is situated in a society that calls for pastors who are servant leaders.

Ethical Consideration

The researcher considered the basic ethical academic writing protocols, such as securing permission from the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Nyanza Gold Belt Field Executive Committee, as the gatekeeper. Creswell and Poth (2018) describe gatekeepers as individuals or organizations that control access to research settings and participants. They emphasize the importance of obtaining permission from gatekeepers, particularly in qualitative research involving sensitive or restricted populations. Then, all four selected participants were contacted, and an appointment for an interview was set up at their convenience. Each of them signed an informed consent form after a verbal request to engage them in the interview. The researcher requested permission from each participant before recording the interview conducted. Confidentiality was observed for the information shared by participants.

Data Collection

The primary technique employed in this study for data collection was semi-structured interviews. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2015), semi-structured interviews are an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life and world of the interviewee to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena. In-depth interviews were conducted in December 2024 and were all through face-to-face sessions between the researcher and each of the participants. The researcher could not conduct a focus group interview due to challenging circumstances that hindered the process. The study on the experiential impact of pastoral servant leadership on personal and spiritual growth of church members in Nyanza Gold Belt Field was explained to each participant before the interview started. An interview protocol was prepared with open-ended questions, and during interviews, follow-up questions were posed to unearth more information related to the studied phenomenon. Permission for recording was sought from each participant before it was carried out.

Data Analysis

Before the data collected was analyzed, the researcher transcribed all four recorded interviews and then, due to the nature of the study, opted to conduct thematic analysis on the data collected through interviews. Thematic analysis is defined as "a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). A thematic analysis was conducted on the four transcribed interviews (for a church pastor, a church elder, and two church members). A six-step framework of thematic analysis, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), was applied to each interview: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Later, a consolidation

of themes across the four interviews from P₁, P₂, P₃, and P₄ was done to determine the most common themes and how they relate to the studied phenomenon. After grouping similar or overlapping themes across the participants, the following overarching themes emerged:

Theme 1: Spiritual Growth and Transformation;
Theme 2: Servant Leadership and Collaboration;
Theme 3: Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation;
Theme 4: Church Unity and Collaboration;
Theme 5: Leadership Development and Mentorship;
Theme 6: Youth Empowerment; and
Theme 7: Social Care and Inclusivity.

FINDINGS

Seven themes emerged from the thematic research data analyzed:

Themel: Spiritual Growth and Transformation

This theme was common among all participants. All three participants (P₂, P₃, and P₄) mentioned how the pastor's leadership influenced their spiritual growth. Examples include P₃'s increased devotion, P₄'s dependence on God, and the elder's (P₂) commitment to prayer as guided by the pastor. P₃ commented that *"Through this pastor, I have learnt that we need to not only be humble but also live a good life,"* while P₁, explaining about servant leadership, said, *"Living by fulfilling Christ's demands is living as an example in our service."*

The servant leadership principles aligned with this theme are stewardship and commitment to the growth of others. Stewardship involves ensuring the spiritual well-being of followers, while commitment to growth ensures individuals grow in their faith and personal lives. The pastor's focus on spiritual practices such as prayer, fasting, and humility reflects stewardship over the spiritual well-being of the church. His actions foster spiritual transformation, guiding members toward deeper faith and dependence on God.

Theme 2: Servant Leadership and Collaboration

This theme was mentioned by P₂, P₃, and P₁. It includes humility, delegating responsibilities, involving church elders and members, and prioritizing service over authority. For example, P₂ comments that, *“The pastor cannot do anything alone. He involves leaders in everything, fostering collaboration.”* This is confirmed by P₁ saying that *“Without involving others, you leave the whole load to yourself, which results in blame.”*

The servant leadership principles connected to this theme are Listening and Stewardship. Listening is central to collaboration, while stewardship reflects the pastor’s role in managing and guiding the church community responsibly. In this theme, the pastor actively involves church elders and members in decision-making, demonstrating humility and listening to their perspectives. This collaborative approach ensures shared responsibilities and accountability.

Theme 3: Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation

This theme was mentioned by P₄, P₂, and P₁. P₂ and P₄ described the pastor’s role in resolving disputes and maintaining harmony through empathy and adherence to principles. For example, P₄ is quoted as saying that, *“The pastor prayed and questioned one person after another until he got the truth, resolving a false accusation,”* while P₂ said that, *“He humbly de-escalates conflicts and ensures unity.”*

The servant leadership principles aligned with this theme are empathy and listening. Empathy and listening are key to conflict resolution, allowing leaders to address challenges with compassion and fairness. The pastor’s empathetic and prayerful approach to resolving conflicts ensures harmony and understanding among members. His willingness to hear out grievances and guide individuals toward reconciliation demonstrates empathy and active listening.

Theme 4: Church Unity and Collaboration

This theme was mentioned by all four participants. The three participants (P₂-P₄) highlighted how the pastor’s leadership fostered unity and collaboration among church members, including teamwork on projects and financial contributions. For example, P₄ commented that, *“People jointly contributed money for the construction of a bigger church, demonstrating unity.”* On the other hand, P₂ responded that, *“The pastor has helped us have a sense of unity by creating groups and promoting collaboration.”*

The servant leadership principle aligned with this theme is Community Building. Community building emphasizes fostering strong bonds within the group, ensuring members work together toward shared objectives. The pastor fosters unity by encouraging teamwork and collective contributions, especially in major church projects like construction and financial giving. His leadership brings members together for shared goals.

Theme 5: Leadership Development and Mentorship

This theme is mentioned by all participants except P₃. What featured in this theme was that the pastor’s mentorship was crucial in empowering young leaders and fostering leadership skills among members. For example, P₄ is quoted as saying that, *“The pastor encouraged me to take on leadership roles and guided me through personal challenges.”* While P₁ explained that *“We involve emerging leaders gradually in church affairs, building their confidence.”*

The servant leadership principle aligned with this theme is commitment to the growth of others. Commitment to the growth of others involves nurturing individuals’ personal and professional development to help them realize their potential. The pastor identifies potential

leaders, mentors them, and gradually involves them in responsibilities. His encouragement builds their confidence and prepares them for leadership roles.

Theme 6: Youth Empowerment

This theme was highlighted by P₄ and P₂. Specific efforts were mentioned to encourage youth to participate in church activities and take on leadership roles. P₄ said that, *"I have encouraged my fellow youths to actively involve themselves in church affairs,"* while P₂ commented that, *"Many young leaders have been empowered under the pastor's leadership."*

The servant leadership principle aligned with this theme is commitment to the growth of others. Encouraging youth participation reflects a dedication to their growth and future contribution to the church community. The pastor prioritizes youth involvement, ensuring they take active roles in church leadership and activities. He mentors them, helping them develop confidence and a sense of purpose.

Theme 7: Social Care and Inclusivity

This theme was mentioned by P₃ and P₁. The pastor's efforts to visit members, support the bereaved, and ensure inclusivity were noted as vital to the church's mission. P₃ is quoted as saying that, *"The pastor coordinated a Sabbath for the needy, prayed with them, and gave hope to everyone."* On the other hand, P₁ confirmed this theme, saying that, *"I visit bereaved families to give them hope and ensure they feel supported."*

The servant leadership principles aligned with this theme are empathy, stewardship, and community Building. Empathy drives the pastor's understanding of others' needs, stewardship ensures care for the community, and community building fosters a sense of belonging and shared purpose. The pastor's efforts to visit bereaved families, support the needy, and include all members regardless of their financial status demonstrate care and

inclusivity. These actions build trust and strengthen the church as a community.

DISCUSSION

The findings from the data thematically analyzed confirm that a pastor applying servant leadership principles, empathy, listening, stewardship, commitment to the growth of others, and community building results in personal and spiritual growth of church members. While a study by Sironen (2020) shows that a ministry-oriented leadership style has a positive impact on increasing congregation engagement and their spiritual growth, Dandel et al. (2025) identified servant leadership as "the most ideal" leadership style for fostering "sustainable spiritual growth and fellowship." It also demonstrates that church leaders who put servant leadership ideas into practice typically foster a more welcoming and encouraging church environment where members feel appreciated and inspired to participate in church activities. However, in their study on Effective Pastoral Leadership in Church Growth and Renewal, Kesumawati and Gultom (2025) discovered that servant leadership traits define effective pastoral leadership. Pastoral servant leadership fosters spiritual transformation, collaboration, unity, conflict resolution, and social care.

By aligning each theme with the specific research question it best addresses, you can clearly demonstrate how the data from the interviews contribute to answering your study's questions. Each theme offers unique insights into the perceptions of the pastor, elder, and members, while overlapping themes (e.g., Conflict Resolution, Unity, collaboration) highlight shared experiences of pastoral servant leadership.

Research Question 1: *How does the local church pastor perceive and interpret his experience as a pastoral servant leader?*

This study, through Theme 5: Leadership Development and Mentorship, answers Research Question 1 as P₁ indicated his self-perception of servant leadership. The pastor sees his role as a mentor, guiding emerging leaders and fostering their growth. This is attested to by P₁ saying that “*We involve emerging leaders gradually in church affairs, building their confidence.*” Spears (1995) notes stewardship as taking responsibility for the well-being of the organization and others, and commitment to the Growth of People as nurturing others’ personal and professional growth.

Research Question 2: *How does the local church elder serving under the pastor perceive and interpret their experience of pastoral servant leadership within the pastor's ministry?*

Themes 2, 3, and 4- servant leadership and collaboration, conflict resolution and reconciliation, and church unity and collaboration answer research question 2. P₂ highlights the pastor’s humility and teamwork, which foster mutual respect and shared leadership. He shares his perspective on the pastor’s leadership. For example, P₂ says that “*The pastor involves leaders in everything, fostering collaboration and showing humility.*” He values the pastor’s ability to de-escalate conflicts and maintain unity within the church. Furthermore, he appreciates how the pastor fosters unity through group activities and shared goals. For example, he says that “*The pastor helped us to have a sense of unity by creating groups and promoting collaboration.*”

On the stewardship principle, Gini and Green (2014) argued that to act as a steward is to act as “an agent” for another. Stewardship, like leadership, is always focused on others. Being a steward requires that leaders recognize that

the ultimate purpose of their work is others and not themselves (Gini & Green, 2014). Leaders, like stewards, do what they do for something larger than themselves, putting their followers’ or constituents’ needs before their own (Gini & Green, 2014).

Demonstrating empathic leadership requires a significant ability to listen. It is this listening with the “third ear” that enables one to sense the conflicts and needs of the stakeholders. The listening skill is a driving force for successful empathic leadership as Whitman, cited in Bethel (2009), admonished, saying that, “Listen. Listen. Listen. You will learn what people think the problem is, and maybe you’ll learn what the solution is” (p. 301).

Servant leadership in church settings has been shown to have significant positive impacts on team building and community among members. Studies have found that servant leadership practices by church leaders enhance community building, which in turn promotes spiritual and numerical church growth (Shaasha et al., 2024)

Research Question 3: *How do church members perceive and interpret their experiences of pastoral servant leadership within the pastor's ministry?*

Themes 1, 6, and 7: spiritual growth and transformation, youth empowerment, and social care and inclusivity; answer Research Question 3. Through these themes, church members, who are P₃ and P₄, share their perspectives and experience of pastoral servant leadership of their pastor. They perceive the pastor’s leadership as transformative, deepening their faith and spiritual practices. For example, P₃ is quoted as saying that, “*Through this pastor, I have learnt that we need to not only be humble but also live a good life.*” It is furthermore observed that the pastor’s encouragement motivates young members to take

on active roles in the church, fostering their sense of responsibility. This is confirmed by P₄ saying that *"I have encouraged my fellow youths to actively involve themselves in church affairs."*

On the other hand, members appreciate the pastor's efforts to care for and include marginalized groups, such as the needy and bereaved. For example, P₃ noted that, *"The pastor coordinated a Sabbath for the needy, prayed with them, and gave hope to everyone."* Spears (1995) notes that stewardship is taking responsibility for the well-being of the organization and others, empathy as understanding and sharing the feelings of others, and community building as fostering a sense of belonging and togetherness.

The findings of the analyses conducted have attested to the fact that a pastor, in a local church, employing servant leadership principles of empathy, listening, stewardship, commitment to the growth of others, and community building, as they provide leadership to their church members, will likely and significantly influence their personal and spiritual growth.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study confirmed that servant leadership principles align well with the theme of leadership development and mentorship. The pastors view their role as mentors, guiding emerging leaders and fostering their growth. The study also confirmed that the servant leadership principles of listening, empathy, stewardship, and community building align well with the themes of servant leadership and collaboration, conflict resolution and reconciliation, and church unity and collaboration. The church elder recognized pastoral servant leadership through the pastor's humility, collaboration, and ability to build unity among church members.

It is evident from this study that the servant leadership principles of stewardship, commitment to the growth of others, empathy, and community building align well with the themes of spiritual growth and transformation, youth empowerment, and social care and inclusivity. Both male and female church members perceived the pastor's leadership as transformative, inclusive, unifying, and empowering for youth.

Based on the study's findings, it can be concluded that a pastor who lacks servant leadership characteristics, empathy, listening, stewardship, commitment to the growth of others, and community building may not effectively function as a servant leader. Consequently, church members may experience limited personal and spiritual growth.

Recommendations

This study has confirmed that pastoral servant leadership is a practical and effective approach that should be adopted by every pastor in the Nyanza Gold Belt Field of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Tanzania. The researcher recommends that pastors and church leaders in the Nyanza Gold Belt Field and beyond embrace pastoral servant leadership, which will provide inclusive and transformative leadership that meets the needs of their congregations. Specifically, the following actions are recommended:

- Mentorship: *Mentor emerging leaders, especially youth.*
- Youth engagement: *Actively engage youth in church activities and decision-making processes.*
- Unity building: *Promote unity through inclusive leadership practices.*
- Conflict resolution: *Train leaders in conflict resolution and reconciliation.*

- Servant leadership training: *Integrate servant leadership principles into church leadership training programs.*

Additionally, while this study was conducted within the Nyanza Gold Belt Field of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Tanzania, future research could expand its scope to a larger context, such as the Northern Tanzania Union Conference or the entire country. Including a larger and more diverse sample of participants in future studies may provide deeper insights into how pastoral servant leadership influences the personal and spiritual growth of church members. Such research could further validate and enhance the practical applications of pastoral servant leadership in various church settings.

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