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Authentic Leadership As A Call Of Faith: An Analysis Of The Role Of Female Congregation Leaders In Church Ministry And Congregational Faith Education

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Abstract

This study examines authentic leadership as a call of faith by analyzing the role of female congregation leaders in church ministry and congregational faith education. The study is based on the premise that church leadership is not merely an organizational responsibility but also a spiritual vocation requiring integrity, self-awareness, relational transparency, moral consistency, and commitment to service. Using a qualitative conceptual approach based on relevant scholarly literature, the study analyzes three interconnected dimensions: authentic leadership practices of female congregation leaders, faith calling and the formation of female leadership identity, and the role of female leaders in congregational faith education. The analysis demonstrates that female congregation leaders practice authentic leadership through self-awareness, transparent communication, ethical decision-making, balanced processing of congregational perspectives, and consistency between Christian values and ministry behavior. Faith calling provides an important foundation for their leadership identity by motivating women to serve, overcome institutional and cultural challenges, and understand leadership as a form of spiritual responsibility rather than merely organizational authority. Furthermore, female congregation leaders contribute significantly to congregational faith education through Bible study, mentoring, pastoral accompaniment, spiritual guidance, role modeling, community service, and participatory learning activities. Their everyday leadership becomes an informal educational process through which congregants learn Christian values through observation, interaction, and practical participation. The study concludes that authentic leadership enables female congregation leaders to integrate faith, character, service, and educational ministry into a coherent leadership practice. Recognizing

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and strengthening the role of female congregation leaders can contribute to more inclusive, participatory, relational, and spiritually mature congregations while providing a broader understanding of leadership as both a vocation of faith and a ministry of education.

Keywords: Authentic Leadership, Faith Calling, Female Congregation Leaders, Church Ministry, Congregational Faith Education, Spiritual Leadership.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership in the church is not merely an organizational function but also a spiritual vocation that influences the direction of ministry, the formation of congregational identity, and the development of Christian faith. In contemporary religious communities, leadership is increasingly expected to demonstrate integrity, transparency, relational sensitivity, accountability, and the ability to translate faith values into meaningful practices. Authentic leadership provides a relevant framework for understanding these expectations because it emphasizes self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing of information, and an internalized moral perspective. Authenticity also connects leadership behavior with ethical responsibility, suggesting that effective leaders should not only achieve organizational goals but also act consistently with deeply held moral and spiritual values (Demont-Biaggi, 2020). In the context of church ministry, these characteristics are particularly important because leadership credibility is closely associated with trust, spiritual example, and the capacity to guide congregants toward meaningful participation in religious life.

The growing significance of spiritual leadership further demonstrates that leadership within faith communities cannot be separated from questions of meaning, values, calling, and collective spiritual development. Spiritual leadership has developed as an important paradigm that considers how leaders inspire individuals and communities through shared values, vision, and a sense of purpose (Oh & Wang, 2020). Within congregations, therefore, leadership should be understood not simply as the exercise of authority but as a process of nurturing faith, building relationships, encouraging service, and facilitating spiritual learning. Recent scholarship on religious leadership similarly indicates that the effectiveness of religious leaders is evaluated through multiple dimensions involving leaders, followers, and congregations, rather than through numerical growth alone (Foppen & van Saane, 2024). This broader understanding creates an important space for examining how women leaders contribute to ministry and faith education through forms of leadership that are authentic, relational, and spiritually grounded.

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The role of women in church leadership has become an increasingly important subject because women frequently contribute substantially to congregational ministry while continuing to encounter structural, cultural, and theological barriers to leadership. Research on Christian women in vocational ministry demonstrates that women's leadership identities are shaped by organizational practices, gender stereotypes, ministry experiences, and opportunities to participate meaningfully in church leadership (Glanz, 2020). Similarly, research on women church leaders shows that informal and socially situated learning plays an important role in how women develop leadership capabilities and negotiate gendered expectations within religious institutions (Mavin et al., 2020). These findings indicate that women's leadership cannot be adequately understood only through formal positions or institutional titles. It must also be examined through everyday ministry practices, relationships, learning processes, and the ways women interpret their calling and identity as spiritual leaders.

The participation of women in congregational leadership also remains influenced by institutional structures. Dijkhuizen (2022) found that the inclusion of women in governance and spiritual leadership within the Dutch Evangelical movement has developed slowly despite relatively positive attitudes toward female leadership at broader denominational levels. This suggests that organizational culture and local congregational structures can either facilitate or restrict women's leadership participation. In addition, research involving female clergy in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America demonstrates that women leaders may encounter gender discrimination and challenges to their well-being even while serving communities that emphasize care and inspiration (Phelps, 2023). Clergywomen may also have to develop coping strategies to navigate institutional sexism within traditionally patriarchal and hierarchical religious systems (Yih, 2023). Consequently, examining women's leadership requires attention not only to their competencies but also to the institutional contexts in which their leadership is practiced.

Authentic leadership becomes particularly relevant in this situation because it enables women's leadership to be understood through authenticity, integrity, moral conviction, and relational engagement rather than through gender-based assumptions about authority. Studies of women in religious leadership demonstrate that faith can become a source of self-determination, leadership identity, and social engagement, enabling women to reinterpret their religious calling and exercise leadership despite institutional resistance (Moultrie, 2022). At the congregational level, organizational resources and institutional characteristics also influence women's access to leadership opportunities, demonstrating that gender equality in religious leadership is shaped by both individual agency and organizational conditions (Ferguson, 2020).

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Furthermore, discussions of gender equality in religious and character education emphasize the importance of educational practices that challenge unequal assumptions and promote more inclusive understandings of participation and responsibility (Truna et al., 2022).

Against this background, female congregation leaders represent an important but insufficiently explored dimension of church ministry and congregational faith education. Their leadership may function simultaneously as ministry, spiritual formation, educational practice, and a lived expression of faith. By examining authentic leadership as a call of faith, this study seeks to understand how female congregation leaders construct their leadership identity, exercise spiritual authority, build relationships with congregants, and contribute to faith education within the congregation. The study is important because it moves beyond viewing women merely as recipients or participants in church programs and instead positions them as active agents in shaping congregational spirituality and educational practices. It also responds to the continuing need to understand religious leadership through broader criteria that include relational, spiritual, ethical, and educational dimensions (Foppen & van Saane, 2024). Therefore, analyzing the experiences and practices of female congregation leaders can provide a deeper understanding of how authenticity and faith calling interact in contemporary church ministry, while also contributing to discussions of gender, leadership, spiritual formation, and congregational education.

Authentic Leadership Theory in Church Ministry.

Authentic leadership theory provides a relevant theoretical foundation for understanding the leadership practices of female congregation leaders because it emphasizes the integration of personal identity, moral values, relational transparency, and responsible decision-making. Authentic leadership is generally conceptualized through four interconnected dimensions: self-awareness, relational transparency, internalized moral perspective, and balanced processing. Self-awareness concerns a leader's understanding of personal strengths, limitations, values, emotions, and influence on others; relational transparency refers to openness and honesty in relationships; internalized moral perspective indicates that decisions are guided by deeply held ethical values; while balanced processing requires leaders to consider different perspectives before making decisions (Wong, 2020; Crawford et al., 2020). These dimensions are particularly relevant to church ministry because religious leadership is expected to demonstrate consistency between faith, character, words, and actions. Rather than relying primarily on formal authority, authentic leaders develop credibility through integrity and trustworthy relationships. Mitekaro and Wa-

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Mbaleka (2022) emphasize that authentic leadership is highly applicable to church settings because churches require leaders capable of maintaining a moral compass while responding to organizational and relational challenges. In this sense, authenticity can be interpreted as a spiritual leadership quality in which a leader's ministry is grounded in genuine faith rather than personal status or institutional power.

The theoretical relevance of authentic leadership becomes stronger when leadership is understood as a relational process. Authentic leadership does not position the leader as an isolated decision-maker but emphasizes the quality of interactions between leaders and followers. Research demonstrates that authentic leadership can strengthen trust because followers perceive authentic leaders as transparent, ethical, and consistent in their behavior (Wang et al., 2020). Trust is particularly significant in congregational environments because church members voluntarily participate in religious communities and often evaluate leaders through interpersonal relationships, moral credibility, and spiritual example. Peyton et al. (2023) similarly found that authentic leadership can cultivate follower trust and commitment, particularly when leaders and followers experience congruence between their values. Applied to church ministry, this suggests that female congregation leaders can strengthen congregational participation when their leadership practices are perceived as consistent with Christian values and with the spiritual expectations of the congregation. Authenticity therefore functions not merely as an individual characteristic but as a mechanism through which leaders establish relational legitimacy.

Another important dimension is the relationship between authenticity and ethical leadership. Crawford et al. (2020) argue that authentic leadership should involve awareness, sincerity, balanced processing, positive moral perspectives, and informal influence. This perspective is particularly meaningful for church leaders because ecclesiastical authority is inseparable from moral responsibility. Female congregation leaders who demonstrate self-awareness may be more capable of recognizing how their personal experiences, assumptions, and emotions influence ministry decisions. Relational transparency enables them to communicate openly with congregants, acknowledge limitations, and establish relationships based on honesty. Balanced processing encourages leaders to listen to different opinions within the congregation, including perspectives that may challenge their own assumptions. Finally, an internalized moral perspective encourages leaders to align ministry decisions with Christian ethical principles rather than with personal interests or social pressure. These four dimensions collectively provide a useful framework for analyzing how female leaders exercise authentic leadership within congregational life.

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Authentic leadership is also relevant to women's leadership because authenticity may provide women with an approach to leadership that does not require them to imitate traditionally masculine models of authority. Nakamura et al. (2022) explain that developing women's authenticity in leadership involves negotiating personal identity, social expectations, and organizational contexts. Apriani and Zulfiani (2020) likewise identify authentic leadership as an important potential approach for strengthening women's leadership because authenticity allows female leaders to demonstrate leadership through credibility, integrity, and personal values. Consequently, authentic leadership can help shift attention away from assumptions that leadership effectiveness is dependent on gender and toward the qualities and practices through which leaders serve their communities. Dağlı (2023), through a meta-analysis examining authentic leadership behaviors according to gender, further demonstrates the importance of investigating authentic leadership without assuming that leadership behavior can be adequately explained by gender differences alone.

The broader empirical literature also supports the relevance of authentic leadership to organizational and relational outcomes. Zhang et al. (2022), based on a meta-analysis of 214 studies involving more than 196,000 participants, found that authentic leadership was associated with numerous follower-, leader-, and performance-related outcomes. Mao et al. (2023) further demonstrated that authentic leadership is associated with trust, organizational identification, and resilience. Although these studies are primarily situated in organizational contexts, their theoretical implications can be extended to church ministry because congregations are also relational organizations in which trust, identification, commitment, and resilience influence collective life. Tijani and Okunbanjo (2020) found that the four dimensions of authentic leadership positively influenced organizational commitment, reinforcing the argument that authenticity can strengthen followers' attachment to an organization. In congregational settings, this attachment can be understood as commitment to ministry, participation in church activities, willingness to serve, and identification with the congregation's spiritual mission.

Thus, authentic leadership theory provides a comprehensive framework for examining female congregation leaders as leaders whose authority is expressed through character, relational credibility, ethical consistency, and self-awareness. The theory is particularly appropriate for the present study because it allows leadership to be interpreted as more than administrative responsibility. It provides a conceptual bridge between personal authenticity and ministry effectiveness, while also recognizing that leadership is formed through relationships with congregants. Female congregation leaders can therefore be examined according to how they

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understand their calling, demonstrate integrity, communicate transparently, process congregational perspectives, and translate Christian values into ministry practices. Authentic leadership ultimately offers a framework for understanding leadership as a lived expression of faith, in which the leader's identity and moral commitments become integral to the process of serving, guiding, and strengthening the congregation

Women's Leadership, Spiritual Calling, and Congregational Faith Education

The theory of women's leadership and spiritual calling provides a second important theoretical foundation for understanding the role of female congregation leaders in church ministry and congregational faith education. Women's leadership in religious institutions has historically been influenced by theological interpretations, patriarchal organizational structures, cultural expectations, and assumptions concerning gender and authority. Contemporary scholarship, however, increasingly recognizes women as important contributors to church leadership, spiritual formation, community development, and ministry innovation. Sianturi (2020) argues that patriarchal traditions have historically restricted women's participation in church leadership and proposes a more inclusive ecclesial model in which the church functions as a shared space of relationship, friendship, participation, and mutual service. This perspective is important because it shifts the understanding of church leadership from hierarchical authority toward participatory ministry. Female congregation leaders can consequently be understood not simply as individuals occupying organizational positions but as agents who create spaces for participation, spiritual growth, and community formation.

The concept of spiritual calling provides an additional dimension to women's leadership. Leadership within a Christian congregation is frequently understood as a vocation grounded in service to God and the community rather than merely a professional role. Lumingkewas (2021) demonstrates that spiritual leadership among pastors involves behavioral dimensions connected with biblical and theological foundations, indicating that religious leadership is strongly connected to spiritual motivation and ministry responsibility. Yulianti et al. (2022), through a review of spiritual leadership research, identify calling, ethical behavior, spirituality, engagement, and organizational commitment as important outcomes associated with spiritual leadership. These findings suggest that leadership can become an expression of deeply internalized values and a sense of purpose. For female congregation leaders, therefore, the idea of calling can explain why women participate in ministry even when leadership roles involve significant social, institutional, or personal challenges. Calling provides a framework through which leadership is interpreted as

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service and responsibility rather than simply status or authority.

The relationship between women and church leadership nevertheless remains complex because institutional structures may limit the realization of women's leadership potential. Dijkhuizen (2022) demonstrates that the transformation toward greater female participation in governance and spiritual leadership within evangelical churches can be slow, even where denominational attitudes appear relatively supportive. Local church structures, organizational traditions, and interpretations of leadership can create obstacles to women's participation. Similarly, Yih (2023) found that clergywomen operating within patriarchal and hierarchical church environments may experience institutional sexism and must develop strategies to navigate gendered challenges. Kanyange (2023) also identifies cultural traditions and interpretations of biblical texts as factors that can influence attitudes toward women's leadership in evangelical churches. These studies indicate that female congregation leaders operate within social and institutional environments that may simultaneously recognize their contributions and restrict their authority. Therefore, the study of female leadership should include both the agency of women and the structural context in which their leadership is exercised.

Women's leadership is particularly significant for congregational faith education because faith formation does not occur exclusively through formal teaching. Maddix et al. (2020) explain that faith formation in congregational life occurs through multiple practices, including worship, Bible study, mission, community participation, and other practices of the local church. This understanding means that congregation leaders contribute to education not only by delivering explicit religious instruction but also through modeling Christian values, facilitating participation, mentoring members, organizing ministry activities, and creating environments in which faith can develop. Female congregation leaders may therefore function as informal educators whose everyday actions communicate theological, ethical, and spiritual meanings. Their leadership can influence how members understand service, compassion, responsibility, community, prayer, and Christian identity. Faith education consequently becomes a process embedded within congregational relationships rather than a process restricted to classrooms or formal religious instruction.

The connection between leadership and faith formation can also be explained through social and relational learning. Congregational members often learn through observation, participation, dialogue, and interaction with trusted leaders. When leaders demonstrate consistency between faith commitments and everyday behavior, they provide concrete examples through which members can interpret religious teachings. This is particularly important for

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women leaders because their visibility can challenge gendered assumptions concerning who is capable of exercising spiritual authority. Randan and Randan (2022) demonstrate that women in church leadership continue to confront assumptions that leadership is primarily a male responsibility, while their analysis of Deborah illustrates the biblical possibility of women exercising significant leadership. Mahardika and Tanjung (2024) similarly argue that women's leadership has an important function in the church and should receive greater opportunities and trust. The visibility of female leaders can therefore have an educational effect by expanding congregational understandings of leadership, vocation, service, and participation.

Women's leadership can also contribute to congregational transformation through relational and participatory approaches. Rather than defining leadership exclusively through preaching or formal decision-making, female congregation leaders may exercise influence through pastoral care, mentoring, fellowship, family ministry, youth ministry, social service, Bible study, and community outreach. These activities can become spaces of faith education because they connect Christian teaching with practical experiences. Mitekaro and Wa-Mbaleka (2022) emphasize the importance of authenticity, moral orientation, and relational transparency in church leadership, while Apriani and Zulfiani (2020) show that authentic leadership can provide a relevant framework for women's leadership. When combined, these perspectives suggest that female congregation leaders can become credible faith educators precisely because their leadership is embodied through relationships and daily ministry practices.

The theoretical perspective on women's leadership and spiritual calling therefore provides an important complement to authentic leadership theory. Authentic leadership explains how leaders exercise authority through self-awareness, integrity, transparency, balanced processing, and moral values, whereas the theory of spiritual calling and women's leadership explains why female leaders participate in ministry and how their leadership operates within theological, cultural, and institutional contexts. Congregational faith education provides the practical arena in which these dimensions intersect. Female congregation leaders can express their calling through ministry practices that nurture faith, create opportunities for participation, model Christian values, and support the spiritual development of congregants. Accordingly, the role of female congregation leaders should be understood as both leadership and educational ministry. Their contribution is not limited to managing church activities but includes shaping the spiritual culture of the congregation. This theoretical perspective consequently supports an analysis of female congregation leaders as authentic, spiritually motivated, relational, and educational actors whose leadership can contribute to the formation of a more participatory and spiritually mature Christian

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community.

DISCUSSION

Authentic Leadership Practices of Female Congregation Leaders in Church Ministry

Authentic leadership practices among female congregation leaders can be understood as a leadership approach in which personal faith, moral integrity, self-awareness, relational transparency, and responsibility are integrated into everyday church ministry. Authentic leadership is particularly relevant to female congregation leaders because their ministry frequently involves balancing formal responsibilities with relational, pastoral, educational, and spiritual functions. Rather than defining leadership primarily through institutional authority, authentic leadership emphasizes the consistency between who leaders are, what they believe, and how they act. The four fundamental dimensions of authentic leadership—self-awareness, relational transparency, internalized moral perspective, and balanced processing—provide a useful analytical framework for examining how female congregation leaders exercise their responsibilities (Wong, 2020). In church ministry, self-awareness enables leaders to recognize their spiritual gifts, limitations, emotions, personal experiences, and influence on congregational members. This awareness is important because ministry leadership requires continuous reflection on whether personal attitudes and decisions remain consistent with Christian values. Crawford et al. (2020) explain that authentic leadership involves leaders who understand themselves while maintaining transparency and ethical consistency in their relationships. Thus, female congregation leaders who demonstrate self-awareness are better positioned to distinguish personal interests from congregational needs and to use their leadership authority responsibly.

Relational transparency represents another essential element of authentic leadership in church ministry. Female congregation leaders often work directly with members through pastoral care, prayer groups, Bible studies, family ministry, social activities, and other forms of congregational engagement. These activities require openness, empathy, trust, and effective communication. Authentic leaders establish relationships by communicating honestly and appropriately rather than creating unnecessary distance between themselves and congregants. Wang et al. (2020) indicate that authentic leadership contributes to trust because followers tend to respond positively to leaders whose behavior is perceived as genuine and consistent. In a congregation, trust becomes particularly significant because members may share personal, family, spiritual, and emotional concerns with their leaders. Female congregation leaders who communicate transparently can therefore strengthen interpersonal relationships and create a

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safer environment for members to participate in church activities. Mitekaro and Wa-Mbaleka (2022) further emphasize the relevance of authenticity in church leadership because religious leaders are expected to demonstrate moral credibility and genuine concern for the people they serve.

The internalized moral perspective is also central to the practice of authentic leadership among female congregation leaders. Church leadership is inseparable from ethical responsibility because leaders are expected to demonstrate Christian values in decision-making and interpersonal conduct. An internalized moral perspective means that leaders do not make decisions solely according to external pressure, popularity, or personal advantage but are guided by deeply held moral and spiritual principles. This dimension becomes particularly important when female leaders encounter conflicting expectations regarding gender, authority, tradition, and ministry responsibilities. Apriani and Zulfiani (2020) argue that authentic leadership can strengthen women's leadership by emphasizing integrity, personal values, and credibility rather than dependence on conventional leadership stereotypes. Accordingly, female congregation leaders can demonstrate authentic leadership when they remain committed to principles of honesty, justice, compassion, service, and accountability even when organizational or social expectations create pressure to conform.

Balanced processing further strengthens authentic leadership because effective church leaders must be willing to listen to diverse perspectives before making decisions. Congregations are heterogeneous communities consisting of members with different ages, experiences, theological understandings, social backgrounds, and ministry expectations. Female congregation leaders who practice balanced processing actively consider feedback, recognize disagreement, and evaluate alternative perspectives before reaching conclusions. Peyton et al. (2023) demonstrate that authentic leadership is associated with trust and commitment when followers perceive leaders as fair and receptive to their perspectives. In church ministry, balanced processing can therefore encourage participatory leadership and reduce the perception that decisions are imposed by those holding formal authority. This approach is particularly valuable for female leaders because inclusive decision-making can strengthen their legitimacy while simultaneously encouraging members to view leadership as a shared ministry responsibility.

Authentic leadership practices can also influence organizational commitment and congregational participation. Tijani and Okunbanjo (2020) found that the dimensions of authentic leadership positively influence organizational commitment, suggesting that leaders who demonstrate transparency, ethical consistency, and self-awareness can strengthen followers'

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attachment to the organization. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2022), through a large-scale meta-analysis, found that authentic leadership is positively associated with various follower and organizational outcomes. Within church communities, these outcomes can be reflected in members' willingness to participate in ministry, support church programs, engage in collective activities, and develop stronger identification with the congregation. Mao et al. (2023) further demonstrate that authentic leadership can foster trust, identification, and resilience, all of which are important for congregations facing social, generational, and organizational changes.

Gender also provides an important contextual dimension in analyzing authentic leadership among female congregation leaders. Dağlı (2023) demonstrates the importance of examining authentic leadership behaviors across gender rather than assuming that leadership effectiveness is inherently determined by gender. Female leaders may face expectations concerning appropriate behavior, authority, emotional expression, and religious roles that differ from those experienced by male leaders. Authentic leadership provides an opportunity for women to exercise leadership without abandoning their personal identity or conforming unnecessarily to traditional leadership stereotypes. Nakamura et al. (2022) emphasize that authenticity in women's leadership involves negotiating personal identity with social and organizational expectations. Therefore, authentic leadership among female congregation leaders can be interpreted as a process of maintaining faith-based identity while exercising authority, communicating with members, making decisions, and responding to institutional challenges. Overall, authentic leadership practices enable female congregation leaders to transform personal faith and moral conviction into concrete ministry behaviors. Through self-awareness, relational transparency, internalized moral principles, and balanced processing, they can establish trust, strengthen participation, model Christian values, and contribute to healthier congregational relationships. Authentic leadership thus positions female congregation leaders not simply as administrators of church activities but as spiritual role models whose character and leadership practices become part of the ministry and faith formation of the congregation.

Faith Calling and the Leadership Identity of Female Congregation Leaders

The concept of faith calling provides an important analytical perspective for understanding the leadership identity of female congregation leaders because leadership in the church is not merely an organizational position but can be experienced as a spiritual vocation rooted in faith, service, and commitment to God and the congregation. A faith calling may motivate women to accept leadership responsibilities because they perceive their involvement in ministry as an

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expression of divine purpose and responsibility. Spiritual leadership research emphasizes that calling is closely connected with meaning, values, spirituality, and commitment, making it particularly relevant for understanding leadership within religious organizations (Yulianti et al., 2022). In this context, female congregation leaders may understand their leadership not primarily in terms of power or status but as an opportunity to serve, guide, educate, and strengthen other believers. Such an understanding creates a leadership identity that is closely connected with personal faith and moral responsibility. Lumingkewas (2021) explains that spiritual leadership in Christian ministry is closely associated with biblical and theological foundations, indicating that leadership identity within the church is shaped by spiritual convictions and ministry responsibilities. Therefore, the concept of calling provides a foundation for examining why women become leaders, how they understand their roles, and how their faith influences their leadership practices.

The leadership identity of female congregation leaders is also shaped by the interaction between personal calling and social expectations. Women who enter church leadership may encounter assumptions concerning appropriate gender roles, authority, responsibility, and participation in religious institutions. These expectations can influence how women understand themselves as leaders and how their leadership is perceived by congregational members. Dijkhuizen (2022) demonstrates that women's participation in church governance and spiritual leadership can develop slowly even within religious contexts that increasingly recognize women's contributions. This indicates that the leadership identity of women is not formed independently but develops through interaction with institutional traditions, theological interpretations, and congregational expectations. Female congregation leaders may therefore need to negotiate between their personal understanding of calling and the expectations established by their churches. Their ability to maintain a strong sense of purpose can become an important factor in sustaining their involvement in ministry.

Faith calling can also function as a source of resilience when female leaders encounter institutional or cultural barriers. Women in religious leadership may experience resistance because of traditional understandings of gender and authority. Yih (2023) found that clergywomen may encounter institutional sexism and must develop strategies to navigate patriarchal and hierarchical structures within religious organizations. Such challenges can affect leadership identity because women may need to continuously affirm their legitimacy and demonstrate their capacity to lead. However, a strong sense of calling can provide internal motivation that enables women to remain committed to ministry despite these difficulties.

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Kanyange (2023) similarly demonstrates that cultural traditions and interpretations of biblical texts can influence attitudes toward women's leadership in evangelical contexts. Consequently, faith calling can become a source of strength that allows female congregation leaders to interpret leadership challenges not simply as organizational obstacles but as part of the broader responsibility of serving their faith community.

The concept of calling is also closely related to authenticity because leaders are more likely to demonstrate authentic behavior when their leadership practices correspond with their deeply held beliefs and values. Authentic leadership emphasizes self-awareness, internalized moral perspectives, and consistency between personal values and leadership behavior (Crawford et al., 2020). For female congregation leaders, faith calling can provide the internal moral foundation upon which authentic leadership is constructed. When leaders understand their ministry as a calling, their decisions and interactions can become expressions of faith rather than simply responses to organizational demands. Apriani and Zulfiani (2020) explain that authentic leadership can support women's leadership by emphasizing personal values, integrity, and credibility. This perspective allows female leaders to exercise leadership according to their own strengths and convictions rather than attempting to reproduce leadership models that may be shaped by masculine or hierarchical assumptions. Authenticity therefore becomes a means through which faith calling is translated into practical leadership behavior.

Faith calling also influences the way female congregation leaders develop relationships with congregants. A leader who perceives leadership as a form of service is more likely to emphasize empathy, care, listening, encouragement, and participation. Such relational practices are important in congregational settings because church members often expect leaders to provide not only administrative direction but also spiritual guidance and emotional support. Mitekaro and Wa-Mbaleka (2022) emphasize the importance of authenticity and relational transparency in church leadership, particularly because religious leaders are expected to demonstrate moral credibility and genuine concern for those they serve. In this sense, faith calling can strengthen the relational dimension of women's leadership by encouraging leaders to prioritize the spiritual and personal needs of congregants. Leadership becomes an act of accompaniment in which the leader supports members in developing their own faith and participation in church life.

The leadership identity formed through faith calling can also influence the educational role of female congregation leaders. Leaders who understand their ministry as a calling may view faith education not simply as the delivery of religious information but as a process of helping congregants develop a deeper relationship with God and a stronger commitment to Christian

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values. Maddix et al. (2020) emphasize that faith formation occurs through diverse congregational practices, including worship, Bible study, service, fellowship, and participation in the life of the church. Female congregation leaders can therefore function as educators through their teaching, mentoring, counseling, modeling, and everyday interactions. Their leadership identity becomes educational because congregants learn not only from what leaders teach but also from how leaders demonstrate faith through their actions. This makes personal example an important component of women's leadership in congregational faith formation.

The visibility of women as faith-based leaders can additionally influence how congregations understand gender and leadership. Randan and Randan (2022) demonstrate that women continue to encounter assumptions that leadership in the church is primarily a male responsibility, while biblical narratives such as the leadership of Deborah provide alternative perspectives on women's capacity to exercise authority. Mahardika and Tanjung (2024) likewise emphasize that women have an important role in church leadership and require greater opportunities and trust. The presence of female congregation leaders can therefore become a form of implicit faith education because it demonstrates that spiritual leadership can be expressed through diverse individuals who possess the commitment, competence, and calling to serve. Their visibility may encourage younger women and other congregational members to recognize leadership as a possible form of Christian vocation.

Overall, faith calling provides a powerful framework for understanding the leadership identity of female congregation leaders. It explains how personal spirituality, moral values, experiences, institutional contexts, and commitment to service interact in the formation of women's leadership. A strong sense of calling can encourage women to overcome institutional challenges, maintain authenticity, develop meaningful relationships, and contribute actively to congregational ministry. When faith calling is integrated with authentic leadership, female congregation leaders can exercise authority through integrity, service, transparency, compassion, and moral consistency. Their leadership identity is consequently not defined solely by their formal position but by the extent to which their ministry reflects their faith commitments and contributes to the spiritual development of others. Faith calling thus provides the foundation through which female congregation leaders transform personal belief into meaningful leadership practice and demonstrate that church leadership can function simultaneously as vocation, service, and spiritual education.

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The Role of Female Congregation Leaders in Congregational Faith Education

The role of female congregation leaders in congregational faith education can be understood as a multidimensional ministry that extends beyond formal religious instruction to include spiritual guidance, mentoring, role modeling, pastoral care, and the creation of learning opportunities within the church community. Faith education is not limited to the transmission of biblical knowledge but involves a continuous process through which individuals develop Christian identity, values, spiritual maturity, and commitment to community life. Maddix et al. (2020) explain that faith formation in congregational settings occurs through worship, Bible study, fellowship, mission, service, and participation in church activities. This perspective positions congregation leaders as important educational agents because their daily ministry practices create environments in which members learn through participation and interaction. Female congregation leaders therefore have an important role in transforming church ministry into a space for continuous faith formation. Their contribution can be observed through their ability to organize educational activities, facilitate discussions, accompany members spiritually, and model Christian values through their everyday conduct.

One significant dimension of female congregation leaders' role in faith education is their function as spiritual role models. Congregational members frequently learn not only through formal teaching but also by observing the behavior, attitudes, and decisions of their leaders. When female leaders demonstrate honesty, compassion, humility, discipline, forgiveness, and commitment to service, these behaviors provide concrete examples of how Christian values can be practiced in everyday life. Authentic leadership strengthens this educational function because authenticity requires consistency between personal values and leadership behavior (Crawford et al., 2020). In this context, female congregation leaders become living examples of the relationship between faith and action. Their leadership can communicate that Christian education is not simply about understanding theological concepts but also about embodying those concepts through relationships and service. Mitekaro and Wa-Mbaleka (2022) emphasize that authenticity in church leadership is closely related to moral credibility and the ability of leaders to demonstrate genuine commitment to the people they serve.

Female congregation leaders also contribute to faith education through mentoring and relational accompaniment. Mentoring allows leaders to provide personalized guidance to congregants as they encounter spiritual, family, social, and personal challenges. Through conversations, prayer, Bible reflection, and practical guidance, leaders can help members interpret their experiences in light of Christian teachings. This relational approach is especially

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important because spiritual development often requires continuous dialogue and encouragement rather than one-time instruction. Yulianti et al. (2022) identify spirituality, calling, engagement, and ethical behavior as important dimensions associated with spiritual leadership, suggesting that spiritual leadership can facilitate meaningful relationships between leaders and followers. Female congregation leaders who integrate mentoring into their ministry can therefore create a supportive environment in which members feel encouraged to ask questions, reflect on their faith, and develop greater confidence in participating in church life.

Another important contribution involves women's participation in Bible study and religious learning activities. Female congregation leaders can facilitate discussions that connect biblical teachings with contemporary issues faced by congregants. Such discussions can make faith education more contextual and relevant to everyday life. Rather than positioning members as passive recipients of religious information, leaders can encourage them to interpret Scripture, express perspectives, ask questions, and connect biblical principles with practical decisions. This participatory approach corresponds with the broader understanding of congregational faith formation as a communal process (Maddix et al., 2020). It also reflects the principles of authentic leadership, particularly balanced processing, because authentic leaders value different perspectives and encourage constructive dialogue. Through these practices, female leaders can help create a congregation in which faith education becomes an interactive and reflective experience.

The educational role of female congregation leaders is also significant in developing participation and community responsibility. Church education can encourage members to understand that Christian faith involves service to others and active participation in the life of the congregation. Female leaders may facilitate opportunities for members to participate in social ministry, charity, youth programs, family activities, prayer groups, and community outreach. These activities provide experiential forms of faith education because members learn Christian values through practice. Mahardika and Tanjung (2024) argue that women have an important role in church leadership and should be given greater opportunities and trust. Increased opportunities for women to lead can therefore expand the educational dimensions of church ministry by introducing diverse approaches to service, community engagement, and spiritual formation.

The presence of female congregation leaders can also contribute to broader understandings of gender and Christian leadership. In some religious contexts, traditional assumptions may associate formal spiritual authority primarily with men. Women's visible participation in leadership can challenge such assumptions and provide congregational members

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with alternative models of spiritual authority. Randan and Randan (2022) highlight the continuing challenges faced by women in church leadership while demonstrating through biblical reflection that women can occupy significant leadership roles. The visibility of female leaders can consequently function as an educational message in itself. When women successfully lead worship-related activities, educational programs, social ministries, mentoring groups, and congregational initiatives, their leadership demonstrates that spiritual gifts and leadership capacities are not necessarily restricted by gender. This can be particularly influential for younger members who are developing their understanding of vocation, service, and leadership.

Female congregation leaders also have an important role in creating inclusive educational environments. Faith education becomes more effective when members feel accepted, respected, and able to participate. Female leaders may contribute to such environments through relational sensitivity, communication, pastoral attention, and recognition of diverse congregational needs. Authentic leadership supports this process because relational transparency and self-awareness encourage leaders to recognize how their behavior affects others. Wang et al. (2020) found that authentic leadership contributes to trust, while Zhang et al. (2022) demonstrated broad positive relationships between authentic leadership and follower outcomes. In congregational faith education, trust can encourage members to participate more actively, share spiritual experiences, discuss difficulties, and engage in learning activities without fear of judgment. Consequently, authentic female leadership can create a foundation for more meaningful and sustainable faith formation.

Finally, the educational role of female congregation leaders is closely connected to their calling and leadership identity. When women understand ministry as a spiritual vocation, educational activities can become expressions of service rather than merely organizational duties. Lumingkewas (2021) emphasizes the theological foundation of spiritual leadership in Christian ministry, while Dijkhuizen (2022) demonstrates the importance of women's participation in church leadership despite institutional limitations. Female congregation leaders who understand their roles as expressions of faith calling can therefore integrate teaching, mentoring, pastoral care, and leadership into a unified ministry. Overall, their contribution to congregational faith education encompasses formal instruction, informal learning, spiritual mentoring, role modeling, community participation, and the creation of inclusive learning environments. Their leadership demonstrates that faith education is a continuous communal process in which Christian values are learned, practiced, experienced, and transmitted through relationships. Thus, female congregation leaders function not only as administrators or ministry coordinators but also as

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spiritual educators whose authentic leadership can strengthen faith formation and contribute to the development of a participatory, mature, and spiritually resilient congregation.

CONCLUSION

The analysis concludes that authentic leadership among female congregation leaders represents a meaningful expression of faith, service, and spiritual responsibility within church ministry and congregational faith education. Female congregation leaders demonstrate authentic leadership through self-awareness, relational transparency, internalized moral values, balanced decision-making, and consistency between Christian faith and everyday ministry practices. Their leadership identity is strengthened by a sense of faith calling that motivates them to serve the congregation, overcome institutional and cultural challenges, and maintain integrity in exercising leadership. Furthermore, their role extends beyond administrative responsibilities to include spiritual mentoring, Bible study facilitation, pastoral accompaniment, role modeling, community engagement, and the creation of inclusive learning environments. Through these functions, female congregation leaders become important agents of congregational faith formation because members learn not only through formal instruction but also through observation, participation, relationships, and practical experiences of Christian service. Authentic leadership consequently enables female leaders to build trust, encourage participation, strengthen spiritual development, and demonstrate that leadership can be exercised through integrity, compassion, service, and moral consistency. Therefore, female congregation leaders should be recognized as authentic spiritual leaders and educators whose faith-based leadership contributes significantly to the development of a participatory, inclusive, and spiritually mature congregation.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future research should explore authentic leadership among female congregation leaders across different Christian denominations, cultural contexts, church sizes, and organizational structures to identify similarities and differences in how faith calling influences leadership practices and congregational faith education. Further studies could employ longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to examine how female leaders develop their leadership identities over time and how authentic leadership affects congregational trust, participation, spiritual growth, and educational outcomes. Researchers should also investigate the experiences of younger female leaders and emerging church leaders to understand how changing social expectations, digital ministry, and contemporary forms of religious education influence women's

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leadership. Comparative studies involving male and female congregation leaders could provide deeper insights into gender, authenticity, leadership effectiveness, and institutional expectations without reducing leadership behavior to gender differences. Future research should additionally examine organizational and theological factors that either facilitate or constrain women's leadership, including church policies, leadership structures, cultural traditions, and interpretations of biblical teachings. Particular attention should be given to how authentic leadership can support inclusive and participatory approaches to congregational faith education through mentoring, digital learning, Bible study, community service, and intergenerational ministry. Finally, future studies could develop practical leadership-development models based on authenticity, spiritual calling, ethical responsibility, and faith formation to strengthen the capacity of female congregation leaders and contribute to more inclusive, relational, and spiritually resilient church communities.

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