

## **Factors Influencing Christians' Change of Church Affiliation: A Case Study of Christians at Redeemed Gospel Churches in Embakasi, Nairobi**

Angelina Nyumu<sup>1</sup>, Wole Adebile<sup>2</sup>, Peter Lee<sup>3</sup>  
Corresponding Email: anyumu@gmail.com

---

### **Abstract**

---

The phenomenon of church mobility among church congregants has become increasingly common within urban Pentecostal churches. Church mobility has increased significantly across African urban Pentecostal contexts, yet limited empirical work explores its underlying drivers within single-denomination settings. This study investigated the personal, spiritual, and socio-economic factors that inform church affiliation among the Redeemed Gospel Churches (RGCs) in the Embakasi region of Nairobi. A qualitative research methodology was employed using a case study design. Data were collected through questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The target population included the clergy, church leadership (chairlady and chairman), and church members who had changed their church affiliation within 2 years before the study. The sample comprised 48 participants drawn from the 6 Redeemed Gospel Churches branches selected, including 30 congregants, 12 council leaders, and 6 pastors, selected through purposive sampling to provide rich and relevant insights. The Push–Pull Theory of Religious Mobility provided the analytical framework for interpreting patterns of movement. Findings reveal that members change church affiliation due to leadership conflicts, governance weaknesses, spiritual dissatisfaction, doctrinal ambiguity, poor pastoral care, socio-economic pressures, and geographical convenience. Young adults were the most mobile demographic, often seeking authenticity, relational connection, and deeper discipleship experiences. The study concludes that strengthening transparent leadership, enhancing doctrinal clarity, and establishing structured spiritual formation programs are essential for reducing unnecessary church mobility. These findings contribute to pastoral theology, ecclesiology, and organizational studies by illuminating membership dynamics in Nairobi's urban Pentecostal landscape.

**Keywords:** Church affiliation, Religious Mobility, Church Transfers, Pentecostal Christianity.

---



## **Introduction**

Religious mobility has increasingly become a defining feature of contemporary Pentecostal Christianity, particularly within rapidly urbanizing African contexts. Scholars observe that African Pentecostalism is marked by fluid congregational boundaries, high member turnover, and dynamic patterns of affiliation as believers navigate diverse spiritual, social, and economic environments (Anderson 2013, 46; Meyer 2015, 128). This mobility reflects broader transformations in religious practice, where individual believers exercise greater agency in selecting congregations that align with their theological convictions, worship preferences, leadership expectations, and lived experiences. As urbanization reshapes social networks and intensifies economic pressures, church affiliation is increasingly understood as a negotiated and evolving process rather than a lifelong commitment (Biri 2016, 8).

Within this context, the church functions not only as a space of worship but also as a social and organizational institution through which faith, identity, and belonging are cultivated (Hashimi 2018, 32). The quality of leadership, doctrinal orientation, pastoral support, and communal life significantly shape how believers experience spiritual growth and evaluate their commitment to particular congregations, as noted by Barton (2012, 51). Recent studies on African Pentecostal and charismatic churches indicate that institutional factors such as leadership accountability, theological coherence, and relational support are central to congregational stability and member retention, especially in urban settings where believers have multiple religious options (Van der Meer 2021, 16; Mwila 2022, 34). Consequently, churches increasingly operate as dynamic spaces where believers continuously negotiate faith, belonging, and institutional trust (Waters 2020, 58).

Although church mobility is not inherently negative and may even indicate increasing theological awareness, self-agency, and a desire for meaningful engagement, it also poses significant institutional challenges, as established by Waruta & Kinoti (2000, 105). In addition, studies have found that high turnover disrupts continuity in discipleship, weakens congregational cohesion, undermines pastoral authority, and inhibits long-term ministry planning (Togarasei 2016, 24; McEwan 2025, 12). In settings where leadership accountability and doctrinal consistency are highly valued, persistent mobility may signal deeper concerns related to governance, pastoral care, or theological identity (Chitando & Biri, 2016, p. 17).



These complexities highlight the need to understand the push-and-pull factors that influence affiliation choices within localized ecclesial contexts.

According to Mwangi & Mugambi (2024, 50), Nairobi's Embakasi region exemplifies this evolving landscape, with congregants frequently shifting between churches in pursuit of spiritual vitality, authentic worship, relational belonging, doctrinal clarity, or personal development. Such movement reflects broader transformations in urban spirituality, where individuals actively evaluate religious spaces in alignment with their theological expectations and lived realities (Gifford 2015, 10; Kalu 2008, 22). As a densely populated, highly mobile urban area, Embakasi offers a compelling context for examining how religious affiliation is negotiated, redefined, and reconfigured within contemporary African Pentecostalism.

Therefore, this study examines the personal, spiritual, and socio-economic factors shaping Christians' decisions to change church affiliation within the Redeemed Gospel Churches (RGCs) in the Embakasi region of Nairobi. The RGC, founded as an indigenous Pentecostal denomination, occupies a distinct place in Kenya's ecclesial landscape, promoting charismatic spirituality, evangelistic outreach, and community engagement (Mukonyora 2007, 14). Yet, like many urban Pentecostal churches, it faces challenges related to congregational retention, leadership expectations, and member satisfaction. By situating these dynamics within broader debates on African Christianity, urban Pentecostal identity, and congregational belonging, this study contributes to theological, sociological, and pastoral discourses that seek to understand how believers negotiate spiritual identity amid shifting religious terrains.

## **Literature Review**

This section reviews contemporary scholarly literature on church affiliation and religious mobility, with particular attention to the personal, spiritual, and socio-economic factors influencing Christians' decisions to change congregations.

### **Factors Influencing Christians' Change of Church Affiliation**

Modern Christian congregations increasingly experience changes in church affiliation, particularly within urban contexts. Scholars attribute this trend to a complex interaction of personal, spiritual, socio-economic, and leadership-related factors that shape believers' decisions to leave one congregation and join another (Francis & Richter, 2007, 21; Pace 2011, 42; Waruta & Kinoti 2000, 19). Rather than reflecting spiritual decline, such mobility often represents intentional religious agency, as individuals seek out congregations that align with



their evolving spiritual needs, life circumstances, and personal expectations (Packard & Hope 2015, 22).

### **Personal Factors**

Personal factors significantly influence Christians' decisions to change church affiliation, as individual experiences, preferences, and life transitions shape how believers relate to congregational spaces (Kerley et al., 2011, 17). Human beings are dynamic, and changes in personal circumstances, such as migration for employment, educational pursuits, marriage, family restructuring, or shifting social networks, often necessitate relocation to new worship communities. Young adults, in particular, are prone to church switching as they seek environments that resonate with their identities, interests, and opportunities for meaningful participation, including involvement in music ministry, leadership development, and youth-oriented programming (Olds 2020, 36).

Pace (2011, 721) affirms that contemporary believers are increasingly “architects of their own biographical religious journeys,” exercising agency in constructing faith experiences that align with personal aspirations. Similarly, Waruta and Kinoti (2000, 103) observe that urban Christians often “shop” for churches that meet both spiritual and logistical needs. Francis and Richter (2007, 34) further argue that many church leavers are not abandoning faith but rather seeking expressions of church life that better fit their life situations. These findings suggest that personal circumstances function primarily as internal push factors that shape affiliation decisions without necessarily compromising personal faith commitments.

### **Spiritual Unmet Needs**

Spiritual dissatisfaction remains a major driver of church mobility, particularly when congregants perceive doctrinal weakness, shallow preaching, repetitive worship, or insufficient pastoral care. Believers often leave churches when their spiritual growth stagnates or when worship experiences fail to nurture authentic encounters with God. Francis and Richter (2007, 36) note that individuals leave churches not because they lose faith, but because they seek communities that feel spiritually nourishing, authentic, and transformative.

In African contexts, the desire for experiential spirituality and deeper encounters with God remains particularly pronounced. Waruta and Kinoti (2000, 103) emphasize that many African Christians hunger for churches where God is experienced in tangible and practical ways. When congregations fail to cultivate environments of biblical teaching, spiritual



formation, and pastoral attentiveness, members are likely to seek alternative churches perceived as offering greater spiritual depth, vitality, and discipleship. Consequently, spiritual dissatisfaction operates as a powerful push factor, while vibrant worship, doctrinal clarity, and pastoral care function as strong pull factors in religious mobility.

### **Socio-Economic Factors**

Socio-economic realities significantly shape church affiliation decisions, particularly among urban and economically vulnerable populations. Economic hardship, unemployment, rising living costs, and limited access to necessities often prompt believers to seek churches that provide not only spiritual nourishment but also material and social support. Chitando and Biri (2016, 17) observe that many churches increasingly function as alternative welfare institutions, offering food assistance, school fees, medical support, and employment connections, thereby attracting vulnerable congregants in contexts of socio-economic uncertainty.

Additionally, financial constraints influence practical considerations such as church proximity and transportation costs. Waruta and Kinoti (2000, 103) note that urban Christians frequently attend churches close to their residences or workplaces, even when such congregations differ denominationally from their original affiliations. These patterns demonstrate that church mobility is not solely a spiritual phenomenon but is also shaped by structural and economic pressures that affect accessibility, sustainability, and congregational participation.

### **Poor Leadership and Governance**

Leadership quality and governance integrity are consistently identified as central determinants of church retention and mobility. Northouse (2021, 16) defines leadership as the process by which individuals influence others toward achieving shared goals, while Kouzes and Posner (2017, 22) describe it as mobilizing people to pursue collective aspirations. Within Christian contexts, leadership is expected to reflect Christ-like virtues of humility, service, moral integrity, and pastoral care, as exemplified in Paul's exhortation, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). Such leadership fosters trust, belonging, and congregational stability.

Conversely, leadership failures manifested through authoritarianism, favoritism, corruption, immorality, financial mismanagement, lack of accountability, and neglect of



pastoral care frequently propel members to leave their congregations. Chitando and Biri (2016, 17) observe that when church leaders abuse power or violate ethical standards, congregants often quietly disengage and seek faith communities characterized by justice, transparency, and relational care. Meyer (2015, p. 120) similarly notes that Pentecostal authority is inherently fragile, and that leaders whose personal conduct contradicts their spiritual claims risk rapid loss of credibility and congregational loyalty.

These leadership and governance challenges thus function as powerful push factors, while transparent leadership, ethical integrity, and compassionate pastoral care operate as critical pull factors in shaping church affiliation decisions.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Pentecostalism in Africa is characterized by vibrancy, adaptability, and contextual relevance. Scholars such as Kalu (2008, 22), Anderson (2001, 146), and Meyer (2015, 120) emphasize that Pentecostal spirituality reflects a synthesis of biblical teachings, charismatic expression, and African cosmologies. These dynamics influence how believers evaluate their church experiences. The Push–Pull Theory, adapted from migration studies (Lee, 1966, 91), posits that individuals move in response to internal push factors and external pull factors. In the context of religious mobility, push factors include leadership crises, spiritual dissatisfaction, poor community support, or conflict; pull factors include better worship experiences, doctrinal clarity, accessible pastoral care, and proximity. This framework supports understanding church switching as both reactive and aspirational.

### **Methodology**

Creswell (2014, 39) defines research design as the plan or proposal for conducting research, involving the intersection of philosophy, strategies of inquiry, and specific methods. A case study research design was used in the study, as it helped the researcher to gain a thorough and clear understanding of a particular group, community, event, or circumstance, as well as offering the ability to investigate the real-world problems in their natural setting while drawing conclusions that will apply to other related situations. Yin (2018, 14) defines a case study as “An empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in depth and within its real-world context.” In emphasis, Creswell (2014, 40) defines a case study as a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded



system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information. The research's case study involved Redeemed Gospel Churches in the Embakasi region.

Data were collected from 48 participants across six Redeemed Gospel Churches in Embakasi: Imara Daima, Pipeline, Falcon Road, Transami, Embakasi, and Tassia. Participants included six pastors, 12 church leaders, and 30 congregants who had changed their church affiliations within 2 years. The study included 48 participants selected through purposive sampling. According to Mugenda & Mugenda (2013, 56), a sample is a smaller group obtained from the accessible population. Sampling is the process of selecting several individuals for a study so that the individuals selected represent the larger group from which they were selected. The sampling technique employed in the study was purposive sampling, which allows a researcher to select cases that have the required information with respect to the objectives of their study, are informative, or possess the required characteristics (Mugenda & Mugenda 2013, 56).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires, enabling participants to articulate lived experiences, spiritual perceptions, and contextual realities surrounding church mobility. Thematic analysis was employed following Braun and Clarke's (2006, 110) framework, enabling systematic identification, coding, and categorization of patterns across participants' narratives. This process yielded three dominant thematic domains: leadership and governance challenges, spiritual and spiritual dissatisfaction, and socio-economic or practical considerations. These themes were subsequently interpreted through the lens of the Push-Pull Theory of Religious Mobility (Lee 1966, 57), which conceptualizes affiliation change as resulting from internal pressures that push individuals away from their current congregations and external attractors that pull them toward alternative faith communities. This analytical integration enhanced the explanatory depth and theoretical coherence of the findings.

The research adhered to ethical principles throughout the process because the qualitative data involved a respondent's personal views and experiences. To address any ethical concerns, the researcher ensured that the informants' identities were concealed using a code. They were offered a consent form, which was signed without any compulsion whatsoever, before they embarked on the research, and all were assured of confidentiality in



the study. In addition, respondents were allowed to withdraw from the response process at any time. To sum up, Cresswell (2014, 60) affirmed that for the study to be ethically sound, it must also be truthful, introspective, and committed to the well-being of participants and their communities. Data were analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 110) six-step framework.

## **Results**

This section presents the study's findings in line with the research objective. Specifically, the study sought to examine the personal, spiritual, and socio-economic factors influencing Christians' change of church affiliation within Redeemed Gospel Churches in Embakasi, Nairobi. The results are organized thematically, beginning with the response rate, followed by respondents' demographic characteristics, and then by an analysis of personal, spiritual, and socio-economic factors shaping church mobility. This structured presentation enables systematic interpretation of the findings and provides an empirical foundation for subsequent discussion and theological reflection.

### **Response Rate**

All 48 distributed questionnaires were duly completed and returned, resulting in a 100% response rate. This exceptional return level ensured comprehensive qualitative coverage, consistent with Creswell and Creswell's (2018, 49) emphasis on completeness and narrative depth as indicators of qualitative validity. The high participation further reflects strong engagement among congregants within Redeemed Gospel Churches (RGCs) in the Embakasi region.

### **Demographic Profile of Respondents**

Demographic information was analyzed to contextualize variations in church mobility. The characteristics assessed included gender, age, marital status, education level, and church position.

### **Gender of Respondents**

The gender distribution of respondents was examined to contextualize participation patterns and explore potential gender-based differences in church affiliation experiences and mobility dynamics. The results were illustrated in Table 1 below:



**Table 1**

*Gender Distribution of Respondents*

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Male	21	43.8
Female	27	56.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Researcher (2025)

Most of the respondents were female (56.2%), indicating that women constitute a slightly higher proportion of active members of Redeemed Gospel Churches (RGC) in Embakasi. This pattern reflects broader African Pentecostal trends in which women demonstrate stronger church participation, greater involvement in ministry activities, and higher levels of congregational commitment, as noted by Van der Meer (2021, 62) and the Pew Research Center (2018, 129). Thus, this finding implied a balanced gender distribution, enhancing the study's representativeness, as perceptions of leadership, belonging, and worship may differ by gender.

**Age of Respondents**

Age distribution was analyzed to contextualize generational patterns in church participation and mobility. The results were shown in Table 2 below:

**Table 2**

*Age Distribution of Respondents*

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
18–25 years	8	17
26–35 years	26	54
36 years and above	14	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Researcher (2025)

More than half (54%) were between 26 and 35 years. This cohort is generally more mobile in church affiliation, aligning with Ndereba (2022, 66), who made observations on Nairobi's urban Christian patterns, that their life stage often predisposed them to seek authentic worship



experiences, spiritual depth, and a sense of belonging, which are key factors influencing church mobility. This implied that age influenced worship preferences, leadership expectations, spiritual formation needs, and likelihood of church switching, particularly within urban Pentecostal contexts.

### **Marital Status**

Marital status was examined to understand how family structure and relational responsibilities influence church affiliation decisions. The results are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Marital Status of Respondents*

<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Frequency Percentage (%)</b>	
Single	10	20.8
Married	28	58.3
Divorced/Separated	7	14.6
Widowed	3	6.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Researcher (2025)

Results showed that the majority of participants (58.3%) were married, suggesting that family-oriented individuals are predominant among church attendees, an important factor in understanding patterns of church loyalty and affiliation. This finding suggests that marital and family-related factors may influence church mobility. In urban church contexts, married congregants may reassess their church affiliation as family needs evolve, particularly regarding the worship environment, pastoral support, and programs for couples and children. A study by Kamau, Njoroge, and Otieno (2025, 30) found that marital commitments and family needs frequently shape church loyalty and participation in urban congregations. Also, married couples who attended church together were significantly more likely to report happier, more stable relationships and stronger institutional affiliation.



### Education Level

Education level was examined to assess how academic attainment influences theological expectations, leadership perceptions, and patterns of church affiliation. Results were illustrated in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Educational Level of Respondents*

<b>Education Level</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Below O-level	6	12.5
O level	14	29.2
Bachelor's Degree	18	37.5
Master's Degree	5	10.4
Doctoral Degree	5	10.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Researcher (2025)

The results show that the majority of respondents (37.5%) had attained a Bachelor's degree, followed by 29.2% who had completed O-level education. A smaller proportion, 10.4% each, held Master's and Doctoral degrees, while 12.5% had education below O-level. This distribution indicates that a significant portion of church members are relatively well educated, with nearly six in ten having attained postsecondary qualifications (Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctoral degrees). The presence of a highly educated membership suggests that Redeemed Gospel Churches in the Embakasi Region attract individuals with strong academic backgrounds, which could shape expectations for church leadership, teaching quality, and organizational transparency. Education affects how individuals assess doctrine, worship quality, and leadership transparency (Waweru and Mbogo 2020, 33). This level of educational attainment may be associated with increased mobility beyond the church context. In urban settings, higher education is often linked to formal employment, career advancement, and job-related transfers, which may necessitate geographical relocation or adjustments in social networks.



### **Position in the Church**

The church position was analyzed to examine how hierarchical roles and ministry responsibilities influence perceptions of leadership, governance, belonging, and church affiliation. Results were illustrated in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Church Position of Respondents*

<b>Position</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Clergy	6	12
Church Leaders	12	25
Members	30	63
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Researcher (2025)

Most respondents (63%) were ordinary church members, while 25% were church leaders and 12% were clergy. This is likely because church mobility occurs more frequently among members, who have fewer institutional responsibilities and greater flexibility to change church affiliation compared to clergy and church leaders. According to Braun and Clarke (2021, 38), diversity in respondent roles enhances thematic validity by capturing both hierarchical and experiential differences within the organization. Consequently, including both church leaders and members provides a richer understanding of the institutional and personal factors influencing church mobility.

### **Personal, Spiritual, and Socio-Economic Factors Influencing Change of Church Affiliation**

The study sought to examine the personal, spiritual, and socio-economic factors that influence Christians to change their church affiliation. Thematic analysis revealed that these influences fall into three broad categories: leadership and governance challenges, spiritual and spiritual dissatisfaction, and socio-economic and practical considerations. Together, these categories align with the Push–Pull Theory, which explains religious mobility as a response to internal pressures that push individuals away from their current congregation and external attractors that pull them toward a new one. These themes are presented below with supporting participant narratives and scholarly interpretation.



Leadership and governance issues emerged as the most dominant push factors. Respondents frequently described experiences of poor communication, lack of transparency in financial decisions, favoritism, divisive leadership styles, and unresolved interpersonal conflicts. One respondent remarked that, “Our pastor began making all decisions alone, even on finances, and members who questioned were treated as rebels.” Another noted that, “The leadership had become divided, and this created tension that made it impossible to worship freely.” These accounts reflect a broader pattern identified in the existing literature: governance weaknesses within Pentecostal churches often drive congregants to seek alternative spiritual homes. These narratives align with contemporary African Pentecostal scholarship, which demonstrates that leadership credibility, accountability, and relational legitimacy are central to congregational stability and retention (Geiger & Peck 2016, 40). When leadership practices contradict ethical expectations or spiritual ideals, congregants often quietly disengage and seek alternative worship environments characterized by justice, transparency, and pastoral care (Kpobi, Sarfo & Yendork, 2017, 59). Leadership failures, therefore, function as powerful push factors, while ethical governance and servant leadership serve as critical pull factors in shaping church mobility.

Spiritual dissatisfaction also played a significant role in influencing mobility. Participants expressed concerns about unmet needs for theological depth, an overemphasis on prosperity-oriented messages, perceived stagnation in spiritual growth, and inadequate pastoral support. Many respondents desired deeper theological engagement and more authentic discipleship. Statements from one of the respondents illustrated this: “Every service was about blessings and giving money, not about the Word of God or moral transformation. I felt spiritually dry, and I wanted a church that teaches the Bible, not one that entertains.” These findings highlight the pull factors that draw congregants to Redeemed Gospel Church congregations, perceived as offering spiritual depth and doctrinal clarity. These findings reflect broader trends within contemporary Pentecostalism, where believers increasingly seek churches that integrate biblical depth, moral formation, relational discipleship, and authentic worship experiences (Gutmann & Peters, 2020, 42; Miller & Yamamori, 2017, 35). Feller & Lombaard (2018, 56) similarly note that African Pentecostal believers prioritize experiential encounters with God that foster transformation in everyday life. When congregations fail to cultivate environments of spiritual formation and pastoral attentiveness, members are likely to



migrate toward churches perceived as spiritually vibrant, doctrinally grounded, and pastorally responsive. Thus, spiritual dissatisfaction operates as a central push factor, while theological clarity and worship vitality function as strong pull factors in religious mobility.

Socio-economic and practical realities contributed to decisions to change church affiliation. Respondents cited factors such as relocation, the need for more accessible church locations, financial strain from ongoing fundraising demands, and a desire for supportive community networks. One member explained, “I joined Redeemed Gospel Church because it was near my home, and they do not pressure us about giving every week.” Such insights are consistent with observations by Chitando and Biri (2016, 17), who note that congregants facing economic constraints often prefer churches that offer flexibility, accessibility, and reduced financial pressure. These factors primarily served as structural moderators, shaping whether believers could maintain engagement with their congregations while navigating urban economic realities (Vahidi, 2022, 221).

### **Summary of Results**

The results demonstrate that church mobility within Redeemed Gospel Churches in Embakasi is primarily driven by leadership and governance challenges and by spiritual dissatisfaction. Socio-economic considerations further shape mobility, often moderating decisions rather than initiating them. The intersection of personal experiences, spiritual expectations, and material realities produces nuanced mobility patterns reflective of broader contemporary African Pentecostal trends.

Overall, these findings indicate that church mobility arises from an interplay of governance shortcomings, spiritual needs, and socio-economic circumstances, each contributing to the push-and-pull dynamics shaping congregational movement. Leadership and governance challenges, such as authoritarian decision-making, lack of transparency, and poor conflict resolution, align with African Pentecostal research that emphasizes the importance of ethical, relationally credible leadership for member retention (Chitando & Biri 2016, 18; Van der Meer 2021, 62). Similarly, unmet spiritual needs, including shallow preaching, prosperity-focused messages, and limited discipleship, reflect global Pentecostal trends, with believers migrating toward churches that provide doctrinal depth, authentic worship, and sustained spiritual formation (Miller & Yamamori, 2017, 34; Root, 2019, 27). Socio-economic factors, such as proximity, commuting demands, work schedules, and financial pressures, further



moderate church participation, consistent with case studies across urban African contexts, where practical accessibility and social support networks influence affiliation decisions (Root, 2019, 39; Van der Meer, 2021, 64). Collectively, these findings underscore that church switching is a multidimensional phenomenon, driven by the interaction of leadership, spiritual, and socio-economic factors, and shaped by both local realities and broader patterns observed in Pentecostal and Charismatic movements.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study affirm the influence of personal, spiritual, and socio-economic factors in shaping church affiliation within Pentecostal churches. The strong influence of leadership dynamics aligns with the existing literature, which emphasizes pastoral integrity, accountability, and relational leadership as critical determinants of congregational commitment and retention. Studies on African Pentecostal churches indicate that leadership conflicts, weak governance structures, and a lack of transparency often erode trust and prompt congregants to seek alternative spiritual communities (Gibbs, 2000, 21; Waruta & Kinoti, 2000, 105; Chitando & Biri, 2016, 18). Similarly, Northouse (2021, 16) and Kouzes and Posner (2017, 23) underscore that ethical and participatory leadership is essential for sustaining organizational cohesion and follower loyalty, findings that resonate strongly with respondents' experiences in this study.

Spiritual dissatisfaction and unmet spiritual needs identified among participants reflect a growing theological consciousness within urban Pentecostalism, where believers increasingly evaluate the biblical depth and theological consistency of church teachings. This observation is consistent with Gifford's (2015, 31) analysis of African Christianity, which notes rising critical engagement among urban congregants, particularly in response to prosperity-oriented messages perceived as shallow or exploitative. Anderson (2013, 8) and Kalu (2008, 78) similarly observe that African Pentecostals are not passive recipients of religious instruction but active agents who assess doctrinal authenticity and spiritual nourishment, often adjusting their affiliations.

The prominence of youth mobility in this study mirrors broader patterns identified in studies on urban Christianity and religious individualization. Younger believers tend to prioritize experiential worship, participatory engagement, and relational authenticity, making them more responsive to both push and pull factors within church environments (Packard &



Hope, 2015, 34; Martí, 2014, 25). Sherkat and Regnerus (2003, 44) further argue that young adults are more likely to experiment with religious affiliation during periods of identity formation, a finding that helps explain the higher mobility observed among respondents aged 26–35 years.

Socio-economic constraints also emerged as significant contextual factors shaping church affiliation decisions. Urban stressors such as financial pressure, relocation, and time constraints influence how believers engage with religious institutions. Chitando and Biri (2016, 17) note that economic vulnerability often heightens sensitivity to church demands, particularly fundraising practices, while Gifford (2015, 31) observes that accessibility and material considerations increasingly shape patterns of religious participation in African cities. These findings reinforce the view that church mobility cannot be understood solely through spiritual lenses but must be situated within broader socio-economic realities.

The applicability of the Push–Pull Theory (Lee 1966, 91) in this study demonstrates its usefulness in explaining the multidimensional nature of religious mobility. Leadership conflicts, spiritual dissatisfaction, and governance weaknesses functioned as push factors, while spiritual depth, relational care, and institutional stability served as pull factors. Consistent with Meyer’s (2015, 121) and Van der Meer’s (2021, 61) work on belonging and mobility, the findings suggest that church switching does not necessarily signal spiritual decline. For many respondents, mobility was described as restorative and identity-affirming. However, as Gibbs (2000, 21) and Osmer (2008, 116) caution, persistent turnover poses risks to congregational stability, leadership sustainability, and long-term discipleship, underscoring the need for intentional institutional strengthening.

## **Conclusion**

This study concludes that a complex interplay of spiritual, personal, and socio-economic factors shapes church affiliation decisions among Redeemed Gospel Churches in Embakasi. Leadership and governance challenges, including a lack of transparency, authoritarian decision-making, and limited pastoral engagement, function as significant push factors. Spiritual unmet needs, such as shallow preaching, prosperity-focused messages, and insufficient opportunities for discipleship, motivate members to seek out congregations that offer doctrinal depth and authentic worship. Socio-economic and practical considerations, including commuting constraints, work obligations, and financial pressures, moderate the



feasibility and sustainability of church participation. Collectively, these findings illustrate that church mobility is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by both individual expectations and structural realities, with mobility often serving as a restorative or identity-affirming process rather than an indicator of spiritual decline.

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be drawn for both practice and scholarship. First, churches should strengthen leadership and governance by prioritizing transparency, ethical decision-making, and participatory approaches, which are essential for fostering trust and retaining members. Enhancing doctrinal and spiritual offerings is also critical; congregations should provide deeper biblical teaching, structured discipleship programs, mentorship opportunities, and authentic worship experiences to address spiritual unmet needs and reduce unnecessary mobility.

Socio-economic and practical constraints must be considered in urban contexts. Churches can improve accessibility, offer flexible service schedules, and provide social support systems that accommodate members' work, family, and financial realities. Additionally, institutionalizing feedback mechanisms through regular congregant engagement, evaluations, and open communication channels can help church leadership identify challenges early and respond proactively.

From a scholarly perspective, this study contributes to understanding contemporary urban Pentecostal identity formation and highlights the multidimensional drivers of church mobility. Future research should explore longitudinal patterns of church switching, conduct comparative studies across denominations, and investigate the effects of mobility on youth religious engagement, thereby providing a deeper understanding of evolving Pentecostal dynamics in urban African contexts.

## **References**

- Anderson, Allan. *African Reformation: African-Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001.
- Anderson, Allan. *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Barton, Ruth Haley. *Pursuing God's Will Together: A Discernment Practice for Leadership Groups*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012.



- Chitando, Ezra, and Kudzai Biri. "Churches and Social Capital in Zimbabwe." *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 155 (2016): 17-18.
- Creswell, John W. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014.
- Creswell, John W., and Cheryl N. Poth. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2018.
- Creswell, John W., and J. David Creswell. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 5th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018.
- Feller, J., & Lombaard, C. (2018). Spiritual Formation towards Pentecostal Leadership as Discipleship. *Koers: Bulletin for Christian Scholarship Koers: Bulletin vir Christelike Wetenskap*, 83(1), 1-12.
- Francis, Leslie J., and Philip Richter. *Gone But Not Forgotten: Church Leaving and Returning*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2007.
- Geiger, Eric, and Kevin Peck. *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2016.
- Gibbs, Eddie. *Church Next: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.
- Gifford, Paul. *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*. London: Hurst & Company, 2015.
- Gutmann, D., & Peters, F. (2020). German Churches in Times of Demographic Change and Declining Affiliation: A projection to 2060. *Comparative Population Studies*, 45.
- Hashimi, S. K. (2018). *Factors that Influence Retention of Affiliation in Christianity* (Master's thesis, Morgan State University).
- Kalu, Ogbu. *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. *2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census, Volume I: Population by County and Sub-County*. Nairobi: KNBS, November 15, 2019.
- Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. *2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census, Volume IV: Distribution of Population by Socio-Economic Characteristics*. Nairobi: KNBS, 2020.
- Kerley, K. R., Copes, H., Linn, A. J., Eason, L., Nguyen, M. H., & Stone, A. M. (2011). Understanding Personal Change in a Women's Faith-Based Transitional Center. *Religions*, 2(2), 184-197.
- Kouzes, James M., and Barry Z. Posner. *The Leadership Challenge*. 6th ed. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2017.
- Kpobi, L., Sarfo, E. A., & Yendork, J. S. (2017). "I'm Here Because of Christ and Worshipping God...": Factors Influencing Religious Switching among Ghanaian Charismatic/ Neo-pentecostal Christians. *Archive for the Psychology of Religion*, 39(3), 295-311.
- Lee, Everett S. "A Theory of Migration." *Demography* 3, no. 1 (1966): 47-57.
- Liebert, Elizabeth. *The Way of Discernment: Spiritual Practices for Decision Making*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008.



- Martí, Gerardo. *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- McEwan, T. (2025). *Women and the Catholic Church: Negotiating Identity and Agency*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Meyer, Birgit. *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity Among the Ewe in Ghana*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004.
- Miller, Donald E., and Tetsunao Yamamori. *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017.
- Mugenda, Olive M., and Abel G. Mugenda. *Research Methods: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*. Nairobi, Kenya: Acts Press, 2013.
- Mwangi, P., & Mugambi, K. (2024). African Pentecostalism from an African Perspective. In *The Palgrave Handbook of Christianity in Africa from Apostolic Times to the Present* (pp. 607–623). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Mwila, B. A. (2022). Changing Religious Affiliations: Factors Affecting Denominational Changes in Nyambene Synod, Kenya. *Holiness*, 7(2), 61–70.
- Ndereba, K. M. (2022). A Holistic Approach to Youth Ministry Models in Africa: A Practical Theology for Faith Formation. *Journal of Youth and Theology*, 22(1), 66–77.
- Northouse, Peter G. *Leadership: Theory and Practice*. 9th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2021.
- Olds, C. B. D. (2020). *Perspectives from the Pew: A Phenomenological Exploration of Congregants' Experiences of Change in their Churches* (Doctoral dissertation, Antioch University).
- Osmer, Richard R. *Practical Theology: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008.
- Pace, Enzo. "The Individualization of Belief." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, edited by Peter B. Clarke, 721–740. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Packard, Josh, and Ashleigh Hope. *Church Refugees: Sociologists Reveal Why People Are DONE with Church but Not their Faith*. Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2015.
- Pew Research Center. *Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington, DC: Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2018.
- Redeemed Gospel Church. "Our History and Vision." Accessed July 17, 2025. <https://redeemedgospelchurch.org/history>.
- Root, Andrew. *The Pastor in a Secular Age: Ministry to People Who No Longer Need a God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019.
- Sherkat, Darren E., and Mark D. Regnerus. "Religious Preference Development, Conversion, and Apostasy: A Longitudinal Analysis of Adolescents and Young Adults." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42, no. 1 (2003): 23–37.
- Vahidi Mehrjardi, S. (2022). Factors Leading to Decline in Church Attendance in the Present Age. *Religious Inquiries*, 11(2), 221-231.
- Van der Meer, Erna. *Belonging and Church Mobility: Identity, Community, and Faith in Urban Contexts*. Leiden: Brill, 2021.



- Van der Meer, Erna. *Belonging in Changing African Christian Communities: Membership, Mobility and Authority in Nairobi*. Leiden: Brill, 2021.
- Waruta, Douglas W., and Hannah W. Kinoti. *Pastoral Care in African Christianity: Challenging Essays in Pastoral Theology*. Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2000.
- Waters, J. R. (2020). *A Multiple Case Study Identifying Factors Influencing Church Attendance and Engagement with Unchurched and Dechurched Families*. Doctoral Dissertation, Liberty University.
- Yin, Robert K. *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*. 6th ed. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2018.

