



Assessing the importance of Self-Care of Pastors in Selected Rural Communities in the Ashanti Region, Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This study assesses the importance of pastors' self-care in some selected rural communities in the Ashanti Region. It reveals that Christian teachings often neglect the self-care of pastors as “spiritual leaders” in the context of African cultural expectations that exacerbate the demands on the clergy. Drawing from theological perspectives, the study highlighted the contributions of some African scholars who advocate for a reimagined pastoral theology that integrates self-care as an essential aspect of ministry. Additionally, biblical foundations such as the *kenosis* principle (Phil. 2:3-8), Jesus' practice of rest (Mk, 6:31), and the *Imago Dei* (Gen. 1:27) were analyzed to demonstrate that self-care does not contradict Christian service but rather a form of responsible stewardship. This study used a qualitative research approach to collect data from selected pastors through interviews, participant observation, and literature analysis, offering a comprehensive understanding of how theological frameworks and cultural spins influence pastoral self-care practices. The findings revealed that many pastors in rural Ghana experience burnout due to socio-cultural and theological pressures, yet little institutional support exists to address this issue. The study concludes by advocating for a more holistic theological model that integrates self-care into pastoral formation, ensuring clergy sustainability and ministry effectiveness. The significant contribution of the study is that it has redefined pastoral care by expanding its scope to include “the caregiver-well-being” as a critical factor for sustainable Christian ministry in Ghana.

Keywords: Pastoral care, self-care, ministerial burnout, stress, the caregiver-well-being

INTRODUCTION

Self-care refers to the “pursuit of holistic and long-term well-being.”¹ It covers an intentional nurturing of spiritual, physiological, emotional and psychological well-being to avoid burnout and foster sustainable ministry effectiveness. This would require that one sets strict boundaries, undertakes enough rest, follows good eating and life habits and embraces support where necessary. Pastors who plan to be in ministry for the

¹ Ruth A. Lawson-McConnell and Katie Thomas, “Self-care in Pastoring and Counselling: A Literature Review,” *Stimulus* Vol. 22, No. 3(2026): 36.

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long haul must seek to understand the condition of their heart, mind, and body regularly.² Pastoral self-care connotes “the wisdom to ensure, as far as humanly possible, a wise and orderly work that conserves and lengthens a pastor’s ministry; the reason for self-care is not so that pastors can become indulgent hypochondriacs, always concerned about their own welfare. Self-care means understanding the meaning of positive health and working toward it.”³ Williams Self, for his part, defines self-care as “...being a steward of the human body and soul, along with the capacity to bring joy to others as well as to experience it.”⁴ All of this is to state that for a pastor to maintain a true well-being, his practice of self-care must be comprehensive, taking into account all dimensions of his being.⁵

Pastors are crucial in providing their congregations with spiritual, emotional, and social support. However, their demanding responsibilities often lead to stress, burnout, and a decline in well-being, especially in rural communities where resources are relatively limited. Politically and historically, the role of the pastor in Ghana has evolved alongside the nation’s socio-economic development. Pastors in rural areas often assume roles that government institutions may not address, such as mediating community conflicts and advocating for social justice.⁶ Although, these contributions are invaluable, they also underscore the need for effective self-care to maintain the physical, mental, and spiritual health of pastors in their demanding responsibilities. There have been times in some rural areas where some pastors have played roles outside mainstream ministry, such as electoral observers on behalf of bodies including but not limited to the Christian Council Ghana, Catholic Bishops’ Conference, Coalition of Democratic Election Observers (CODEO) and sometimes too others have become community secretaries, Assemblymen/women, and Unit Committee members. This is because, in some cases, pastors appear to be among the few literate people in rural communities whose services are sought.

Recent scholarship has become increasingly concerned about the well-being of clergy, particularly pastors serving in rural areas.⁷ Pastors in these contexts often assume multifaceted roles, ranging from spiritual leaders to social advocates in communities that often lack essential resources. Despite the increasing recognition of the challenges clergy face, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, the discourse on their self-care remains limited. One significant knowledge gap is the limited exploration of how cultural and theological beliefs about self-sacrifice contribute to a neglect of self-care among pastors.

Historically, the role of pastors in Ghana’s Ashanti Region has been shaped by the legacies of missionary movements that highlighted sacrificial service as a hallmark of ministry.⁸ These historical missionary narratives in Ghana that equated pastoral dedication with self-denial have deeply influenced perceptions of clergy roles. Although this model has undoubtedly inspired selflessness, it has also contributed to a pervasive concrete culture of congregational needs over personal well-being of the minister. As a result, rural pastors often focus on communal needs at the expense of their mental, physical, and spiritual health.

Scholars argue that this imbalance has long-term repercussions for pastors’ physical, emotional, and spiritual health, often leading to burnout.⁹ Contemporary debates, however, suggest that this approach is unsustainable. Some theologians argue that self-care aligns with biblical principles of stewardship and renewal, while others view it as contradicting Christian ideals of selflessness. The lack of consensus within the theological literature makes pastors unclear about the spiritual legitimacy of self-care. In such a baffling

² Jamie McClanahan, *Pastoral Self-care: Developing a Burnout-Resistant Approach to life and Ministry* (Lynchburg, Virginia: Doctor of Ministry Thesis, Liberty University School of Divinity, 2018), 7.

³ Peter Brain, *Going the Distance: How to Stay Fit for a Lifetime of Ministry* (Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2004), 24.

⁴ William L. Self, *Self, Surviving the Stained Glass Window* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2011), 44.

⁵ McClanahan, *Pastoral Self-care*, 20.

⁶ Joseph Connolly, *The Self-Care and Wellness Program for Pastors* (USA: Regent University, 2023), 95.

⁷ Crystal B Fulmer and Robert R Sinclair, “Burnout among Pastors in Relation to Congregation Member and Church Organizational Outcomes,” *Review of Religious Research* Vol. 65, No. 1(2023): 90.

⁸ Emmanuel Y. Attah, Albert Kofi Woode and Victor Washington, “The Role of Neo-Prophetic/Charismatic Churches in the Socio-Economic Development of Ghana,” *Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion* Vol. 56, No. 3(2023): 45, <https://doi.org/10.7176/jpcr/56-03>.

⁹ Christopher J Adams et al., “Clergy Burnout: A Comparison Study with Other Helping Professions,” *Pastoral Psychology* Vol. 66, No. 2(2017): 147.

context, the current study aims to address a significant gap in the literature by examining self-care as a critical aspect of sustainable pastoral leadership and ministry.

In theological discourse, debates around self-care and pastoral ministry often revolve around biblical interpretations of self-sacrifice and selflessness.¹⁰ Although some have argued that self-care is inconsistent with the teachings of Christ, others maintain that it is aligned with the biblical model of stewardship of one's body and mind.¹¹ For instance, Jesus Christ frequently withdrew to solitary places to pray and rest, exemplifying a balance between service and self-renewal.¹² Yirenkyi posits that this tension between selflessness and self-care has implications for how pastors in Ghana perceive and adopt self-care practices, particularly in rural settings where theological misconceptions may exacerbate neglect of personal well-being.¹³

Ghana's educational institutions and theological seminaries also demonstrate gaps in addressing this issue. Research shows that pastoral training programs often highlight doctrinal and ministerial skills but do not adequately and effectively equip clergy with the tools to manage stress, burnout, or health challenges.¹⁴ This lack of preparation leaves pastors vulnerable to the demanding nature of rural ministry, exacerbated by limited access to health and social services in underserved areas.

Furthermore, while some studies have examined clergy burnout and mental health in broader contexts, few have focused on the intersection of cultural, political, and socio-economic factors unique to rural Ghanaian pastors. Rural pastors often act as mediators for community issues ranging from poverty alleviation to local conflicts, placing them in roles that far exceed their spiritual mandates.¹⁵ However, the existing literature fails to capture how these added responsibilities intersect with self-care practices, leaving unanswered questions about how to sustainably balance these demands. Nanthambwe contends that contemporary studies in Africa and beyond highlight rural pastors' socio-political and economic challenges, further compounding their vulnerability.¹⁶ Ghana's rural pastors, especially in the Ashanti Region, operate within resource-deprived communities and bear additional responsibilities beyond their pastoral duties. According to Osafo, the expectation of acting as community leaders, financial supporters, and spiritual counsellors, often with limited institutional support, creates a cycle of stress and overwork.¹⁷

The lack of targeted self-care training during theological education aggravates these pressures. Asamoah-Gyadu highlights that most pastoral training programs in Ghana focus on doctrinal teaching and neglect the clergy's emotional and physical health.¹⁸ Educational and structural gaps further justify the importance of this research. Training curricula in theological seminaries seldom equip pastors with the tools to manage stress or practice self-care. This oversight leaves them ill-prepared to navigate the multifaceted demands of ministry in rural contexts, where healthcare and other support systems are often inaccessible.¹⁹ This study examines the intersection of education, theology, and pastoral practice to provide insights that contribute to a more holistic pastoral preparation and support model. Ministerial-care education for seminarians at the various seminaries that incorporate ministry contexts would come in handy.

¹⁰ Leanna K Fuller, "In Defense of Self-Care," *Journal of Pastoral Theology* Vol. 28, No. 1(2018): 8.

¹¹ Jodi M Jacobson et al., "Risk for Burnout and Compassion Fatigue and Potential for Compassion Satisfaction among Clergy: Implications for Social Work and Religious Organizations," *Journal of Social Service Research* Vol. 39, No. 4(2013): 455.

¹² Jacobson et al., "Risk for Burnout and Compassion Fatigue and Potential for Compassion Satisfaction among Clergy," 458.

¹³ Kwasi Yirenkyi, *Transition and the Quest for Identity: A Socio-Ethical Study on the Problem of Identity and Political Role of the Ghanaian Clergy in a Modernizing Society* (Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh, 1984), 51.

¹⁴ Kwabena J. Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill Press, 2005), 112.

¹⁵ Cynthia Sampson, "Religion and Peacebuilding," in *Peacemaking in International Conflict: Methods and Techniques*, (Washington D.C, USA: United States Institute of Peace, 2007), 323.

¹⁶ Patrick Nanthambwe, "Public Theology as a Theology of Resilience in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Public Pastoral Care Contribution," *Religions* Vol. 15, No. 10(2024): 95.

¹⁷ Joseph Osafo, "Seeking Paths for Collaboration between Religious Leaders and Mental Health Professionals in Ghana," *Pastoral Psychology* Vol. 65 No.2 (2016): 493.

¹⁸ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context* (Eugene, Oregon: Regnum Books, 2013), 114.

¹⁹ Michael Anthony Milton, *Reimagining Pastoral Education and Training* (Erskine Theological Seminary, 2022), 54.

The demanding role of pastors in rural communities, particularly in the Ashanti Region of Ghana, has highlighted a persistent issue: While pastors provide essential spiritual, social, and psychological support to their congregations, their well-being often goes unaddressed. Previous research has acknowledged the importance of self-care for professionals in high-demand roles. However, studies on rural clergy in Ghana remain scarce, leaving critical gaps in understanding how self-care practices (or the lack thereof) influence pastoral effectiveness and sustainability.²⁰

This study situates itself within contemporary debates on the sustainability of pastoral ministry, explicitly addressing how self-care practices impact rural pastors' effectiveness and well-being. This paper explores the significance of self-care among pastors in selected rural communities within the Ashanti Region, highlighting how their well-being affects their effectiveness and longevity in ministry. The paper aims to assess the importance of self-care practices among pastors in rural communities such as Adansi, Asokwa, Bodwesango and Fumso districts of the Ashanti Region. It aims to explore perceptions of rural pastors about self-care within the theological, cultural, and pastoral context of the Ashanti Region. It also endeavours to identify rural pastors' challenges in implementing self-care practices and examine their impact on their physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Finally, the paper recommends practical strategies and institutional frameworks for promoting, improving and sustaining self-care practices among pastors in rural communities.

This research is necessary because it addresses an overlooked but crucial aspect of pastoral ministry. Focusing on the Ashanti Region, this study examines rural pastors' challenges in Ghana and contributes to a broader understanding of self-care in African pastoral contexts. The findings have practical implications for theological education, ecclesiastical policies, and pastoral training programmes, providing a foundation for long-term support systems that improve the well-being and effectiveness of pastors in rural communities of Ghana.

The controversy over self-care's theological legitimacy, combined with a lack of empirical research on its practical implications for pastors in Ghana, creates an urgent need for investigation. Without addressing these gaps, pastors will remain at risk of burnout, compromised health, and reduced ministry effectiveness, potentially weakening the social and spiritual fabric of rural communities. This study seeks to fill this critical void by exploring the importance of self-care for rural pastors in the Ashanti Region and proposing actionable recommendations to bridge these gaps.

METHODOLOGY

This study was geographically situated in the Ashanti Region of Ghana, a region renowned for its strong cultural identity, deep-rooted traditions, and significant role in the history of Christianity in the country. As the historical seat of the Ashanti Kingdom, the region is characterized by rural communities that often depend on pastors for spiritual guidance and social and community leadership. The study focused on pastors serving in rural communities, accentuating their unique challenges and experiences regarding self-care. Although, the Ashanti Region is vast, this study focused on the Adansi, Asokwa, Bodwesango, and Fumso districts to ensure a more in-depth and manageable investigation. These districts represent rural pastoral experiences, socio-economic conditions, and cultural influences shaping pastors' self-care practices. The study maintained a balance between depth and generalizability by narrowing the scope to 10 respondents, capturing diverse perspectives while ensuring practical feasibility.

The methodological approach of this study was qualitative and grounded in phenomenology and a case study. It explored the lived experiences, perceptions, and practices of rural pastors in the Ashanti Region of Ghana regarding self-care. Qualitative research is well-suited for examining complex social phenomena, mainly when it aims to understand the meanings, values, and motivations individuals attach to their actions and experiences.²¹ This methodology aligns with the research aimed at understanding how pastors

²⁰ Yirenkyi, *Transition and the Quest for Identity*, 67.

²¹ J.W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Sage Publications Sage CA: Thousand Oaks, CA, 2017), 203.

conceptualize and navigate self-care challenges within their pastoral roles. The study adopted a case study research design, designed to explore self-care practices among rural pastors in selected districts of the Ashanti Region. Case studies are appropriate for examining specific instances of a phenomenon within a particular context.²² Using a case study design also enabled the researchers to collect rich, descriptive data that offers meaningful insights into the impact of socio-cultural, theological, and institutional factors on pastors' well-being. This design provides both breadth and depth in capturing the complexities of rural pastoral life and the unique challenges of self-care in these contexts.

Given that the population of rural pastors in the Ashanti Region is dispersed and may be difficult to enumerate comprehensively, this study used a purposive sampling technique to select ten (10) respondents from a diverse group of pastors representing different denominations and geographic locations within the region. Purposive sampling is appropriate for qualitative studies as it allows one to select participants who can provide the most relevant and detailed insights into the research questions.²³ The sample included pastors from varied denominations (Pentecostal, Neo-prophetic, and missionary-led churches), ensuring diverse perspectives on the theological and cultural implications of self-care in ministry. The pastors who participated in this study received pseudonyms to protect their privacy and confidentiality. This enabled them to freely share their experiences without fear. This implies that the names of respondents presented in this paper are just pen-names assigned to them by the researchers.

Additionally, participant observation was employed to better understand the socio-cultural dynamics within the churches and communities where the pastors serve. Prior discussions were held between the researchers and the individual respondents and permission was sought regarding scheduled visits to the communities and churches where they ministered. The researchers during their visits, mingled with church members for church gatherings and community ministrations. The informal approach observed allowed them to critically observe the organizational and societal warmth of rural churches. The observation instrument focused on how pastors interact with their congregations, community leaders, and other social structures that influence their work and well-being.

As a qualitative research approach, the researchers conducted interviews and surveys with selected pastors to gather firsthand information and analyzed the data thematically. Thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative research to identify and interpret meaning patterns within qualitative data.²⁴ Tape recorders were used to record the data from the interviews. After that the data was transcribed, sorted and analyzed thematically. Initially, the researchers immersed themselves in the data by thoroughly reading the transcripts and field notes and comparing the field data with the existing and relevant literature. Specific and relevant themes that emerged from the field study and literature were identified and analyzed. The thematic analysis process used helped to identify patterns and draw conclusions on the necessity of self-care in sustaining pastoral duties in rural Ghana. The findings contribute to discussions on pastoral health and offer recommendations to promote sustainable self-care practices among religious leaders in rural settings.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The fieldwork involved ten (10) pastors in four rural districts of the Ashanti Region. Of the 10 respondents, there were four females and six males. The assumption is that in Ghana, there are more male pastors than female pastors,²⁵ and more male pastors are posted to rural areas as compared to female pastors. This explains the study sex disparities in the sampling population. The distribution of the respondents were as follows: Adansi (30%), Asokwa (20%), Bodwesango (30%), and Fumso (20%).

The results showed that 90% of rural pastors strongly recognised the significance of self-care in maintaining their ministry. However, 70% of the pastors reported that they had previously neglected their

²² R.E. Stake, *The Case Study Method in Social Research* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 94.

²³ M.Q. Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2015), 50.

²⁴ V. Braun & V. Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* Vol. 3, No.2(2006): 77.

²⁵ Grace Sintim Adasi, Hannah Benedicta Taylor Abdulai and Ransford Churchill, "Gender Politics and Social Change: The Status of Women Leaders in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana," *Canadian Social Science* Vol. 9, No. 6(2013): 107-108.

well-being due to cultural and theological pressures. Pastors underscored the need to maintain a harmonious equilibrium between personal accountability, community support, and divine reliance.

The Agony of a Rural Pastor

Apart from spiritual activities such as long hours of prayer, fasting, exorcism and preparation of sermons each week, a rural pastor is engrossed with visitations, counselling and resolution of disputes in the community.²⁶ Most of these pastors operate in communities plagued with a multitude of issues, including but not limited to poverty, diseases, fractured families, and concerns for witchcraft; coupled with a lack of basic social amenities such as health care facilities, electricity, internet connectivity, wholesome water supply, schools, financial institutions and many more.

Rural Pastoral Life and Ministerial Burnout

Rural pastors in Ghana, especially those in less urbanized areas such as some parts of the Ashanti Region, face significant pastoral challenges. The multiple roles these pastors must assume, combined with inadequate financial remuneration and a lack of training in health care, create an environment ripe for burnout. This phenomenon of burnout is compounded by the isolation of rural pastors who may lack access to peers or counsellors with whom they can share their struggles. Affum-Baffour highlights that burnout among rural pastors is a widespread problem, mainly due to these high expectations and the lack of training in self-care and stress management techniques.²⁷ Without systematic institutional or community support, many of these pastors face severe physical and emotional exhaustion, increasing ministerial burnout rates.

Research findings in the literature regarding burnout among rural pastors can be confirmed by the current study. During the field research, the pastors interviewed highlighted the reality of physical and emotional burnout. Joseph Adomako, for instance, recalls an occasion when he was suffering from malaria but had to manage to deliver a sermon on Sunday morning because there was no one reliable to take up that role.²⁸ No doubt, this pastor could have died or worsened his health situation. Grace Ntiamoah reports fainting during a crusade in one of the villages under her pastoral care.²⁹ This could be very embarrassing and had the potential to subsequently affect her ministry because some could ascribe her unfortunate situation to a paroxysm or demonic attack. Emmanuel Kusi who is in-charge of three communities which are far apart from one another, relates that at one time he was so exhausted from his trips that he could hardly speak.³⁰ In examining pastoral burnout, Adjei explores the critical role that self-care practices play in counteracting this trend in rural Ghanaian ministries.³¹ This affirms the significance of this study.

Stress and Emotional Health of Pastors

While fulfilling one's ministerial calling, pastoral work exposes clergy members to high levels of stress due to the demands placed on them by their congregations. While many pastoral studies have highlighted the psychological stress associated with the ministry, Adwoa Asare explores the emotional stress pastors in the Ashanti Region experience, focusing on emotional labour, societal expectations, and mental strain caused by constant interaction with diverse community problems.³² Asare argues that this chronic stress, if left unchecked, leads to anxiety, depression, and burnout, further exacerbating the challenges rural pastors face in Ghana.³³ The theological education system in Ghana often neglects training in emotional resilience and

²⁶ An interview with a pastor at his residence in the Adansi District, March 10, 2025.

²⁷ Kwasi Affum-Baffour, *Leadership and Pastoral Well-Being: Reflections from Rural Ghana* (Nairobi, Kenya: African Theological Press, 2019), 98.

²⁸ Interviewed by the researchers at his pastoral station in the Adansi District, March 10, 2025.

²⁹ Interviewed at her pastoral station in the Adansi District, March 10, 2025.

³⁰ Interviewed at his pastoral station in the Bodwesango District, March 24, 2025.

³¹ Kojo Adjei, *Burnout in the Ghanaian Ministry: The Impact of Unaddressed Self-Care* (Florida, USA: Church Renewal Press, 2016), 65.

³² Adwoa Asare, *Emotional Labor in Ministry: The Health Implications for Ghanaian Pastors* (Ghana: Ghana Theological Publishing, 2018), 32.

³³ Asare, *Emotional Labor in Ministry* 40.

mental health management, so Emmanuel Osei-Sarpong's call for a curriculum that integrates emotional well-being into pastoral training programmes is timely.³⁴

The fundamental question is, why is it that the idea of pastoral care in Ghana has been approached from a narrowed angle and skewed toward the provision of care for all others except the care-giver, in this case, the pastor? How could one lose sight of the fact that “unless clergy take care of their own needs, they may not be as effective in supporting others.”³⁵ The case is different in many parts of the West. In many parts of the world, pastoral work is considered a profession in the proper sense of the term. Pastors in such jurisdictions earn salaries, have good conditions of service and proper retirement packages. However, in Africa, many church organizations consider pastoral work as a voluntary service and do not have adequate financial and social arrangements for it. A large number of pastors in Ghana, whose church denominations have some monthly financial support for them receive what they called “stipend,” which is a paltry allowance for attending meetings and making calls.

African Theological Perspectives on Pastoral Care and Self-Care

According to James Thompson, pastoral care is fundamentally rooted in Christian theology, drawing from biblical teachings on service, sacrifice, and the call to shepherd God's people.³⁶ Thompson further asserts that the theological basis for pastoral ministry is often traced to Jesus Christ as the “Good Shepherd” (Jn 10:11-14), who lays down His life for His sheep.³⁷ This sacrificial leadership model has shaped Christian understandings of pastoral responsibility for centuries, highlighting selflessness, endurance, and firm service to others. However, Emmanuel Lartey laments that this emphasis on sacrificial service has often led to an imbalance, where self-care is viewed as secondary or a sign of weak faith.³⁸ Meaza et al. assert that the theological foundations of pastoral care are deeply embedded in Christian teachings about sacrifice, service, and selflessness.³⁹ Early Christian writings, particularly the Pauline Epistles, stressed the self-emptying nature of pastoral service, where ministers were expected to place others' needs before their own (Phil. 2:3-8).⁴⁰ The Greek term *kenosis*, meaning “self-emptying,” has been a key theological concept that underscores the humility and total devotion expected of church leaders.⁴¹ While this perspective encourages dedication and commitment, it also contributes to a culture where clergy neglect their well-being, often leading to burnout and emotional exhaustion.

Mercy Amba Oduyoye highlights the importance of reconsidering pastoral care holistically, integrating mind, body, and spirit within the ministry framework. To her, Traditional African Christian theology, has often focused primarily on the spiritual dimension of ministry while neglecting pastors' emotional and physical needs.⁴² Oduyoye further argues that when theological discourse focuses only on spiritual health, pastors feel pressured to ignore their struggles in favor of the congregation's needs. This, in turn, leads to diminished effectiveness in ministry and personal suffering.⁴³

The concept of self-care is not absent in the Bible. Jesus Himself frequently withdrew from the crowds to rest and pray, demonstrating a model of balanced ministry (Mk. 6:31; Lk. 5:16). The Sabbath

³⁴ Emmanuel Osei-Sarpong, *Theology, Well-Being, and Leadership: A Critical Evaluation of Ministerial Formation in Ghanaian Seminaries* (Church and Ministry Publications, 2019), 62.

³⁵ Franco Vacarrino and Tony Gerritsen, “Exploring Clergy Self-care: A New Zealand Study,” *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society* Vol. 3, Issue 3(2013): 69.

³⁶ James W. Thompson, *Pastoral Ministry According to Paul: A Biblical Vision* (South Carolina: Baker Academic, 2006), 56.

³⁷ Thompson, *Pastoral Ministry According to Paul: A Biblical Vision* 60.

³⁸ Emmanuel Y. Lartey, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World* (Sheffield: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013), 45.

³⁹ Meaza T. Woldemichael, Marcel Broesterhuizen, and Axel Liègeois, “Christian Pastoral Care and Psychotherapy: A Need for Theoretical Clarity,” *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* Vol. 67, No. 4(2013): 12.

⁴⁰ G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009), 62.

⁴¹ Paul T. Nimmo and Keith L Johnson, *Kenosis: The Self-Emptying of Christ in Scripture and Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2022), 78.

⁴² Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on the African* (Sheffield: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009), 62.

⁴³ Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on the African*, 71.

principle (Exod. 20:8-11) reinforces the idea that rest is not just permissible but mandated by God for human flourishing. These biblical foundations challenge the notion that self-care contradicts sacrificial service, instead positioning it as a necessary practice for sustained ministry.

Moreover, while advocating for perseverance in ministry, the Apostle Paul also acknowledges pastoral work's physical and emotional toll. In 1 Timothy 5:23, he advises Timothy to care for his health, signifying an early recognition that clergy must attend to their well-being. Augustine of Hippo further developed this understanding, arguing that the love of self in its proper form is not sinful but essential for one's ability to love and serve others.⁴⁴ This theological perspective suggests that self-care is compatible with pastoral ministry and is an integral part of it.

African Christian theology has traditionally emphasized communal well-being, where the leader exists for the benefit of the community. Mbiti articulates this communal identity in his concept of "I am because we are," which has profoundly shaped pastoral expectations in African contexts.⁴⁵ Although this perspective fosters strong community bonds, it also contributes to the overwhelming expectations placed on pastors, who are often viewed as spiritual leaders and all-encompassing care-givers. As a result, African pastors frequently experience extreme pressure to meet the social, economic, and spiritual needs of their congregations without adequate personal support.⁴⁶

Jude Edomwonyi argues that theological training in African seminaries must incorporate pastoral self-care teachings, pointing out that ministry effectiveness depends on pastoral well-being.⁴⁷ He critiques African Christianity's historical tendency to focus on suffering as a measure of faithfulness, noting that this mindset has led many clergy to endure hardship unnecessarily.⁴⁸ Instead, Edomwonyi calls for a reform of African pastoral theology that integrates well-being as a theological priority.⁴⁹ The growing body of theological work on pastoral care suggests that self-care must be understood not as a selfish act but as an act of stewardship.

The doctrine of the *Imago Dei*, (Gen. 1:27) asserts that human beings, including pastors, are made in God's image and are therefore called to nurture their physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.⁵⁰ Similarly, Jesus' commandment to "love your neighbour as yourself," (Mk 12:31) implies a balanced approach focusing on self-care. Therefore, a reimagined pastoral care theology must incorporate self-care as a spiritual discipline. Just as prayer, fasting, and service are necessary for spiritual growth, rest, emotional support, and physical health must also be regarded as essential components of ministry. This theological shift would sustain clergy for long-term service and improve their ability to minister effectively.

Although traditional pastoral theology has drawn attention to sacrifice and selflessness, contemporary theological thought increasingly advocates a balanced approach that includes self-care as a vital part of pastoral ministry. The biblical and theological foundations for self-care exist within scripture and Christian tradition, yet their application remains limited, particularly in African contexts. By integrating self-care into theological training and pastoral practice, the church can nurture healthier, more effective clergy who can serve their communities sustainably.

The Role of Culture in African Pastoral Care

⁴⁴ Henry Chadwick, "New Letters of St. Augustine," *The Journal of Theological Studies* Vol. 34, Issue 2(1983): 425.

⁴⁵ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1970), 89.

⁴⁶ Andrew Purves, *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2001), 73.

⁴⁷ Jude Osarogiabon Edomwonyi, *Balancing Pastoral Care and Social Outreach in the Best Interest of Rural Communities: A Practical Theological Study* (North-West University, South-Africa, 2021), 61.

⁴⁸ Edomwonyi, *Balancing Pastoral Care and Social Outreach in the Best Interest of Rural Communities: A Practical Theological Study* 65.

⁴⁹ Edomwonyi, "Balancing Pastoral Care and Social Outreach in the Best Interest of Rural Communities: A Practical Theological Study", 70.

⁵⁰ Charmiane Choong Poh Lee, *Imago Dei and Its Significance for Pastoral Leadership Effectiveness in a Global Society* (South Africa: North-West University, 2008), 67.

Culture, in general, may not be profound in Pastoral Theology of some Christian traditions, but may subtly influence pastoral actions and inactions. Tapiwa Mucherera asserts that African ideas on pastoral care are deeply embedded in cultural attitudes toward clergy and the communities they serve.⁵¹ In Ghanaian and other African societies, the notion of a pastor as a “spiritual person,” carries significant weight, shaping the expectations placed on religious leaders.⁵² This cultural perception parallels the traditional roles of African spiritual figures such as priests, priestesses, and herbalists, who were seen as intermediaries between the divine and human realms. These figures did not merely provide spiritual guidance but were also healers, conflict mediators, warriors, and community advisors. Similarly, modern Christian pastors, especially in rural Ghana, have inherited these cultural expectations, which require them to be accessible, self-sacrificing, and ever-present for their congregations.⁵³

Kwame Gyasi critiques the immense societal burden on pastors in rural Ghana, particularly in the Ashanti Region. He argues that many pastors are expected to function beyond their spiritual roles, serving as economic providers, psychological counsellors, and mediators in family disputes.⁵⁴ Unlike in Western contexts, where religious leaders often operate within structured institutions that provide resources and support, rural Ghanaian pastors often lack formal institutional backing, leaving them vulnerable to emotional and physical exhaustion.⁵⁵

Samuel Agyemang highlights that in Akan communities, the notion of “spiritual person,” extends beyond religious doctrine to a cultural framework in which the pastor assumes a paternal/maternal role over congregants.⁵⁶ Grace Ntiamoah confirms that in her community, the people consider her as a “spiritual pillar, leader and mother.”⁵⁷ The reality is affirmed by Martha Asare who on a daily basis, is faced with how to navigate her role as the “spiritual mother” of the community.⁵⁸ This relationship demands unwavering commitment, sometimes leading pastors to focus on the needs of others at the expense of their personal well-being.⁵⁹ The expectation to be available at all times, combined with limited access to mental health resources, contributes to severe burnout and stress.

The role of the Christian pastor in Ghana can be compared to that of the traditional spiritual leaders, such as *akomfoɔ*, “traditional priests/priestesses” and *adunsifoɔ*, “herbalists” who historically served as the backbone of religious and social structures in African societies. Francis Acquah notes that traditional priests were deeply integrated into their communities’ spiritual and social life, often living within shrines and temples where they provided counsel, healing, and spiritual protection.⁶⁰ This historical model has influenced contemporary Christian pastors’ views, with congregations expecting them to be powerful, ever-present and deeply involved in all kinds of community affairs.

However, a key difference between traditional priests and Christian pastors is the institutional framework that governs their roles. Traditional priests often operated within a well-defined structure, with apprentices, elders, and spiritual assistants, as well as the chiefs, who supported them. In contrast, most rural

⁵¹ Tapiwa N. Mucherera, *Counseling and Pastoral Care in African and Other Cross-Cultural Contexts* (Sheffield: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2017), 44.

⁵² Mucherera, *Counseling and Pastoral Care in African and Other Cross-Cultural Contexts* 44.

⁵³ Razak Mohammed, “Who will Do All These If I am Not around?": Bonding Social Capital and Health and Well-Being of Inpatients,” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being* Vol. 13, No. 1(2018): 72.

⁵⁴ Kwame Gyasi, *Pastoral Care and Well-Being: The Challenges Facing the Ghanaian Clergy* (Accra: Ghana University Press, 2017), 91.

⁵⁵ Gyasi, *Pastoral Care and Well-Being: The Challenges Facing the Ghanaian Clergy* 95.

⁵⁶ A personal communication with the pastor at his pastoral station in Asokwa District, April 20, 2025.

⁵⁷ A personal communication with the researchers at her pastoral station in the Adansi District, March 10, 2025.

⁵⁸ A personal communication with the researchers at her pastoral station in the Asokwa District, April 20, 2025.

⁵⁹ Daniel Agyemang, *Pastoral Care and Counseling in Ghana: A Study of the Role of the Pastor as a Spiritual Father* (Accra: SonLife Press, 2015), 87.

⁶⁰ Francis Acquah, *The Impact of African Traditional Religious Beliefs and Cultural Values on Christian Relations in Ghana from 1920 Through the Present: A Case Study of Nkusukum-Ekumfi-Enyan Area of The Central Region* (United Kingdom: University of Exeter Press, 2011), 63.

pastors are largely engaged in the ministry work all alone, with limited support systems, making their responsibilities even more demanding.⁶¹

Given these cultural expectations, there is a growing need for a self-care model that aligns with the realities of African pastoral leadership. Gyasi advocates for a framework that recognizes the unique pressures faced by rural pastors while promoting sustainable self-care strategies.⁶² This involves encouraging pastors to develop personal boundaries, seek peer support, and integrate indigenous African wellness practices such as communal rest, storytelling therapy, and traditional healing rituals into their self-care routines. Amadu Bamba further explores how communal norms shape pastoral leadership's health and relational boundaries.⁶³ While African culture highlights collective well-being, this collectivism sometimes results in unrealistic expectations of pastors. Thus, Bamba suggests that self-care initiatives should be embedded within community structures, encouraging congregations to actively support their pastors' health rather than solely depending on them for all assistance.⁶⁴

All of this is to say that the cultural perception of pastors as spiritual persons in Ghana and other African societies places significant demands on their physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. These expectations, rooted in historical and traditional African religious practices, require pastors to function beyond their ecclesiastical mandates. However, unlike their traditional counterparts, Christian pastors often lack structured support systems, making self-care an urgent necessity.

Self-care of Pastors in Ghana

The closest majority of pastors in Ghana come to regarding the concept of care in ministry is a body of knowledge meant to conscientize and prepare them to offer care and counselling to their church members and the vulnerable in society. The content of the curriculum for pastoral education and training in many of the seminaries in Africa emphasizes pastoral care for others and focuses less on pastoral self-care. This is because in the African context, a pastor is thought to be superhuman or at least, a hybrid of human and divine who could be at the mercy of supernatural provisions. A pastor is expected to show an unquestionable resilience in the face of adversities and display bravado against weakness, fear and pain. In that context, an expression of hunger, pain, tiredness, sorrow and other similar human emotions is considered as an element of weakness. These cultural worldviews feed into the pastoral makeup of an African pastor. Thus, some die too early, others break down in the course of the ministry earlier than expected, and still others suffer in silence.

However, many pastors do not consider self-care to be selfish, but as a sacred duty. In personal interactions with some of the respondents, Daniel Kwabena asserted that self-care is a spiritual discipline, essential to his ministry.⁶⁵ Isaac Ofori could not agree more with Kwabena when he described self-care as a form of devotion to God.⁶⁶ Mary Boateng affirms that God desires to keep ministers of the Gospel healthy, not fatigued.⁶⁷ To buttress this point, Grace Ntiamoah alludes to Jesus, who occasionally withdrew from the multitude and went to solitary places for refilling.⁶⁸ Thus, one could say that, among all the respondents, self-care is elevated from a personal need to a theological necessity. The views of the respondents are in sync with those of Augustine, who argued against the notion that self-care is sinful.⁶⁹ The point is that one cannot empty oneself for others if oneself is empty. Hence, pastors' self-care prioritization is not a theological

⁶¹ Joseph Atuahene Owusu, *A Comparative Study of the Prophets of African Indigenous Churches and Akan Traditional Priests: A Critical Examination of Their Training* (Accra: University of Ghana Press, 2010), 89.

⁶² Gyasi, *Pastoral Care and Well-Being*, 102.

⁶³ Amadu Bamba, *African Theology and the Well-Being of Pastors in the African Community* (Kenya: University of Nairobi Press, 2013), 77.

⁶⁴ Bamba, *African Theology and the Well-Being of Pastor* 80.

⁶⁵ A personal communication with the respondent at his pastoral station in the Adansi District, March 10, 2025.

⁶⁶ A personal communication with the respondent at his pastoral station in the Bodwesango District, March 24, 2025.

⁶⁷ Interviewed at her pastoral station in the Bodwesango District, March 24, 2025.

⁶⁸ Interviewed at his pastoral station in the Adansi District, March 10, 2025.

⁶⁹ Henry Chardwick, "New Letters of St. Augustine," 425.

aberration but a necessary humanity. Of course, there is no gainsaying view that pastoral well-being is essential for ministry effectiveness.⁷⁰

However, pastors are gently dismantling the myth of their superhuman resilience. This is affirmed by Isaac Ofori that his congregation have begun recognizing that he is human with needs, emotions and limitations.⁷¹ Their congregations are slowly learning to provide care in return. This reshapes the pastoral role into one marked by reciprocity and mutual support.

Thus, some rural pastors having experienced or sensed stress-induced danger have begun taking self-care as a serious issue in their religious work. In a personal communication with some of the respondents, they often seek solitude in the nearby highlands for prayer and meditation.⁷² Similarly, Joseph Amoako dedicates a day in a week when he recuses himself from his pastoral routines and strolls through the forest as a way of relaxation and for mental rejuvenation.⁷³ Samuel Agyemang takes time each day to listen to music and sits under shady trees to relax.⁷⁴ In addition to taking rest when necessary, Emmanuel Kusi resorts to herbal medicines for his personal health challenges and consumes a lot of vegetables to stay healthy.⁷⁵ On her part, Grace Ntiamoah ensures that minor tasks are delegated to some of her elders to lessen the pastoral burden on herself.⁷⁶

From the foregoing, one would observe that though the respondents showed their desire for pastoral self-care, their understanding is somewhat limited. Some of the models they have adopted are likely to increase their stress. For instance, climbing a mountain for prayer and meditation or strolling through a forest, could be spiritually refreshing but has the potential to create burnout for a rural pastor. Those who resort to unprescribed herbal medicines for their health needs may end up compromising their health conditions. All of this shows that although these pastors are crafting new paradigm of ministry, where divine service includes rest, human fragility is honoured and sustainability is wisely prioritized, there is a need for pastoral self-care education for rural pastors and awareness in the nation as a whole.

Humanizing the African Pastor without Desecrating the Spirit

The context within which the African pastor is nurtured and ministers, poses some significant challenges for their longevity and well-being, and effectiveness of pastoral ministry in rural Ghana. The *akɔmfɔɔ* and *adunsifoɔ* caste, fashioned for pastors in Africa, is unfortunately prejudiced. The traditional priests/priestesses and herbalists not only have numerous people assisting them in the discharge of their duties, but also their services are frequently not free. On many occasions, their clients are required to present foodstuffs, domestic animals and cash for sacrifices to be made for them. These sacrificial items, whether used or not in the sacrificial process, end up furnishing the homes of the priests/herbalists. Some other times, the clients are actually charged to pay an amount before services are rendered to them. Aside from all these “legitimate” benefits, subscribers of the services of traditional priests and herbalists are expected to return with better and higher items and or cash to redeem their *mmaase*, “thanksgiving” promises when their expectations are met. In addition, the operations of a traditional priest/priestess can be likened to a sole-proprietor, where he/she takes absolute control over all the income received from the services rendered.

The plight of a rural pastor is in stark contrast to that of a traditional priest or herbalist. Historical records indicate that some of the missionary-led churches in Ghana used to distribute food items to the rural people in order to attract them to Christian evangelistic and church meetings. This has promoted a dependence mentality legacy among rural church members. In a graphical description, one of the respondents stated that their ministerial experience was “likened to drawing water from an empty well.”⁷⁷ This metaphor

⁷⁰ Edomwonyi, *Balancing Pastoral Care and Social Outreach in the Best Interest of Rural Communities* 65.

⁷¹ A personal interaction with the pastor at his station in Bodwesango District, March 24, 2025.

⁷² In an interview with Daniel Kwabena at his pastoral station in Adansi District, March 10, 2025.

⁷³ A personal communication with the pastor at his station in Adansi District, March 10, 2025.

⁷⁴ A personal interaction with him at his pastoral station in Asokwa District, April 20, 2025.

⁷⁵ In an interview with the respondent at his pastoral station in Bodwesango District, March 24, 2025.

⁷⁶ She was interviewed at her residence in the Adansi District, March 10, 2025.

⁷⁷ A personal interaction with Samuel Agyemang at his pastoral station in the Asokwa District, April 20, 2025.

reflects the expectations placed on rural pastors. They are to draw spiritual, emotional, physical and economic strength from God, yet the rural church congregation relies heavily on them for their own well-being and survival. Consequently, when pastors cannot meet these demands, some of the members have chosen to stop participating in fellowship altogether.

In many cases, unlike traditional priests, rural pastors rely solely on their spouses and children for support. They bear the weight of the ministry alone, yet they are not only expected to attend to the demands of their church members but also fulfil financial obligations to their church headquarters. This situation is particularly common among rural pastors serving in some of the missionary-led and Pentecostal churches. These churches typically operate under an episcopal or Presbyterian system of governance, where authority rests either with a bishop at the top of a hierarchical structure or a powerful group of elders, in the case of the Presbyterian model, who have oversight responsibilities of the church. Most rural pastors under these systems of church governance are not comparable to traditional priests in terms of well-being and conditions of service. While traditional priests run their religious affairs as sole proprietors, accountable to no one, most rural pastors are required to report to their headquarters and senior pastors. They are often required to remit a percentage of the offerings and tithes collected, on a weekly or monthly basis.

However, the narrative is quite different among those in the African Initiated/Indigenous Churches (AICs), especially, the Neo-prophetic ministries. These ones operate like African chiefs. They strategically incorporate cultural frameworks of reverence afforded to chiefs and traditional priests into their ministerial practices. Although it occupies a distinct religious role, its influence within local communities parallels that of indigenous spiritual leaders. Their church members are at their beck and call, often voluntarily organizing agricultural tasks such as weeding, sowing, harvesting, husking and shelling to support their pastors. Moreover, it is customary for church members to assume responsibility for maintaining both the temples and the pastors' manses.

In addition to these acts of service, many voluntarily contribute essential resources such as foodstuffs, water, and firewood, thereby ensuring the material sustenance of pastoral households.

The single women in the church are at his disposal. He is free to marry as many as he can. In many instances, it is considered a privilege for those women whom the pastor chooses to marry, reflecting the high esteem in which the pastoral office is held. These practices are frequently justified to ensure that the pastor's material, financial and emotional needs are taken care of so that he can have the right frame of mind to minister effectively.

This irony within the rural pastorate is particularly striking. Although rural pastors serving either missionary-led or Neo-prophetic churches operate within the same communities, their congregations respond to them in markedly different ways. Although both groups of pastors are recognized as spiritual leaders, the interpretation and practical expression of that role vary significantly across the diverse Christian traditions in rural Ghana.

In Neo-prophetic churches, congregants' perception of their pastors as spiritual leaders is understood as them being divine conduits, uniquely positioned to facilitate access to the spiritual realm. Their role is like the mantis of the Ancient Near East, which functioned as an oracle of the gods. This understanding is deeply embedded in the theology and practice of such churches, where the pastor often embodies "prophetic" authority and spiritual insight. Through dreams, visions, and revelatory messages, the pastor is believed to channel guidance, healing, and breakthroughs from God to the people. As a result, congregants' spiritual experiences and engagements are frequently mediated through their pastor, reinforcing a strong dependence on his or her spiritual gifts and perceived proximity to the divine. This elucidates the reasons why unlike their colleagues in the missionary-led churches, pastors in Neo-prophetic churches are lavished with gifts and offerings.

Health and Medical Support for Rural Pastors

Rural pastors in Africa, including those in the Ashanti Region, often lack easy access to medical services due to inadequate healthcare infrastructure.⁷⁸ This lack of access results in untreated illnesses and general health deterioration among clergy members. Gyasi explains that although Ghana has made significant strides in healthcare, rural pastors often lack proper medical care.⁷⁹ Stress in managing congregational needs, combined with a lack of available medical services, exacerbates their physical health problems. Kojo Adjei describes rural Ghana's healthcare access issue as one of the principal barriers to the well-being of rural pastors, particularly those serving in isolated areas where even transportation to nearby towns is not readily available.⁸⁰

Mental health remains a highly unaddressed area of pastoral training, particularly within African theological education systems. As Elias Lunga notes, there is a gap between the mental health needs of African clergy and their theological preparation, which traditionally underlines doctrinal education over personal health and well-being.⁸¹ Lunga advocates for the development of an integrative model of pastoral formation that includes mental health education, training in stress management, and wellness programmes, tailored to the ministry's specific demands.⁸² Scholars argue that emotional resilience and coping strategies should form core components of any pastoral education, as pastoral burnout can lead to ineffective ministry, early retirement, or even psychological crises.⁸³

Community and Church Support Systems for Pastors' Health

In African communities, the communal nature of society often extends to pastoral roles, where community and church members offer various forms of support to clergy.⁸⁴ However, Magezi argues that these support systems are inadequate to meet the emotional, mental, and physical needs of pastors.⁸⁵ In rural communities, where economic support is often minimal, local congregations must establish structures beyond providing financial aid to ensure that pastors have time for rest, emotional healing, and physical care. Drawing on indigenous models of communal well-being, Lunga highlights the importance of collective responsibility for clergy care within African church communities. He advocates for new community-based self-care systems where pastoral leadership can access continuous support.⁸⁶

Financial Stress and Economic Support for Rural Pastors

Financial instability is another primary concern for many rural pastors.⁸⁷ The rural areas of Ghana often do not generate enough tithes and offerings or provide revenues for pastors to support themselves. Without a sustainable income or church-sponsored health insurance schemes, pastors in rural areas face financial insecurity that contributes to overall stress. Affum-Baffour indicates that this economic pressure results in poverty cycles in which pastors cannot afford the necessary health care or self-care practices.⁸⁸ Churches and theological institutions can help address these issues through conferences, seminars and workshops to educate pastors on how to enhance their economic stability.

Organizational and Institutional Models for Pastoral Wellness

⁷⁸ Jackson Andrew Hester, *Stress and Longevity in Pastoral Ministry: A Phenomenological Study* (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018), 76.

⁷⁹ Gyasi, *Pastoral Care and Well-Being* 89.

⁸⁰ Kojo Adjei, *Access to Health Care for Clergy: A Case Study of Rural Ghana* (Accra: University of Ghana Press, 2020), 71.

⁸¹ Elias Lunga, *Ministry and Health in Africa: Re-Thinking Pastoral Care* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 82.

⁸² Lunga, *Ministry and Health in Africa* 50.

⁸³ Benjamin A Griffin, *Challenges of Pastoral Leaders: Maintaining Resilience While Contemplating Transitioning out of Ministry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 131.

⁸⁴ Vhumani Magezi, "Community Healing and the Role of Pastoral Care of the Ill and Suffering in Africa," *In Die Skriflig* Vol. 40, No. 3(2006): 505.

⁸⁵ Magezi, "Community Healing and the Role of Pastoral Care of the Ill and Suffering in Africa," 507.

⁸⁶ Lunga, *Ministry and Health in Africa* 98.

⁸⁷ Crystal Mary Burnette, *Burnout among Pastors in Local Church Ministry in Relation to Pastor, Congregation Member, and Church Organizational Outcomes* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2016), 75.

⁸⁸ Affum-Baffour, *Leadership and Pastoral Well-Being: Reflections from Rural Ghana*, 112.

A growing body of research suggests that formalizing wellness programmes for clergy through churches and theological education institutions can have a significant positive impact.⁸⁹ Kojo Asamoah examines different models of pastoral wellness in both African and Western contexts, advocating for programmatic interventions that offer counselling, physical health monitoring, and relational support to pastors.⁹⁰ Kwame Nkrumah's work also indicates that institution-driven wellness initiatives can counteract pastoral stress by providing an alternative to informal, ad hoc self-care practices that may not meet the actual needs of clergy.⁹¹

RECOMMENDATIONS/THEOLOGICAL DIRECTION

Church leadership bodies should establish institutional support systems such as mandatory sabbaticals, counselling services, and healthcare benefits to address pastoral burnout and improve clergy wellness. Additionally, denominational organizations should develop financial assistance programmes such as subsidies, insurance plans, and low-interest loans to alleviate financial burdens and support clergy well-being. Congregational members must be sensitized through education initiatives to reduce excessive demands on pastors while promoting a shared responsibility for their health and well-being. Denominations should create peer support networks that foster mentorship, encourage experience-sharing, and provide emotional support for rural pastors to combat feelings of isolation. Churches should enforce rest and recreation policies by ensuring pastors take vacations and participate in regular retreats designed for leisure and renewal.

To address healthcare challenges, the government should collaborate with churches to establish accessible healthcare services for people serving the nation in various capacities in rural areas, including mobile clinics and tailored medical packages. Collaborative efforts between the Ghanaian government and church organizations should lead to rural clergy development initiatives that provide infrastructure support and highlight pastors' contributions to community development.

The study recommends that theological institutions, seminaries and Bible Schools incorporate holistic pastoral self-care training into their curricula, highlighting physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being alongside traditional ministerial preparation. Finally, research institutions and theological colleges should draw attention to further research on rural Ghana's cultural, economic, and gender-specific challenges to pastoral self-care, generating data-driven recommendations for sustained pastoral well-being and effective ministry.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the critical issue of pastoral self-care in rural communities of the Ashanti Region of Ghana, highlighting the multifaceted challenges pastors face, including financial instability, inadequate healthcare access, and cultural expectations that foster overwork and isolation. The findings revealed that many pastors have a narrowed understanding of self-care, focusing primarily on spiritual disciplines while neglecting their physical, emotional, and mental health, contributing significantly to burnout. Unexpected findings showed that some congregations are aware of pastors' struggles and attempt to support them informally, reflecting the potential for collaboration between communities and institutional structures. Moreover, despite their challenges, pastors demonstrate remarkable resilience, sustained by their faith and sense of calling. The study concludes that holistic support systems, integrated self-care training, and collaborative efforts between churches, government, and theological institutions are essential to address these gaps effectively. By addressing these issues, pastors' well-being and ministerial effectiveness in rural Ghana can be significantly improved, offering valuable insights into sustainable ministry in similar contexts throughout Africa. The research contributes valuable insights into the role of self-care in enhancing ministerial effectiveness. It reveals how structural and cultural dynamics within Ghanaian churches enable or hinder pastors' well-being. Addressing these issues holistically, with coordinated efforts by churches,

⁸⁹ Jacobson et al., "Risk for Burnout and Compassion Fatigue and Potential for Compassion Satisfaction among Clergy: Implications for Social Work and Religious Organizations," 131.

⁹⁰ Kojo Asamoah, *Developing a Pastoral Wellness Program for African Clergy* (Kenya: African Theological Press, 2017), 61.

⁹¹ Kwame Nkrumah, *Sustaining Pastoral Care: From Challenges to Models of Support* (Accra, Ghana: University of Ghana Press, 2021), 78.

government, and communities, could transform the lives of clergy and the overall effectiveness of rural ministry. The results make a substantial contribution to the study by emphasising the impact of African cultural expectations, spiritual discipline, and limited institutional support on rural clergy's daily lives and health practices. Consequently, they validate the urgent need for a contextually grounded self-care framework in pastoral ministry. This study has emphasized that pastors' self-care prioritization is not a theological aberration but a necessary humanity.

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