


Discipleship Approach for Local Church Leaders in the Kigali City – East Central Rwanda Field



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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to examine the perception and practice of spiritual disciplines among local church leaders in the East Central Rwanda Field of the Seventh-day Adventist Church based in the City of Kigali. A total of 160 leaders, including elders and local department directors, from 38 churches in the area were randomly selected to participate in the study. Data was collected through a self-constructed questionnaire. The data underwent exploratory analysis and was assessed for reliability and validity using Cronbach's alpha. The findings indicated that a lack of spiritual training was the primary factor contributing to disengagement. Church elders and local department directors expressed their willingness to serve but admitted their inefficiency due to lack of proper training. Consequently, it was recommended that local church leaders should receive training in spiritual practices to help enhance their discipleship as they care for the believers. Numerous research studies have been conducted, but none of them have specifically focused on the impact of discipleship on the leaders of the local church. Although the success of the church is closely linked to leadership at the local level, this study has emphasized the importance of discipleship at the local level in training lay leaders, an area that has not received much attention.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Kigali City has experienced significant growth both in terms of membership and infrastructure. Unfortunately, over the past three years, there has been a noticeable absence of a structured discipleship program for local church leaders, which has resulted in their limited engagement with spiritual activities within the church. Local church leaders tend to be absent during mid-week prayer meetings, based on my observations. Only 10% of church elders (2 out of 20) and 12% of local department directors (3 out of 25) frequently attend church activities on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at sunset at Remera Church, one of the largest churches in the city. When assigned to speak to their congregations, local leaders often fulfil the requirement but may deliver a short, meaningless message with incoherent biblical references. Most local church leaders tend to hide their weaknesses. Due to a lack of preparation they resorted to reading pages one after another from the Spirit of Prophecy books during the sermon. When churches plan a week of spiritual emphasis or an evangelistic campaign, they typically seek out a literature evangelist to be the main speaker, as elders and local department directors may not feel equipped for such activities. Church leaders arriving late to Sabbath School suggests a waning commitment. This trend appears to be consistent across all churches in Kigali

City. Unfortunately, this lack of leadership presence has resulted in dry and unfulfilling prayer meetings, which has led to decreased motivation among church members to participate. This may increase the risk of members joining heretical sects or even backsliding.

Nevertheless, there are some other areas where local church leaders still exhibit commitment such as donating to the cause and constructing church buildings. Although church leaders have some weaknesses in discipleship, they are willing to learn how to perform their duties and strengthen their spiritual journey. When invited for spiritual training, they participate in considerable numbers. Duron declared that the lack of a prompt discipleship program was the root cause of Christianity and morality decline. She said that as Christianity is declining in America, so is morality.¹ Church leaders who have served long invent their way of duty, missing the basics of discipleship. Asamoah-Gyadu said there was a concern for the discipleship process in African Churches as far as the ministries are concerned... there is a need for the optimization of Christian impact in Africa.² Byler stated that spiritual transformation in a leader's life will produce trust and confidence in followers, who will more willingly adopt their leader's choice.³

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed a significant gap in the local church leadership ranks. Before disciplining others, it is important to disciple local church leaders. The city's churches have lost many elders and local department directors. At least 8.5% of leaders have embraced false beliefs about vaccines, leading church members astray who rely on their guidance. Boyd has stated that disciple-making is a continuous process that consists of two elements: bringing others to Christ through baptism and instructing them to adhere to Christ's teachings.⁴ The modern church continues to carry out the command of baptizing, but it seems to place less emphasis on teaching. The New Testament presents a variety of teaching methods, including learning, strengthening, encouraging, training, and many others. This study highlights training as the most crucial aspect of discipleship in terms of the process. Shirley believed that being a disciple is largely influenced by teaching. He emphasized that teaching provides a strong foundation for a biblical perspective, by offering both structured and unstructured opportunities for learning and practice.⁵ The church's recovery from that loss requires serious investment in spiritual formation from its leadership. Rivera defined biblical discipleship as the process of forming, transforming, and applying the Word of God in a believer's life.⁶ The main objective of this study is to analyze the perception of local church leaders on the indicators of spiritual disciplines. The specific aim of this study is to evaluate the practice of spiritual disciplines among local church leaders.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hull stated that discipleship ranks as God's top priority because Jesus practised it and commanded us to do it, and his followers continued it.⁷ He then deplored that discipleship was being neglected and discarded by many today as optional or only for the radical believer.⁸ Lastly, he concluded that most Christians are spiritually immature.⁹ Another writer has emphasized the importance of discipleship, noting that although Christ and the apostles placed great importance on it, the voices of well-known pastors, authors, and theologians who have sounded the alarm over the years seem to be lost in today's busy and fast-paced lifestyles.¹⁰ Being deeply committed to discipleship, James believed that effective discipleship would produce the leaders and believers necessary for every church to succeed. Nouwen has posited that a rule

¹ S. Duron, "Discipleship Renewed: Returning to the Ancient Teachings of Jesus as the Manual for Modern-Day Christianity" (Southeastern University, 2023), <https://firescholars.seu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1025&context=dmin>.

² J Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "'Go Near and Join Thyself to This Chariot...': African Pneumatic Movements and Transformational Discipleship," *International Review of Mission* 106, no. 2 (2017): 336–55, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/irom.12190>.

³ J. Byler, *The Heart of a Christian Leader* (Lancaster, PA: Global Disciples, 2010).

⁴ L. A. Boyd, "Discipleship and the Church," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1980), https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1250&context=lts_fac_pubs.

⁵ Chris Shirley, "It Takes a Church to Make a Disciple: An Integrative Model of Discipleship for the Local Church," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 50, no. 2 (2008): 207–24, https://swbtsv7.s3.amazonaws.com/media/Theology_Journal/50.2/50.2_Shirley.pdf.

⁶ S. L. Rivera, "Intentional Discipleship: Implementing a Theology of Discipleship for Spiritual Growth" (Liberty University, 2023), <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6079&context=doctoral>.

⁷ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (NavPress, Kindle Locations, 2014).

⁸ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*, 458-459.

⁹ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*, 458-459.

¹⁰ Fink Todd M., *Biblical Discipleship: Essential Components for Attaining Spiritual Maturity* (Sutherlin, OR: Selah Book Press, 2017).

of life or spiritual exercise can enrich Christian spirituality.¹¹ Wilson used spiritual formation interchangeably with spiritual disciplines, equating it to discipleship in Jesus' earthly ministry.¹² Peterson discussed the concept of "born-again Christians" and noted that while many people claim to have experienced a spiritual rebirth, there is often little evidence of mature Christian discipleship in their lives. He recognized that there is a significant demand for religious experiences, but little desire for the patient and disciplined apprenticeship required to develop a deep and meaningful faith.¹³ Alemayehu warned about the elephant that walks into churches. The author says that unfortunately, it is widely recognized that non-discipleship is the elephant in the Christian church today. He then specifically addressed the issue in the SDA Church. The writer added that despite its exponential growth, it has at the same time suffered disturbing membership losses. Lastly, he recommended that it is high time to refocus on discipleship—the heart of the Great Commission.¹⁴

In the abstract of his paper, Peck addressed the core issue of consistent discipleship in the Adventist Church in Rwanda. He wrote that one of the most important concerns of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Rwanda was how to deal effectively with the numerical growth of new converts.¹⁵ He then indicated that few pastors were equipped to care for the increasing number of members.¹⁶ Last, he proposed to develop a program providing theological education and training for pastors and mature local church leaders to improve their leadership abilities and skills.¹⁷ As per Nsengimana, small group discipleship was one of the methods used to enhance the growth of the church in Gikondo.¹⁸ Gikondo is one of the Seventh-day Adventist biggest churches in Kigali City. He did not mention discipleship training for local church leaders.

Authors have spent time describing how spiritual disciplines are essential components of discipleship. Monaghan said that we do not know God apart from the disciplines, but the disciplines are only a means to the end of knowing God.¹⁹ Dallas emphasized that the gospel word and the Holy Spirit bring new life to persons dead in sin utilizing spiritual disciplines.²⁰ Two other authors said that as practices of transformation, the spiritual disciplines offer an open door to depth-oriented habits... they create opportunities for individuals to be transformed.²¹

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study was quantitative and aimed to assess the perception of church leaders, specifically church elders and department directors of local churches in Kigali City, regarding discipleship. It considered various factors that reflect spiritual disciplines, such as regular personal prayer, family worship, fasting, journaling, home visitation, bible study, mentoring new converts, and fair-sharing. Foster said that the disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us.²² Vos emphasized three disciplines of prayer, meditation, and study of scripture have often been thought of as indispensable to the

¹¹ H. J. M. Nouwen, *Reaching out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (Kampala, Uganda: Fountain Publishers, 1996).

¹² T. Wilson, "Christian Spiritual Formation," *Emerging Leadership Journeys* 10, no. 1 (2017): 126–37, https://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/elj/vol10iss1/ELJ_Vol10_Iss1_full_issue.pdf#page=115.

¹³ E. H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019).

¹⁴ Melak Alemayehu Tsegaw, "Refocusing on Discipleship: The Heart of the Great Commission and the Hub of All Local Church Ministries," *Ministry Magazine*, 2019, <https://cdn.ministrymagazine.org/issues/2019/issues/MIN2019-04.pdf>.

¹⁵ Robert G. Peck, "Theological Education in Context: A Pilot Extension Program for the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Rwanda" (Andrews University, 1992), 5. <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/dmin/643>.

¹⁶ Peck, "Theological Education in Context: A Pilot Extension Program for the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Rwanda," 5.

¹⁷ Peck, "Theological Education in Context: A Pilot Extension Program for the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Rwanda," 5.

¹⁸ Schadrack Nsengimana, "Using a Small Group Approach to Increase Church Growth in the Gikondo Seventh-Day Adventist Church" (Andrews University, 2014), <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/dmin/253/>.

¹⁹ R. S. Monaghan, "Spiritual Disciplines," JacobsWellNJ.org, n.d.,

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5021315e24acd9bf56e6893f/t/58b872f8b3db2b27f6440a2a/1488483067306/disciplines_web_jw.pdf.

²⁰ Dallas Willard, "Spiritual Disciplines, Spiritual Formation, and the Restoration of the Soul," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 26, no. 1 (March 8, 1998): 101–9, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009164719802600108>.

²¹ Davin J. Carr-Chellman and Michael Kroth, "The Spiritual Disciplines as Practices of Transformation," in *Religion and Theology: Breakthroughs in Research and Practice* (IGI Global, 2020), 293–307, <https://www.igi-global.com/chapter/the-spiritual-disciplines-as-practices-of-transformation/246193>.

²² R. J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline, Special Anniversary Edition: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2018).

journey of faith.²³ The study's instrumentation relied on a questionnaire, with each discipline guiding the formulation of the questions.

Population and Sampling

The study was conducted among the churches in Kigali City, and local leaders from 38 churches were selected for investigation because they displayed the characteristics being studied. The study focused on a population of 950 local church leaders. Convenience sampling was used to select participants. The researcher selected 160 elders and local department directors based on availability and accessibility.

Instruments

The study utilized a self-constructed questionnaire consisting of eight statements related to the crucial factors associated with discipleship to gather data. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale to measure the items, where 1 = strongly disagree (SD), 2 = disagree (D), 3 = neutral (N), 4 = agree (A), and 5 = strongly agree (SA). (See the questionnaire in the appendices).

Data analysis

Data were analyzed through exploratory analysis. For each variable, the centre and spread of results were described. The data were stored in a database using Excel, and Excel and SPSS were used to conduct data analysis.

Validity and Reliability

This research refers to how consistently a measure or questionnaire produces the same results when repeated using the same subjects under the same conditions. Cronbach's alpha is a statistical measure commonly used to evaluate the internal consistency of a questionnaire. In this research, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.8, which strongly indicates that the questionnaire is reliable.

Ethical Considerations

The questionnaire began with an introduction and an informed consent page before the questions. Respondents were not obligated to participate, and their confidentiality was guaranteed. They had the freedom to decline at any point if they wished to do so. To maintain the integrity of the data, any fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism was strictly avoided.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Demographics of Respondents

The age range of the respondents was 18 to 65+. Out of the total respondents, 89 (55.6%) were males, while 71 (44.6%) were females. The study classified the respondents into four age groups. 33 (20.6%) were aged between 18 to 34, 68 (42.5%) were aged between 35 to 49, 37 (23.1%) were aged between 50 to 64, and 22 (13.7%) were aged 65 years and above. Five educational levels were also considered. These are primary, high school, undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate. Out of the total respondents, 11 (6.8%) did the primary, 52 (32.5%) did the high school, 47 (29.3%) did the undergraduate, 36 (22.5%) did the graduate, and 14 (8.7%) did the postgraduate.

Table 1: Data collected on 8 items defining spiritual disciplines.

SN	Variables	SA /A	N	D/SD	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Regular Prayer	90 (56.2%)	5 (3.1%)	65 (40.6%)	3.5	0.65
2	Family Worship	79 (49.3%)	3(1.8%)	78 (48.7%)	3.2	0.62

²³ Beverly Vos, "The Spiritual Disciplines and Christian Ministry.," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 36, no. 2 (2012), https://professorphanor.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/SpiritualDisciplines.Simplicity.Week6_.Highlighted.pdf.

3	Fasting	46 (28.7%)	4(2.5%)	110(68.7%)	2.7	0.71
4	Journaling	55 (34.3%)	10(6.2%)	95(59.3%)	2.2	0.63
5	Home visitation	72 (45%)	8(5%)	80(50%)	3.3	0.68
6	Bible study	110 (68.7%)	1(0.6%)	49(30.6%)	4.0	0.72
7	Mentoring new converts	53(33.1%)	8(5%)	99 (61.8 %)	2.9	0.68
8	Faith-sharing	67(41.8%)	7(4.3%)	86 (53.8%)	2.3	0.81

SA/A stands for Strongly Agree and Agree, N for Neutral, and D/SD for Disagree and Strongly Disagree.

Prayer: Allocating a specific time for personal prayer is crucial for one's spiritual journey. According to the table provided, more than half (40.6%) of the respondents do not consider regular prayer as a significant part of discipleship. This lack of emphasis on prayer can negatively impact spiritual growth, as prayer is a crucial element of Christianity. David and al. said prayer is an important aspect of many people's daily lives, yet little is known about the relationships between prayer and daily experiences.²⁴ The strength of our connection with God is largely dependent on the time we allocate to personal prayer. Nelson wrote that prayer is the primary connection that allows us to receive God's Spirit, which enables us to be spiritual.²⁵ Coleman defined prayer as the communication of the soul with the Spirit of the Lord.²⁶ Chuck adds another element of prayer as a discipline. He said prayer opens the door for God to do glorious work in his disciples.²⁷ As it becomes a habit, genuine prayer will produce positive changes in Christian life; and that is discipleship.

Family worship: It is important to spend enough time in family worship as it plays a significant role in spiritual formation. The findings revealed that 48.7% of local church leaders did not spend a reasonable time in family worship. The implication is that believers may become legalistic and only worship at church, due to the neglect of worship in their homes. This study agrees with Wallace that worship is a response to God's grace and call to discipleship.²⁸ Louis emphasizes that all of the purposes for having family worship tend to lead one to sanctification, bringing a person to faith, strengthening that faith, keeping one in that faith, and bringing forth fruits of that faith.²⁹ George recommended it is of great importance that very suitable means for promoting the Christian life should have a place within the home.³⁰ Discipleship is a long-life process of spiritual growth. Family worship as a daily practice contributes to increasing Christian life at home.

Spiritual fasting: Regular fasting plays a crucial role in achieving spiritual transformation. The study found that 68.7% of local church leaders disagreed with the statement above. The implication is that they may not be aware of their spiritual emptiness, making self-sacrifice difficult. Monaghan said that fasting is the abstention from something for spiritual reasons.³¹ Ryan emphasized that fasting is inviting the action of the Holy Spirit.³² Lynne went further saying that fasting ushers Christians into a reflective place where

²⁴ David B Newman, John B Nezelek, and Todd M Thrash, "The Dynamics of Prayer in Daily Life and Implications for Well-Being.," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 124, no. 6 (2023): 1299, <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2023-35376-001>.

²⁵ Alan E. Nelson, *Spirituality & Leadership: Harnessing the Wisdom, Guidance, and Power of the Soul* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2016).

²⁶ Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship* (Old Tappan, NJ: F.H. Revell, 1998).

²⁷ Chuck Smith, *Effective Prayer Life* (Word for Today, 2000).

²⁸ Robin Knowles Wallace, "Worship and Becoming Disciples," *Quarterly Review-Nashville-United Methodist Publishing House-* 23, no. 2 (2003): 131–40, https://www.academia.edu/20295658/Disciples_of_the_Future.

²⁹ Louis J. Sievert, "Worship in the Home: Family Devotions," 1978, <http://essays.wisluhsem.org:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/3725/SievertDevotions.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

³⁰ George E Horr, "Family Worship," *The Biblical World* 27, no. 2 (1906): 104–11, <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdf/10.1086/473702>.

³¹ Monaghan, "Spiritual Disciplines."

³² Thomas P. Ryan, *Disciplines for Christian Living: Interfaith Perspectives* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1993).

they can listen to God and pray wholeheartedly for things that really matter.³³ Dimitri urged that Christians should be fully aware of the ultimate ground of their privilege to fast and to pray. Then he gave two purposes of fasting: to render more apt for prayer, and to bring back into relationship with God.³⁴ That relationship with God is what discipleship is all about.

Bible journaling: Bible journaling plays a vital role in nurturing spiritual development.

The results revealed that 59.3% disagreed with the notion that spiritual journaling is highly important in the process of discipleship. Thus, the leaders of the local church may not be able to effectively practice other spiritual disciplines in their daily lives. The study concurred with Whitney who said that journaling helps to maintain the other spiritual disciplines.³⁵ Olan revealed that the goal of Bible journaling is not just gaining information but rather a spiritual transformation.³⁶ Jim specified that journaling is more than keeping a diary, rather it involves reflection. He then indicated the objectives of journaling. First, it enables us to remember and clarify thoughts, feelings, and ideas. Second, it helps to see patterns of behaviour of which one may not be aware.³⁷ Luci affirmed that if you become a consistent journal keeper, you will change and be changed.³⁸ Spiritual journaling fosters a sense of mindfulness in the life of the journal keeper.

Home visitation: Visiting homes helps to foster relationships and build trust between local church leaders and members of the church community. The study found that 50% of respondents did not value this spiritual exercise, which resulted in inadequate care for church members and made them susceptible to following false teachers. The study is in agreement with White as she gives two advantages of home visitation: acquaintance with people and people's establishment.³⁹ The tradition of home visitations plays a crucial role in fostering trust and camaraderie among local church authorities and congregants. This mutual trust strengthens their bond and encourages church members to attentively heed the guidance provided by their leaders.

Bible study: To promote effective discipleship, local church leaders need to engage in Bible study regularly. The study found that 30.6% of respondents disagreed with the statement. Although not alarming, this disagreement may impact the spirituality of leaders and their churches. If one neglects to study the Bible, one's understanding of religion will lack depth. Neglecting the Bible may lead to teaching irrelevant content to members. Chery said that Bible study helps gain insight into what it means to be Christlike.⁴⁰ Olesberg concluded that meeting God through the Bible is an utter necessity.⁴¹ The Word of God, as stated in John 6:63 NKJV, is the spiritual bread of life. True discipleship requires regular nourishment from that Word. Spiritual growth is contingent upon the establishment of such habitual practice.

Spiritual mentoring: Mentoring new believers is a powerful tool for church leaders to disciple others and implement their beliefs effectively. The majority of respondents (61.8%) disagreed that local church leaders must mentor new converts. The implication is that new members may struggle to fully integrate into the church, resulting in a higher likelihood of backsliding following their baptism. The study agrees

³³ Lynne M Baab, *Fasting: Spiritual Freedom beyond Our Appetites* (Lisle, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2009).

³⁴ Dimitri Oikonomou, "Christian Fasting," *Mozaik* 10, no. 2 (2002): 16–18, <http://www.koed.hu/mozaik10/dimitri.pdf>.

³⁵ D. S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014).

³⁶ Stubbs Olan, *Bible Crawling: Finding Joy in God by Journaling through the Psalms* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2023).

³⁷ Jim Martin, "Journaling as a Spiritual Discipline," *Leaven* 2, no. 4 (1992): 8, <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2066&context=leaven>.

³⁸ Luci Shaw, *Life Path: Personal and Spiritual Growth through Journal Writing* (Regent College Publishing, 2004).

³⁹ Ellen G. White, "Pastoral Ministry," in *Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists*, 1995.

⁴⁰ Sandy Chery, "Best Bible Study Methods for Discipleship Formation: How Bible Study as a Spiritual Discipline Shapes Believer" (Southeastern University, Fire Scholars, 2023), <https://firescholars.seu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=mdiv>.

⁴¹ L. Olesberg, *The Bible Study Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to an Essential Practice* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012).

with Mallison's assertion that mentoring allows individuals to maximize God's grace in their service.⁴² On the same note, Robinson agrees that mentoring is intentional discipleship.⁴³ Horsfall indicated that spiritual mentoring has been a spiritual practice of healing and renewal of souls.⁴⁴ In this context, the continuous renewal of the soul is the fundamental aspect of discipleship.

Faith sharing: The primary responsibility of local church leaders is to share their faith. Out of all the respondents, only 41.8% agreed with the given statement, while 53.8% disagreed with it. The implication is that the faith may not be embraced as personal and public evangelism could suffer greatly. The act of sharing one's faith is essentially a personal and relational response of disciples. This is in line with Fox and Morris' idea that faith sharing is about introducing individuals to a Person, namely Christ.⁴⁵ Faith sharing is a relational discipline. Jim asserted that sharing Christian faith today involves three stories: your story, the story of the other person, and God's story in Jesus. He concluded that the interaction between these stories forms a triangle of relationships.⁴⁶ Successful discipleship does not involve an isolated lifestyle as an island; instead, it always involves a shared life. Discipleship is witnessing life for Christ.

In the section above, the study discussed the findings and identified three key observations from the results. Firstly, it was revealed that leaders have less knowledge about using spiritual disciplines as tools for discipleship. Secondly, the leaders honestly admitted they were not satisfied with their practice of spiritual disciplines. Thirdly, these local leaders have shown an interest in being trained in spiritual exercises. Finally, it was observed that the leaders' knowledge gap has had an impact on the church members. As a result, the researcher has proposed recommendations in the next paragraph to address this issue.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After analyzing the results, the following recommendations can be made to further explore the topic of discipleship. First, it's important to note that measuring discipleship over time is not a one-time experiment, as spiritual change takes time. Therefore, conducting a long-term study on discipleship for local church leaders will yield more precise results. Second, spiritual disciplines play a crucial role in fostering discipleship. It is essential to teach these disciplines to local church leaders and members so that they can be practised individually or together for their spiritual growth. Third, the discipleship approach developed in this study should be implemented for church leaders of all local churches in the East Central Rwanda Field. Last, discipleship is a lifelong process and a pathway to spiritual transformation. Spiritual practices are essential for spiritual maturity. The findings of this study provide an opportunity for further research, and the researcher encourages writers to explore this topic in more depth since it has a significant impact on all layers of Christian life.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to explore how local church leaders perceive and practice spiritual disciplines. The study found that many local church leaders in Kigali City are not trained in discipleship, as almost half of them ignore the impact of spiritual disciplines on the process of discipleship. However, the study also found that once these leaders are properly trained, it can lead to a threefold benefit: equipped leaders, a transforming journey of discipleship, and a well-cared-for flock. "Equipment," doesn't just mean adding knowledge or materials, but it expresses the spiritual maturity of the leaders, including their own spiritual lives and their experience in discipling others. Finally, the study suggests that the gender and

⁴² J. Mallison, *Mentoring to Develop Disciples & Leaders* (Lidcombe, Australia: Scripture Union and OpenBook Publishers, 1998), <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f322e36d5e561588e310a43/t/5f59b5026fe5f14fe1ced5e2/1599714593743/Vol+22+No+1+Lukes%2BJournal%2B317%2Bweb.pdf#page=19>.

⁴³ N. S. Robinson, *Mentor for Life: Finding Purpose Through Intentional Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016).

⁴⁴ Tony Horsfall, *Mentoring for Spiritual Growth: Sharing the Faith Journey* (Abingdon, UK: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2008).

⁴⁵ Eddie H. Fox and George E. Morris, *Faith-Sharing: Dynamic Christian Witnessing by Invitation* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2006), 33.

⁴⁶ Jim Currin, "Sharing Faith," Abingdon, Bible Reading Fellowship, 2011,

https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=sharing+faith&btnG=#d=gs_cit&t=1717152255568&u=%2Fscholar%3Fq%3Dinfo%3A%2F%26output%3Dcite%26scirp%3D4%26hl%3Den.

education level of local church leaders may affect their responsibilities, but not necessarily their discipleship growth.

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ABOUT AUTHOR

Gerard Karasira Nsengiyumva is a highly experienced and ordained pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Rwanda, with an impressive 30-year record of serving in various capacities. He completed the Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology from the prestigious Adventist University of Africa in 2017. His academic pursuits have continued and he is currently engrossed in pursuing a Doctorate of Ministry from the same esteemed university. His experience ranges from serving in local churches to holding the prestigious position of executive director of the conference, which speaks to his vast knowledge and expertise. Gerard finds immense joy in preaching to congregations of all sizes, and he also has a keen interest in teaching and training pastors and lay people. He has a particular passion for mentoring new and young pastors, which is a testament to his dedication and commitment to the growth and development of the church community. His research interests are centered around the development of effective discipleship strategies and the process of spiritual formation. He is particularly interested in exploring the intersection of theology and practical methodologies, intending to identify best practices for nurturing the spiritual growth of individuals and communities.