

# Pastoral Leadership and Congregational Engagement in Faith Growth: A Study of 1 Peter 5:2



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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between pastoral leadership and congregational involvement in fostering faith growth based on 1 Peter 5:2, using GBI Miracle Service Cibubur (GBI MSC) as a case study. Employing a qualitative approach with a case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with church leaders and members, direct observation, and document analysis. Thematic and interpretative analyses were conducted to uncover the dynamics between leadership practices and congregational participation. Findings reveal that pastoral leaders play multifaceted roles, including those of spiritual guides, teachers of the Word, counselors, motivators, and caregivers. However, several challenges arise, including limited committed ministry personnel, imbalance between ministry and personal life, interpersonal conflicts, and insufficient communication with congregants. Congregational involvement, fostered through ministry opportunities based on talents, mentoring, spiritual formation, and community fellowship, significantly contributes to individual and collective faith growth. Active participation enhances spiritual maturity, character transformation, and a deeper connection with God. This study concludes that effective pastoral leadership rooted in biblical values and responsive to the needs of the congregation is essential for sustainable faith development: personal spiritual consistency, leadership capacity, supportive community structures, and congregational engagement influence leadership effectiveness. The study offers practical insights and theological reflection for strengthening church leadership and participatory discipleship in contemporary local church contexts.

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## Introduction

In the context of church leadership, the pastoral role is often regarded as a central pillar in building the faith life of the congregation (Cahyadi, 2009). A pastoral leader plays a significant role in guiding and strengthening the congregation to achieve spiritual maturity, as spiritual guidance from a pastoral leader is both a calling and a gift from God (Malailak, 2021). According to M. Bons Storm, a pastoral leader or shepherd is an individual who knows Jesus Christ, can emulate His behavior, and represent Him, so that their actions and words are not based on personal power, but on the power of Jesus as the Good Shepherd (Storm, 2019). Furthermore, the success of pastoral ministry is not solely determined by a shepherd's

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ability to manage the church organization but also by how they serve as a role model and spiritual leader, motivating the congregation to be actively involved in spiritual life (Loloang, Purba, Kelana, 2023). R. G. Sirait argues that a successful shepherd cannot be separated from the vision they hold (Sirait, 2020). Charles Swindoll echoes a similar view, stating that vision plays a crucial role in life because it originates from faith, is strengthened by hope, supported by imagination, and becomes stronger through the passion one holds (Swindoll, 2000). Bethel Church Indonesia (GBI) Miracle Service Cibubur is one such community that continuously strives to improve the quality of the congregation's faith growth (Untung, 2019). During this journey, challenges related to the congregation's involvement in various church activities, including worship, ministry, and social events, have emerged. One crucial aspect influencing this involvement is the style of pastoral leadership applied (Prajogo, 2019).

A pastoral leadership style based on biblical principles, such as in 1 Peter 5:2, not only functions to manage the church organization but also serves as a spiritual example that encourages the congregation to engage more actively in their spiritual life (Patintingan, Hermanto, Hindradjat, 2023). Robert K. Greenleaf is the person who first introduced the concept of servant leadership to the public. In his essay, "The Servant as Leader," he argued that authentic leadership starts from the attitude of being a servant. According to him, there are three main elements required for a servant leader: humility, compassion for others, and the awareness to serve. Hayward, in his "Believers" growth curve, noted that throughout three decades, there has been a significant spiritual transformation. The "Believers" population has experienced exponential growth, becoming the majority in society, while the "non-believers" population has drastically decreased.

This pattern reflects a collective conversion process that not only requires time but also the church's strategic involvement to effectively and contextually fulfill its mission mandate (Hayward, 2002). In the context of GBI Miracle Service Cibubur, the implementation of leadership values based on 1 Peter 5:2 becomes relevant for study. How church leaders apply these principles in their ministry, and how this leadership style affects the congregation's involvement, is an important issue that needs to be explored. One of the challenges faced by modern churches is the gap between leaders and the congregation (Budi, 2021).

Some members feel less involved in decision-making processes or feel that they do not receive enough attention from the leaders (Lie, 2019). This situation can diminish the congregation's enthusiasm for actively engaging in service. Grounded in 1 Peter 5:2, pastoral leadership should be inclusive, where leaders not only provide direction but also accompany the congregation in their faith journey (Harefa et al., 2025). This can foster a closer relationship between leaders and the congregation, which in turn supports collective growth in faith. The urgency of this research is not only seen in the importance of theological understanding in pastoral leadership but also through previous studies. Previous research has widely discussed the relationship between pastoral leadership style and congregation involvement. Some studies have shown that inclusive and love-based leadership styles have a positive impact on engagement and satisfaction within the congregation (Agapa, Affandi, Wiryohadi, 2023).

However, studies on the specific application of biblical principles in the context of a local church are still limited. This study fills that gap by focusing on GBI Miracle Service Cibubur as a case study, thus providing both practical and theoretical contributions to other church ministries. This study is also relevant because it highlights the need for a more biblically based pastoral approach in addressing modern challenges within the church. The impact of pastoral leadership on faith growth shows varied results, depending on the internal and external factors that affect its effectiveness. Therefore, to bridge the existing gap, a more structured strategy is required in building adaptive pastoral leadership, enhancing congregation

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involvement, and strengthening spiritual guidance so that faith growth can be more evenly distributed and sustainable.

This research fills a gap in pastoral leadership studies by focusing on congregation involvement as a key factor in faith growth, based on a theological analysis of 1 Peter 5:2. Several previous studies have discussed pastoral leadership in various contexts, such as leadership structures in congregational churches (Jentile, 2021), competence-based approaches to church leadership (Rojas, 2022), and leadership dynamics influenced by community identity and practices (Barentsen, 2019). Although these studies provide in-depth insights into pastoral leadership aspects, there are limitations in discussing the direct relationship between pastoral leadership and congregation involvement in the context of faith growth.

Therefore, this study offers a new perspective by examining how the principles in 1 Peter 5:2 can be applied to enhance congregation involvement as part of an effective pastoral leadership strategy. Additionally, some studies have explored leadership principles based on this verse, such as the importance of voluntary attitudes and role modeling in nurturing the congregation's spirituality (Siahaan, Simbolon, 2023), as well as theological analyses of broader Christian leadership principles (Yowei, Sutikto, Manno, 2023). Likewise, other studies have discussed congregation involvement in ministry but have primarily focused on the pastoral servant attitude. However, no studies have explicitly examined the relationship between pastoral leadership and congregation involvement in enhancing faith growth using a case study approach in a specific church environment. Thus, this research offers novelty by providing more specific and applicable academic contributions in linking pastoral leadership and congregation participation as mutually supportive factors in building a stronger faith life.

## **Research Method**

This study uses a qualitative approach (Moleong, 2014), with a case study design to explore the understanding and application of pastoral leadership and congregation involvement in building faith growth based on 1 Peter 5:2. This approach was chosen because it captures the social and theological dynamics holistically within the context of a local church's life. The research site is focused on Bethel Church Indonesia Miracle Service Cibubur (GBI MSC), which was selected due to its active and participatory community characteristics and ongoing development, making it a relevant location to examine the implementation of pastoral leadership principles, as outlined by the Apostle Peter.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with seven informants, including leaders and congregation members, observations of church activities, and a review of the church's internal documents, such as liturgical guides, ministry policies, and activity reports. Secondary data, including biblical texts and theological literature, were also analyzed to provide a normative and reflective foundation for the field findings, with a particular focus on 1 Peter 5:2 as the primary theological foundation. Data were analyzed using thematic and interpretive techniques. Thematic analysis was employed to identify primary patterns in leadership practices and congregation participation, while interpretive analysis explored the theological meanings underlying each theme identified. Triangulation techniques were employed to enhance the validity of the findings by integrating the results of interviews, observations, and documents, thereby providing a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the ecclesiastical reality under study.

## Results and Discussion

### *The Meaning of Pastoral Leadership According to the Letter of 1 Peter 5:2*

The letter of 1 Peter is thought to have been written before 110 CE, when Polycarp quoted from it in his letter to the Philippians (Phil. 1:3// 1 Pet. 1:8). Given the circumstances of suffering described in the letter of 1 Peter, it is likely that the early Christian community to which the letter was written lived under the shadow of persecution of Christians by the emperors Domitian (81-97 CE) and Trajan (98-117 CE) (Byrley, 2017; Eugenio, 2021). When the letter of 1 Peter was written, Christians were suffering because of the persecution of the Roman authorities. Therefore, this letter aims to strengthen the faith of Christians amid the suffering that was being experienced because of the name of Christianity (Keller, 2018; Schnabel, 2018). More deeply, the suffering of Christians is interpreted as a consequence of following Christ, and at the same time imitating Christ who had previously suffered for the world (Burkett, 2002). That is why, in the context of suffering, the meaning of pastoral leadership receives primary attention to strengthen Christians as they face suffering and injustice.

The theological concept of pastoral leadership in 1 Peter can be understood based on the structure and composition of this text, which is illustrated in the following table.

Table 1. Structure and Guidline of 1 Peter

CONTENT	TEXT
SALUTATION	1:1-2
HOPE IN SUFFERING	1:3-13
HOLY CONDUCT	1:14-2:10
GOOD CONDUCT AMONG THE GENTILES	2:11-3:12
SUFFERING AS A CHRISTIAN	3:13-4:19
FINAL EXHORTATION AND CONCLUSION	5:1-14

Based on the composition of the letter of 1 Peter, the idea of Pastoral leadership in 1 Peter 5:2 is part of the closing composition and Conclusion of this letter. In this section, the author concludes his letter with instructions to the elders (5:1-4) and younger men (5:5-7). Here, he portrays Christian suffering as the work of the devil (5:8-11) (Burkett, 2002).

In 1 Peter 5:2, the imperative “to shepherd” (ποιμαίνετε / poimainete) is central to understanding Christian leadership. This term evokes two key biblical themes: (1) the Old Testament imagery of God and King David as shepherds (Psalm 23; Ezekiel 34), and (2) Christ as the Good Shepherd who sacrificially lays down His life (John 10:11). Wayne Grudem (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries) argues that this command redefines leadership from mere “ruling” to relational service elders are to provide “spiritual nourishment” and guide the flock in imitation of Christ. As noted by commentator Craig Keener, this passage reflects a servant-leadership paradigm that is relational, sacrificial, and rooted in the example of Christ, establishing a high ethical standard for pastoral ministry that remains relevant for contemporary ecclesiology and church leadership practice. The participle “to oversee” (ἐπισκοποῦντες / episkopountes), as analyzed by Pickwell and Henson (Grudem, Pickwell, & Henson, 2022), is not about authoritarian control but active guardianship of sound doctrine and congregational well-being. Peter emphasizes willingness of heart (ἔκουσίως / hekousiōs) as the primary motivation, rejecting mere obligation. Grudem further contrasts the phrases “not under

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compulsion" (οὐ κατ' ἐπιταγήν) and "eagerly" (ἀλλ' ἀθαρσῶς), stressing that pastoral ministry must flow from divine calling, not external pressure or material gain (οὐκ ἐξ ὀφέλους / *ouk ex ophelous*).

From this, Peter outlines three marks of church leadership: (1) *Shepherding*: cultivating intimate relationships with the flock, mirroring Christ's example, (2) *Overseeing*: safeguarding believers' faith from doctrinal corruption, (3) *Serving willingly*: rejecting coercion or personal ambition. Grudem and Pickwell & Henson agree: this passage not only addressed the early church but also critiques modern leaders preoccupied with power or profit. Authentic Christian leadership must reflect the sacrifice and humility of Christ, the Chief Shepherd (Grudem, Pickwell, & Henson, 2022).

### ***Applying Pastoral Leadership from 1 Peter 5:2***

The results of this study reveal three main focuses that elaborate on the research objectives, namely: the application of pastoral leadership principles based on 1 Peter 5:2, the form of congregation involvement in church life, and the impact of pastoral leadership on the spiritual growth of the congregation along with the factors influencing its effectiveness. First, regarding the application of pastoral leadership principles in 1 Peter 5:2, it was found that church leaders have genuinely applied the biblical principles of shepherd leadership in their ministry lives. Leaders act as shepherds who guide the congregation not out of compulsion, but with willingness and sincere motivation. This application is reflected in five main roles: as spiritual leaders and life examples, as teachers and proclaimers of the Word of God, as counselors and spiritual companions, as motivators in spiritual growth and ministry, and as individuals who care for the needs of the congregation. Through personal interactions, pastoral visits, as well as teaching and prayer ministries, pastoral leaders help shape the spiritual life of the congregation with love and integrity. However, the implementation of this pastoral leadership faces significant challenges.

Some main obstacles include: the limited number of truly committed ministry workers, the difficulty of balancing time between ministry responsibilities and personal life, differing characters and views among church ministers causing disharmony, and limitations in communication and personal approach to the congregation. Additionally, a balance is needed between decisiveness in decision-making and sensitivity to the congregation's condition to ensure effective ministry.

Second, regarding congregation involvement in church activities, it was found that active participation varies and is dynamic, adjusted to the interests, talents, and capacities of everyone. This involvement includes service based on talents, mentoring and guidance processes, participation in cell communities, as well as spiritual self-training and development. Through these activities, the congregation is not only functionally active but also emotionally and spiritually engaged in the life of the church. The presence of community and fellowship strengthens the sense of belonging, togetherness, and mutual support among the congregation. This active participation positively contributes to the growth of the congregation's faith, including: an increased personal closeness to God, character transformation reflecting Christian values, a growing sense of responsibility toward ministry, heightened awareness of the importance of serving, and the use of spiritual gifts to build others.

Third, this study found that pastoral leadership has a significant impact on the spiritual growth of the congregation. Pastoral leaders who actively, consistently, and spiritually carry out their roles have a profound impact in guiding the congregation through counseling, prayer, teaching the Word, and community building. The congregation guided in this way experiences growth in their relationship with God, character transformation such as patience and humility, and spiritual resilience in facing life's struggles. Factors influencing the effectiveness of pastoral leadership in supporting the congregation's spiritual growth include: (1) the personal and relational approach of the leader to the congregation, (2) the leader's increased capacity in

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leadership and ministry, (3) active congregation participation in church ministry, (4) support from a healthy and constructive church community, and (5) the spiritual consistency of the congregation in living a personal spiritual life, such as prayer, Bible reading, and fellowship.

### ***Pastoral Leadership and Fostering Spiritual Growth***

The findings of this study provide an in-depth overview of the dynamics of pastoral leadership and congregation involvement in fostering spiritual growth and demonstrate how the principles of 1 Peter 5:2 can be applied contextually and relevantly in contemporary church life. First, the application of pastoral leadership principles in 1 Peter 5:2 serves as a theological foundation that affirms that a church leader not only leads structurally but also spiritually and relationally. This aligns with John C. Maxwell's thought, emphasizing that true leadership is not merely authority but influence that arises from living an example (Maxwell, 2007). Henri Nouwen also reminds us that a true spiritual leader must focus on the spiritual needs of the congregation, not just the intellectual delivery of teaching (Nouwen, 1989). In this context, pastoral leaders serve as examples and spiritual guides who consider the congregation's needs holistically. While much has been done well, challenges such as the lack of committed ministry workers and the difficulty of balancing time between ministry and personal life highlight the importance of time management, leadership development, and enhancing empathy and interpersonal communication.

Second, congregation involvement in ministry activities proves to be a significant driver of spiritual growth. This underscores that the church relies not only on the quality of its leaders but also on the active participation of its members. Eugene H. Peterson emphasizes that true pastoral ministry is rooted in relationships with God and the congregation, not just organizational activities. He highlights the importance of prayer, Bible reading, and spiritual guidance as the foundation of ministry integrity, consistent with the principles of 1 Peter 5:2. The congregation's participation, accompanied by mentoring, training, and community-building, ensures that faith growth occurs not only individually but also collectively. This strengthens the view that spiritual growth is a collaborative outcome between the shepherd and the congregation.

Third, pastoral leadership proves to have a real impact on the congregation's spiritual transformation. Ongoing guidance based on love and the Word of God significantly influences the congregation's spiritual maturity. Richard J. Foster's statement that spiritual disciplines are the main foundation for Christian leaders to lead authentically and inspire spiritually is relevant here. Without spiritual depth, leadership risks becoming shallow and directionless. Practices such as prayer and fasting shape leaders to bring renewal to the congregation, in line with the principles outlined in 1 Peter 5:2. This type of leadership not only brings the congregation closer to God but also leads to transformation in character and the mission of the ministry. The factors influencing the effectiveness of pastoral leadership highlight the need for church leaders to grow continually, not only spiritually but also in ministry competence. Enhancing leadership capacity, community support, and personal spiritual consistency serve as complementary foundations in creating a healthy church.

Overall, this discussion shows that pastoral leadership and congregation involvement are not separate entities but interconnected elements that support each other in building a vibrant church. This study strengthens the view of theologians and church practitioners that faith growth does not occur automatically but through a process led, guided, and worked together in love, example, and active participation.

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## Conclusion

This study affirms that the pastoral leadership principles in 1 Peter 5:2, leading the congregation voluntarily, not lording it over them, and setting an example in love, have been applied in the ministry context of GBI Miracle Service Cibubur. The congregation's involvement in service, community, and spiritual training has made a significant contribution to faith growth, both in personal spirituality and church life. The relationship between pastoral leadership and congregation involvement is not only functional but also relational and theological. The principles of 1 Peter 5:2 prove to remain relevant and applicable in shaping a spiritually healthy church, if they are applied contextually and reflectively.

This research highlights some visions for practical ministry. Church leaders need to continue developing their leadership capacity, not only administratively but also spiritually and relationally. Interpersonal communication, servant leadership training, and a mentoring culture for the congregation need to be strengthened systematically and continuously. The curriculum for pastoral leadership training should emphasize the integration of leadership theory, spirituality, and the contextual practices of the church. Character development and pastoral sensitivity should be the focus in preparing future leaders. For further research, we would like to offer two suggestions. First, future research could compare the application of pastoral leadership principles in different denominations or church cultures to observe variations in approach and effectiveness. Second, longitudinal studies are necessary to observe the dynamic and sustainable impact of pastoral leadership on the spiritual growth of the congregation. By considering both practical and academic aspects, this study is expected to contribute as an initial step in opening up further development in the field of practical theology, especially in pastoral leadership and the development of the congregation's faith life.

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