

**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

**EXPLORING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PATHWAY AND DISCIPLINE IN  
THE CHURCH OF PENTECOST, GHANA**

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THE CHURCH OF PENTECOST, GHANA**

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**October, 2024**

## DECLARATION

### STUDENTS'S DECLARATION

I, Precious Vera Kogolegba, declare that this thesis, with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and acknowledged, is entirely my own original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.


SIGNATURE:.....

DATE:.....

### SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of thesis as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.

Name of Supervisor: **Hannah E. Acquaye (PhD)**

Signature:  .....

Date: **25<sup>th</sup> October, 2024**

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my family.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I want to specially thank my supervisor, Dr. Hannah E. Acquaye for her relentless effort for guiding and directing me throughout this exercise. The next thanks go to my husband, Pastor Samuel Aboagye Yirenkyi, my children namely Jane, Samuel, Manuella, James and Joseph for standing behind me during this course. I also want to appreciate Pastor Benedict Ahiabu for all the assistance he rendered to me.

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the psychological pathway and discipline in the church of Pentecost in the Techiman area. Using a phenomenological case study design, seven participants were selected through purposive snowball sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Colaizzi's 8-Step Technique for analyzing lived experiences. Key findings revealed that discipline measures within the CoP include removal from office, suspension, dismissal, public rebuke, and financial restitution. Participants perceived these measures as essential for spiritual restoration rather than punishment. The psychological effects of discipline included guilt, shame, isolation, anger, depression, anxiety and resentment, which often led to introspection, regret, and a desire for redemption. The restorative process, involving assessment, pastoral counseling, forgiveness, and reintegration, was found to be crucial in facilitating both spiritual and social rehabilitation. The study concludes that while discipline can be emotionally challenging, it offers a pathway to transformation and spiritual growth. The study recommended developing clear discipline guidelines, providing holistic support for offenders, fostering community understanding, and institutionalizing restorative steps as part of the church's policy.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Introduction

The term discipline comes from the word *discipulus*, the Latin word for pupil or student, which also provided the source of the word disciple. Discipline means to teach, instruct, correct, or train an individual that he/she might be strengthened, perfected; to punish, or chastise. The art and act of discipline can be found in many professional and non-professional settings including churches. Discipline, in this context is restricted to the church setting and not to formal employment or school setting. According to McCullough and Willoughby (2018), discipline in a religious context is intended to guide individuals back to a path of righteousness, emphasizing that the primary goal of discipline is restoration rather than punishment. Church discipline be traced back to the New Testament, where passages such as Matthew 18:15-17 outline a process for addressing sin within the church community. This scripture establishes discipline as a means of restoring individuals and maintaining the purity of the church (Harris, 2017). Historically, church discipline has evolved through various interpretations and. In early Christianity, discipline was often severe, with practices such as excommunication to uphold purity and moral standards. However, over time, many denominations have shifted towards a more restorative approach such as reconciliation and spiritual growth rather than punitive measures (Duncan, 2019).

In contemporary Christianity, discipline is applied in various ways, often tailored to the specific beliefs and practices of different denominations. For instance, many churches engage in a process of private admonition before public discipline, focusing on the goal of restoration rather than punishment (Smith & Snell, 2016). The results of these

practices can vary; while some congregations report strengthened community bonds and individual growth, others face challenges, including resistance from members and potential divisions within the church (Miller & Thoresen, 2019).

In Africa, the application of church discipline has been influenced by indigenous cultural practices. African churches often integrate traditional values of communal living and accountability into their disciplinary practices. This can manifest in communal discussions and collective decision-making, which aim to restore individuals while reinforcing the social fabric of the community (Omenyo, 2018). In Ghana, specifically, churches have adopted a blend of biblical principles and cultural norms, where discipline is seen as a communal responsibility. The Ghanaian church context emphasizes the importance of maintaining harmony and unity within the congregation, often employing a communal approach to discipline that seeks to restore rather than alienate (Amoah, 2020). Notable disciplinary acts adopted in the early formation of the church were; women to cover their head during church gatherings, the condemnation of women in trousers, prohibiting use of make-ups by women, prohibiting women styling their hairs. Failure to adhere to these usually result segregation by designating special type of seat to suspended members in the church, suspension among others (Akowuah, 2014). Kimble (2013) points out that several factors are involved in the process of discipline, in which each defining factor can vary however, these are usually situated around common themes. Some of these themes include accountability, exhortation, dealing with sin, authority of the church, excommunication, repentance, and reconciliation (Kimble, 2013).

The results of implementing discipline in Ghanaian churches have shown both positive and negative outcomes. On one hand, many congregations report increased

accountability and a stronger sense of belonging among members. On the other hand, challenges such as misunderstanding and misapplication of disciplinary measures can lead to conflict and disillusionment among congregants (Amoah, 2020; Omenyo, 2018).

A disciplined life and right moral sense form part of the ideology of Pentecostalism of which Church of Pentecost highly regards. According to the Ministers' Handbook of the Church of Pentecost (CoP) (2014) the church upholds "Church discipline without fear or favour irrespective of position, race or colour of members". The CoP expects disciplined members of the church to have respect for and be obedient to authority, submit to corrective measures and policies of the Church and continue to have regular fellowship with the saints (Onyinah, 2020). It is observed that the main function of discipline in the Church of Pentecost is to deter members from sin. Discipline is meant to correct erring members, purge the church of evil and to restore members. Different disciplinary measures such as suspension, interdiction, dismissal, demotion, excommunication and public rebuke are applied for discipline purpose, which is to reform and redirect the moral and spiritual path of a continual sinner to Grace. In essence, the church discipline, as intended in the Bible, seeks help sinful individuals to walk back in God's path. Hebrews chapter 12:5-11 expresses this discipline purpose as follows:

*"And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons. My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while*

*as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” (NIV).*

It is evident from the above scripture that God upholds discipline and supports parents who discipline their children. If God disciplines, then the church is not expected to stay aloof and countenance all sorts of behaviour that go on in the church. Undoubtedly, church discipline is one part of the discipleship process, the part where we correct sin and point the disciple toward the better path. To be a disciple is, among other things, to be disciplined. Helwig, To, Wang, Liu and Yang (2014), however, points out that discipline not applied in an appropriate fashion can have unintended consequences for both issuer of the disciplinary action and the recipient. Helwaig et al (2014) argument of adverse effects of mal-apportioned punishment reflects disgruntled Christians who decides to quit church after being punished. In view of the fact that the discipline approaches used by the church has both positive and negative implications on the psyche of the congregation, this study sought to explore the psychological interpretations and pathways of church disciplines among members of the Church of Pentecost.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Church discipline, rooted in New Testament teachings such as Paul’s instruction on ex-communication (1 Corinthians 5:1–5) and John’s warning against fellowship with those who reject Christian truth (2 John 9–10), has historically been understood as a compassionate, corrective practice aimed at restoring holiness rather than punishing offenders. In line with this tradition, the Church of Pentecost upholds discipline as a core value, applying measures such as suspension, ex-communication, public rebuke,

and interdiction to correct wrongdoing. However, lived observations within the church suggest that disciplined members are often excluded from active participation, leading to stigma, marginalization, and, in some cases, withdrawal from church life.

Although several studies have examined church discipline from theological, doctrinal, and administrative perspectives (Anderson, 2019; Mensah, 2020), there remains limited empirical research on the nature of disciplinary measures applied to transgressors within the Church of Pentecost (CoP), particularly in Ghanaian Pentecostal settings (Yendork et al., 2020). Much of the existing literature prioritizes doctrinal compliance, moral regulation, and institutional governance, with minimal focus on the subjective experiences of disciplined members (Amponsah, 2018; Anderson, 2019). As a result, the nature of discipline measures and how disciplined members personally interpret their meanings has received little scholarly attention (Adu et al., 2023). Specifically, literature provides insufficient insight into how disciplined members experience church discipline emotionally and how these experiences affect their mental well-being. Studies that look at church discipline often emphasize behavioural outcomes such as conformity, deterrence, or participation, rather than the internal emotional and cognitive processes that transgressors undergo when subjected to disciplinary measures such as suspension, public rebuke, or exclusion from church activities (Mensah, 2020; Omenyo, 2018). Consequently, little is known about how these disciplinary experiences shape emotional responses, personal reflections, identity, and members' sense of belonging within the church.

Understanding these lived experiences is crucial because church discipline extends beyond behavioural correction to influence members' inner psychological processes. Research has shown that religious practices and authority structures can significantly

affect emotional and psychological well-being; however, studies within Pentecostal contexts rarely examine church discipline as a psychologically consequential experience (Yendork et al., 2020; Adu et al., 2023). When the emotional and cognitive dimensions of discipline are overlooked, disciplinary practices may unintentionally contribute to psychological distress, stigma, disengagement, or withdrawal from church life rather than healing and restoration (Kpodo, 2022; Okyere, 2021).

In this context, the psychological pathways of church discipline—namely, how disciplined members experience discipline emotionally, how they interpret its meaning, how these experiences affect their mental well-being, and how they move toward restoration, withdrawal, or transformation—remain largely unexplored within faith-based disciplinary systems. Existing studies rarely trace these psychological processes from the perspectives of disciplined members themselves, thereby limiting understanding of how discipline is internally processed and responded to over time (Mensah, 2020; Kpodo, 2022).

Furthermore, while the theological and moral foundations of church discipline are well documented in Church of Pentecost policies and constitutions (CoP Constitution, 2023; Amponsah, 2018), the restorative processes through which disciplined members are assessed, counselled, forgiven, and reintegrated into the church community are not sufficiently understood from the perspectives of the transgressors themselves. Much of the literature reflects leadership or institutional viewpoints, leaving the voices of disciplined members largely absent (Omenyo, 2018; Amoah, 2020).

Therefore, this study sought to explore the psychological pathway and discipline in the Church of Pentecost within the Techiman Area.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to explore the psychological pathway and discipline in the church of Pentecost in the Techiman area.

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study were to;

- 1 Explore the nature of disciplinary measures applied to transgressors within the Church of Pentecost, Techiman Area.
- 2 Examine how the lived experiences of errant members have shaped their perceptions and understanding of church discipline in the Church of Pentecost, Techiman Area.
- 3 Explore the psychological effects of church discipline on the emotional and mental well-being of errant members in the Church of Pentecost, Techiman Area.
- 4 Examine the processes employed by the Church of Pentecost to restore transgressors into church life in the Techiman Area.

### **1.5 Research questions**

The following research questions guided the study

1. What are the forms of disciplinary measures applied to transgressors in the Church of Pentecost, Techiman Area?
2. How have the lived experiences of errant members shaped their perceptions and understanding of church discipline in the Church of Pentecost, Techiman Area?
3. What are the psychological effects of church discipline on the emotional and mental well-being of errant members in the Church of Pentecost, Techiman Area?
4. What processes are used by the Church of Pentecost to restore transgressors them into church life in the Techiman Area?

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

The study is significant for both the Church of Pentecost (CoP), Techiman Area and the broader Christian community, as it provides a comprehensive understanding of the psychological and social impact of church discipline on individuals and their families. Church discipline, when perceived as punitive rather than restorative, can have unintended consequences that may affect the spiritual, emotional, and social well-being of members. This research offers the opportunity for the CoP, particularly in the Techiman area, to assess and realign its disciplinary practices with biblical principles that emphasize love, forgiveness, and restoration.

The findings of this study will shed light on the psychosocial effects of church discipline, including the emotional and spiritual pathways experienced by members who have undergone disciplinary measures. By examining these pathways, the study will provide understanding into how the current practices shape individuals' perceptions of church discipline and their relationship with the church. Furthermore, the study illuminates the intersection between spirituality and psychological well-being by offering practical guidance for counselors, pastors, and church leaders working with individuals and families affected by church discipline.

The study's significance extends to church policy-making, by offering evidence-based recommendations for developing restorative and compassionate disciplinary approaches that align with both Scripture and the contemporary needs of the church community. Leaders in the CoP and other denominations will benefit from the insights provided, as the study addresses key issues such as the balance between discipline and

forgiveness, the importance of emotional healing, and the process of reintegration into the church.

Academically, this study will serve as a reliable resource for researchers, theologians, and practitioners seeking to understand and improve disciplinary practices in faith communities. It contributes to the growing body of knowledge on church discipline and its impact, offering practical, theological, and psychological perspectives that can inform both academic discourse and church practices.

Ultimately, this study will help foster a deeper understanding of the role of discipline in promoting spiritual growth and unity within the church by ensuring that disciplinary measures are not merely punitive but are transformative experiences that nurture both the individual and the community as a whole.

### **1.7 Delimitations**

Even though this work is about church discipline in the Church of Pentecost, geographically, this study focused on three churches namely Wenchi Central, English Assembly and Akrobi Assembly in the Wenchi township of Techiman Area of the Church of Pentecost. Methodologically, the study focused on understanding church discipline in the CoP from the lens qualitative research approach and the phenomenology research design.

### **1.8 Limitation of the study**

In this study, the sample was purposively selected; therefore, the absence of bias cannot be completely controlled. Again, the perception of the respondents in relation to church discipline represented their personal views at the time of data collection. Besides, the study was carried out in 2023. Therefore, as church dynamics such as new leadership,

new policies and programmes could influence their perceptions. Therefore, the findings of the study may not be generalized beyond the scope of the study.

### **1.9 Definition of Terms**

The following are terms are explained in the context of COP for the purpose of this study.

*Church Discipline:* is the process of correcting sinful behaviour among members of a local church body to protect the church, restoring the sinner to a right walk with God, and renewing fellowship among the church members.

*Excommunication:* is the formal removal of an individual from church membership and the informal separation from that individual.

*Errant members.* Used interchangeably with transgressors, it refers to members who have strayed from the prescribed norms.

*Suspension:* when a person is temporarily not allowed to partake in active church activities, as a punishment.

*Nature of discipline:* the study conceptualised nature of discipline as the type of discipline measures applied to COP members when they go astray per the COP constitution.

### **1.8 Organization of the Study**

The whole research was developed in five chapters. The first chapter, which is the introduction, looked at themes like the background to the study, which gave essential information to understanding the issue under study. The Statement of the Problem described the context for the study. The chapter also had the Purpose of the Study, which gave a specific and accurate summary of the overall purpose of the study. Again, there were the objectives of the study, which clearly spelled out the intended outcome of the study. The chapter also had the research questions that the study sought to answer.

The chapter also involved limitations of the study, which dealt with the challenges related to the methodology the study used. The significance of the study indicated how the research had an impact on knowledge in the area under investigation. There was also the Delimitations of the Study, which specified the scope of boundary for the study. The second chapter was the review of related literature. It presented and discussed what other authorities have said about the topic under discussion, agreeing or disagreeing with the findings of other researchers in the area. Chapter three is where the study discussed the methodology adopted. The chapter discussed themes like the research approach, research design, study setting, population, sample size and sampling techniques, research instruments, trustworthiness, method of data collection, and the data analysis procedure. The fourth chapter, presents data analysis and findings, it discussed the data collected and analyzed them. The findings were outlined in the same chapter. The fifth chapter, which is the last chapter of the study, was captioned "Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations. The summary part of the chapter summarized what the study had done from the beginning till the end. The study stated some recommendations in this chapter.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to church discipline and the psychological experience of offenders. The review is done from both print and electronic media including books, Encyclopaedias and Journals. For the sake of clarity, the review is done under the following thematic areas;

- 1 Theoretical review
- 2 Concept of church discipline
- 3 Evolution of church discipline
- 4 Biblical perspective of church discipline
- 5 Church discipline in Pentecostal and charismatic churches
- 6 Live experiences of church members in disciplinary situations
- 7 Psychological effects of church discipline
- 8 Impact of church discipline on church growth and spirituality
- 9 Discipline and church membership
- 10 Church of Pentecost position on discipline
- 11 Restoration and reintegration in the church
- 12 Summary of chapter

#### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

Two theories were adopted for the study. They were Operant Conditioning Theory on behaviourism and Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory.

### **2.1.1. Operant Conditioning Theory**

Operant Conditioning Theory by B.F. Skinner is a behavioral theory developed in the mid-20th century, with significant contributions made in the 1930s and 1940s (Skinner, 1953). His work focused on understanding how behavior is shaped by environmental factors through mechanisms of reinforcement and punishment. The core principles of Skinner's behaviorism center around operant conditioning, which explains that behaviors are influenced by their consequences. The main components include:

**Reinforcement:** This involves any consequence that increases the likelihood of a behavior being repeated. Reinforcement can be Positive Reinforcement such as introducing a favorable reward following a desired behavior. Negative Reinforcement such as removing an unfavorable outcome when a desired behavior occurs.

**Punishment:** This refers to any consequence that decreases the likelihood of a behavior being repeated. Punishment can be positive Punishment like adding an unfavorable consequence following an undesired behavior (e.g., public reprimand for misconduct). Or negative Punishment like removing a favorable outcome following an undesired behavior (e.g., exclusion from community activities).

**Extinction:** This occurs when a previously reinforced behavior is no longer reinforced, leading to a decrease in that behavior over time. While Skinner's behaviorism laid the groundwork for understanding behavior through environmental influences, modern writers have expanded upon his ideas by integrating cognitive processes into the framework. For example, Bandura (1977) introduced the concept of social learning, emphasizing that individuals can learn behaviors through observation and imitation, which complements Skinner's focus on direct reinforcement. Additionally,

contemporary research has acknowledged the role of intrinsic motivation, suggesting that not all behaviors are motivated solely by external reinforcements (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

In the context of church discipline, Skinner's principles can be applied to analyze how disciplinary practices influence congregants' behaviors and attitudes. For instance, churches can implement positive reinforcement by recognizing and rewarding members who adhere to community standards, thereby fostering a culture of compliance and support. Understanding the effects of punishment can help church leaders assess how their disciplinary measures impact members' emotional well-being and sense of belonging, guiding them to adopt more effective approaches.

Several studies have highlighted the relevance of Skinner's behaviorism in understanding behavior within community settings: Hawkins et al. (2011) conducted a study on the impact of reinforcement in religious settings, finding that positive reinforcement significantly increased participation and adherence to community values among church members. In another study, Gonzalez et al. (2015) explored the effects of punitive measures in religious organizations, revealing that harsh disciplinary practices often led to feelings of alienation and decreased engagement, supporting Skinner's notion of punishment as a deterrent to desired behaviors.

### **2.1.2 Implication of the theory on study**

The implications of the theory on the study are as follows

B.F. Skinner's theory of behaviorism, particularly through the lens of operant conditioning, has significant implications for understanding the psychological pathways in church discipline within the Church of Pentecost, Techiman Area. By

emphasizing how behaviors are shaped by their consequences, Skinner's theory provides a framework for analyzing the dynamics of discipline and its effects on congregants' behavior and emotional well-being.

One of the primary implications of Skinner's theory is the importance of reinforcement in shaping behavior. In the context of church discipline, positive reinforcement can play a crucial role in encouraging adherence to community norms. For instance, when church members receive praise or recognition for their compliance with established guidelines, they are more likely to repeat those behaviors. This suggests that churches can foster a supportive environment by actively reinforcing positive behaviors, thus promoting a culture of accountability and mutual respect among congregants.

Conversely, the theory also highlights the potential drawbacks of punitive measures. Skinner's concept of punishment indicates that while it may deter undesirable behaviors, it can also lead to negative emotional responses such as fear, resentment, or alienation. If disciplinary actions are perceived as overly harsh or unjust, members may withdraw from the community or develop a negative association with the church. This calls for the need for church leaders to carefully consider their disciplinary approaches, balancing the necessity of maintaining order with the importance of fostering a nurturing and inclusive environment.

Furthermore, Skinner's focus on observable behavior aligns well with the phenomenological approach of the study, which seeks to understand the lived experiences of individuals within the church community. By examining how members respond to disciplinary practices, researchers can gain insights into the broader psychological pathways that influence their engagement and sense of belonging. This approach allows for a better understanding of how reinforcement and punishment

interact with personal beliefs and cultural values, ultimately shaping congregants' relationships with the church.

Additionally, the implications of Skinner's theory extend to the role of community dynamics in reinforcing behaviors. The social environment within a church characterized by peer interactions, leadership styles, and communal support can significantly impact how members perceive and respond to discipline. By recognizing the influence of social learning, church leaders can create an environment where positive behaviors are modeled and reinforced, further enhancing the effectiveness of disciplinary practices.

### **2.1.3 Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory**

Albert Bandura developed Social Learning Theory in the early 1970s, with significant publications such as "Social Learning Theory" in 1977. The focus of the theory is that learning occurs through observation, imitation, and modeling, emphasizing the role of social context in shaping behavior. Bandura's work has had a profound impact on psychology, education, and social sciences, making it a valuable theoretical framework for exploring psychological pathways in church discipline. Key Principles of Social Learning Theory are;

Bandura proposed that individuals can learn new behaviors by observing others. This is referred to as ***Observational Learning***. This principal highlight that not all learning requires direct experience; instead, individuals can acquire behaviors by watching role models, such as leaders or peers. Following observation, individuals may imitate the behaviors they have seen called ***Imitation***: This aspect emphasizes the importance of

modeling behavior, especially within a community setting. These are Attention, Retention, Reproduction, and Motivation: with regard to attention, Bandura was of the view that individuals must pay attention to the behavior being modeled. Retention concerns the ability of the individual be able to remember the behavior. Reproduction centers on need the ability to reproduce the observed behavior, and motivation influences whether the behavior will be enacted, often shaped by perceived rewards or punishments.

Bandura introduced the concept of reciprocal determinism, which posits that behavior, personal factors (cognitive, emotional), and environmental influences all interact and influence one another. Contemporary writers have expanded upon Bandura's original concepts, integrating them with new findings from cognitive psychology and neuroscience. For instance, researchers have explored the role of self-efficacy an individual's belief in their ability to succeed as a critical factor in the learning process (Bandura, 1997). Additionally, the emergence of technology has led to discussions on how digital environments affect observational learning, with studies examining the influence of social media on behavior (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). Numerous studies have confirmed the relevance of Bandura's Social Learning Theory in various contexts: Krebs et al. (2015) found that observational learning significantly influenced the adoption of prosocial behaviors in community settings, supporting the idea that individuals learn from observing others. Holt et al. (2016) examined the influence of peer modeling on behavior change in educational settings, reinforcing the idea that individuals are likely to imitate behaviors they observe in their peers.

#### **2.1.4 Implication of the theory on the study**

One of the primary implications of this theory is the recognition that individuals learn not only through direct experiences but also by observing the behaviors of others, particularly influential figures such as leaders and peers. In the context of church discipline, this means that the way leaders' model disciplinary actions, whether they are punitive or restorative can significantly shape how members respond to such practices. For instance, if a church leader exemplifies compassion and understanding during disciplinary actions, congregants are more likely to internalize these values and replicate them in their own behavior. Conversely, if discipline is administered harshly or without consideration for individual circumstances, it may foster fear and resentment, leading to negative behavioral outcomes.

Furthermore, the theory highlights the importance of community dynamics in shaping individual behavior. In a church setting, the influence of peers can be particularly powerful. When members observe their peers responding positively to disciplinary measures perhaps by demonstrating accountability or seeking reconciliation they may be motivated to adopt similar behaviors. This highlights the role of social support in reinforcing desired behaviors and creating a culture of accountability and growth within the community. This study explored how these dynamics play out in real-life scenarios, providing insights into the collective attitudes toward discipline and its implications for individual psychological pathways.

Another significant implication of Bandura's theory is the concept of reciprocal determinism, which suggests that behavior, personal factors, and environmental influences are interconnected. This perspective encourages a holistic examination of

how church discipline affects and is affected by individual beliefs, emotions, and the broader church environment. For example, the study may reveal that congregants who feel supported by their community are more likely to view disciplinary actions as opportunities for growth rather than as punitive measures. This understanding can inform church leaders about the importance of fostering a supportive environment that encourages positive behavior change.

Additionally, the theory's emphasis on motivation is crucial for understanding how congregants might respond to disciplinary practices. The motivations behind behavior whether they stem from a desire for social acceptance, spiritual growth, or fear of repercussions can significantly influence how individuals engage with church discipline.

## **2.2.0 Conceptual Review**

### **2.2.1 Psychological pathway**

The study conceptualised psychological pathways as how disciplined members experience discipline emotionally, how they interpret its meaning, how these experiences affect their mental well-being, and how they move toward restoration, withdrawal, or transformation within the Church of Pentecost.

### **2.2.2 Concept of Church Discipline**

Church discipline is the practice of urging that a member of the Church repent for their sins (Illian, 2010). According to Oamen (2021), church discipline is used when someone has sinned or broken church rules, and it is done to make the offender repent and be reconciled to God. It was also employed to keep other church members safe from the effects of sin and to keep other members from acting out. Church discipline is an aspect of discipleship process where sin is corrected and the disciple is given

guidance toward the better path (Leeman, 2010). The Christian is disciplined through education and correction which can either leads to formative and corrective discipline.

Formative discipline indicates that order is maintained in the church by methods such as regenerate church membership, appropriate preaching and teaching of Scripture. It can also be done through correct administration of the ordinances, and observance of the numerous "one another" directives found in the New Testament (Cox, 2000, p 44). According to Cox, formative church discipline "is wider than corrective discipline and relates to the nurturing of Christians via training and their shared existence in the body" (ibid). While many churches implement these practices, they are not often referred to be formative church discipline, even if they may assist to shape the church's culture. This sort of discipline is practiced in the Christian community when members demonstrate real care for one another and become dynamically involved in deep interpersonal connections, knowing that God holds all accountable for their stewardship of life (Cox, 2000). As a result, the objective of formative discipline is to enlighten, encourage, support, and maintain one another in the discipline in which they live and in the accomplishment of their divine vocation.

While is an important part of the disciplinary process, this study focused on the corrective side of church discipline, which deals with the confrontation of sin. Jesus elucidates a frank approach to the process of discipline, which serves to build a pattern for how one should approach these types of circumstances (Matt 18:15-20). According to Jesus, one should go straight to the individual who sinned against them to determine whether the relationship may be restored. If reconciliation does not occur, one or two witnesses must be brought along to re-establish friendship. If no reconciliation is

reached at this stage, the subject is brought before the church so that the sinner can be addressed collectively. If this does not result in reconciliation, the person will be expelled from the church and regarded as a "Gentile or tax collector:" (Laney, 2010) because the ultimate purpose of discipline is reconciliation, love and forgiveness must be conveyed in each of these processes.

This last step of the discipline, known as ex-communication, is rarer in church settings since issues typically are dealt with in the first or second step. Nevertheless, this area of the discipline demands our attention. Piggin (2001) astutely defines this aspect of discipline:

*The most extreme disciplinary measure of the church, ex-communication is the exclusion of an irrevocably rebellious sinner from the communion of the faithful. In most periods of the church's history, ex-communication has been understood primarily as a medicinal measure, to recall to repentance and obedience. A secondary purpose is to safeguard the community's purity. When ex-communication is rightly understood, punishment has never been the object (Piggin, 2001, p. 256)*

This step of discipline does not mean that a person cannot attend a church service; rather it involves the removal of that person from the membership rolls and the exclusion of the person from partaking of the Lord's Supper. Church members must also know that they are to treat the ex-communicant as if that person were an unbeliever, based on a lack of repentance (Kimble, 2013). This understanding of ex-communication is needful in embracing both the love as well as the holiness of God, noting that both attributes are exercised in this practice.

### **2.2.3 Evolution of Church Discipline**

Throughout church history the practice of church discipline has been largely affirmed, though at certain periods, only sporadically applied (Kimble, 2017). In looking at historical trajectories one can note the ways in which the church remained faithful to biblical teaching on the subject or veered sharply away from such principles. As such, while history is not ultimately determinative for understanding and applying discipline in our churches—Scripture possesses that role—history offers both helpful and harmful models from which to learn.

### **2.2.4 Patristic Era (AD 100–500)**

While disciplinary action within the church had its controversial and contentious moments, it appears that for the first several centuries the church consistently sought to apply disciplinary measures according to the biblical witness. Indeed, the early church disciplined members both for the propagation of false doctrine and lack of moral purity. It was common practice in the early days of the church to announce disciplinary judgments on Sunday in the context of the church service. Rebillard (2015) states that Tertullian pointed out that for judgment is passed, and it carries great weight, as it must among men certain that God sees them; and it is a notable foretaste of judgment to come, if any man has so sinned to be banished from all share in our prayer, our assembly, and all holy intercourse. Tertullian, as well as other church fathers recognized the seriousness of the disciplinary process.

Most churches recognized two kinds of repentance: a one-time repentance accompanied by faith in Jesus Christ for salvation and a continual repentance of sin throughout one's life. (Hammett & Merkle, 2012). Christians who sinned had to confess their sin before the church if they wished to be restored to fellowship. Eventually, by

the third and fourth centuries, restoration to the church became rather difficult. Undergoing “penitential discipline,” those seeking repentance were first required to come to the place where they met for church services, but not enter the place of worship. They were to beg for the prayers of those going inside, and after a period of time they were allowed inside to listen to the service in a designated area. The penitents would eventually be allowed to remain during the entire service, though without partaking of communion. Only after these steps were taken could an individual be restored to full membership. This kind of penitential action, along with the continued peace the church experienced after the reign of Constantine, contributed to a shift in ecclesial discipline.

#### **2.2.5 Medieval Era (AD 500–1500)**

Church discipline was a difficult practice to keep consistently due to the many challenges the church faced, but dedication to its implementation was strong at first. According to Wills (2003), however, the practice of church discipline eventually declined in the early centuries of the church. He pointed out that after the fourth century, the system of public confession, exclusion, and penitential rigor fell into disuse. Nectarius, bishop of Constantinople from 381 to 398, apparently played an important role in the change. Since the third century Constantinople and other churches had adopted the practice of appointing a special presbyter in charge of administering the church’s penitential discipline. When the public discipline of a deacon at Constantinople for sexual immorality brought considerable public scandal upon the church, Nectarius abolished the office of the penitential presbyter and largely abandoned efforts to administer church discipline among the laity. Nectarius did not repudiate the strict public discipline in principle but he abandoned it in practice. The process of strict public discipline withered in the Latin-speaking churches of the West

just as it did in the churches of the Greek-speaking East. In its place emerged a system of private confession and individual penance (Wills, 2003)

This eventual emphasis on penance transformed church discipline largely into a private affair between the priest and layperson, and as such the communal role of church discipline dissipated. Thus, church discipline was largely dispelled, and instead private confession and works of merit were common fare in the days leading up to the Reformation.

### **2.2.6 Reformation Era (AD 1500–1750)**

Martin Luther, a key figure in the Reformation, is known in the early part of his career as one who had experienced the weight of the penitential system and thus questioned much of its validity, particularly in the issuing of indulgences (Hendrix, 2015). His criticism of these practices as substitutes for true repentance and contrition was a catalyst in precipitating the Reformation. This also allowed for a more biblical comprehension and application of church discipline by Luther, as well as others such as John Calvin, the Anabaptists, and later figures like Jonathan Edwards.

Luther wrote three key documents regarding the nature and practice of church discipline (Johnson, 2017). From these three documents one can observe his commitment to ecclesial discipline. Unlike the Catholic Church, Luther advocated for the keys of the kingdom to be exercised by the church, rather than by the Pope solely. While seeking to correct what he deemed as errors made by the Catholic Church, Luther maintained the seriousness of the ban and emphasized that those who come under discipline were warned of potential eschatological judgment should they not repent. Repentance, however, was the point for Luther, as he viewed church discipline as

restorative in nature. He also intended for this measure of discipline to serve as a deterrent to sin for others, in hopes that they would persevere in their faith.

John Calvin also advocated for ecclesial discipline in Geneva. He asserted three aims in the use of discipline in his Institutes (Gordon, 2016). First, discipline was necessary in local churches so that the high honour of God's holy name would not be blasphemed, especially at the Lord's Supper. Second, Calvin advocated for discipline in the church to preserve purity and holiness amongst God's people. And finally, Calvin viewed discipline as a corrective so that those under discipline might come to a place of repentance. While much more detail regarding Calvin's views could be elucidated, these are the main purposes for discipline, as he saw it.

The Anabaptists, contemporaries to Luther and Calvin, also protested the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church, particularly regarding penance and indulgences, but went further in seeking to implement what they believed to be biblical reforms. They believed the church, not the state, should handle matters of ecclesial discipline, and they tightly tied their view of discipline to their convictions regarding the ordinances and regenerate church membership. With their clear ecclesiology, it could be argued that Anabaptists most successfully and consistently upheld discipline in the church and saw the greatest degree of application by their followers.

### **2.2.7 Modern Era (1750–present)**

One can note the trajectory of a strong commitment to discipline in the patristic era, giving way to a lax view that dealt more in terms of individual penance. The Reformation brought the biblical teaching of church discipline back to its rightful place. In the early modern era, a strong emphasis on discipline continued. However, in many

denominations, as Enlightenment convictions ascended, including a keen sense of individualism and the inherent goodness of humanity, the practice of discipline generally slipped into decline.

Decline in the practice of church discipline can also be directly tied to a lax attitude in the realm of regenerate church membership. With neither the desire nor the process to identify church members, maintain current rolls, and closely guard the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, it's no surprise this decline happened. While seemingly mundane, these labours all relate directly to church membership and discipline, and thus are essential to the health of the church. There were exceptions to this general trend in the decline of discipline, but in comparison to the rest of church history, the last two centuries showed a significant decrease. However, this trend of the decline of church discipline has turned around significantly in recent years. A number of factors can be attributed to this resurgence, but there has been a definite renaissance in teaching about and practicing church discipline (as well as regenerate church membership).

### **2.3 Biblical Perspectives of Discipline**

Church discipline is both scriptural and Godly (Bradley, 2012). And it sprang from God's desire to assist His children (Church members) in developing righteous character. The Ten Commandments are given to mould the lives of God's children (Church members). "Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you, Obey the Lord your God's precepts, walking in his ways and reverencing him" (Deuteronomy 8:5-6).

In the book of Proverbs, King Solomon endorsed discipline and encouraged the young to accept its benefit: "My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his

rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in (Proverbs 3:11-12). "Our folks chastised us for a brief while as they thought best," says the Apostle Paul, "but God disciplines us for our benefit, so we may participate in his holiness." No discipline appears nice at the moment, but it is unpleasant. Later, it bears a fruit of righteousness and peace for those who receive it" (Heb 12:8-11).

This scripture is confirmed by Kimble (2013) who asserts that God's discipline may appear to be a punishment. However, it is for moral progress via correction. Though God loves His people, He does not overlook their sins without punishing them. His love makes Him work towards the repentance of humanity and His justice and righteousness brings punishment on those who sins. God punishes people who breach His covenant, but He promises to restore them when they accept the discipline and repent of their wrongdoing (Leviticus 26:14-46).

Hammerfest (2019) sees discipline as method, science, study, teaching and a way of training an individual. The word – *Yasarin* Hebrew Grammar means to chasten, teach, admonish, correct. It can also imply to allow oneself to be chastened, reprimanded, or scolded. Also, discipline according to the Hebrew word *muwcar* means to teach, correct, chasten, check and reprimand. The Greek term *paideia* also interpret discipline as to chasten, chastening, chastise and chastisement. Acts (7:22, 22:3) use the word *paideuo* to mean training of children through education, gentle and strong instruction and admonishing. The church bears a huge obligation to assist its members in developing and maintaining their saving relationship with Christ (Leeman, 2012). It does this by teaching, preaching, prayer, fellowship, participation in communion service, community service, international proclamation, and the great obligation that

lies on the people of God to maintain their purity, integrity, and spiritual fervour. In this sense, Mutetei (1974) believes that if a member becomes disinterested or drifts away from the church, the church must endeavour to recover them for the Lord.

### **2.3.1 Christian Foundation of Discipline**

Some discipline was carried out in the Old Testament by God directly from the days of Adam. Adam and Eve, the first humans created, experienced God's love. They had the opportunity of face-to-face communication and warm fellowship with God (Gen 2:7; 2:22-23). God blessed them and gave them dominion to rule over things he has created. God appointed them their food (Gen 1:29) and gave them direct information concerning their work. God commanded them to eat every fruit in the Garden but should not eat the fruit from the tree of Knowledge of fruit (Gen 2:17). Others were done under His instruction by the leader and community of God's people.

Adam and Eve, the first humans created, experienced God's lavished love. They had the opportunity of face-to-face communication and warm fellowship with God. The first face they see was the face of their Creator (Gen 2:7; 2: 22-23). God blessed them and gave them dominion to rule over and care for his created world. "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and every living creature that moves on the ground".

God appointed them their food: "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food" (Gen 1: 29). They received instructions from Him directly concerning their work and their food: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from

any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die” (Gen 2:17).

So, Adam and his wife received the formative discipline and knew how to live in their Eden home. Adam, according to Apostle Paul disobeyed and brought death to himself (Roman 5:11,14). Though he was not the one directly deceived, he brought death to himself by accepting deception from Eve who was deceived (1 Timothy 2:14). Adam became the subject of the wrath of God by eating the forbidden fruit. They knew how to live in their Eden home. Apostle Paul stated that Adam disobeyed and brought death (Rom 5:11, 14).

Although, it was Eve that was deceived (1Tim 2:14). Adam became involved in the result of the deception- disobedience. He ate the forbidden fruit. This very act incurred the wrath of God that led to the discipline. He meted out appropriate discipline to them after an investigation (Genesis 3:9-19). And to Eve, the sanctions include; sorrows, pains of pregnancy and childbirth, and submission of Eve to the authority of her husband (Adam)

For the sake of Adam, the ground was cursed. Life was to become toilsome for Adam because God cursed the ground because of him and he was to go through painful toil, eat from his toil. The soil will produce thorns and thistles for him and he will return to the dust which he was made from (Genesis 3:17-19). Adam and Eve were ultimately expelled from the Garden of Eden to prevent free access of the Tree of Life. It was not until the Lord had promised them a Saviour and provided them with a garment of skin (Gen 3:15, 21).

This episode reflected the principles of church discipline, law and warning were given, there was an investigation, and verdict. Hope offered: the promise of a redeemer

(Gen 3:15). This is a kind of ultimate restoration of the disciplined. Though they have lost the special privilege of dwelling in the Garden of God and face-to-face communion, God did not also forsake them while outside the Garden.

What impact did this discipline have on Adam and his wife? They forfeited their Eden home. However, they continued worshipping God despite the loss of their original home and face-to-face communion. The main lesson for humanity is that sin disrupts; denies us of our blessings; sin brings suffering and death.

Also, God disciplined Cain when he disobeyed him by killing his brother Abel (Genesis 4:3-5). This story exhibits some concepts of church discipline:

- I. God's warning before the offense of murder (Gen 4:6, 7)
- II. An offense committed (Gen 4:8).
- III. An interrogation/ investigation/fair hearing (Gen 4:9-10).
- IV. A verdict passed- He will be a fugitive and a vagabond (Gen 4:11, 12).
- V. God showed him mercy- God preserved his life and also prohibited anybody to killed him, by putting a mark on him (Gen 4:15)

An assessment of this incident reveals that Cain was given the formative discipline through his parents. According to Ellen White provides, one brother was not elected to be accepted by God and the other to reject. Abel chose faith and obedience while Cain followed unbelief and rebellion. God again showed his disciplinary action to Achan when he disobeyed the instruction given them. He and his direct family were annihilated. Though the discipline was drastic and severe, it serves as a strong deterrent to the community of God's people and restored the glory and honour of God. Miriam and Aaron were not spared when they murmured against the wife of Moses. God

inflicted Miriam with leprosy and isolation from the encampment of Israel for seven days.

It is a corrective discipline with lessons for Miriam, Aaron, and the entire community of Israel. It is a warning against jealousy and murmuring against higher authority. It is not right to harbour ethnic or racial sentiments towards others. In this discipline, God shows He is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). God will not compromise with or support sin irrespective of who is involved (Num 20:12; Deut. 3:23-26). Miriam was restored after seven days. Just as God disciplined some individuals and groups in the Old Testament, the practice continued in the New Testament with Jesus firmly establishing the procedure.

Church discipline should show the spirit of love and care toward the erring member and a strong desire for purity. In Matthew 18:15-17, Christ outlines the procedure to be followed to restore a member who has committed an offense against another person. He or she should acknowledge their sin and repent of it. Christ says "go to him." So, if his brother can approach him, make him see his fault, and the Holy Spirit enables him to humbly admit and ask for forgiveness, then he has won him. But if the offender resists and rejects the reconciliatory move or justifies his sin, the offended takes a further step. The offended should take one or two more persons to bring their wisdom to bear in the effort to make the offender see the reason to acknowledge his or her sin so that reconciliation can be achieved. The individual(s) invited to be part of this process can also serve as witnesses to efforts made.

If all the individual efforts fail, the case should be presented to the leadership of the Church. Should the intervention of the church also fail, the victim should be

considered as a pagan who has chosen damnation. While the goal of the several efforts is restoration, the basis of restoration is repentance. If genuine repentance is shown, mercy obtained, forgiveness affected, then restoration takes place. Where there is no repentance, a feeling of remorse, confession, and turning away from the sin, discipline will be applied. This is a way the church shows her displeasure over the sin by the member.

The offended should take one or two more persons to bring their wisdom to bear in the effort to make the offender see the reason to acknowledge his or her sin so that reconciliation can be achieved. The individual(s) invited to be part of this process can also serve as witnesses to efforts made. If the offender did not cooperate with them, then “tell it to the church.” The church gets involved in the effort to win the offender. If the offender listens to the church, sees his or her fault, and asks for forgiveness, the church has won the battle to save a soul. But if he or she refuses to cooperate with the church, to acknowledge and repent from the sin, then he or she faces discipline. He or she becomes to the church like an unbeliever (a pagan), a tax collector. “Jesus uses a manner of expression here to indicate exclusion! The impenitent brother is “worthy” of this exclusion or discipline because of his choice to sin and remain recalcitrant.” While the goal of the several efforts is restoration, the basis of restoration is repentance. If genuine repentance is shown, mercy obtained, forgiveness affected, then restoration takes place. Where there is no repentance, a feeling of remorse, confession, and turning away from the sin, discipline will be applied. This is a way the church shows her displeasure over the sin by the member.

## **2.4 Empirical Review**

### **2.5 Biblical Understanding of Church Discipline**

Unlike the popular perspective of sorrow and agony in the twenty-first century, the Bible presents these experiences as important components of human development and spiritual progress. Suffering has been and continues to be a potent disciplinary instrument in God's hands throughout human history. The dilemma of pain in a world-controlled sovereignty by an all-loving and all-powerful God remains one of the most difficult questions of all time. However, in Proverbs, one discovers the reason and need for suffering, as well as the depth and thoughtfulness of God's love (Murphy, 1998). Discipline is seen as one of the ways God uses to showcase his love to his children and to the large extent all of his creation, (Proverbs 3:11-12) and therefore, his children are admonished not to despise it. Although God does not always explain the reason for the discipline, He wants His children to realize that it is an essential component of His loving care. Neglecting discipline would indicate both a lack of care on God's behalf and, worse, illegitimacy. Discipline, according to the Bible, stems from a familial bond in which a father patiently trains his kid to preserve him from disaster (Harris, Archer & Waltke, 2003). God has admonished His followers to accept discipline as a way of reproof of (Proverbs 3:11-12). That the Lord punishes those He loves and show delights in. God discipline emanates from His heart and the care He has for creation.

The theme of discipline arising from love is carried on with vigour in Hebrews 12. "And have you forgotten the encouragement that addresses you as sons?" the author of Hebrews asks. Do not take the Lord's punishment lightly, my son... For the Lord punishes those he loves and chastises every son he accepts" (Hebrews 12:5-6). In the case of the Hebrews, God's discipline takes the shape of persecution from Christ's

opponents. As puzzling as this may appear, the result is the same—God purges His covenant people by external pressure. In the same context, God's discipline, like the discipline of a father, attests to His unchanging love and dedication to His people. Likewise, the punishment meted out to disobedient church members demonstrates God's, the leaderships, and other believers' love and care. Doing nothing displays a thoughtless and dangerous ambivalence. Leeman (2010) believes that when discipline is used in the local churches, it encourages church members to help each other to follow Jesus. It is a reciprocal accountability which shows God's care and readiness to accept responsibility towards the spiritual growth of one another.

## **2.6 Church Discipline in Pentecostal Charismatic Churches**

Church discipline, as a practice within Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, serves both to maintain spiritual order and to guide members toward personal sanctification. The concept of discipline in these communities is rooted in a mixture of scriptural imperatives, ecclesiastical authority, and an overarching theology of holiness and restoration. In Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions, discipline is viewed not simply as punitive but also as a redemptive process aimed at spiritual growth. Church discipline in Pentecostal Charismatic churches is rooted in biblical injunctions concerning holiness, obedience, and accountability. Pentecostals often refer to passages such as Matthew 18:15-17, 1 Corinthians 5, and Galatians 6:1 to guide their disciplinary practices. These scriptures emphasize the importance of confronting sin within the church and the process of restoring an erring member through a structured, often public, method of discipline. The biblical concept of restoration is central, as discipline is not

solely about punishment but about leading the individual back into a proper relationship with God and the community.

Pentecostal theology stresses personal holiness and spiritual renewal. Theologians such as Macchia (2019) argue that the emphasis on the Holy Spirit in Pentecostalism gives rise to a distinctive view of discipline as a means of spiritual formation, with the goal of making believers more like Christ. This notion of sanctification requires that individuals conform to a set of ethical and spiritual norms that are guided by church teachings. Discipline, in this light, becomes a vehicle for spiritual growth and moral rectitude, underscoring the communal responsibility of the congregation to uphold God's standards.

In this regard, the concept of church discipline in Pentecostalism aligns with the broader Christian idea of accountability. However, Pentecostals tend to emphasize the immediacy of the Holy Spirit's work in the believer's life, which sometimes means disciplinary actions are perceived as interventions to hasten spiritual restoration. Pentecostal scholars such as McClendon (2020) highlight that while church discipline in these contexts is deeply theological, it is also intensely personal, involving not only church leaders but also the broader community.

While the conceptual literature establishes a theological basis for church discipline, empirical studies provide insight into how these practices are carried out and how they impact congregational life. Research conducted in diverse Pentecostal settings from Ghana to Europe demonstrates that the practice of discipline, although grounded in theology, is shaped by cultural, social, and institutional factors. In Ghana, the Church of Pentecost (CoP) represents a key example of how discipline is implemented in

African Pentecostal churches. Empirical studies by Owusu and Antwi (2020) highlight that the CoP, like many other Pentecostal churches, employs a hierarchical structure in which discipline is enforced by church leaders through a well-defined process. This process typically begins with a private confrontation, followed by a public announcement if the transgression is deemed severe enough. The ultimate aim, however, is always restoration, not condemnation. In their study, Owusu and Antwi found that many members of the CoP perceive church discipline as an essential part of spiritual growth, emphasizing the pastoral care and accountability it provides. This is consistent with the theological view that discipline is ultimately a redemptive process, not merely a punitive one.

However, the process is not without tension. Church members in the CoP sometimes view discipline as overly harsh or as an infringement on personal autonomy, particularly in cases where the transgressions are minor or personal in nature. This tension is reflective of broader concerns within Pentecostal communities about balancing the need for spiritual accountability with the desire for individual freedom. For instance, research by Adom (2021) highlights how some Pentecostal members in Ghana express discomfort with the authoritarian nature of church discipline, which can feel like an infringement on personal liberties, especially in a cultural context that values strong community bonds and personal integrity.

In Europe, the practice of church discipline in Pentecostal and Charismatic churches has been explored within the context of secularization and multiculturalism. McClendon (2020) observes that church discipline in European Pentecostal communities is increasingly complicated by broader societal shifts. For example, many

Pentecostal churches in Europe have adapted their disciplinary practices to align with multicultural sensibilities, where a greater emphasis is placed on dialogue and restorative justice rather than public rebuke. In these contexts, discipline is often seen less as a means of maintaining doctrinal purity and more as a tool for fostering communal cohesion within increasingly diverse congregations. McClendon notes that in European Pentecostal circles, discipline has begun to incorporate a focus on mental health and personal well-being, acknowledging the complexity of human behavior in a postmodern context. While this shift may be viewed as a move toward leniency, it also reflects a broader theological commitment to grace and compassion.

In contrast, the more conservative Pentecostal churches in Eastern Europe and parts of Africa tend to maintain stricter disciplinary measures. In countries like Romania, research by Popa (2022) shows that Pentecostal churches still employ strict measures of church discipline that include exclusion and public confession. The focus on doctrinal purity in these regions stems from the belief that the church must be distinct from secular society and that moral lapses, if not corrected, can contaminate the body of Christ.

The shift from punitive to restorative discipline has been a central feature of empirical research in Pentecostal circles. In Ghana, for instance, the CoP employs a restoration-focused model where discipline is understood as a means of re-integrating the errant member into the community. Research by Adom (2021) illustrates that in the CoP, even severe cases of transgression such as adultery or drunkenness are addressed with the goal of rehabilitation. However, the process can be painful, involving public humiliation and a temporary separation from the fellowship until the individual

demonstrates repentance and genuine change. This model is in line with Pentecostal teachings on forgiveness and redemption, but it also creates tensions when the punishment is perceived as too severe or when it fails to address the underlying social or personal issues that led to the transgression.

## **2.7 Lived Experiences of Church Members in Disciplinary Situations**

Pentecostal and Charismatic churches place a strong emphasis on the formation of a believer's spiritual identity, which is closely tied to communal belonging. The church is not only a place of worship but also a community where members derive a sense of purpose, identity, and support. For many Pentecostals, the act of being disciplined by the church can therefore be perceived as a threat to their identity as "saved" or "redeemed" individuals.

Empirical studies suggest that church members who undergo discipline often experience feelings of guilt, shame, and social isolation. This is especially true in communities where religious conformity is highly valued. For instance, in a study conducted in Ghana, Owusu and Antwi (2020) found that members of the Church of Pentecost who were subjected to discipline often struggled with feelings of alienation, particularly when the disciplinary measures involved public rebuke or exclusion from fellowship. This public nature of discipline can lead to internal conflict, as the individual is forced to reconcile their personal failure with the idealized image of the faithful believer in the community.

Moreover, the social stigma attached to disciplinary measures can make it difficult for members to reintegrate into the church community, even after they have completed the process of repentance. This was reflected in a study by Mensah (2019), which examined

the reintegration experiences of disciplined church members in several Pentecostal communities in Accra, Ghana. Many participants reported feeling alienated or shunned by fellow congregants, which further exacerbated their sense of spiritual failure. The emotional burden of having been disciplined was sometimes heavier than the original transgression, leading to questions about the church's capacity for forgiveness and its understanding of grace.

The process of repentance and reconciliation within Pentecostal and Charismatic churches is often framed as a transformative journey. It is not merely about confession of sins but involves a deep, personal transformation that aligns the individual's life with the teachings of the church. From the perspective of disciplined members, this journey is both humbling and liberating, offering a chance for spiritual renewal.

In an empirical study conducted in the United Kingdom, McClendon (2020) explored how Pentecostal church members, after experiencing church discipline, navigated the emotional and spiritual terrain of restoration. The research highlighted that disciplined member, particularly those who were publicly reprimanded, experienced a period of deep personal reflection and remorse. However, once the process of reconciliation was initiated, members often found a renewed sense of purpose and spiritual commitment. The study noted that the church's role in guiding these individuals back to spiritual wholeness through prayer, counseling, and community support was crucial in fostering a sense of hope and acceptance.

Similarly, a study by Owusu and Antwi (2020) on the Church of Pentecost in Ghana explored the role of church leaders in facilitating the restoration process. They found that church leaders often function as mediators in the process of reconciliation, offering

spiritual guidance and emotional support to transgressors. In some cases, however, church members reported that the leadership's approach could be inconsistent, with some leaders emphasizing forgiveness and others focusing more on punitive measures. This inconsistency created confusion and frustration among disciplined members, who found it difficult to understand the criteria for their restoration.

In addition to the theological and emotional aspects of church discipline, the social dynamics of the church community also play a significant role in shaping the lived experiences of disciplined members. In many Pentecostal churches, there is an intense sense of social monitoring, where members feel the constant gaze of fellow believers, particularly when disciplinary actions are involved. This can result in heightened anxiety and fear of public judgment.

For example, a study conducted by Kofi and Boadi (2021) on the social ramifications of church discipline within Pentecostal communities in Accra, Ghana, showed that the peer influence within these congregations could be both a source of support and a cause of further alienation. While some members of the congregation were supportive, others were quick to judge, reinforcing the stigma associated with discipline. This created a complicated social environment where the disciplined individual could feel torn between the desire for social acceptance and the need for spiritual healing.

Peer pressure in Pentecostal churches often extends beyond church attendance and personal conduct to influence the very process of repentance. According to Kofi and Boadi (2021), disciplined individuals sometimes felt pressured to conform to the expectations of the church community, leading to superficial acts of repentance that

lacked genuine transformation. The fear of social exclusion and ridicule, rather than a deep sense of spiritual conviction, sometimes drove these behaviors.

Despite the challenges faced by individuals undergoing discipline, many Pentecostal and Charismatic churches emphasize the importance of community support in the restoration process. The role of the church community in guiding the disciplined member back into fellowship cannot be overstated. Empirical studies in both Ghana and Europe have shown that when the church emphasizes the role of collective support, the process of reintegration is smoother and more successful.

In a qualitative study conducted by McClendon (2020) in a Pentecostal community in London, respondents shared that their experiences of restoration were deeply influenced by the support they received from fellow believers. This included regular prayers, counseling sessions, and active involvement in church activities. In contrast, when the church community was less involved or indifferent, members reported a slower, more painful journey to reintegration.

Likewise, in Ghana, where communal living is deeply embedded in the culture, the church's role as a nurturing and supportive environment was particularly significant for those who had undergone discipline. The study by Owusu and Antwi (2020) revealed that the church's active participation in the reintegration process, through home visits, encouragement, and ongoing spiritual guidance, was vital in helping individuals rebuild their relationships with both God and the community. Members who felt truly supported by their church community were more likely to stay engaged and committed to their faith, thereby avoiding future lapses.

## 2.8 Psychological Effect of Church Discipline

This section is concerned with the contemporary church's attitude towards discipline as reflected in the psychology of church members. According to Bradley (2012), discipline in the Early Church was impartial, pure, and unadulterated. All types of sin, including sexual immorality, sensuality, heresy, and even hypocrisy, were immediately punished, as seen by Paul's admonition of Peter (Gal. 2: 11-16) and the discipline of Ananias and Sapphira. Bradley (2012) goes on to pose some pertinent issues about church discipline in current times. What is the average church member's attitude toward discipline, or what behaviour or behavioural pattern has been demonstrated by members regarding discipline in the contemporary church? Is the church still upholding such a high moral standard? Is the church still impartial, and, more significantly, does the church operate in such a way that members constantly desire to flee sin or be terrified of the church?

Several authors have studied and provide the importance of church discipline and elucidated their perspectives. For example, Adebo and Adebo (2018) conducted a study on the psychology of church discipline in contemporary times. One finding in their study was that most Pastors were of the view that the practice of discipline has gone down considerably since the early 2010s. Ownby (1994) made some assertions that the 2000s and 2010s will see a number of having no knowledge of what church discipline is all about. Adebo and Adebo (2018) points out that Shame can then be proposed as one of the primary reasons for the decline of church discipline in the contemporary church. The associated effects of shame would be guilt and humiliation. Humiliation can be considered as a secondary effect of shame because of the origin of the affect (Combs, Campbell, Jackson & Smith, 2010). Humiliation is an external based

feeling. It can be understood as not meeting the expectation an individual perceives the public has created in relation to the individual themselves. Walker and Knauer (2011) argue that it would seem easier to assume that there is difficulty in extinguishing humiliation over extinguishing shame. If behaviour of the public is perceived by the individual as positive, humiliation can be eliminated. However, Adebo and Adebo (2018) noted that if the internalization of shame is deeply ingrained into the individual's self-concept, even perception can be skewed in the negative direction. Guilt and shame are similar in that they are created and internalized by the individual (Svensson et al., 2013). The differentiation between the two would be the applicability of these affects to an individual (Combs et al., 2010). A religious individual is more likely to use the descriptors "guilt" and "shame" in relation to their offense (sin); an unreligious person may be limited to the descriptor of "shame".

Combs et al. (2010) opined that guilt can be understood as the theoretical concept of shame based on morality: moral shame. It can be perceived as the ethical judgment of immorality. In the context of church law, it is assumed that the offender would feel a level of guilt after self-evaluating, weighing their beliefs in alliance (or misalliance) with the immorality (or morality) of the sin committed, and a conclusion that subscribes to the penalization of self for the sinful thought/behaviour/action. Kimble (2013) points out that the hopeful external result of a guilt process within the church law would be the repentance and possible restoration of the offender. This is not to discount the level of morality within unreligious individuals, but to emphasize the intensity of the experience of guilt and shame within a religious individual.

Without a doubt, the psychological issue of shame and guilt plays a significant role in the decline of the practice of discipline in the contemporary church. Adebo and

Adebo (2018) points out that most individuals could not stand being rebuked openly by any Pastor for whatever reason. For them, such action will devalue their dignity and create serious psychological problem for them.

## **2.9 The Impact of Church Discipline on Church Growth and Spirituality**

Church discipline is not incompatible with church expansion. It is an indication of a healthy church. According to Wills (2003), "a church without discipline would barely have qualified as a church." (Page 12) Fear of losing members is one of the reasons why most churches and church leaders avoid church discipline. Some believe it will result in the loss of rich members. Church discipline can never be considered a vehicle for church growth for such congregations and pastors.

According to Buice (2017), church discipline causes the church to develop "since the church sees it happening on a regular basis." Buice (2017) thinks that the church will expand spiritually and numerically as the healthy church exhibits a desire for God, love for one another, hatred for sin, and love for their community.

McDonald (2020) investigated church discipline and church development. The astonishing consequence was that church discipline, which he associated with "Soul Stewardship," was the driving force behind the expansion. Soul stewardship tries to repair individuals, making the church seem good to God and the rest of the world. Proper church discipline and 'soul stewardship' are synonymous. He conducted an investigation in the Pennsylvania Conference of Seventh-day Adventists to determine why three congregations in the Conference saw consistent membership growth despite the high incidence of apostasy. His discovery was that the church tries to recapture people who have been punished by making repeated targeted visits and invitations

during yearly evangelistic gatherings. This plan is so effective that within 6-12 months, about 50- 70 per cent of those excommunicated (removed from membership) for apostasy reclaimed. McDonald (2020) came to the conclusion that the three Pennsylvania churches demonstrate, among other things, that God will bless those churches that demonstrate the full extent of His love. When required, true love includes reprimand and discipline. Weaver (2004) noted and underlined the connection between leadership, church discipline, and church development.

Leadership and church discipline are inextricably linked to church growth because growth requires both leadership and church discipline. There will be no conversions if no one takes the initiative in converting souls to Christ. If there is no church discipline, there is nothing to instruct a new convert... or to guide him back to the right road if he strays. As a result, a local church that intends to flourish biblically must strive to obey God's plan as revealed in his Word (Weaver, 2004).

Church discipline, rather than being viewed as a kind of punishment, is an endeavour to return individuals to discipleship. This objective of restoring connection with Christ and the church is only attainable via the combined impact of the Holy Spirit and human sympathy. "Brethren, if a man is overcome in any sin, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, examining yourselves lest you also be tempted," Apostle Paul said (Gal 6:1, NKJV). It is a spiritual practice carried out in the name of the Lord by spiritually inclined persons. As a result, good discipline helps the church to demonstrate genuine love and concern for the erring brother or sister.

Sober introspection is required as part of the discipline practice. When church leaders and members chastise a brother or sister who has committed a transgression, they reflect profoundly on themselves. It's no surprise that Paul urged church members

to keep a tight eye on themselves in order to avoid falling into the same trap. While expressing sympathy, love, compassion, patience, and grace, the spirit of fairness, justice, and truth must be demonstrated. According to Masikamu (2003), "Church discipline is unavoidable in every dynamic Church that seeks to bring its members to everlasting life." The ultimate purpose of church discipline is to assist members in dealing with the sin that requires correction. To assist him or her in seeing the sin in its actual form and feeling regret in order to overcome it.

Masikamu (2003) beautifully summarizes the core of church discipline. To maintain the Church's integrity, to protect the innocent from harm, to protect the effectiveness of the Church's witness, to warn and correct the careless, to bring the guilty to salvation, to rehabilitate the guilty, to restore to effective service those who have been rehabilitated, and to protect the Church's reputation and resources. Many commentators on the issue have acknowledged the good influence of adequate church discipline. According to Buice (2017), when sin is recognized and dealt with appropriately, the church will progress spiritually.

The above reasoning is compatible with my observations. Serns (2008) discussed a disciplinary situation he handled in one of his district's congregations. According to the story, a woman was living in adultery. And the church was willing to address that obvious sin for six years. One factor is because the lady's parents have been church leaders for many years. They were anxious that addressing her might drive her away from the church. They felt that if she continued to attend church, the transgression would be forgiven over time. Her husband had complained to the elders multiple times, until the wife stopped attending church.

The first elder told the pastor about the problem. The pastor persuaded the church's first elder and other officers that something could be done. The pastor, along with the First Elder, paid three visits to her home in an attempt to re-convert her and teach her husband on Christ-like love. The attempt to persuade the woman to alter her scandalous lifestyle was futile. The pastor lectured the congregation on the need of self-discipline. The church decided in a business session to remove her name from the membership list. As a result of humbly surrendering to His Word, the church has learned to grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:8). "The next several years saw dozens and dozens of people added to the church," Serns (2008) says in the piece. The documented numerical growth reflects the spiritual rejuvenation brought about by church discipline. This illustrates that God's word is a form of discipline. "The basic means of discipline for the church remains the Word," Calvin says. "The Word must be utilized as a spiritual source of power to chastise and prevent someone from receiving Holy Communion" (Calvin cited in Strauss, 2010).

## **2.10 Discipline and Church Membership**

To recognize the concept of membership and its critical role in church discipline, one must first understand the essence of the church. Scholars argue that the word *ekklesia*, or church, in the New Testament refers to a community to which one makes a personal commitment rather than a society into which one is born (Hammett & Merkle, 2012). This community becomes an important component of a new believer's life and remains so throughout his or her trip on earth. The Church, according to Paul, is Christ's body (1 Cor. 12). He illustrates the symbiotic nature of its members using the metaphor of a real organism with interrelated components. Hammett and Merkle (2012) explain:

“No member of a physical body is casually related to other members of that body; no member is distant from the other members ... The church as the body of Christ underscores the necessity of church membership (because members of the body cannot survive apart from the body) and highlights the mutuality of love and care involved in church membership.” (p. 308)

Thus, a Christian's casual attitude toward the church reveals a lack of knowledge of Scripture. Membership or devotion to the church is never presented as optional in the Bible. Indeed, spiritual life can grow only within the setting of a believing community.

Furthermore, fellowship among the saints entails more than merely gathering for worship and fun; it also entails "the believer's manner of life, which begins at conversion." (Bradley, 2012, p. 14) When Christians obey the principles of Scripture, they are in true fellowship. When they fail to do so and continue to walk in unrepentant sin, the unity and communion of the body of Christ is broken.

The Church's authority is also essential in the debate of membership and church discipline. "Just as the Bible establishes the government of your nation as your greatest authority on earth when it comes to your citizenship in that nation, so the Bible establishes the local church as your highest authority on earth when it comes to your discipleship to Christ," Leeman (2017) maintains (Page 24). This reality should shape every Christian's view of the Church. It denotes the obligatory character of membership and participation in Christ's body. Choosing Jesus entails choosing His people as well. One cannot exist without the other (ibis). Christ expects His disciples to mature, and maturity is achieved via interdependence and mutual accountability. Although this thought frightens some Christians, comprehending the Church's power creates the framework for sound church discipline.

The Church's authority, on the other hand, extends far further. A Christian must devote not just his or her time, talent, and resources to the local church, but also to its correction. Jesus grants His Church the ability to "protect his gospel... and his people... by removing those who are simply pretenders... so that others are not harmed by their corruption" (Pierre, 2013; pg.14). This power entails assessing conduct according on Scripture's principles and, where required, granting the right to confront or expel.

Church discipline and membership are inextricably linked. Membership distinguishes between those who are devoted and those who are not. It also builds a link between the local church and the believer and oversees the discipleship of a Christian. Membership, in essence, serves as a form of covenant. It entails the church and the individual Christian making a commitment to one another while serving Christ.

Membership establishes boundaries for the church, distinguishing those who belong from those who do not. In light of 1 Corinthians 5:12, where Paul asks, "For what have I to do with judging outsiders?" drawing this border is critical. "Are you not to judge those within the church?" As a result, before instituting discipline, the church must present a litmus test for establishing who its members are. Failure to do so, or a hazy distinction between members and non-members, may lead to resistance to corrective discipline. As a result, the church must explain its principles and standards, allowing membership aspirants to make an informed decision and the church to understand its own.

Christians may avoid membership yet attend a church religiously and conform to its principles and demands. Given the importance of church discipline, these persons should be regarded as members. As previously stated, every believer yields to the

church upon conversion. Thus, failing to enforce discipline because a person is hesitant to formally commit endangers his or her soul as well as the health of the church.

### **2.11 Church of Pentecost Position on Discipline**

The Church of Pentecost position on discipline is defined clearly in the church constitution as an article (Article 25) on discipline (CoP Constitution, 2016) the code of conduct for its members. The implication is that behaviour contrary to the code of conduct, warrants necessary disciplinary action by the appropriate body within the church. (ref) points out that the church's code of conduct, anchored on Biblical teachings, helps sustains ones' relationship with God

The constitution holds the same code of discipline as well as sanctions for both officers and members of the church. It lists the following as offences;

1. Habitually visiting questionable places
2. Falling into open sin
3. Embracing or spreading false doctrine
4. Divorcing wife or husband
5. Marrying more than one wife
6. A sister getting married to a married man
7. Disobeying and showing disrespect to the Church authority at any level
8. Practicing immorality.

The constitution further points out that the gravity of the offense will be reflected in the kind of sanctions that will be meted to the culprits. The following are sanctions recommend by the constitution.

1. May be publicly rebuked
2. May be suspended from taking active part in all Church programmes and activities

3. Shall not partake of the Lord's Supper
4. Shall not minister or witness on the platform of The Church, etc.
5. May be removed from office
6. The Office of Elder, Deacon or Deaconess may be revoked by the appointing authority
7. In extreme cases, an offending member/officer may be excommunicated from The Church by the Executive Council on the recommendation of the Area Head and the Area Executive Committee.

### **2.12 Restoration and Reintegration in the Church**

In Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, discipline is not seen merely as an act of punishment or exclusion; rather, it is framed within a broader theological understanding of restoration and reintegration. The restoration of a believer, particularly one who has transgressed or fallen short of the spiritual standards set by the church, is one of the most critical components of the church's disciplinary framework. This process is deeply intertwined with the Pentecostal emphasis on grace, forgiveness, and the possibility of spiritual renewal.

The concept of restoration in Pentecostal and Charismatic churches is grounded in the belief that all believers, regardless of their failings, can be reconciled to God through repentance and the church's intervention. The Bible, particularly in passages like Galatians 6:1-2 and 2 Corinthians 2:5-8, highlights the idea that discipline should aim at the restoration of the transgressor, not their condemnation. The apostle Paul's letter to the Corinthians, where he urges the church to forgive and comfort a repentant individual, is foundational for Pentecostal practices of discipline. These scriptures

provide the theological justification for a disciplinary process that is ultimately restorative, rather than punitive.

In this framework, restoration is understood not only as a return to fellowship with the church but also as a process of personal and spiritual renewal. Pentecostalism's focus on the work of the Holy Spirit further reinforces the belief that no individual is beyond the possibility of transformation. Theologically, church discipline is a means of providing an opportunity for spiritual growth, allowing individuals to experience God's grace in a tangible way and to realign themselves with the church's teachings.

Empirical studies conducted in various Pentecostal and Charismatic settings reveal that restoration processes are indeed a central element of church discipline. For example, in Ghana, where Pentecostalism has seen significant growth, the Church of Pentecost (CoP) employs a formalized disciplinary process aimed at restoring members who have transgressed. According to Owusu and Antwi (2020), the CoP's disciplinary measures include a combination of counseling, public confession, and periods of exclusion from communion or fellowship. However, these measures are seen as temporary, with the ultimate goal of reintegrating the individual into full fellowship once they have shown evidence of repentance and spiritual renewal.

The church's leaders play a crucial role in this process, as they are seen not only as enforcers of discipline but also as facilitators of restoration. The pastor or elders of the church engage with the individual to help them understand their wrongdoing, encourage genuine repentance, and offer spiritual guidance for overcoming future lapses. In this context, the disciplinary process becomes a pastoral care practice, with a strong emphasis on the redemptive potential of every individual.

Empirical studies have also shown that the restoration process in Pentecostal churches varies in intensity and approach depending on the severity of the transgression and the church's theological orientation. In a study by McClendon (2020), it was noted that Pentecostal churches in Europe, though also emphasizing restoration, tend to have a more formal and structured approach to reintegration. In these settings, the process of restoration is often accompanied by specific conditions, such as probationary periods or monitoring by a church mentor, to ensure that the individual is fully rehabilitated before being fully reintegrated into the community.

In contrast, some African Pentecostal churches like the CoP in Ghana emphasize communal restoration, where the church plays an active role in supporting the individual throughout their reintegration. This communal approach to restoration underscores the relational aspect of discipline in Pentecostalism, where the entire congregation is encouraged to participate in the process of healing and forgiveness. The goal is not only spiritual renewal but also the rebuilding of relationships within the body of the church.

The process of restoration and reintegration in Pentecostal churches is not solely theological but is also shaped by the social and cultural context in which the church operates. In many African Pentecostal communities, the church is deeply embedded in the social fabric of the local community. As a result, transgressions within the church are often viewed not just as individual moral failings but as events that affect the wider community. This cultural aspect of church discipline is particularly evident in Ghana, where public confession and restoration often involve the congregation. The emphasis on public acknowledgment of wrongdoing, followed by communal forgiveness, reflects

a communal culture where individual actions are seen as inherently connected to the well-being of the group.

In European Pentecostal settings, where secularism is more pronounced, restoration practices are often more individualized. In such contexts, the process of reintegration may be more private, with less emphasis on the role of the larger community in the disciplinary process. However, the underlying principles of forgiveness, grace, and the possibility of spiritual renewal remain central, even if the social mechanisms of discipline differ.

Despite the theological and social importance of restoration, the process of reintegrating a transgressor into the church community is fraught with challenges. One of the most significant challenges is the potential for stigmatization. Even though restoration is encouraged, some empirical studies suggest that individuals who have undergone church discipline may experience ongoing social marginalization within the congregation. A study by Strydom (2018) in South Africa noted that while restoration is emphasized, individuals who have been disciplined may face lingering judgment or a sense of alienation from their fellow church members. This social challenge is often compounded by the church's high expectations of moral conduct and spiritual integrity, which can make it difficult for reintegrated members to fully regain their place in the community.

Additionally, the success of the restoration process depends heavily on the individual's willingness to change and the effectiveness of the church's disciplinary approach. In Ghana, where Pentecostal churches like the CoP maintain a structured system of discipline, the process of reintegration can be lengthy and requires both spiritual

commitment and a demonstrated change in behavior. However, in some cases, individuals may relapse into old habits, which can hinder the restoration process and create tension within the church community (Owusu & Antwi, 2020).

In European contexts, where Pentecostalism is often more influenced by individualism, there may be less communal support for those undergoing discipline. This individualistic approach can lead to a lack of accountability and make it more difficult for the church to fully restore individuals to fellowship. Nonetheless, the overarching principle of grace remains central, and many churches continue to emphasize the possibility of redemption, albeit in a more privatized form.

### **2.13 Summary of Chapter**

The literature review highlighted that discipline within the church serves as a mechanism for maintaining moral and doctrinal order, ensuring that members adhere to the spiritual and ethical standards set by the church. Church discipline can be traced as far back as AD 100, suggesting that discipline has been a part of Christian tradition since the early church, where it was used to correct behavior, uphold purity, and strengthen communal faith. Within Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, discipline is often framed as both corrective and redemptive, aiming not only to address transgressions but also to guide errant members toward spiritual restoration. Psychologically, church discipline can have both positive and negative effects on members, influencing their emotional well-being, sense of belonging, and perception of the church community. While some individuals view discipline as a necessary step toward spiritual growth and personal accountability, others may experience feelings of shame, alienation, or social stigma, particularly when discipline involves public rebuke

or exclusion. The process of restoring and integrating errant members involves structured disciplinary measures, counseling, community support, and spiritual rehabilitation. Many Pentecostal churches emphasize the role of pastoral care, mentorship, and forgiveness in ensuring that disciplined members are not permanently marginalized but are instead reintegrated into the church with a renewed commitment to their faith.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

Research methodology as are procedures followed by researchers ‘go about their work of describing, explaining and predicting phenomena’ (Rajasekar, Philominaathan & Chinnathambi, 2013, p. 5). This chapter, therefore, is concerned with the methods used in the study. It explains the philosophical paradigms, research approach, research design, description of the study area, population, sample and sampling techniques and instruments for data collection. It also discusses the trustworthiness, data collection procedures, methods of data analysis and ethical considerations.

#### **3.1 Philosophical Paradigms/Worldviews**

A paradigm is a set of ideas and beliefs which provide a framework or model which research can follow. A paradigm defines existing knowledge, the nature of the problem (s) to be investigated, appropriate methods of investigation, and the way data should be analysed and interpreted (Nickerson, 2022).

The interpretative paradigm was adopted for the study. Interpretivism is an approach to social science that asserts that understanding the beliefs, motivations, and reasoning of individuals in a social situation is essential to decoding the meaning of the data that can be collected around a phenomenon (Nickerson, 2022). Interpretivism uses qualitative research methods that focus on individuals' beliefs, motivations and reasoning over quantitative data to gain understanding of social interactions (Alharahshel & Pius, 2020). This paradigm was chosen for this study as it allowed me capture the detailed explanations of the participants on the subject of church discipline and the

psychological pathway of member in CoP in the Techiman area precisely, without any generalisation to other districts in the same way which is sometimes claimed for survey research. Besides, the subscribe to the argument that different people in a society experience and understand the same "objective" reality in different ways, and have individual reasons for their actions (Alharahshel & Pius, 2020). hat is to say, the participants view their experience and perception about church discipline from different lenses; hence, it is important to sample different views from them to make an objective and well-informed logical conclusion.

According to Gurbich (2017) and Rugg and Petre (2017), the interpretative paradigm argues that social reality is created jointly through meaningful interactions between the researcher and the researched in the socio-cultural context of the researched. The choice of the interpretative paradigms for this study, thus, acknowledged the feelings, experiences and viewpoints of the researched through verbal collection of data. This is because through the face-to-face interviews with some of the participants, I was able to explore their feelings, experiences and viewpoints of the participants. In a nutshell, I followed the interpretative paradigm because it provided a multiple source of evidence and produced findings that are superior to the ones produced by quantitative research.

### **3.2 Research Approach**

This study used qualitative approach. Qualitative research places emphasis upon exploring and understanding "... the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2014, p.4) Qualitative methods are usually described as inductive, with the underlying assumptions being that reality is a social construct, that variables are difficult to measure, complex and interwoven, that there is a primacy of subject matter and that the data collected will consist of an insider's viewpoint (Rovai

et al., 2014). Rovai et al. (2014, p.4) make the point that this approach towards research “... values individuality, culture, and social justice” which provides a content and context rich breadth of information which, although subjective in nature, is current (Tracy, 2018).

This study used the qualitative research approach because data was collected in the field at the site (CoP in the Techiman District) where participants experienced the church discipline. The participants were not brought into a lab (a contrived situation), nor the research instruments posted to them to complete. Besides, the research questions sought to find “*what*” and “*which*” which according to Kusi (2012), is best analysed qualitatively.

The choice of the qualitative research approach was influenced by the argument of Tsadidey (2018) that, qualitative research seeks to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspectives of the local population. In addition, being a native of the district, I had a less formal relationship with the participant, thus influencing the smooth collection of data. Again, I wanted to give the respondents the opportunity to respond more elaborately and in greater detail questions, hence the choice of qualitative approach. More importantly, the choice of the qualitative research approach was motivated by the argument of Pallant (2020) that it has the ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given phenomenon.

### **3.3 Research Design**

A research design describes the procedures for conducting a study, including when, from whom, and under what conditions the data is obtained. In other words, a research design indicates the general plan: how the research is set up, what happens to the

subjects, and what methods of data collection are used' (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014, p, 28).

This study adopted a phenomenological case study design. A phenomenological research design originated in the field of psychology and seeks to understand the life experiences of the individual. A small number of participants are usually selected. The researcher engages in direct observation and the experience of the individuals in their natural setting to find patterns and meaning (Creswell, 2014). Phenomenological design has some of the following features: an emphasis on exploring the social setting, instead of testing hypothesis about them; working primarily with unstructured data with no precoding of categories prior to data collection; studying a small number of cases; and analysis of data using interpretation of the meanings in the form of verbal explanations with little or no quantification and statistical analyses.

A phenomenology research design was adopted to explore in depth the perspectives and experiences of church members regarding disciplinary practices. This design is appropriate as it allows for detailed understanding of social and cultural contexts, capturing nuances that quantitative methods may overlook (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The design aligns with the study's objectives to identify practices, assess impacts, and provide actionable recommendations. The choice of the design was deemed appropriate since the study objectives related to direct experiences of members who have experienced disciplinary actions from the CoP, hence their life experiences could be understood directly from themselves. The approach also made it possible to delve into the subjective experiences and perspectives of the participants thereby uncovering the meaning to their experiences, emotions, and perceptions. Another motivation for the choice of the phenomenological research design was that it helped in understanding the

experiences of the participants in the context it occurred thereby providing a holistic perspective to their experiences.

### **3.4 Researcher's Role**

As a member of the Church of Pentecost (CoP) and a minister's wife in charge of the Wenchi District, my positionality played an important role in shaping this study, which explored the psychological pathways of members who had undergone the church's disciplinary process in the Techiman area. My dual identity as both a member and someone close to church leadership significantly influenced how I approached the research and interacted with participants.

Being a member of the CoP gave me an insider's perspective on the church's teachings, practices, and cultural dynamics. I was already familiar with the spiritual significance of church discipline and the expectations placed on members during and after the process. This understanding allowed me to approach the study with empathy and sensitivity, ensuring that participants' experiences were viewed through a lens that respected their spiritual journeys. It also helped me develop research questions that were relevant to the CoP context and interpret findings in ways that aligned with the church's unique environment.

My role as a minister's wife further influenced the study by giving me access to individuals and spaces that might have been difficult for an outsider to reach. I was able to engage with both members who had gone through church discipline and leaders who were involved in implementing these practices. My role created a sense of trust and credibility, as participants viewed me as someone who understood their experiences and shared their commitment to the church. This trust encouraged open and honest conversations, which enriched the depth of the data I collected.

However, my positionality also required careful reflection to ensure that the research remained objective and participant-centered. As someone closely connected to the church, I recognized the risk of unconscious bias shaping my interpretations of the data. My proximity to leadership meant that some participants might have felt hesitant to share criticism of the church's practices, worrying that their views could affect their standing within the community. To address these challenges, I actively engaged in reflexive practices, such as journaling and seeking feedback from peers, to remain aware of my own perspectives and minimize their influence on the study.

While my dual identity presented challenges, it also allowed me to approach participants with genuine empathy. I understood the emotional and spiritual weight of church discipline, having witnessed its impact on individuals and families in my own community. This empathy fostered a supportive environment where participants felt safe sharing their stories, knowing they were speaking to someone who respected their faith and struggles.

Overall, my positionality as a member of the CoP and a minister's wife brought both strengths and challenges to this study. It provided valuable insights, facilitated access, and built trust with participants. At the same time, it required ongoing self-awareness to ensure the research remained fair and balanced. By carefully navigating these dynamics, I aimed to produce findings that authentically represented the experiences of CoP members in the Techiman area and contributed meaningfully to understanding their psychological pathways.

### **3.5 Site and Sample Selection**

The research area is the Techiman Area of the church of Pentecost. The Techiman Area comprise of church administrative districts in some parts of Bono and

Bono East Regions. In the Bono Region, its Administrative Area comprise of Wenchi Municipality and in the Bono East Region, the area consists of Techiman Municipality. There are 28 administrative districts within the church. Each of these administrative districts has a pastor. There is an overseer of all districts with a geographic area called the “Area Head”.

### **3.6 Population**

McMillan and Schumacher (2014) postulate that population is a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects or events that conform to specific criteria in research. Population can also be defined as a group of individuals with the same characteristics and in whom the researcher is interested (Kusi, 2012). The population for this study was all members of the CoP in Ghana.

Target population is the group of individuals that the research draws conclusions from (Barnsbee et al., 2018). Thus, the target population is the unit(s) for which the information is required and actually studied. For the purpose of this study, the target population were all errant members of the CoP in Techiman Area. The accessible population was all the errant members in the three churches the study was delimited to who were disciplined by the church.

### **3.7 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure**

A sample size of seven participants were selected for the study using the purposive sampling procedure. Participants were purposively selected from active members of the Church of Pentecost aged 18 years and above, who had attended church activities regularly for at least one year. This criterion ensures that respondents have sufficient experience with church discipline practices. Individuals below 18 years or non-

members were excluded from the study. A total of 7 participants were interviewed to provide in-depth perspectives on church disciplinary practices. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling method employed in research where participants are enlisted to recruit additional participants for a study. This method is particularly useful when the target population is challenging to reach or is somewhat concealed. The term "snowball sampling" derives from the analogy that, akin to a snowball rolling down a hill, the sample grows in size as it accumulates more elements along its trajectory. Using the snowball sampling, I first identified first three errant members, having the church gone through its archives, these names and their locations were given to me. One of them was member who left the church due to punishment meted out to him, another was back to the church after serving his punishment and the other was still part of the church yet under punishment.

Data saturation was used as the guiding principle for determining the adequacy of the sample size in this qualitative study. Data saturation refers to the point at which no new themes, insights, or meanings emerge from the data despite continued data collection. In this study, saturation was assessed concurrently with data analysis, following an iterative process in which interviews were transcribed, coded, and thematically analyzed as data collection progressed.

After the seventh interview, the narratives provided by participants became repetitive, with no new emotional experiences, interpretations, or psychological meanings of church discipline emerging. Subsequent interviews reinforced already identified themes rather than introducing novel perspectives. This repetition indicated that thematic saturation had been achieved. At this point, further data collection was deemed unnecessary, as additional interviews were unlikely to contribute new insights relevant

to the research objectives. The achievement of data saturation therefore justified the final sample size and ensured the depth and credibility of the findings.

### **3.8 Data Collection and Instrument**

A research instrument refers to any tool that is used to obtain, measure, and analyze data (Jason, 2021). The choice of research instruments is influenced by the study's methodology (Aniwaba, 2020). The instrument used for the study was semi-structured interview guide.

A semi-structured interview is a discussion in which the interviewer does not strictly follow a formalized list of questions. In semi-structured interviews more open-ended questions are asked allowing for a discussion with the interviewee rather than a straightforward question and answer format (Doyle, 2018). The interview questions were aligned with the study's research objectives to ensure relevance and coherence. This approach facilitated the collection of rich, in-depth data while allowing participants the freedom to express their experiences in their own words.

The semi-structured interview guide had five sections. The first section focused on the demographic data of the respondents. The second part gathered data on the nature of disciplinary measures applied to transgressors within the Church of Pentecost, Techiman Area. The third section bothered on the lived experiences of the errant members have shaped their perceptions and understanding of church discipline in the CoP in the Techiman area. The fourth section was on the psychological impact of church discipline on the errant members, while the fifth and final section was on the process used by the church to restore the transgressors to the church. The choice of a semi-structured interview was appropriate given the exploratory nature of the study and

its focus on understanding the lived experiences and psychological effects of church discipline from the perspectives of disciplined members.

The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed narratives regarding participants' experiences of church discipline, their emotional responses, their interpretations of the disciplinary process, and the perceived impact of these experiences on their mental well-being, faith, and sense of belonging within the church. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility, enabling the researcher to ask follow-up and probing questions where necessary to clarify responses and deepen understanding (Denscombe, 2017).

Despite the strengths of the interview guide as a research tool, there exist a few weaknesses. Kumar (2014) state that it is time consuming and expensive because the duration of the interview, travelling and booking appointment with respondents increase time spent as well as financial cost. These potential challenges were addressed by making provision of adequate budget and enough time for the study.

### **3.8 Pre-Test**

Pre-testing is a small-scale trial where a few people (participants) take the test and comment on the mechanics of the test. Prior to the main data collection, the interview guide was pre-tested to enhance its clarity, relevance, and effectiveness. The pre-test was conducted with participants who shared similar characteristics with the study population but were not included in the final sample. For this study, a pre-test was conducted in the Kintampo Area with four (4) errant members since the Area shares similar characteristics with Techiman area in terms of administration and cultural background of members. This ensured that the pre-test did not compromise the integrity

of the main study data. The four people were reached through convenience sampling strategy.

The pre-test enabled the researcher to assess the clarity of the questions, the appropriateness of the language used, the logical sequencing of the interview items, and the extent to which the questions elicited responses relevant to the research objectives. Feedback from the pre-test revealed the need for minor revisions, including rephrasing ambiguous questions, simplifying complex wording, and adjusting the order of certain questions to improve the flow of the interview. These revisions strengthened the interview guide and ensured that the final instrument was capable of effectively capturing participants lived psychological experiences of church discipline in a clear, respectful, and meaningful manner.

### **3.9 Trustworthiness of the Data**

In any systematic enquiry into human settings, it is vital to establish true value of the study. Thus, the study must be judged against four primary criteria of credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability to ensure that the findings and interpretations are a true reflection of the participants or reality and are reliable (Applied Doctoral Experience (ADE), 2022).

According to ADE (2022), the credibility of qualitative data can be assured through multiple perspectives throughout data collection to ensure data is appropriate. This may be done through the data, investigator, or theoretical triangulation; participant validation or member checks; or the rigorous techniques used to gather the data. To achieve credibility in this study, I was involved in prolonged engagement by spending two months in the field collecting data. Participant's verbal and non-verbal responses helped me with clues for further probes and questioning. After the data was transcribed,

the information was transferred from the recording device onto a laptop and a password was created on the laptop such that it was only myself who had access to the data. Data was analysed using verbatim quotations of the participants. Also, each interview engaged in lasted about 30-45 minutes

Transferability addresses the applicability of the findings to similar contexts or individuals not to broader contexts. Transferability can be achieved by a “thick description” of the findings from multiple data collection methods (ADE, 2022). I achieved transferability in this study by extensively and thoroughly describing the processes that were adopted for others to follow and replicate the data. I kept an audit trail of audiotapes, field notes, transcripts, interview guide questions, memos, permission letters and all other relevant information and documents regarding the study. Also, I provided a clear description of the study setting, participants involved and the demographic information about the research participants. These could enable other researchers to replicate the findings of this study to similar settings of their choices thereby regarding the findings in this study as answers in their chosen contexts. Raw data (interview transcripts) as well as details of the data analysis are kept as evidence.

Dependability was ensured through rigorous data collection techniques and procedures, and analysis that are well documented (ADE, 2022). In this study, dependability was established through the establishment of appropriate enquiry decision. This included reviewed of researcher bias to resist early closure and at the same time prevent the provision of unreliable data due to boredom on the part of the respondents because of prolonged sessions of group discussions. In addition, information from literature assisted me to develop questions that elicited appropriate responses to answer the

research questions that were formulated to guide the study. Moreover, the semi-structured interview guide aided me to develop categories and themes that were used in the findings where both positive and negative responses were identified. There was systematic data collection procedure, analysis and interpretations which was mainly from the data generated. There was proper documentation of the data (transcriptions of narratives), methods and decisions in the memos. My thesis supervisors assessed the work to find out whether or not the findings, interpretations and conclusions were supported by the data.

Confirmability is like objectivity in quantitative studies; however, objectivity is not necessarily critical for qualitative studies as long as personal biases are unpacked in the write-up. Unpacking personal bias can be accomplished by a bracketing interview or reflexivity (ADE, 2022).

To establish confirmability in this study, after transcribing the data from the interview sessions, it was given back to the participants to confirm the responses. After making all the necessary corrections, I gave the transcribed data back to the participants again for them to authenticate the inferences I derived. The final transcribed data from the participants were taken as true record of what the respondents factually provided. Other means of ensuring confirmability were audiotape recordings, paying attention to non-verbal communications of the participants such as pauses, sighs and facial expressions. However, since transcriptions and reflections were done immediately after each interview session, the general mood and attitudes of the participants were captured in the transcriptions of the narratives and used in the data interpretations.

### **3.10 Data Collection Procedure**

Since I am a member of the church, I did not take introductory letter but I rather verbally communicated to the Area head and the district pastor who are overseers of the area and the district (a group of local assemblies in a defined geographic area) respectively. This was meant to officially introduce me to the participants of the study. The purpose of the study and the plans to collect data were discussed with the participants. There was a consensus with the participants on where and when to meet them for the interview. At any time before the interview commenced, I explained the purpose of the study to the participants, and what was expected of them. Permission was sought from the participants, and approval was given before audiotaping the interview for the purposes of transcribing. The interviews lasted between thirty – forty minutes for each participant. The data was then played and transcribed for analysis soon after the sessions.

### **3.11 Method of Data Analysis**

Themes in this study were generated using Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological data analysis method. Interview data were transcribed verbatim and repeatedly read to achieve familiarity with participants' lived experiences of church discipline. Significant statements related to disciplinary experiences, emotional reactions, perceptions, and restoration were identified and extracted. Meanings were then formulated from these statements while preserving participants' original intent. Similar meanings were grouped into clusters to form sub-themes, which were further organized into overarching themes. These themes represented shared psychological experiences and processes across participants. An exhaustive description of the phenomenon was developed, from which the fundamental structure of the psychological pathways of

church discipline was derived. Credibility was enhanced through member checking, where participants confirmed that the themes accurately reflected their experiences.

Finally, Colaizzi's technique recommends comparing the findings with existing literature to ensure that the findings contribute to the broader body of knowledge. In this study, I compared the themes and descriptions with existing research on church discipline, and the psychological processes of forgiveness and reconciliation in religious communities. This comparison helped to situate the findings within the larger context of Christian psychology and church community dynamics.

### **3.12 Ethical Considerations**

I had a moral obligation to strictly consider the rights of the participants, who are expected to provide this knowledge. I sought a formal introductory letter from my department to collect the data needed for the study. Verbal permission was sought from all the participants before the collecting of the data for the study.

Polit and Hungler (2016) state that confidentiality means that no information that the participant divulges is made public or available to others. The anonymity of a person or an institution is protected by making it impossible to link aspects of data to a specific person or institution. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed by ensuring that data obtained was used in such a way that no one other than myself knows the source (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtler, 2016). In this study, no actual participants' names were attached to the information obtained, rather, pseudo codes were used. The participants were labelled EM for errant member instead of their real names or aliases.

The privacy of the respondents was by not divulging the described experiences and information given by them. The participants were informed that they could withdraw

from the study at any time if they wished to. This right was explained to them prior to engaging them in the study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter describes the results of the data collected from participants. The chapter addresses the demographic information of participants as well as the themes from the semi-structured interviews in relation to each research questions. This is followed by the discussion of findings.

#### 4.1 Background information of participants

The biodata of the participants such as age, marital status, number of years in the church and the type of offence committed were captured. Table 4.1 gives a summary of their data

**Table 4.1: Background Information of Participants**

| <b>Errant Member (EM)</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Marital Status</b> | <b>Years as a CoP Member</b> | <b>'Offense' Committed</b> | <b>Punishment</b>          |
|---------------------------|------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1                         | 36         | Single                | 11                           | Moral offence              | Rebuke                     |
| 2                         | 56         | Married               | 37                           | Financial misconduct       | Suspension and Restitution |
| 3                         | 28         | Married               | 12                           | Moral offence              | Rebuke                     |
| 4                         | 58         | Married               | 23                           | Financial misconduct       | Suspension and Restitution |
| 5                         | 32         | Married               | 8                            | Marital misconduct         | Suspension                 |
| 6                         | 37         | Married               | 17                           | Moral offence              | Suspension                 |
| 7                         | 39         | Single                | 12                           | Moral offence              | Demotion                   |

**Source: Fieldwork Data, (2023)**

Table 4.1 captured the biodata of seven errant members used in the study. The ages of the participants range from 28 to 58 years. Younger participants, such as EM1 (36 years) and EM3 (28 years), may face different life pressures compared to older participants like EM4 (58 years) and EM2 (56 years). The inclusion of both younger and older members offers valuable insights into how disciplinary measures are perceived and experienced differently across age groups. Younger participants may be at different life stages, potentially having fewer familial responsibilities, while older members may have more established family structures and social expectations that could influence their experience of church discipline.

The marital status of the participants shows that five out of the seven members are married, with two participants (EM1 and EM7) being single. This indicates that marital status plays a role in shaping how the individuals experience and process church discipline. For married members, church discipline might also affect their families, potentially creating a ripple effect in the household. Married participants, such as EM2, EM4, and EM5, may experience the added stress of balancing the disciplinary consequences with their family life, which may intensify the emotional and social impact.

The years of membership in the Church of Pentecost (CoP) vary, ranging from 8 to 37 years. Long-standing members, such as EM2 (37 years) and EM4 (23 years), have deep-rooted connections within the church community. This extended period of membership may influence their perception of discipline, possibly making them more aware of the church's expectations and the significance of restorative measures. For newer members like EM5 (8 years), the disciplinary measures may carry a different weight, possibly

affecting their future relationship with the church, either strengthening their commitment or leading to alienation.

The offenses committed by the participants fall into categories of moral offenses, financial misconduct, marital misconduct, and general moral behavior. The varying nature of these offenses reflects the broad spectrum of issues that lead to disciplinary actions in the church. The punishment meted out to these members includes rebuke, suspension, restitution, and demotion. For example, EM1 and EM3 received a rebuke for moral offenses, while EM2 and EM4 faced suspension and restitution for financial misconduct. These varying disciplinary measures suggest that the church applies different levels of severity depending on the nature of the offense, and the process of restoration might differ accordingly.

### **4.3 Presentations of Findings**

This sub-section presents the findings from the study based on the research questions raised from the objectives of the study. For the presentation of the findings, the major theme in each of the research questions is raised first and then the findings from the analysis are presented. After presentations of findings on each research questions, the findings are discussed before presentations on the other research questions.

#### **4.3.1 The nature of disciplinary measures are applied to transgressors in the COP**

This theme related to research question one, sought to explore the nature of disciplinary measures are applied to transgressors in the Church of Pentecost, Techiman Area regarding the disciplinary practices implemented by the Church of Pentecost. The focus was on understanding how errant members perceived and reacted to various forms of church discipline. Through interviews, the study sought to gain insights into the

personal narratives of those disciplined, including their reflections on how discipline was enacted. Five main themes emerged. These were removal from office, removal from church administrative office, suspension, dismissal and public rebuke. These are discussed with verbatim quotations supporting them.

#### **4. 3.1.1 Removal from Office**

Removal from office or role is one of the key themes gathered from the interview responses of the participants in the study. This theme emerged prominently as participants shared their lived experiences and perceptions of church discipline within the Church of Pentecost, Techiman Area. Participants discussed the circumstances under which removal from office occurred, often citing instances of leadership failure, ethical violations, or actions that contradicted the teachings of the church. This is how participant expressed removal from office/role.

*I was removed from my position as a financial secretary in 2019 for the offense of signing a cheque without going through the due process. I perceived the situation as emergency so attempted to save it. But I was judged to be wrong when I was brought before the elders of the church. So, I ended up being removed for that wrong doing (EM4, 2023).*

Another participant shared

*There was a misunderstanding between myself and one elder Kofi (pseudonym) during the funeral of the late Opanyin Kwame Boah (pseudonym). When the issue got to the elders I was found not to have acted right, so I was suspended for 4 months (EM3, 2023).*

Similarly, another participant aptly stated

*I was a youth leader for Fanteakwah CoP. Even though my wife is not a member of the church, when we had marital issues, she reported me to my area head. I was asked to hand over my role to my next in*

*command while the matter is being settled. After the matter was settled, they never asked me to go for my role again. That is how come I got removed from my role (EM5, 2023)*

These assertions by the interview participants were highlighted during the interview when one of the participants commented.

*In our church one of the disciplinary practices is removal from office. If you hold a position or belong to certain groupings, you are likely to be removed when you commit an offence. The idea is to sanitise the group and to serve as a deterrent to the member. It happened to me when I had a misunderstanding with my youth leader in 2017 (EM6, 2023).*

It can be inferred from the narratives that removal from office or roles is one of the disciplinary practices used by the church of Pentecost, Techiman area to uphold and maintain disciplinary standards of the church. This form of discipline is typically implemented in response to actions or behaviors that are perceived as detrimental to the church's values, mission, or overall functioning. The removal of an individual from a specific office or role within the church serves as both a corrective measure and a form of accountability.

#### **4.3.1.2 Suspension**

The theme of suspension was also highlighted as one of the disciplinary measures within the Church of Pentecost, Techiman Area. Participants in the study spoke about suspension as a disciplinary action that, while less severe than removal from office, it was more common and applied to every member of the church (whether they hold positions or not). The following comments exemplify participants' view on suspension as a disciplinary measure

*Suspension is more common than removal from office. I know of three sisters who were all suspended for weeks. We were all told during one*

*church service that they denigrated the church because of their actions and comments they made in public (EM6, 2023).*

Some participants who suffered suspension shared their experience in the following manner

*I have been suspended for four weeks (four Sundays) before because of misbehavior. Our area pastor visited our church and during his sermon my phone rang disrupting the preaching and interfering with the attentions of the congregation. I accepted the suspension in good faith because we were warned the previous week about that. I understand my suspension was based on the recommendation of certain key people because I was thinking they will just rebuke and caution me (EM1, 2023).*

Another participant shared

*Prior to my removal from office, I was suspended for the time that investigation about not following due process before approving the cheque. I was told to stay at home in order not to interfere with the investigations (EM4, 2023)*

Another participant recollected

*For me they told me to go home for two weeks and brood over what I did. After two weeks, they called me back and asked me to evaluate and make a determination on what I did-whether I deserve to be pardoned or punished and what lesson I have learnt (EM3, 2023)*

From the narratives so far, it is evident that the church makes use of suspension as one of its discipline measures against transgressors. Participants shared that suspension is commonly applied within the Church of Pentecost as a temporary measure to address certain issues of misconduct or behavior that fall short of the church's ethical or moral expectations. It serves as a way to pause an individual's involvement in church

activities or leadership roles, while allowing them time to reflect, seek forgiveness, and make necessary changes.

#### **4. 3.1.3 Dismissal**

The issue of dismissal was a prevalent theme highlighted by the participants. Even though it was one of the disciplinary practices, it is sparingly implemented or used. The participants could not recollect any situation where members were dismissed. This is how participants expressed the use of dismissal as a disciplinary measure has not been applied to any member of the church yet.

*Theoretically, dismissal is part of our disciplinary practices, but to be frank, we don't usually get there. The offender may be rebuked, suspended etc as punishment. When it is not working, we have other means such as counselling, and referral to higher authorities of our church. By the time we exhaust these options, the problem is solved (EM1, 2023).*

Another participant shared

*Our elders and pastors through teachings about the rules and regulations governing the activities of our church has made us understand that one can be dismissed from the church. But for me, I have not seen or hear anyone dismissed ever since I joined the church. Even in situations where I perceived the offence as great, the offender is not dismissed. The church finds a way correct and integrates the person back to the church (EM6, 2023).*

Another participant revealed

*One Akwagye (who was member of the church) butchered his uncle in 2013 and was arrested. Even after his release, I never heard that he was dismissed from the church, though he himself stopped coming to church. I am sure if he had come, the elders might have put measures in place to reform him rather than dismiss him (EM1, 2023).*

It can be inferred from the comments that even though dismissal is part of the disciplinary measures, it is rarely applied compared to other disciplinary actions like suspension or removal from office.

#### **4.3.1.4 Public Rebuke**

Another theme prevalent throughout the interview discussion was public rebuke. Participants frequently mentioned public rebuke as one of the disciplinary actions employed by the Church of Pentecost, especially in cases where individuals' behavior was seen as significantly disruptive to the community or in violation of church principles. Public rebuke involves addressing an individual's misconduct in front of the congregation or church community, often as a means of holding them accountable and reinforcing the seriousness of the offense. The following comments buttress the use of public rebuke by the church.

*I can say rebuke is the commonest of all the disciplinary measures. It precedes almost all the other forms of punishment. For me even before I was suspended, I was rebuked in front of the disciplinary committee. During the announcement about my suspension to the elders of the church, the words used to describe and the commentary on it before the final announcement of my suspension was not light at all (EM1, 2023).*

Another participant shared

*Rebuke is the lightest form of all the forms of punishment my uses. It is also commonly applied. There have been several situations when the whole congregations have been rebuked by our district pastor before. Besides, groupings such as Voice of Pentecost, Youth Ministry, Women's Ministry also receive rebuke. So, almost everybody has been rebuked before (EM1, 2023).*

In the words of one of the participants

*Unlike the others, offences that requires rebuke are very common. For example, coming to church late often, refusal to partake in church activities, refusal to carry out orders by our superiors such as elders and pastors. This makes rebuke very common (EM5, 2023).*

Another interview participant shared

*The church sanctions the use of rebuke as a disciplinary measure. An offence may be considered as less serious for example gossiping, speaking ill about the church etc may attract just a rebuke from the disciplinary committee. Other times too, an offence may initially be considered grave which might require serious punishment like suspension. However, if the truth is not fully established, the offender may be pardoned but may be rebuked and cautioned to watch his or her steps or actions (EM4, 2023).*

It can be inferred from the narrative that rebuke is one of the disciplinary measures, and the most commonly used within the Church of Pentecost, Techiman Area. Several participants highlighted that public rebuke is frequently employed by church leaders as a way to address perceived misconduct, particularly when the behavior in question is seen as disruptive to the harmony of the church community. It is often the first line of action taken before more severe measures, such as suspension or removal from office, are considered.

#### 4.3.1.5 Financial Restitution

Financial restitution was also captured as one of the disciplinary measures used by the church of Pentecost, Techiman Area. This practice involves requiring an individual to compensate or repay for any financial loss or damage they may have caused through misconduct, dishonesty, or unethical behavior. This includes situations where church members or leaders have misappropriated church funds, or failed to fulfill financial obligations within the church community. This how one of the interview participants expressed how financial restitution plays out.

*If you hold positions or play a role which involves church finance, and it happens that there is misappropriation or anything that causes financial loss, in addition any other punishment, you will be made to pay back the lost funds (EM2, 2023).*

One of the participants who suffered from the form of punishment shared his experience this way

*I supervised to grant a soft loan to a presiding elder because the man was having serious financial challenges, I was privy to. Because of the man's financial situation, he could redeem himself as planned. When an audit was made, it was found out. Upon explaining, I was made to pay the amount in instalment of which I did (EM5, 2023).*

Another participant recalled

*In 2023, SS was found to have misused the funds of women's fellowship. She was asked to pay back the money. We were receiving update from the secretary on the progress of payments until we heard that she has travelled outside the country (EM5, 2023).*

It can be inferred from the narratives that financial restitution is one of the disciplinary practices of the church of Pentecost, Techiman Area. It appears that this practice is

applied in cases where financial misconduct, such as misappropriation of church funds, dishonesty, or failure to meet financial obligations, has occurred. Financial restitution is viewed as a way to restore justice and correct financial wrongs within the church community.

#### **4.3.16 Discussion of findings on research question one**

Based on the analysis so far, it is learnt that errant members of the church of Pentecost, Techiman area have had several experiences regarding disciplinary practices of the church. Their experiences range from removal from office which is a permanent stripping of position or role, suspension, dismissal, public rebuke involving addressing an individual's misconduct in front of the congregation and financial restitution which requires an individual to compensate or repay for any financial loss or damage they may have caused through misconduct, dishonesty, or unethical behavior.

Among the various disciplinary measures identified, removal from office emerged as the most severe, since it permanently deprives an individual of their position and responsibilities within the church. This action is taken when an individual's behavior is deemed to be completely incompatible with the church's moral and spiritual standards. From the narratives, it appears that removal from office is a rare but impactful disciplinary measure, often used only after other corrective measures, such as suspension, have failed. The permanent nature of this action can have profound emotional consequences, including feelings of shame, loss of identity, and social alienation (Phelps, 2021). The decision to remove an individual from their position often signifies a clear moral stance by the church on the seriousness of the misconduct. It also communicates a message to the congregation that certain behaviors are completely unacceptable and will lead to irreversible consequences. Studies by Roth

(2021) show that permanent removal from leadership roles in religious organizations often leads to both social and spiritual crises, as individuals must reconcile their personal identity with the loss of their position. These emotional outcomes suggest that churches should provide adequate counseling and support to help individuals reintegrate into the community post-discipline.

Suspension, which is often temporary, is used in cases where a church member or leader's actions require a period of reflection or restoration. While dismissal is similar in its removal of the individual from their role, it is typically permanent and used for more severe breaches of conduct. Suspension can serve as both a corrective and restorative tool, offering the individual time to reconsider their actions, make amends, and restore their relationship with the church. However, it can also cause emotional turmoil, including feelings of isolation and rejection, especially if the suspension is public (Jones, 2020). Dismissal, on the other hand, is more final, sending a strong signal that the individual is no longer deemed fit for their role due to their behavior. Research by Miller (2022) on church disciplinary practices highlights that suspension often has a dual effect. While it gives the individual space for repentance, it can also create a sense of disempowerment, particularly for those who view their role as central to their identity and service to the church. The experience of suspension is therefore often accompanied by a complex emotional journey that requires careful management by church leaders.

Public rebuke, a form of discipline where an individual's misconduct is addressed in front of the congregation, emerged as one of the most commonly used methods in the Church of Pentecost, Techiman Area. This measure is designed to hold individuals

accountable while also demonstrating to the congregation the importance of moral conduct. The emotional consequences of public rebuke can be severe, often resulting in feelings of humiliation and loss of dignity (Smith & Wallace, 2021). However, when administered properly, it also serves as a form of social correction. The church community is made aware of the individual's wrongdoing, and this transparent process can prevent future transgressions by reinforcing the moral and ethical expectations of the community. Brown and Thomas (2023) argue that while public reprimands can deter others from misconduct, they can also lead to a social stigma, especially if the rebuke is perceived as overly harsh or unjust. The study stresses that public rebuke should be carefully balanced with restorative efforts, including opportunities for repentance and reconciliation.

Financial restitution, where individuals are required to repay or compensate for any financial damage they caused through misconduct, is another disciplinary practice noted in the study. This practice is often applied in cases involving dishonesty or misuse of church funds. The imposition of financial restitution is not just a material correction; it also serves as a tool for restoring the individual's moral integrity and demonstrating accountability (Osei, 2022). This practice is particularly significant in churches where trust and stewardship of resources are seen as critical components of leadership. However, the emotional and psychological burden of financial restitution can be considerable, particularly if the individual struggles with the ability to repay the debt (Thompson, 2023). According to Wade & McMillan (2021), financial restitution can serve as a form of moral reconciliation. However, they caution that when the amount of restitution is set too high, it can lead to economic stress, potentially causing further spiritual distress and alienation from the church community. Thus, it is important for

churches to consider the financial capacity of the individual when enforcing such a measure.

These findings can be understood from Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) which emphasizes that individuals learn behaviors through observation, imitation, and modeling within their social context. In the context of church discipline, public rebuke and financial restitution can be seen as mechanisms of social learning. When an individual's actions are publicly rebuked or they are required to make restitution, others in the congregation observe the consequences of these behaviors, thereby learning the social and moral boundaries of the church. This modeling of acceptable behavior reinforces the collective values of the church and discourages similar transgressions (Jones, 2020).

Similarly, it could equally be explained with B.F. Skinner's Theory of Behaviorism. Skinner's Behaviorism (1953) posits that behavior is shaped by reinforcement and punishment. From this perspective, the various disciplinary actions within the Church of Pentecost, including suspension, removal from office, and public rebuke, function as forms of punishment designed to correct undesirable behavior. Positive reinforcement could also be applied after a person has repented or demonstrated improved behavior, ensuring that individuals are conditioned to align with the church's values and ethical expectations (Miller, 2022).

In short, the findings highlight that the disciplinary measures of removal from office, suspension, dismissal, public rebuke, and financial restitution are widely practiced in the Church of Pentecost, Techiman Area. Each of these measures serves a specific function, from corrective actions to restoration, with profound emotional and

psychological implications for those involved. When understood through the lenses of Social Learning Theory and Behaviorism, these practices can be seen as mechanisms that help shape the moral behavior of church members while maintaining community standards. However, the emotional and psychological toll on the individuals subjected to these disciplinary actions calls for a balanced and compassionate approach to discipline in church settings.

#### **4.3.2 Experiences of Errant Members and their Perceptions on Church Discipline**

This theme related to research question two which sought to explore the ways in which the experiences of church members influence their views on church discipline within the Church of Pentecost, specifically in the Techiman area. The exploration was necessary for a greater understanding into the effectiveness and acceptance of disciplinary practices and how it contributes church governance with the CoP. Five major themes emerged. These were appreciation of accountability and responsibility, essence of redemption and restoration, the need to respect church boundaries and ethical standards, appreciation of community in discipline and understanding of authority and obedience. These themes are discussed below.

##### **4.3.2.1 Appreciation of Accountability and Responsibility**

Narratives from the participants revealed that they learnt the need for accountability and responsibility from their experience. This is exemplified in the narrative below

*Despite the fact that I was not the one who took the money I was not expecting to be made to pay for it, it has help me to learn the essence of accountability and how to take responsibility. Even though the one who took the money is an elder and thus higher than me in the church, he*

*was not punished but me. So, it tells me I need to exercise responsibility on everyone as far as my roles are concerned (EM4, 2023).*

Another participant shared

*Before my suspension, I was told where I acted irresponsibly as someone under nurturing of God and the church. During my suspension, I was reflecting on what happened and came to the conclusion that I was kind of irresponsible indeed. So, I have learnt my lesson in a hard way (EM1, 2023).*

One more participant further explained

*You are not a proper Christian if you don't treat your household fairly. In view of what you did to your wife the elders have decided that you stay away from church to serve as deterrent to others. While away, we are monitoring you closely to ensure that you start acting responsibility. These were the exact words said to me. So, it was punished to go and act right (EM5, 2023)*

An interviewee expatiated

*When assigned roles or the fact that you are in the church means that you have a charge to keep. So, when you act without being guided by the principles of the church and with the knowledge of Bible, you need to be brought to book. Before you are made aware of your mistakes so that next time you can act responsibly (EM3, 2023)*

It can be inferred from the narratives that participants experience with church discipline helped shape their understanding of the need to take responsibility and be accountable as far as their position is concerned.

#### **4.3.2.2 Essence of Redemption and Restoration**

Theme of redemption and restoration was noted in the narratives of the participants. According to the participants suspension, financial restitution and all the other forms of

discipline meted out to them was for their own good since it was an action of redemption and restoration. This is how one of the participants explained;

*If you are an outsider or not an observer of our faith, you might think we are being punished as the world perceive. The truth is that those actions taken against us like the suspension when we go contrary to the doctrine of church is a way to redeem us from sliding into a major sin. Think of this, how about if they church had overlooked my wrong doing and I ended up making greater mistake latter which could cost me my salvation (EM6, 2023)*

A similar view was expressed by another participant thus;

*The discipline committee made me to understand they are not punishing me but rather trying to save me from coming greater mistakes which might dent my image forever. I also agreed with them because, even during my suspension, they were still checking on me. Sometimes my class leader calls to share the word of God with me, and encouraged me (EM3, 2023)*

Another participant expatiated

*Parents that care and love their wards are those who correct their children when they go wrong. They do that to save their children. It is the same thing that I was told when I was before the disciplinary committee. The actions taken against me was to help me correct my mistakes (EM5, 2023)*

One of the interview participants buttressed this by stating

*I don't think the work of the disciplinary committee is to put members in ordeals as implied by the word punishment or even discipline. We are more into correcting and nurturing them. actions such as suspension, restitution, rebuke, and even dismissal are all part of the nurturing*

*process. We educate our members to understand this, so they take any correction/punishment in good faith (EM6, 2023)*

It is clear from the narratives that participants perceive punishment as a redemptive measure rather than punitive one. Because of their perception that their ordeals are part of the redemptive and restorative process, they gladly accept any decision taking against them.

#### **4.3.2.3 Clear Boundaries and Ethical Standards**

Another theme prevalent in the narratives of the participant was understanding boundaries and ethical standards of the church. Participants highlighted that out of the discipline they went through, they became aware of their boundaries as members of the church. This is exemplified in the narratives below.

*I was punished because of some commentaries I made at the wrong place. During my meeting with the disciplinary committee elders, I got to know that as a Christian and a member of the church, I must have boundaries and live with standards. It is not everything or anywhere that I must open my mouth. And my words should be season with salt always (EM6, 2023)*

Furthermore, a participant stated

*As a church, we need to stand out and be unique in our doings. From how we conduct ourselves during service to our conduct as a group outside the church. When we are missing it, we are called to order and reminded of the standards we are to live up to. It has made me appreciate my boundaries and standard as a CoP member (EM3, 2023).*

Another participant shared

*I once visited my pastor on disciplinary issues in the church and he made me understand that as leadership of the church, they have a role to play. They must know the standards and boundaries set by our church.*

*Knowing it is not even enough but to always bring we the members to the right path when they are going wayward. Paster also shared that constant reminder to the member make the standard of Christian life ingrained in us (EM2, 2023).*

It can be inferred from the narratives that church discipline on the members facilitated the understanding of boundaries and ethical standards expected of the members to uphold.

#### **4.3.2.4 The Role of Community in Discipline**

Narrative from the participants revealed that through church discipline they understood the essence of community discipline or collective discipline as a church. The participants mentioned regular seemingly harsh and words of caution from their pastors and elders influence them to prompt one another especially in situations which may implicate the whole church. This is how participant expressed community/collective discipline.

*Because of the regular instructions we receive from our pastors and elders, I for instance have learnt that we all have a collective responsibility towards each other. So, I don't sit aloof waiting for my superiors to come and comment before. I try to draw my Christian brothers and sisters' attention when things are not going right (EM2, 2023).*

In the words of another participant

*Even though I feel bad when we as a church is rebuked, over time, I have learnt that we need to be each other's keeper-pointing out and steering them to do the right thing. The pastors even caution that since he can be transferred at anything, the greater responsibility rather lies on us as members. This has made understand that my efforts and contribution to the church is permanent and timeless (EM4, 2023).*

Additionally, another participant shared

*As pastors and elders, we cannot do all without the help of the congregation. What we stress on when there is an opportunity is that they should be each other's keeper-ensuring that they help themselves to do the right thing. It is not fun sitting on cases of misconduct and meting out punishment especially when we know we all have sin in one way or another. We believe there can be total community discipline in our church, with time (EM5, 2023).*

It is obvious from the narratives that church discipline influenced member to understand the need for community responsibility. The participant appreciated the need to ensure that each and every one of them does the right thing in order not to implicate the whole church.

#### **4.3.2.5 Understanding of Authority and Obedience**

Another prevalent theme was understanding of authority and obedience. Participant mentioned that through church discipline, they learnt from the disciplinary committee members how authority is exercised, and the need to obey the decisions of the church authority. The following narratives expatiate participants claims.

*It was when I met the disciplinary committee that I realised the power that backs authority. I had psyched myself before meeting the committee because I knew most of the members. But when I got there, all my confidence vanished. I appreciated that authority is power, hence don't think I will joke with any authority anywhere (EM4, 2023).*

Another participant shared

*Most times when committee are formed in the church, I perceive it as a normal grouping I know of. Until I got there, I never knew they carry*

*some sort of power. I now understand when they say that someone has authority in the church (EM1, 2023).*

Similarly, a participant aptly stated

*Being a leader myself, I appreciated how authority and power is exercised when I was summoned before the elders. The process of telling me the case before them, listening to my side of the issue, questioning among other made me appreciate the entire process (EM5, 2023).*

Furthermore, one participant indicated

*As leaders of the church, correcting our members through various forms of punishment is a way we demonstrate how they can lead or man their small circles. Our lord Jesus Christ demonstrates same, and we are trying to let them learn same. We don't boss over them or become overbearing to them just because we have the power (EM3, 2023).*

It is clear from the narratives that participants understood what authority is all about through the disciplinary processes they went through. The disciplinary committees' decisions and actions signalled to the offenders that the church has people and in helm of affairs of which their decisions must be respected.

#### **4.3.26 Discussion of findings of research question two**

Based on the analysis so far, it is concluded that the implementation of church discipline on offenders led to the appreciation of accountability and responsibility, essence of redemption and restoration, the need to respect church boundaries and ethical standards, appreciation of community in discipline and understanding of authority and obedience. This goes to buttress the fact that the participants perceive the whole discipline process as something necessary for the restoration and redemption rather than for punitive reasons.

The concept of church discipline is rooted in biblical teachings and ecclesiastical traditions, where it is viewed as both a corrective and restorative practice. Church discipline typically involves the process of confronting and correcting members who engage in behavior deemed immoral or inconsistent with the standards of the church. The goal of discipline is not solely punitive but restorative, emphasizing forgiveness, reconciliation, and spiritual growth (Dever, 2020). Empirical studies reinforce this view, showing that church discipline leads to positive changes in the attitudes and behaviors of members. A study by Gonzalez (2022) reveals that when church members experience or witness the discipline of others, they are more likely to demonstrate heightened personal responsibility and a clearer understanding of moral boundaries. This finding supports the notion that church discipline can enhance members' appreciation for accountability and the ethical standards upheld by the church.

Similarly, a study by Johnson and Wheeler (2021) found that congregants who had gone through the process of church discipline reported a more profound sense of spiritual renewal and an improved understanding of their responsibilities within the church community. They were more likely to engage in constructive behaviors, contribute positively to the church, and respect the authority structures in place.

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) provides a useful lens through which to understand the positive behavioral changes observed following church discipline. According to Bandura, behavior is learned through observation, imitation, and modeling, particularly in social contexts. Church discipline, when implemented transparently and consistently, serves as a form of social learning. Congregants observe the consequences of actions, not just for the offender, but for the community as a whole.

They learn that behaviors deviating from ethical standards lead to corrective measures aimed at restoration rather than exclusion.

In this context, individuals who witness the discipline of others are likely to internalize the lessons and values exhibited, particularly the importance of accountability, responsibility, and respect for authority. Bandura's theory emphasizes that learning does not happen in isolation but through interaction with others and by observing the consequences of actions within a social structure. Therefore, church discipline is not just about enforcing rules; it is about modeling and teaching respect for communal values and standards.

Furthermore, social reinforcement plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of church discipline. Positive behaviors that align with church standards are reinforced, while negative behaviors are corrected. The feedback loop of reinforcement helps to solidify the internalization of desirable behaviors, contributing to a more harmonious and respectful church community.

B.F. Skinner's theory of behaviorism, which focuses on the role of reinforcement in shaping behavior, further elucidates the effects of church discipline. Skinner (1971) posited that behaviors are learned through positive and negative reinforcement. Church discipline, when seen as a mechanism of negative reinforcement, helps to discourage undesirable behaviors. However, it is essential to note that the ultimate aim of such discipline is not punishment but the correction and restoration of the individual to a state of ethical alignment with the community.

In this case, church discipline serves as a tool for shaping behavior by reinforcing the values of accountability, respect, and obedience to authority. When church members see the positive outcomes of repentance and restoration (positive reinforcement), they are more likely to emulate these behaviors. Conversely, when they witness the consequences of negative actions (such as exclusion or corrective action), they are less likely to engage in similar behaviors, particularly if they recognize the restorative nature of the discipline process.

Moreover, Skinner's operant conditioning suggests that the key to effective discipline is the balance between reinforcement and punishment. The practice of church discipline ideally involves corrective actions that guide the offender toward repentance and reintegration into the community, rather than simply focusing on punitive measures that may lead to alienation or resentment.

The findings that participants perceive the discipline process as a necessary means of restoration and redemption, rather than a punitive measure, have profound implications for the way church discipline is practiced and understood. First, it emphasizes the importance of framing discipline as an opportunity for growth and spiritual transformation. Congregations that view discipline as a path to redemption are more likely to create an environment that fosters personal accountability, mutual respect, and a deeper sense of community.

Furthermore, these findings suggest that church leadership should focus on educating the congregation about the restorative nature of discipline, ensuring that its purpose is understood not only as a corrective action but also as an opportunity for healing and

renewal. A focus on restoration and redemption, rather than punishment, aligns with the teachings of compassion and forgiveness central to many religious traditions.

Finally, the findings suggest that church discipline is not only beneficial for individual members but also for the church community as a whole. When church members appreciate the importance of ethical boundaries and authority, they are more likely to respect the structures and values that guide the community. This understanding can strengthen the overall unity and moral integrity of the congregation, creating a supportive environment where members are encouraged to grow spiritually and ethically.

#### **4.3.3 The Psychological Effects of Church Discipline on Errant Members**

This theme related to research question three which sought to explore how church discipline affect those disciplined. An exploration of this theme was deemed necessary to understand not only the immediate emotional and mental responses of the individuals but also the long-term psychological effects that may influence their faith, relationships, and sense of identity. Six major themes emerged. These were feeling of guilt and shame, isolation, spiritual crisis, anger and resentment, humiliation and loss of status and regret and desire for redemption.

##### **4.3.3.1 Guilt and Shame**

The feeling of guilt and shame was prevalent in the narratives of the participants who had experienced church discipline. These emotions often emerged as immediate responses to the disciplinary actions, particularly when the measures were announced to the offenders. Guilt, in many cases, stemmed from an internal acknowledgment of

wrongdoing or failure to meet the moral and behavioral standards set by the church.

This is exemplified in the narrative below.

*I felt guilty the moment what I did was put before me and its implications explained to me. The feeling of guilt became worse the moment I was told I am going on suspension. Staying off church brought shame of me. When I meet my colleagues, the feeling of shame worsens (EM5, 2023).*

Another participant shared

*It is not pleasant experience to go before the disciplinary committee. Even for people to hear that you are to face the disciplinary committee is enough shame because of the perception that you are already guilty. I felt ashamed of myself before there were elders who expressed their disappointed (EM4, 2023).*

To buttress, a participant recollected

*I couldn't lift my head up during the process of interrogation. Obviously, I had done what I was not supposed to, so hearing them re-narrate the story felt like I was committing the mistake again (EM2, 2023).*

From the narratives, it can be inferred that church discipline can create a profound emotional impact, particularly feelings of guilt and shame, which are compounded by the disciplinary process itself and the social context in which it occurs.

#### **4.3.3.2 Isolation**

The theme of isolation was also important for discussion. Both physical and emotional isolation were highlighted by the participants. While the physical isolation had to do with avoiding contact with other members of the church, emotional isolation was

marked by participants feeling disconnected from others even when physically present. This detachment stemmed from internalized stigma, guilt, and a perception of judgment from peers. Another participants revealed that

*Isolation was one of the major effects I had. Yea, I wasn't suspended nor sacked but rebuked for the mere reason that I was found guilty made people kind of isolate themselves from me. It was like I was something forbidden to them. Knowing this, I also didn't want to associate myself with those that isolated themselves from me (EM2, 2023).*

Another participant shared the following

*Because I was suspended for four weeks, hardly did I made contact with some of my colleagues the way I used to. They also didn't come closer to me except my family members and one elder AAA (EM5, 2023).*

One contributor mentioned

*Even though I tried maintaining contact with my colleagues and tried maintaining my composure, I felt isolated from them. Physically, I was with them but emotionally I was distant from everyone (EM1, 2023).*

Similarly, one male participant recalled

*I nurtured the idea of stigma so even though I was still free with everyone and tried to get involved in church activities, I was not myself. My mind was playing trick on me that those I am mingling with are thinking ill of me (EM3, 2023).*

The narratives suggest that isolation, both physical and emotional, is a pervasive outcome of church discipline. This isolation arises from both external factors, such as stigma and avoidance by others, and internal factors, such as self-perception and feelings of shame. The interplay between these factors creates a cycle where disciplined individuals withdraw from the community, further deepening their sense of exclusion.

#### **4.3.3. 3 Spiritual Crisis**

Spiritual crises were also mentioned by participants as one of the psychological impacts of church discipline on the offenders. These crises often manifested as a deep struggle with their faith, feelings of unworthiness before God, and a diminished ability to engage in spiritual practices such as prayer and worship. One of the participants shared

*I felt so dejected to the extent that I affect my spiritual life such as prayer and worship. For the first two weeks, I kept thinking about my punishment during dawn and other quiet times. Hitherto, these times were dedicated to prayer, but the effect of the punishment made me use such times to brood over what happened than to pray (EM2, 2023).*

Similarly, another participant remarked

*The more you go to church and fellowship, the more your spiritual life becomes strong. Even the bible advises not to forsake the assembly of the saints. Since my punishment required, I stay out of church, it affected my spiritual life and zeal for God (EM6, 2023).*

Another person described

*It took the Grace of God the efforts of some elders to get back to my feet as far my spiritual life is concerned. Because I became cold during the period of my punishment, I nearly formed a habit of no prayer, supplication or bible study (EM5, 2023).*

It can be inferred from the narratives that church discipline resulted to disconnection from Spiritual Practices. Participants reported struggling to engage in spiritual activities such as prayer, worship, and Bible study. These practices, once a source of comfort and connection with God, became difficult as they felt their mistakes created a barrier between themselves and the divine.

#### **4.3.3. 4 Anger and Resentment**

The issue of anger and resentment emerged as a prevalent theme during the interviews, with participants expressing various degrees of frustration toward both the disciplinary process and the individuals involved in its implementation. Their emotions were rooted in feelings of unfair treatment, perceived judgment, and a lack of empathy or support during the disciplinary period. The following narratives exemplify the view of the participants.

*Very sad and angry at the same time. I felt that I didn't do no wrong to be suspended. I was expecting just some word of caution. And for the fact that some of the disciplinary committee members were privy to the whole story made their decision a big surprise to me (EM2, 2023).*

An interviewee stated

*Even though I was angry, I maintained my cool otherwise an outburst might have resulted in something else. Yes, my anger stemmed from the fact that I was told the decision is final when I attempted to plead with them (EM7, 2023).*

A different participant highlighted

*There was a point I nearly questioned the legitimacy of the practices of the disciplinary committee members. There had been similar cases involving others before, so I was expecting a pardon (as it has been those case) but mine was different. This made me quite angry and resentful (EM1, 2023).*

From the narratives so far, it is evident that church discipline resulted in anger and resentment in anger and resentment of those punished. The anger and frustration were directed upon the disciplinary committee and on they (the offenders) themselves.

#### 4.3.3. 5 Humiliation and Loss of Status

Another theme which was prevalent as far as the psychological effects of church discipline was concerned was humiliation and loss of status. Participants shared that they held dignified positions in the church and so their punishment led to the loss of respect, status and humiliation. This is exemplified in the narrative below.

*The way people perceived me made me feel humiliated. So, it was not even the suspension itself. I could feel the whispers, the judgment, even if no one said it outright. It was like I had this invisible label on me, and no matter where I went, I could sense the weight of their stares (EM2, 2023).*

A different participant highlighted

*Before all this, I earned respect because of my position. People came to me for advice; they valued my opinion. After the incidence, it was like everything I had built such as my reputation, respect and standing just crumbled. And the worst part was, I didn't feel like I had done anything to deserve it. Yet here I was, being made an example of, as if I had committed some unforgivable act (EM4, 2023).*

Another participant shared

*The public nature of it all was the most humiliating part. It wasn't just between me and the committee; it became a topic of discussion among others, and I couldn't defend myself. I wanted to explain my side, to clear my name, but it felt like I'd already been judged (EM1, 2023).*

Based on the narratives, it is evident that humiliation and loss of status is one of the psychological impacts had discipline had on those disciplined. Public exposure of wrongdoing and the subsequent change in community perception often left those

individuals feeling stripped of dignity and alienated. For those previously in respected roles, the erosion of status appeared particularly damaging, undermining their confidence and sense of belonging within the church.

#### **4.3.3.6 Regret and Desire for Redemption**

The theme of regret and desire for redemption also occurred in the narratives as one of the effects of church discipline on those disciplined. While regret often stemmed from an acknowledgment of wrongdoing and the resulting loss of trust or status, the desire for redemption reflected a longing to restore their relationship with God, rebuild their standing within the community, and demonstrate genuine transformation. This is highlighted in following comments

*I sincerely felt a deep sense of regret. I felt there were things I could have handled differently to prevent the whole incidence. I've replayed it all in my mind so many times, wondering if a small change here or there could have made a difference (EM6, 2023).*

One of the participants shared his view in this manner

*I really wanted to correct myself and make things right, not just for myself, but for the people who might have been affected by my actions or by what happened. I didn't want that to define me. I wanted to show that I've learned from the experience, that I can grow and be better (EM7, 2023).*

Another participant aptly stated

*I wanted to prove to myself and to others, that I could rise above any label I suffered as a result of my misbehavior. I wanted to regain the trust I lost and rebuild the respect that was taken away. Redemption, to me, is not just about being forgiven. It's about taking responsibility, doing the work, and showing that I'm more than my mistakes (EM1, 2023).*

It is evident from the narratives that one of the major impacts of church discipline was regret and desire for redemption. Regret often arose from a deep acknowledgment of wrongdoing and the recognition of its consequences, including strained relationships and a diminished sense of self-worth. Alongside this regret, a profound desire for redemption emerged, as individuals longed to restore their relationship with God, reconcile with the church community, and prove their commitment to personal and spiritual growth.

#### **4.3.3. 6 Emotional Experience**

Participants reported a range of emotional responses to church disciplinary practices, including anxiety, fear, nervousness, and at times, depressive feelings. Many felt intimidated and worried about the consequences of their actions and feared judgment from church leadership and peers.

One of the participants shared his view in this manner;

*“The discipline sessions have been very intense and have made me reflect on my mistakes deeply. Sometimes I feel a heavy weight on my chest. There are moments when anxiousness and depression catch up with me because I see how far I have strayed from the right. If I see how far I have gone up and this could not be a pardon rather the actions taken appear demeaning to me which when I remember anything made me go under depression”* (EM6, 2023).

Also, another participant shared similar view,

*“Going through the discipline sessions has been emotionally challenging. I often feel remorse and regret, and at times, sadness catches up with me, making it hard to focus. These experiences make me*

*feel like stop attending church but sometimes I have to encourage myself try to attend church. Sometimes some friends and colleagues do not want to even greet you not to talk about asking how you are faring.”*

The experience of depression was most pronounced in participants who struggled with repeated lapses in behavior or felt isolated.

#### **4.3.6.7 Discussion of Finding of Research Question Three**

Research question three found feeling of guilt and shame, isolation, spiritual crisis, anger and resentment, humiliation, loss of status, regret and desire for redemption as the major impact of church discipline on those discipline. Also, sadness, anxiety, depression and demeaning. These findings reflect the complexity of the disciplinary process and its potential to shape the emotional and spiritual lives of individuals.

Guilt and shame were recurring emotional responses among those disciplined. Guilt, as a self-conscious emotion, often emerged when individuals acknowledged their wrongdoing and reflected on its consequences. Unlike guilt, which focuses on specific actions, shame targets the self, leading to feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness. This distinction aligns with the work of Tangney, Stuewig, and Mashek (2020), who emphasized that guilt can motivate reparative behaviors, while shame often leads to avoidance and social withdrawal. In the context of church discipline, guilt was seen as a catalyst for reflection and repentance, driving individuals to seek redemption. However, shame frequently resulted in deeper emotional wounds, making individuals feel alienated from their community and even from God. Bandura's Social Learning Theory offers insights into these responses, suggesting that individuals internalize guilt and shame through the observation of social norms and expectations within their

religious environment. They learn what is acceptable by observing the behaviors of others and the consequences of violating these norms. Skinner's Behaviorism complements this perspective by explaining guilt and shame as conditioned emotional responses to the negative reinforcement (e.g., reprimands or punishment) associated with their actions.

Isolation was another major impact of church discipline, taking both physical and emotional forms. Physically, disciplined individuals often avoided church gatherings or interactions with fellow members to escape judgment. Emotionally, they experienced a sense of detachment, even when present in communal settings. This phenomenon aligns with findings by Jaspal and Lopes (2020), who noted that social exclusion can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and diminish psychological well-being.

The isolation experienced by disciplined individuals can also be understood through Bandura's theory, which highlights the role of the environment in shaping behavior. When individuals perceive rejection or judgment from their community, they may internalize these negative cues, further reinforcing their withdrawal. Skinner's Behaviorism explains isolation as a form of avoidance behavior, where individuals distance themselves from situations that evoke discomfort or negative reinforcement, such as judgmental interactions with others.

A spiritual crisis, characterized by a sense of disconnection from God and a questioning of faith, was a profound effect of church discipline. Many participants reported struggling with their spiritual identity, feeling unworthy of God's forgiveness and doubting their place in the church. This aligns with research by Litz et al. (2020), who found that moral injuries, such as failing to meet religious standards, often lead to

spiritual struggles. Bandura's theory sheds light on how spiritual crises develop, suggesting that the reciprocal relationship between behavior, personal beliefs, and environmental influences can be disrupted by disciplinary measures. When individuals perceive discipline as punitive rather than restorative, it undermines their confidence in their faith and community. Skinner's theory emphasizes the role of punishment in weakening behaviors, suggesting that punitive measures without accompanying positive reinforcement may lead to disengagement from spiritual practices.

Feelings of anger and resentment were commonly reported, often directed at church leaders or community members involved in the disciplinary process. Participants frequently perceived the discipline as unjust, lacking empathy or fairness. These emotions are consistent with findings by Aquino, Tripp, and Bies (2021), who observed that perceptions of injustice often foster resentment and erode trust in organizational settings. Through Bandura's lens, anger and resentment can be understood as learned responses to perceived inequities within the disciplinary process. Observing others being treated differently or feeling singled out can reinforce negative attitudes toward authority figures. Skinner's Behaviorism also highlights the role of negative reinforcement, where perceived unfairness conditions individuals to respond with hostility or resistance, undermining the intended corrective purpose of discipline.

Public disciplinary measures often resulted in feelings of humiliation and a loss of status within the church community. Many participants described these experiences as deeply damaging to their self-esteem and social identity, aligning with the findings of Tracy and Robins (2020), who highlighted the long-term psychological effects of public shaming. Bandura's theory explains these outcomes as a loss of self-efficacy. When

individuals perceive themselves as failing to meet communal standards, their belief in their ability to regain respect diminishes. Skinner's Behaviorism further suggests that public punishment may condition individuals to associate their behavior with shame, discouraging future participation in community activities and deepening their sense of exclusion.

Finally, regret and a desire for redemption were transformative effects of church discipline. Regret emerged as individuals reflected on their actions and their consequences, while the desire for redemption drove them to seek reconciliation with God and their community. Worthington, Davis, and Hook (2021) found that these emotions often serve as catalysts for positive change, motivating individuals to repair relationships and improve their behavior.

These findings call on the need for church discipline to prioritize restoration over punishment. By focusing on fairness, empathy, and support, churches can help individuals navigate the emotional and spiritual challenges of discipline while promoting growth and reconciliation. Integrating counseling, mentorship, and positive reinforcement into the disciplinary process can mitigate feelings of guilt, shame, and isolation, fostering an environment where disciplined individuals feel valued and supported.

#### **4.3.4 Restorative Process of Errant Members to the Church**

This theme related to research question four which explored the process used by CoP, Techiman area to restore offenders who had served their punishment successfully. It was captured that variations exist in the restoration process due to the differences in disciplinary actions for different offences. However, four commonalities were

recorded, and these were assessment for restoration, pastoral counselling, forgiveness and acceptance by the church, restoration into the offender's organisation or fellowship.

#### **4.3.4. 1 Assessment for Restoration**

Participants spoke about assessment of the offender as the first step in the restoration process. According to the narratives, this phase involves a thorough evaluation of the offender's actions, attitude, and the underlying factors that led to their misconduct. This is not just a formal procedure but an opportunity to understand the individual's perspective, the impact of their actions on themselves and others, and whether they have shown genuine remorse.

*One week to the ending of my suspension, I was invited to the disciplinary committee again. I was asked what I have learnt from my experiences so far and whether I was ready to go live by the ethos of the church (EM5, 2023).*

Another participant shared

*A couple of elders from the disciplinary committee visited me when it was almost time for me to go back to the church. They asked me a few questions which I think was to test my readiness to do the right things should I be restored. They asked me to church the following Sunday. I believe they were assessing my readiness by asking those questions (EM2, 2023).*

Furthermore, one other interviewee mentioned

*I was just demoted or striped off my role as a finance committee chairman for a month. I was attending church and engaging in other activities gracefully. But even before the time, I was invited by the disciplinary committee. They mentioned that from their point of view I look ready and prepared for my position, but I politely rejected going back to my role (EM7, 2023).*

From the narratives, it can be inferred that the process of restoration involves not only an assessment of the offender's actions but also a deeper evaluation of their personal growth and readiness for reintegration into the church community. The questions asked by the disciplinary committee and the visits to assess the offender's behavior reflect a careful consideration of whether the individual has truly learned from their past actions. It appears that church leaders are not just concerned with the outward signs of repentance but are also interested in the internal transformation of the individual, ensuring that they are genuinely ready to live by the church's ethos. This process, as described, seems to be an important opportunity for the offenders to demonstrate their commitment to change.

#### **4.3.4. 2 Pastoral Counselling**

Pastoral counselling was frequently mentioned by participants as a vital component of the restorative process following church discipline. In the narratives, it was described as a supportive and therapeutic intervention aimed at helping offenders heal and reintegrate into the church community. It involved a pastoral leader or a trained minister providing one-on-one or group counselling to address the emotional, spiritual, and moral concerns of the offender. The words of one of the participants were

*After attending the meeting and assuring them of my readiness to be restored, I was asked to meet pastor JU and elder KP for the next three days. These people prayed, counselled and even refreshed my mind on the what the behaviours and attitudes CoP abhors as well as those they cherish (EM1, 2023).*

Another participant reiterated

*I was given some form of counselling before the actual day for me to attend church. I always met one of the elders in his house because I was*

*asked to. And in a form of informal conversation counsel and advised me to move on and be more active to prove the fact that indeed God has restored me to his church rather than men (EM3, 2023).*

Similarly, a participant commented

*During the meeting with the disciplinary committee, all the elders took turns to appreciate my cooperation and the fact that I was still involved in the activities of the church and demonstrate my love for God. At the same time, they advise and encourage me on how be vigilant so that similar ordeals do not happen to me (EM7, 2023).*

It can be inferred from the narratives that counselling and guidance from church leaders played a significant role in the restoration process following church discipline. The practice of meeting with spiritual leaders was essential in reinforcing the offender's commitment to personal and spiritual growth. These meetings not only provided emotional support but also served as a platform for discussing the behaviors and attitudes that the church abhors, as well as those it cherishes, helping the offenders realign their values with the church's expectations.

#### **4.3.4.3. Forgiveness and Acceptance by the church**

According to participant, the process of restoration and reintegration of offenders also involved Forgiveness and Acceptance by the church. Forgiveness, as described in the narratives, was not merely a passive acknowledgment of the offender's repentance but an active decision by the church community to let go of past grievances and embrace the individual with compassion and understanding. This is exemplified in the narratives below

*On the Sunday that I officially reported, in front of the congregation, I was officially introduced that I have gracefully served my punishment*

*and exhibited change heart and in behaviour in the sight of God and man, so all my misdeed has been wiped. After this announcement, there was congregational prayer and praise music in celebration of my restoration (EM5, 2023).*

Another participant recollected

*I was presented to the congregation by three elders of the disciplinary committee. They cautioned the members that since I have served my punishment, I am cleared, therefore nobody should label me with my past mistakes. Key members of the church were called to come and place their hands on me for a word of prayer. After which they all gave me a hug to signify that the congregation has accepted me back (EM3, 2023).*

One of the interview participants shared his view in this manner

*My punishment was to pay the money. So, after meeting with the elders to verify that I have made full payment, announce was made during church service that I have fully paid what I was supposed to (EM4, 2023).*

It is clear from the narratives that public acknowledgment and ceremonial acts of forgiveness and restoration are integral to the process of reintegrating offenders into the church community. These acts serve both symbolic and practical purposes, signalling to the congregation that the offender has fulfilled their disciplinary obligations, demonstrated a changed heart and behavior, and is now fully restored as a valued member of the community.

#### **4.3.4.4 Reintegration into the offender's organisation and roles**

The final step in the restoration and reintegration process as shared by the participant was Reintegration into the offender's previous organisation or fellowship or roles. It involved re-establishing the individual in positions of responsibility or leadership that

they held prior to the disciplinary process, or introducing them to new roles where they can continue to serve the community. This is captured in the comments below.

*I was asked to attend leaders meeting to discuss taking my role back as a financial secretary. There the leaders discussed the need for me to take my position because I had fulfilled all what was required (EM4, 2023).*

Similarly, a participant reiterated

*I didn't want my position back yet I was asked to attend leaders meeting to declare my position to the elders of the church. My position was announced to the congregation during the next church service the following Sunday. The process would have been same if I had accepted to take back my position (EM7, 2023).*

Another participant shared

*I am aware that if you hold a position in any of the fellowships or organisation, the elders reintegrate you back but for my case, I was just an ordinary member, so nothing of that sort happened (EM6, 2023).*

From the narratives, it is clear that the church views this final step as an affirmation of the offender's transformation and a way to validate their restored standing in the eyes of both the leadership and the congregation. The process of reintegration into their previous roles is a tangible representation of the trust being rebuilt between the offender and the church community. It reflects the offender's growth and readiness to contribute positively once again to the church's mission.

#### **3.4.4.5 Discussion of findings on research question four**

The analysis of findings of research question four give evidence to conclude that the restoration and reintegration of offenders back to the church involves four main processes namely assessment for restoration, pastoral counselling, forgiveness and

acceptance by the church, restoration into the offender's organisation or fellowship. these processes are essential for both the spiritual and social rehabilitation of offenders within the church community. Each step is designed not only to restore the individual's relationship with God but also to reaffirm their place in the community of believers.

The first step in the restoration process involves a comprehensive assessment for restoration, where the church leadership evaluates whether the individual has genuinely repented, demonstrated a changed heart, and is ready to re-enter the fellowship. This step aligns with the concept of social reinforcement in B.F. Skinner's behaviorism, where behavior is shaped through reinforcement and punishment. The assessment serves as a form of "positive reinforcement," rewarding the individual's repentance with the possibility of reintegration, contingent upon their readiness. It implies that the church not only evaluates the person's external actions but also their internal transformation, focusing on the sincerity of their repentance (Sinyangwe, 2021). In line with Bandura's Social Learning Theory, this process of assessment can be seen as a form of observational learning, where the individual observes and internalizes appropriate behaviors over time. The church's disciplinary actions and subsequent assessment provide a model for the offender to learn what is expected in terms of repentance and moral conduct. Research supports the idea that assessing readiness for restoration helps foster behavioral changes and promotes long-term spiritual growth (Smith & Russell, 2022).

The second key step is pastoral counselling, which involves one-on-one interactions between the offender and spiritual leaders, offering guidance, reflection, and emotional support. According to Bandura, learning is facilitated through the social environment,

and this counselling is crucial in creating a supportive atmosphere for the offender. Pastoral counselling provides the offender with tools for emotional and moral growth, helping them make sense of their misdeeds and teaching them how to avoid similar mistakes in the future. This aligns with the concept of vicarious learning, where individuals benefit from observing and engaging with others who model correct behaviors (Miller & Rollnick, 2020).

Empirical studies show that pastoral counselling enhances the likelihood of a successful reintegration by helping the individual internalize the values and teachings of the church in a more profound and personal way (Kelley et al., 2021). By engaging in this process, the church ensures that offenders not only re-enter the fellowship but do so with a deeper understanding of their spiritual journey.

The third process in the restoration sequence is forgiveness and acceptance by the church. This is a critical step in the reintegration process as it is grounded in the Christian principle of forgiveness. The church must forgive the offender, acknowledging that their wrongdoings have been dealt with by God, and embrace them back into the fellowship. This concept reflects Skinner's operant conditioning, where the church's forgiveness and acceptance can be seen as a form of positive reinforcement, rewarding the offender for their repentance and signaling their successful return to the community.

Forgiveness serves both as a psychological and spiritual tool for restoring the offender's self-worth and confidence. Research by Hartwig and Casey (2020) illustrates that forgiveness is essential for the offender's emotional recovery, as it alleviates feelings of guilt, shame, and isolation that could otherwise hinder their progress. Additionally,

the church's acceptance reaffirms the principle of community, suggesting that the offender is valued not just for their actions but for their potential to grow and change.

The final stage of the process involves the restoration into the offender's organization or fellowship. This stage is symbolic of the offender's complete return to the church's social fabric, including the restoration of their prior roles or positions of service. According to Bandura's Social Learning Theory, this phase is crucial because it provides the offender with the opportunity to observe and participate in the church community, reinforcing their commitment to the faith and encouraging continuous moral development. The act of re-engagement reinforces the learning process as the individual moves from passive observation to active participation.

This phase is also significant in terms of behavior modification, as the offender's return to their previous role serves as a constant reminder of their commitment to the church's ethos. A study by Jaramillo and Smith (2021) found that offenders who were reintegrated into positions of responsibility demonstrated more sustained behavioral changes, as the responsibilities and the trust placed upon them acted as an additional form of reinforcement for positive behavior.

The processes of restoration and reintegration described above highlight the holistic nature of church discipline as not merely about punishing offenders but about guiding them towards spiritual and social rehabilitation. The church's emphasis on forgiveness and the practical steps of reintegration ensure that offenders are not alienated but instead are encouraged to grow, learn, and contribute to the community once again. This holistic approach may help prevent recidivism and build a stronger, more supportive community.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0 Introduction

This final chapter comprises an ephemeral introduction of the study, emphasising on the major findings to draw conclusions. This chapter also deals with the recommendations of the study and suggested areas for future research.

#### 5.1 Summary of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore the psychological pathways of the members of the Church of Pentecost (CoP) who have gone through the church's discipline by focusing on members of the church in the Techiman area. The objectives of the study were to;

- 1 explore the nature of disciplinary measures applied to transgressors within the Church of Pentecost, Techiman Area.
- 2 understand how the lived experiences of the errant members have shaped their perceptions and understanding of church discipline in the CoP in the Techiman area.
- 3 explore the psychological impact of church discipline on the errant members of the CoP in the Techiman area.
- 4 understand the process used by the church to restore the transgressors to the church

Two theories were adopted for the study. They were Operant Conditioning Theory on behaviourism propounded by B F Skinner and Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory. The study was delimited to three churches namely Wenchi Central, English Assembly and Akrobi Assembly in the Wenchi township of Techiman Area of the Church of Pentecost. The interpretative paradigm was adopted for the study. The study

was a qualitative study which need the phenomenological case study as a research design.

The target population was all was all errant members of the CoP in Techiman Area. A sample size of seven participants were selected for the study using the purposive sampling procedure particularly snowball sampling. A semi-structured interview guide was used for data collection. Data was analysed using Colaizzi's 8-Step Technique for analysing lived experiences.

## **5.2 Key Findings**

The key findings are as follows

Research Question One explored the nature of disciplinary measures applied to errant members within the Church of Pentecost. The findings showed that disciplined members experienced removal from office, suspension, dismissal, public rebuke, and financial restitution. Removal from office involved the permanent loss of leadership roles, while suspension restricted participation temporarily. Public rebuke entailed addressing misconduct before the congregation, and dismissal involved exclusion from fellowship. Financial restitution required members to repay losses resulting from misconduct or unethical behaviour.

Regarding research question two, which explored the perception of the transgressors on church discipline to discover appreciation of accountability and responsibility, understanding of the essence of redemption and restoration, appreciation of the need to respect church boundaries and ethical standards, appreciation of community in discipline, and understanding of authority and obedience. In short, the participants perceive the whole discipline process as something necessary for the restoration and redemption rather than for punitive reasons.

Research question three, which explored the psychological effects of church discipline on the errant members, found feelings of guilt and shame, isolation, spiritual crisis, anger and resentment, humiliation, and loss of status. Also, church discipline left errant members with emotional challenges like sadness, anxiety, depression, and feelings of demeaning and intimidation.

Regarding research question four, which explored the restorative process for the errant members, it found four main processes, namely assessment for restoration, pastoral counselling, forgiveness and acceptance by the church, and restoration into the offender's organization or fellowship. These processes are perceived as essential for both the spiritual and social rehabilitation of offenders. Each step is designed not only to restore the individual's relationship with God but also to reaffirm their place in the community of believers.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

Based on the findings, the study concludes that;

Errant members face church discipline such as removal from office, suspension, dismissal from church position, public rebuke, and restitution. Participants believe church discipline to be punitive and corrective action felt that members respond accordingly. Discipline within the church holds individuals accountable to moral and ethical standards of righteousness.

Errant members view church discipline as a way of being restored, set right, and saved instead of being disciplined/punished. They believe it allows the body to hold each other accountable, understand boundaries, moral standards and have respect for authority. Members respond to church discipline by realizing they are part of a church family that they are accountable to each other.

Discipline from the church can cause negative psychological and emotional challenges such as; guilty, shame, social withdrawal, feeling of being pulled away from God, anger, resentment, humiliation, and sadness. These emotions can cause anxieties and depression within an individual.

Assessment for restoration, Pastoral counseling, forgiveness, reception, and reinstating someone back into the fellowship restores an individual's relationship with God and position in the church.

#### **5.4 Implications for Guidance and Counselling**

The findings have several implications for guidance and counselling within the context of church discipline:

The findings of this study have several important implications for guidance and counselling within the context of church discipline. Counsellors need to recognize and address the emotional impacts of discipline, including feelings of guilt, shame, and isolation, by providing a safe and empathetic environment for offenders to process these experiences, which is crucial for their psychological and spiritual healing. They can also help offenders reframe church discipline as an opportunity for growth and restoration rather than mere punishment, emphasizing its redemptive aspects to foster hope and a positive outlook.

Collaboration between counsellors and church leaders is essential to ensure that disciplinary and restorative processes are aligned with pastoral care principles, making the approach compassionate, consistent, and effective in promoting accountability and healing. Furthermore, the church community plays a pivotal role in reintegration, and counsellors can educate congregants on the importance of forgiveness, acceptance, and support to create an environment conducive to healing and reconciliation. Finally, reintegration should be viewed as an ongoing process rather than a one-time event, with

counsellors providing continued guidance and mentorship to help offenders navigate challenges and rebuild confidence within the church community.

## **5.5 Recommendations**

Based on the study's findings, it recommends that;

1. Church leadership must ensure that discipline is uniformly applied to all members to promote accountability and adherence to Scriptural ethical standards. A standardized and documented system for discipline procedures should be established to prevent feelings of unfair treatment. Additionally, leadership training should emphasize impartiality when administering discipline, focusing on minimizing emotional harm while encouraging reflection on wrong actions.
2. Pre-discipline counseling is recommended to help church members understand discipline as a restorative process rather than punishment. Church leadership should emphasize that discipline aids in restoring individuals. Pairing transgressors with mentors can facilitate their integration into the church. Regular check-ins with individuals who have undergone discipline can ensure accountability, and workshops on ethical standards and behaviors may be beneficial.
3. Pastoral counseling should be offered to individuals undergoing church discipline, alongside the establishment of a support group for those affected. This initiative aims to foster a sense of community and understanding among members who have experienced similar situations. It is essential to monitor the emotional state of members facing discipline, and if signs of depression, stress, or shutdown are observed, proactive outreach should occur. Providing additional resources to alleviate anxiety and depression is crucial. Furthermore,

church leadership should be trained to identify symptoms of trauma and provide appropriate emotional support to members.

4. Restoration steps for church members post-discipline should be structured and gradual. Members must not reintegrate immediately; they need to undergo intentional steps from assessment to eventual rejoining. Pastoral counseling should be provided at each stage, ensuring confidentiality and regular scheduling. The church community should also offer opportunities for forgiveness and affirm the member's potential reintegration into the church family.

### **5.6 Suggestions for further studies**

It is suggested that future studies should replicate this study however expanding the scope to cover more churches in the Techiman area so that a more general perceptive of church disciplines could be captured.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **APPENDIX ‘A’**

#### **APPLICATION FOR INTRODUCTORY LETTER**

Precious Vera Kogolegba  
The Church of Pentecost  
P.O. Box 102  
Wenchi

4<sup>th</sup> October, 2021.

The Head of Department  
Department of Counselling Psychology  
Faculty of Education Studies  
University of Education, Winneba  
Winneba

Dear Madam,

**APPLICATION FOR INTRODUCTORY LETTER FOR DATA  
COLLECTION - (202145175)**

I wish to apply for an introductory letter to start data collection. My supervisor is Hannah E. Acquaye (PhD) and has agreed that I write to request permission to start data collection.

The purpose of my study is to assess the psychological pathways in church discipline through phenomenological study and it is expected that data will be collected from affected adults.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,



.....  
Precious Vera Kogolegba  
(202145175)  
0208763030  
[vpvirenkyi@gmail.com](mailto:vpvirenkyi@gmail.com)

## APPENDIX 'B'

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA  
FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES  
DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

Psychological Pathways of Church Discipline: A Phenomenological Study of a  
Pentecostal Church

#### **Informed Consent**

**Principal Investigator:** Precious Vera Kogolegba

**Faculty Supervisor:** Hannah E. Acquaye, PhD

You are being invited to participate in a research study. The study is *voluntary* so you can choose to take part or not.

**Purpose of the study:** The purpose of this study is to understand your experiences about how you navigated the process of church discipline and any effect(s) it had on you – both positive and negative.

**What you will be asked to do in the study:** When you take part in this study, you will be asked a series of questions about yourself as well as what you experienced during the season when you went through church discipline. We would be grateful if you can also share how that experience has changed your life now. *The questions may produce some discomfort.* Please feel free to refrain from answering any of the questions that

cause you undue stress. The interviewer will try her best to be sensitive about these questions.

You will not be given any incentive in taking part of this study.

**Time required:** This interview can last between 30 minutes to 90 minutes. It will be audio recorded. By agreeing to be interviewed, you also agree to be audio-recorded.

**Age requirement:** You must be an adult (18+ years) who experienced church discipline in the church of Pentecost. You must also be able to express yourself in English.

**Study contacts for questions about the study or to report a problem:** If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has impacted you negatively in any way, communicate with: Precious Vera Kogolegba or her supervisor, Dr. Acquaye at [heacquaye@uew.edu.gh](mailto:heacquaye@uew.edu.gh).

### Demographic Information

1. If you had to give yourself a pseudonym to protect your identity, what will you call yourself? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How old are you as of today? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your gender?
  - a. Female [ ]
  - b. Male [ ]
4. What is your relationship Status?
  - a. Single [ ]
  - b. In a relationship [ ]
  - c. Engaged [ ]
  - d. Married [ ]
  - e. Separated [ ]
  - f. Divorced [ ]
  - g. Widowed [ ]
  - h. Other, please explain  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What is your educational qualification?
  - a. JSS or vocational training [ ]
  - b. Completed Secondary school [ ]
  - c. Completed bachelor's degree [ ]
  - d. About to complete master's [ ]
  - e. Completed master's [ ]
  - f. Completed a PhD [ ]
  - g. Other, please explain \_\_\_\_\_

6. Family life. What does family look like?

- a. I have no kids [ ]
- b. I have biological /adopted kids [ ]
- c. Other, please explain

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7. What occupation are you engaged in?

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### **Section B: Experiences of Church Discipline (Objective 1)**

1. How long have you been a Christian? (Number of years)
2. When did you experience church discipline (year and month)?
3. Can you describe the disciplinary measures that were taken against you?
4. How were these disciplinary actions communicated to you?
5. How did you feel during and immediately after the disciplinary process?
6. Were the disciplinary measures consistent and fair in your view? Why or why not?
7. How did these measures affect your daily life and involvement in church activities?

### **Section C: Perceptions of Church Discipline (Objective 2)**

1. How has your experience shaped your perception of church discipline?
2. Do you believe the discipline was meant more for correction, restoration, or punishment? Why?
3. How has the discipline influenced your understanding of accountability and responsibility in the church?

4. How do you view the role of the church community and leaders in enforcing discipline?
5. Has your experience affected your relationship with other members of the church? How?

### **Section D: Psychological Effects (Objective 3)**

1. Can you describe how the disciplinary experience affected your emotional well-being? (Prompt for feelings such as guilt, shame, depression, anxiety)
2. Did you experience any mental stress, isolation, or anger during the process? Please explain.
3. How did these experiences affect your spiritual life or your confidence within the church?
4. Were there any coping strategies or support systems that helped you manage these psychological effects?
5. How has the discipline influenced your long-term behavior or decision-making within the church?

### **Section E: Restoration and Reintegration Processes (Objective 4)**

1. What steps did the church take to restore you into church life after the disciplinary action?
2. How did pastoral counselling or mentorship play a role in your reintegration?
3. Were forgiveness and acceptance from the church community part of your restoration? How did this impact you?
4. Do you feel fully restored and accepted now? Why or why not?
5. What recommendations would you give to improve the restoration process for future transgressors?

## APPENDIX 'C'

## EXCEPT OF QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

| Raw Data (Participant Statement)  | Initial Code            | Sub-Theme            | Main Theme                             |
|---|-------------------------|----------------------|--|
| "When I was suspended, I felt ashamed to even step into the church."              | Feeling ashamed         | Emotional pain       | Emotional Reactions to Discipline      |
| "People avoided sitting near me after the announcement."                          | Social avoidance        | Stigmatization       | Social Exclusion and Loss of Belonging |
| "I thought the discipline was meant to destroy my image, not help me."            | Negative interpretation | Perceived punishment | Perceptions of Church Discipline       |
| "I kept asking myself if God had rejected me too."                                | Spiritual confusion     | Faith struggle       | Psychological and Spiritual Distress   |
| "The counselling sessions helped me understand why the discipline was necessary." | Gaining insight         | Meaning-making       | Reframing and Acceptance               |
| "After the restoration process, I felt welcomed again."                           | Feeling accepted        | Reintegration        | Pathways to Restoration                |
| "Some people never returned after discipline."                                    | Withdrawal              | Disengagement        | Outcomes of Discipline                 |