

Beyond Managerial Leadership: New Testament Theology as the Foundation for Congregational Spiritual Transformation

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Abstract:

Church leadership today faces complex issues and challenges related to spiritual stagnation among congregations and shifting moral values. Many church leaders still prioritize administrative and managerial approaches, so that New Testament (NT) theological principles, which should serve as the ethical and spiritual foundation, are often not applied consistently. The spiritual transformation of congregations is hindered by the lack of integration of Christian values into everyday leadership practices. This study aims to explore how a New Testament theological approach can serve as a conceptual framework for shaping transformative church leadership and fostering Christian value-based spiritual growth within congregations. The qualitative descriptive research method employed concludes that New Testament theology provides the philosophical foundation for church leadership, rooted in the example of Christ and the values of love, service, and sacrifice. When implemented through a New Testament theological approach, transformative church leadership is able to foster a holistic and sustainable renewal of the congregation's spirituality. The implications of New Testament theology-based church leadership are evident in the growth of the congregation, which is not only quantitative but also qualitative in terms of maturity of faith and commitment to service.

Keywords:

New Testament theology, church leadership, spiritual transformation, Christian values, congregational service

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INTRODUCTION

Church leadership in the historical and sociocultural context of the modern era, when the church no longer focuses solely on liturgical activities and worship rituals, but is also called upon to respond comprehensively to the social, cultural, and spiritual changes within the congregation. The development of globalization, digitalization, and increasing socio-economic complexity has shaped the congregation's mindset and lifestyle, making them increasingly diverse, thus requiring church leaders to present a leadership model capable of bridging faith with the realities of daily life (Wengkau et al., 2024). In this situation, church leadership cannot rely solely on administrative or structural approaches; rather, it requires a theological foundation grounded in biblical truth in order to foster the spiritual depth of the congregation. Shifting values and the influence of popular culture also affect the orientation of faith, so the church faces the challenge of maintaining relevance without losing its spiritual identity. Within this framework, the New Testament (NT) Theological Approach emerges as a strategic theological foundation because it emphasizes leadership principles rooted in Christ's example, such as humble service, inclusive love, and a commitment to character formation (Susilo & Baskoro, 2024). This approach enables church leaders to integrate Gospel values into every pastoral decision, guide the congregation in their growth in faith, and build a transformative and sustainable church culture amid modern social dynamics (Saputra, 2024). Therefore, the New Testament theological approach emphasizes the urgency of transformative church leadership grounded in Gospel values to strengthen congregational spirituality, the relevance of ministry, and the sustainability of the church's mission within a contemporary, sustainable social context.

Current church leadership practices reveal a growing gap between the theological theories taught in pastoral education and their concrete implementation in the field. Many churches face internal conflicts rooted in the spiritual stagnation of the congregation (Momongan et al., 2026), low levels of active member involvement in ministry, and the weak integration of Christian values into strategic decision-making processes (Siagian & Naingolan, 2025). This situation reflects a shift in leadership orientation that tends to emphasize pragmatic, managerial, and organizational efficiency aspects, while theological and spiritual dimensions are often sidelined. As a result, the values of faith, which should serve as the moral and ethical foundation of leadership, no longer serve as the primary guide in leading the congregation (Sumual & Arifianto, 2025). This situation creates tension between the church's spiritual vision and leadership practices that are more administrative in nature and oriented toward quantitatively measurable results (B. M. Lase et al., 2025). Furthermore, the pressure to adapt to the demands of the modern era, including competition among religious institutions and increasingly complex congregational expectations, has further widened the gap between theological ideals and pastoral reality. These challenges call for critical reflection on models of church leadership, so that leadership practices can once again be rooted in authentic and transformative Gospel values (Saputra, 2024). Therefore, a reconstruction of the church leadership paradigm rooted in Gospel theology is necessary to bridge the gap between theological ideals and pastoral practices in a contextual, sustainable, and transformation-oriented manner.

The gap between theological ideals and the practice of church leadership also contributes to the weakening of the church's role as a vibrant and relevant community for nurturing the

faith of its congregation. When leadership focuses primarily on administrative achievements, growth in attendance, and organizational stability, the spiritual dimension, which should be at the heart of ministry, loses its space for reflection. Congregants risk viewing the church merely as a formal institution, rather than as a space for spiritual encounter that shapes character and deepens one's relationship with God (Bura et al., 2026). In such situations, the processes of discipleship, pastoral care, and spiritual development often proceed routinely without any tangible transformative power. This imbalance also affects the congregation's trust in their leaders, as the decisions made do not always reflect the values of love, justice, and integrity taught in the Gospel. Furthermore, rapid social change, the penetration of digital culture, and a crisis of meaning in life among the younger generation increasingly demand that the church provide leadership capable of addressing spiritual needs contextually. Awareness of this reality underscores the importance of renewing the church's leadership paradigm by integrating theological depth with pastoral sensitivity, so that the church may once again function as a meaningful agent of spiritual transformation in the lives of the congregation and society (Harianto & others, 2021). Therefore, a renewal of church leadership grounded in contextual theology and pastoral care has become an urgent necessity so that the church may once again function as a center for the formation of faith, character, and the ongoing spiritual transformation of the congregation.

Regarding research on this topic, Indra Richard Sigarlaki previously studied life transformation in holiness: efforts to improve the morality of church leadership showed that life transformation in holiness significantly influences the improvement of church leadership morality. Leaders who internalize the principle of holiness demonstrate consistent integrity, responsibility, and exemplary conduct in decision-making and pastoral interactions. This approach fosters the development of an ethical culture, enhances congregational trust, and strengthens the cohesion of the church community. The study's conclusion affirms that the spiritual development and holiness of leaders are not merely personal dimensions but serve as a strategic foundation for ethical, transformative church leadership capable of fostering the sustainable growth of the congregation's faith (Sigarlaki, 2024).

Meanwhile, research by Maruli Tua Tampubolon and Asep Afaradi on Christian leadership as a testimony of faith in modern society shows that Christian leadership serves as a tangible reflection of internalized faith, providing an ethical and moral example for modern society. Christian leaders who embody the values of love, integrity, and responsibility are able to build public trust, encourage active congregational participation, and reinforce the church's role as an agent of social transformation. The conclusion of this study affirms that Christian leadership is not merely organizational management but a testimony of faith that influences social life, strengthens community cohesion, and demonstrates the relevance of the Gospel's teachings within the context of modern societal dynamics (Tampubolon & Afaradi, 2025).

A similar study conducted by Rahel Reiva Frisika Kelung et al., on servant leadership as a pastoral accompaniment strategy in the character formation of Christian adolescents, shows that servant leadership plays a crucial role in the pastoral accompaniment of Christian adolescents, as it emphasizes the example of service, humility, and consistent love. This approach enables leaders to guide adolescents in character development, the formation of moral values, and a contextual understanding of faith. Observations of youth mentoring programs

indicate improved discipline, active participation in church activities, and the internalization of Christian values in daily life. The study's conclusions affirm that servant leadership not only strengthens the leader-congregation relationship but also serves as an effective strategy for shaping mature, ethical, and service-oriented Christian youth (Kelung et al., 2025).

Based on the three findings above, which highlight the aspects of morality, witness of faith, and pastoral accompaniment, there is a gap regarding a systematic theological approach in church leadership. Research on how New Testament (NT) theology serves as a normative foundation for leadership, while simultaneously fostering the holistic spiritual transformation of the congregation, remains limited. This raises the research question: How can New Testament theology serve as a normative foundation for transformative church leadership and contribute to the growth of faith, the formation of spiritual character, and the active participation of the congregation in the modern social context? This is based on the fact that previous research has not explicitly integrated Christian values into transformative leadership strategies, spiritual character formation, and the fostering of active congregational participation in the modern social context. This gap calls for a study examining the interaction between New Testament theological principles, leadership practices, and their direct impact on the growth of the congregation's faith. Thus, the novelty of this research lies in the development of a framework for transformative church leadership based on New Testament theology as a normative foundation that integrally connects Christian values, spiritual character formation, growth in faith, and active congregational participation in addressing the challenges of the modern social context.

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method that allows for an in-depth understanding of the phenomena of church leadership and the spiritual transformation of the congregation through the lens of New Testament theology (Kusumastuti & Khoiron, 2019). This approach was chosen because the study is exploratory and interpretive in nature, focusing on the interpretation and integration of Christian values into pastoral leadership practices. The primary data sources consist of church documents and New Testament theological literature. This study begins by examining New Testament theology as the philosophical foundation of church leadership rooted in Christian values. Subsequently, this study analyzes models of transformative church leadership as well as strategies for transforming congregational spirituality through a New Testament theological approach. Finally, this study examines the implications of New Testament-based church leadership for congregational growth, both spiritually and institutionally.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

New Testament Theology as the Philosophical Foundation of Church Leadership

New Testament (NT) theology offers a solid philosophical and theological foundation for church leadership, as it emphasizes principles that are universal and relevant to contemporary

pastoral practice in this digital age. Church leadership is not merely about organizational structure or administrative management, but emphasizes integral ethical and spiritual dimensions (Palopak et al., 2024). Here, Christ's principles, such as sincere service, humility in decision-making, and consistent love, serve as the primary guidelines that shape a leader's character. The emphasis on servant leadership, as exemplified in the Gospel of Matthew 20:25–28, affirms that true leadership authority is not meant to assert power, but to serve and foster the well-being of the congregation (Indrajaya & Widiyanto, 2024). Furthermore, Christ's act of washing His disciples' feet in John 13:12–17 highlights an empathetic approach to leadership that values the dignity of every congregation member, thereby fostering trust and cohesion within the church community. The theological foundation of the New Testament provides a conceptual framework that guides leaders in making strategic decisions aligned with biblical values (Yuanita, 2025). Therefore, the New Testament theological approach serves as the normative foundation for ethical, transformative, and service-oriented church leadership, aimed at realizing a community of faith rooted in the true example of Christ.

The implementation of New Testament theological principles in contemporary church leadership has a significant impact on the formation of a healthy spiritual culture. Leaders who consistently emphasize love, humility, and service can increase congregational engagement in various aspects of church life, including worship, discipleship, and social ministry (Agapa et al., 2023). Paul's epistles, particularly 1 Corinthians and Philippians, emphasize the importance of integrity, honesty, and moral commitment as characteristics of Christ-inspired leadership. Case studies of churches in Indonesia show that leaders who internalize New Testament values can manage internal conflicts wisely, foster an atmosphere of open communication, and strengthen the congregation's sense of ownership regarding the church's vision and mission (Stefanus Zalukhu & Tioma Silaen, 2025). Furthermore, the application of New Testament theological principles in the context of cultural pluralism and denominational diversity also requires leaders to balance local traditions with universal Gospel values, so that church leadership remains relevant and adaptive to socio-economic dynamics and contemporary challenges (Andrian & Waharman, 2024). Therefore, the application of New Testament theology strengthens contextual, integrity-driven, and transformative church leadership, thereby fostering a participatory, adaptive, and effective spiritual culture for the sustainable growth of the congregation.

Further analysis highlights the opportunities and challenges of integrating New Testament theology into church leadership. Opportunities arise from the ability of New Testament theological principles to shape visionary, ethical, and transformative leaders, thereby motivating the congregation to actively participate in ministry and spiritual activities (Sulistyo et al., 2024). Meanwhile, the challenges faced include resistance to change, a shift in leadership orientation toward pragmatism, and the complexity of modern church management, which often separates administrative aspects from spiritual dimensions. Documentation of church leadership practices across various regions of Indonesia shows that an awareness of New Testament theological principles encourages leaders to adopt a holistic pastoral approach, integrating faith, Christian values, and social ministry into every strategic decision (Susilo & Baskoro, 2024). This approach not only fosters the spiritual growth of the congregation but also strengthens the moral and ethical legitimacy of leaders, while enhancing sustainable internal cohesion amid

dynamic cultural and social challenges (Tampubolon & Afaradi, 2025). Therefore, the integration of New Testament theology is an essential strategy for strengthening church leadership that is theologically grounded, contextually adaptive, and transformative, for the sake of the congregation's spiritual sustainability amid the dynamics of the modern era.

Transformative Church Leadership Based on Christian Values

Transformative church leadership based on Christian values emphasizes the integration of principles of faith with practical leadership, so that every action taken by church leaders is directed toward the character formation and spiritual growth of the congregation. Values such as Christian integrity and responsibility serve as the primary guidelines for strategic decision-making, conflict management, and the development of pastoral ministry (Raya & others, 2025). Transformative church leadership based on Christian values is rooted in the example of Jesus Christ, who led through love, humility, and service, not power alone, as affirmed in Mark 10:45 that the Son of Man came to serve. Church leaders are called to emulate the attitude and teachings of Christ (Rini et al., 2024), who humbled himself (Phil 2:5–7) (Sutono et al., 2023), to shepherd the congregation with full responsibility and exemplary conduct (1 Pet 5:2–3), and to build up the body of Christ toward maturity in faith (Eph 4:11–13). Such leadership is also characterized by integrity and spiritual wisdom (Prov 11:14), faithfulness in both small and great matters (Luke 16:10), and a commitment to bearing fruit that glorifies God through the lives and ministry of the congregation (John 15:8). Moreover, transformative leadership views the congregation as active partners in ministry, not merely objects of administrative management, so that the interaction between leaders and the congregation is dialogical and collaborative. An analysis of the literature and pastoral documents shows that churches that apply Christian values in leadership can create an inclusive spiritual climate that supports the growth of individual faith (Halawa et al., 2025). Thus, an emphasis on love-based ministry fosters moral and ethical awareness among congregants while strengthening community cohesion. This practice demonstrates that leadership focused on Christian values can bring about comprehensive spiritual transformation, strengthen congregational engagement, and cultivate a culture of service consistent with Gospel principles (Mangape et al., 2025). Therefore, transformative leadership grounded in Christian values serves as a strategic foundation for the church to shape the spiritual character of the congregation, strengthen participation in ministry, and foster an empowered and sustainable community of faith.

The implementation of Christian values in transformative leadership includes mechanisms that facilitate the holistic development of the congregation's potential, including discipleship, character development, and active participation in social ministry and liturgy (Sanjaya et al., 2025). Here, the value of justice serves as the foundation for fair and transparent decision-making, while integrity guides leaders to uphold a code of service consistent with the teachings of Christ. Love, as the primary principle, encourages leaders to build empathetic and supportive relationships, while responsibility underpins moral commitment in addressing both internal and external dynamics within the church (Wong & Senjaya, 2024). Meanwhile, case studies of local churches show a positive correlation between transformational leadership and an improvement in the spiritual quality of the congregation, as evidenced by the congregation's awareness in worship, involvement in social ministry, and willingness to internalize Gospel

values in daily life. Thus, this strategy demonstrates that Christian-values-based leadership is capable of producing a sustainable impact on the growth of faith and the spiritual depth of the congregational community (Mudak & Manafe, 2025). Therefore, Christian-values-based transformative leadership serves as a sustainable strategic framework that strengthens faith formation, enhances the spiritual quality of the congregation, and reinforces the church's role as an agent of social renewal.

Transformative leadership grounded in Christian values also demonstrates adaptability in facing contemporary challenges, including cultural shifts, social pressures, and the influence of globalization that affect the congregation's way of life (Situmorang et al., 2025). Leaders who have internalized Christian values are able to manage change wisely, provide clear spiritual guidance, and motivate the congregation to actively participate in the church's mission. An analysis of pastoral documentation shows that churches that implement transformative leadership based on Christian values have seen an increase in congregational participation in worship, discipleship, and social ministry, which simultaneously enhances community cohesion and the quality of individual spiritual growth (Lembang, 2024). This approach emphasizes the importance of balancing administrative duties with spiritual development, ensuring that leaders focus not only on quantifiable outcomes but also on the growth of character and the depth of the congregation's faith. Such leadership is capable of shaping a dynamic church community with high spiritual resilience and a focus on holistic transformation in harmony with Gospel values (Sitiana et al., 2025). Therefore, transformative leadership grounded in Christian values serves as a strategic foundation for navigating the changing times, strengthening the congregation's faith, enhancing community cohesion, and maintaining the church's relevance within the dynamics of the global society.

Strategies for Transforming Congregational Spirituality through a New Testament Theological Approach

The spiritual transformation of the congregation, grounded in New Testament (NT) theology, emphasizes the importance of integrating theological principles with pastoral practices in daily life. This approach views growth in faith not only as a change in behavior but also as the development of character, a deepening relationship with God, and an internalized moral consciousness (Harianto & others, 2021). In this context, strategies for congregational formation through faith education serve as a primary mechanism, where understanding of Gospel texts, doctrinal study, and spiritual reflection are directed toward fostering a critical and profound spiritual awareness (Boymau & Lao, 2025). Through spiritual retreats and biblical meditation activities, space is provided for congregants to experience silence, introspection, and renewal of their relationship with God, so that their faith becomes vibrant and relevant in facing both social and personal challenges. Furthermore, congregants' experiences demonstrate that participation in structured faith education enhances theological understanding while fostering attitudes aligned with Christian values (Lende & Arifianto, 2025), which in turn positively influences their consistent participation in ministry and church community life (Simanjuntak & Tambun, 2024). Therefore, spiritual transformation grounded in New Testament theology serves as the strategic foundation for holistic congregational discipleship, deepening the

relationship with God, shaping Christian character, and fostering active engagement in sustainable church life.

Social ministry serves as a follow-up strategy that strengthens the congregation's spiritual transformation through concrete acts of love and responsibility toward others (Hapsari et al., 2025). New Testament theology provides a conceptual framework that emphasizes the close relationship between faith and action, so that social ministry is not merely a social activity but an authentic expression of faith and the implementation of Gospel values in real-life contexts (Armianti & Patara, 2024). In this context, congregants who are active in social ministry learn to express the values of love, justice, and humility, while simultaneously experiencing the development of a more mature spiritual character. Observations of local churches show that consistent social ministry programs not only increase congregational engagement but also strengthen community cohesion, foster a sense of ownership regarding the church's mission, and cultivate a collective awareness of moral responsibility and Christian ethics. Involvement in this ministry serves as a means for church leaders to instill New Testament theological principles contextually, so that congregants can experience holistic and sustainable spiritual growth, both individually and as a community (S. Lase & Silean, 2025). Therefore, New Testament theology-based social ministry serves as a strategic means for the spiritual transformation of the congregation, strengthening contextual faith, shaping Christian character, and reinforcing ethical responsibility in sustainable community life.

The integration of Gospel principles into daily life is the third focal point in the New Testament theology-based spiritual transformation strategy, as it connects the congregation's faith experience with contextually relevant practical applications. Activities such as family discipleship, small group discipleship, and faith-based community initiatives provide opportunities for the congregation to apply the principles of love, integrity, and responsibility in real-life situations (Toisuta, 2025). In their research, Gloria Palinggi et al. demonstrated that congregants who are accustomed to internalizing Gospel principles in their daily actions exhibit greater spiritual resilience, the ability to cope with social conflicts, and improved quality of interpersonal relationships. The interaction between pastoral practices and New Testament theological principles reinforces the congregation's understanding that faith is not merely normative but living, dynamic, and transformational (Liska et al., 2025). The long-term impact of this strategy is evident in the strengthening of church community cohesion, the deepening of relationships between leaders and congregants, and the growth of individual spiritual character oriented toward Gospel values. This approach affirms that the spiritual transformation of the congregation through New Testament theology produces comprehensive, sustainable, and relevant change in the context of modern life (Tampubolon & Afaradi, 2025). Therefore, the integration of Gospel principles into daily life through a New Testament theological approach serves as a strategic foundation for shaping congregational character, strengthening community cohesion, and affirming a living, contextual, and sustainably transformative faith.

Implications of New Testament Theology-Based Church Leadership for Congregational Growth

Church leadership grounded in New Testament (NT) theology has significant implications for congregational growth, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Such leadership emphasizes the integration of Christian values, love, integrity, justice, and responsibility into all church activities, from worship planning to the management of social ministries (Toding et al., 2025). Meanwhile, churches that implement New Testament-based leadership experience increased congregational participation in regular worship services, spiritual retreats, and discipleship programs. This growth is reflected not only in attendance numbers but also in the quality of congregational engagement in faith learning, community service, and the internalization of Gospel values in daily life (Sudjarwo et al., 2024). A consistent theological approach enables leaders to guide congregants in developing spiritual depth, strengthening their relationship with God, and fostering a culture of service oriented toward the simultaneous growth of both individual and communal faith. In this context, theological leadership focuses on balancing church administration with the spiritual character development of the congregation, ensuring that growth is both comprehensive and sustainable (Rawung et al., 2025). Therefore, church leadership grounded in New Testament theology has strategic implications for the holistic growth of the congregation, strengthening spiritual depth, active participation, and a sustainable culture of service oriented toward Gospel values.

Further analysis highlights how New Testament theology-based leadership strengthens congregational involvement in social ministry and church community activities, which in turn strengthens community cohesion and fosters Christian character (Gea, 2025). Programs designed with theological principles, such as children's ministry, community social activities, and small group discipleship, foster a culture of active participation and moral responsibility among congregants. This indicates that congregants who are actively involved in these activities internalize Gospel values more deeply, demonstrate steady spiritual growth, and can express their faith through concrete actions in daily life (Asmara, 2023). Leadership that prioritizes New Testament principles also facilitates dialogue between leaders and the congregation, enhances transparency in decision-making, and builds strong trust within the community (Susilo & Baskoro, 2024). The long-term impact of this leadership strategy includes strengthening social cohesion, improving the quality of worship, and shaping character in alignment with Christ's teachings, thereby enabling the congregation to develop holistically and become empowered in the context of contemporary life (Halawa et al., 2025). Therefore, New Testament theology-based church leadership plays a strategic role in strengthening congregational participation, building community cohesion, and fostering a holistic, adaptive, and sustainable Christian character.

New Testament theology-based church leadership faces contemporary challenges, including the influence of secularization, digital pressures, and rapid cultural change, yet it is able to affirm the strategic role of leaders as facilitators of the congregation's spiritual growth (Sulistyo et al., 2024). Meanwhile, theological leadership equips leaders to navigate social dynamics, inspire active congregational participation, and ensure that Christian values remain the primary foundation for every pastoral decision. Empirical analysis of local churches shows that leaders who internalize New Testament principles can foster holistic congregational

growth, including spiritual, social, and moral aspects, thereby increasing the congregation's contribution to the church's mission in the community (Sanjaya et al., 2024). The interaction between theological leadership and pastoral practice has a tangible impact on the resilience of the congregation's faith, the formation of mature Christian character, and consistency in carrying out community service. This approach demonstrates that church leadership grounded in New Testament theology does not merely focus on administrative aspects but fosters a comprehensive transformation that is relevant, adaptive, and sustainable for congregational growth within the context of modern life's challenges (Purba, 2025). Therefore, New Testament theology-based church leadership serves as a strategic framework for fostering holistic transformation within the congregation, strengthening the resilience of faith, building Christian character, and enhancing the church's contribution to contemporary society.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that New Testament (NT) theology provides a solid philosophical and theological foundation for ethical, transformative, and service-oriented church leadership. Christ-centered principles such as love, humility, integrity, justice, and responsibility serve as the normative foundation that shapes the character of church leaders and guides leadership practices so they are not confined to purely administrative aspects but emphasize spiritual and moral dimensions. Church leadership rooted in New Testament theology has proven capable of fostering a healthy spiritual culture, building empathetic relationships between leaders and congregants, and cultivating active congregational participation in worship, discipleship, and sustainable social ministry.

The integration of New Testament theology into church leadership has direct implications for the spiritual transformation and holistic growth of the congregation, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Strategies for faith formation, social ministry, and the internalization of Gospel values in daily life strengthen spiritual depth, Christian character, and the cohesion of the church community amid the challenges of the modern age. Thus, church leadership grounded in New Testament theology is not only theologically relevant but also contextually adaptive, thereby ensuring the sustainability of the congregation's faith, strengthening the church's role as an agent of social renewal, and affirming its relevance within the dynamics of contemporary life.

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