

## Navigating the sacred spectrum: Implications of multiple church membership in urban Ghana

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### ABSTRACT

The contemporary Ghanaian religious environment has progressively seen a widespread of multiple church membership (MCM). However, scholarly debates are limited in this discourse, particularly in relation to how Christians negotiate these religious identities and implications for spiritual formation. Extant research on African Christianity often draws attention to mobility, the widespread of Pentecostalism, and denominational pluralism, but they hardly investigate how Christians simultaneously engage in multiple churches. This study addresses this gap by exploring the motivations, experiences, and implications of MCM among Christians in the Adentan Frafraha area of Accra. Social Identity Theory (SIT) anchored this research. Using a phenomenological approach, the study draws on 24 participants through in-depth interviews with leaders and congregants (Presbyterian, Charismatic, Pentecostal, and Catholic). Findings reveal that MCM is driven by diverse factors, including the search for spiritual empowerment, prophetic encounters, family obligations, proximity, ministry opportunities, and enduring emotional ties to former congregations. Participants reported that exposure to varied teachings and worship styles enriched their spiritual lives, broadened their theological perspectives, and enhanced their sense of belonging. However, the study also identifies significant challenges. These include doctrinal confusion, fragmented spiritual formation, conflicting commitments, and weakened congregational loyalty. Church leaders expressed concern about inconsistent attendance patterns and the difficulty of providing coherent discipleship to members with multiple affiliations. The study concludes that MCM reflects a broader shift toward fluid, pragmatic, and experiential forms of Christian identity in urban Ghana. It calls for further interdisciplinary research on how religious mobility, charismatic spirituality, and urban social dynamics shape emerging patterns of Christian belonging and participation.

**Keywords:** Culture, Indigenous African Traditions, Multiple Church Membership, Pentecostalism, Religious Identity, Urban Ghana

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### I. INTRODUCTION

“Man is by nature a social animal,” as described by Aristotle. These timeless words remind us that human beings seek belonging and connection. In matters of faith, this search often becomes more than just finding a community; it is a quest for meaning, fulfilment and spiritual identity. In Ghana today, this journey of belonging has taken an interesting turn. Many Christians do not just belong to one church. Instead, they participate actively in the life of two or more congregations. This emerging pattern is known as multiple church membership (MCM).

Christianity in Ghana is vibrant, diverse and deeply woven into the cultural fabric of the nation. According to the Ghana Statistical Service (2021), over 71% of the population identify as Christian. This includes Catholics, Protestants, Pentecostals/Charismatics and other independent denominations. This diversity reflects both historical missionary legacies and the rapid expansion of indigenous and Pentecostal movements over the last four decades (Gifford, 2004). Urban centres such as Accra have become spiritual marketplaces, where churches operate side-by-side, each offering unique worship styles, teachings and community networks (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013).

Multiple church membership (MCM) refers to the practice where individuals maintain active participation in more than one church at the same time (Stark & Finke, 2000; Bredenkamp & Schoeman, 2015). This is different from simply switching churches; it is about belonging concurrently to several congregations, attending services, joining activities and sometimes contributing financially to each fellowship. The practice is not unique to Ghana. Studies in Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa show similar patterns, particularly in urban areas where mobility, media ministries and competitive church programming encourage Christians to diversify their spiritual affiliations (Adogame, 2013; Chitando et al., 2020). However, Ghana’s religious landscape, with its mix of traditional religiosity, colonial mission churches and dynamic Pentecostalism, makes this phenomenon especially fascinating.

In Accra, and especially in communities like Adentan Frafraha, the reasons for multiple church members are complex. Some seek deeper spiritual experiences that they feel one church alone cannot provide. Others maintain ties with a family’s historic church while engaging in the energetic worship of a charismatic congregation. Accessibility, social networks and exposure to church services via television, radio and online platforms also play a role. Yet, while MCM offers opportunities for spiritual enrichment, it also raises questions about commitment, loyalty, doctrinal confusion and the nature of Christian unity.

Globally, the trend towards flexible religious affiliation is growing. The Pew Research Centre (2017) reports that in many countries, people are more likely to change or mix religious practices than in previous generations, reflecting an era of “religious fluidity.” In Africa’s urban settings, this fluidity often expresses itself not in abandoning religion, but in expanding one’s religious participation across multiple communities.

This article explores the implications of multiple church membership in urban Ghana, drawing on empirical data from a case study in the Adentan Frafraha area of Accra. It seeks to understand why Christians engage in this practice, what it means for their spiritual lives and how it shapes the broader Christian community. In doing so, it opens a conversation about identity, belonging and the changing nature of faith in a pluralistic and competitive religious environment.

### 1.1 Research Objectives

- i. To identify the factors that give rise to multiple church membership.
- ii. To examine effects of MCM on congregants and leaders of the four selected churches within the Adentan Frafraha area.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

Social Identity Theory (SIT) provides an important lens for understanding the complex religious affiliations observed in contemporary Ghana, particularly the phenomenon of multiple church membership. As reflected in the thinking of Tajfel and Turner (1979), the theory explains how individuals derive a sense of self and belonging from the social groups to which they belong. At its core, SIT emphasises that social identities such as being a member of a particular church form a crucial part of one’s self-concept, alongside personal identity. The theory highlights key processes of social categorisation, social identification and social comparison, all of which influence how individuals perceive themselves and others (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hornsey, 2008).

The foundations of Social Identity Theory revolve around Tajfel et al.’s (1971) earlier concept of the “minimal group paradigm.” This notion demonstrated that even arbitrary categorisation into groups was sufficient to generate both in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination (Tajfel et al., 1971). This suggested that group membership itself, rather than material rewards or personal relationships, could shape attitudes and behaviours. Over the years, the theory has been expanded through complementary frameworks such as Self-Categorisation Theory (Turner et al., 1987), Uncertainty-Identity Theory (Hogg, 2007) and the concept of identity complex (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). These developments underline the fluidity of identities and the ways individuals manage multiple and sometimes overlapping group memberships.

Studies consistently show that group identities influence cooperation, conformity and leadership dynamics (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Haslam, 2004). In religious contexts, scholars such as Ysseldyk et al. (2010) demonstrate how faith communities function as powerful social identities, shaping well-being, resilience and intergroup relations. Furthermore, empirical work on leadership illustrates that individuals perceived as prototypical of a group gain legitimacy and influence. This is a principle that resonates strongly with the charismatic leadership observed in Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Ghana (Hogg, 2001; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013).

In a religiously pluralistic environment like Accra, Ghana, believers navigate overlapping identities. Many maintain affiliation with the family’s historic mission church. At the same time, they actively participate in the vibrant worship of a charismatic congregation. This reflects what Roccas and Brewer (2002) describe as “social identity complexity”, where individuals combine and balance several group memberships (e.g., overlapping identifications as Catholic + Charismatic fellowship + youth prayer network). SIT also helps to explain how multiple affiliations can address different psychological and social needs. More especially, the need for belonging may be satisfied in one church, while the need for spiritual distinctiveness or empowerment may be fulfilled in another (Stark & Finke, 2000). In times of uncertainty, whether economic or personal, participation in diverse churches may also serve as a strategy to reduce self-doubt and gain clarity (Hogg, 2007). For instance, in addressing uncertainty, believers may add a second church whose messages are on deliverance, prosperity teachings or even healing services.

Ultimately, SIT unpacks the ways in which Christians manage overlapping affiliations, the motivations behind their fluid religious identities and the social dynamics that sustain such practices. At the same time, its explanatory limits invite a complementary engagement with theological, economic and cultural perspectives to capture the full complexity of the Ghanaian Christian experience.

While SIT provides valuable insights into how individuals navigate multiple group memberships, the theory has shown limitations in its explanation when addressing the deeper spiritual motivations that drive religious behaviours. Social Identity Theory primarily focuses on social categorisation, social identification and social comparison. However, it does not fully account for the experiential, affective and metaphysical dimensions of faith that often shape religious participation. In the context of Ghanaian Christianity, motivations frequently extend beyond group affiliation. The desire

for spiritual power, existential reassurance or direct engagement with the supernatural cannot be adequately explained through the lens of social comparison or in-group dynamics alone. Substantive studies highlight that religious behaviour in African contexts is deeply intertwined with spiritual efficacy, ritual potency and the quest for tangible divine intervention (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005; Pargament, 1997). These dimensions fall outside the scope of Social Identity Theory. Because of this limitation, there is a need for complementary frameworks that go beyond social identity.

Social Identity Theory offers a useful framework for understanding how individuals navigate multiple and overlapping church affiliations. However, its focus on socio-cognitive processes does not adequately account for the broader forces at play. Above all, SIT overlooks the structural, economic and phenomenological dynamics that shape contemporary African Christian practice. Furthermore, an eclectic but complementary approach of “religious mobility theory” and “religious economy models” can help provide perspectives that deepen the SIT analytical framework. These complementary viewpoints provide clarity on how the Ghanaian urban Christian manages the rivalry in a growing religious marketplace. It also adjusts their spiritual activities and negotiates different ecclesiastical settings.

Religious mobility theory challenges the assumption that religious belonging is fixed, exclusive or institutionally bounded. Gez et al. (2021) argue that African Christian practice is increasingly characterised by *butinage*. This is a form of spiritual “foraging” in which believers move between churches, ministries and ritual spaces in search of meaningful experiences, efficacious practices and relational belonging. This mobility is not merely episodic but reflects a broader cultural logic in which religious identity is dynamic, situational and responsive to shifting personal and social needs. As Premawarhana (2022) notes, mobility is not a deviation from indigenous religiosity, but a longstanding mode of spiritual engagement rooted in relationality, adaptability and pragmatic responses to life’s uncertainties.

In the Ghanaian context, this theoretical orientation helps to explain why congregants participate in prophetic services, healing programmes, or worship events outside their primary church. Such movements are not necessarily signs of doctrinal instability or weak commitment. Rather, they mirror a repertoire-based approach to spirituality in which believers assemble diverse religious resources to address various facets of their lives. In complementing SIT, the religious mobility theory discusses identity complexity in the context of lived, personal experiences of believers that are shaped by perks and conveniences of a pluralistic denominational community.

Religious economy models further enrich this analysis by situating church membership within dynamics of supply, demand and competition in Africa’s religious marketplace. Rooted in the work of Stark and Finke (2000), religious economy theory conceptualises religious institutions as suppliers of spiritual goods. These goods may include, but are not limited to, moral guidance, healing, community and prophecy. On the other hand, believers act as consumers who evaluate these offerings based on perceived quality, efficacy and relevance. In competitive environments, religious groups innovate, diversify their services and tailor ministries to attract and retain adherents (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005; Iannaccone, 1998; Meyer, 2004). This framework has been applied to African Christianity to explain the proliferation of Pentecostal and charismatic movements (Adogame, 2013; Gifford, 2004). These movements emphasise spiritual power, personalised prophecy and experiential forms of worship. Such features resonate strongly because they address widespread demand for solutions to existential and socio-economic challenges.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the phenomenological method as the most suitable approach for exploring lived experiences of multiple church membership in urban Ghana. Phenomenology, as a qualitative research methodology, focuses on uncovering the essence of human experiences by examining them as they are lived rather than as they are theorised. In the study of religion, phenomenology provides an avenue to capture the subjective depth and richness of individual religious experiences (Chitando, 2005). As Cox (2010) argues, the phenomenological method allows religious practices to be understood within the cultural context while remaining sensitive to the perspectives of the participants themselves.

A central feature of phenomenology is *epoche*, the suspension of the researcher’s preconceptions to approach the phenomenon with fresh eyes. In practice, the researcher began by keeping a reflexive journal, documenting personal beliefs and expectations about Ghanaian Christianity and MCM. In this study, the researcher bracketed prior assumptions about multiple church membership to engage more openly with the perspectives of participants. During interviews, *epoche* was maintained through mindful, non-directive listening, avoiding leading questions and allowing participants to shape the direction of their narratives. When unexpected insights emerged, the researcher paused for clarification rather than imposing interpretative frames. Member checking further ensured that meaning was not lost but remained in the viewpoints of the study participants. Lastly, horizontalization was applied during the analysis stage to avoid prematurely focusing on themes that matched the researcher’s preconceived notions.

Data was generated through in-depth interviews with leaders and congregants of four selected churches within the Adentan Frafraha area: the Presbyterian Church of Ghana Victory Congregation, St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church, ICGC Holy Ghost Temple and Grace Mountain Ministries. These churches were chosen because of their denominational diversity, large congregations and proximity, which made them accessible sites for identifying and

engaging participants. The initial design included focus group discussions; however, participants expressed discomfort in group settings. To address this, the study increased the number of individual interviews, conducting a total of twenty-four interviews. That is six participants from each church, comprising two leaders and four congregants. This adjustment ensured that the richness and diversity of experiences were captured despite the absence of focus groups.

Purposive sampling was adopted to strategically select participants based on specific characteristics, qualities, or criteria relevant to providing rich and meaningful information related to the research objectives. Unlike random sampling methods, purposive sampling is strategic and deliberate, aiming to include individuals who can provide rich and meaningful information related to the research focus (Palinkas et al., 2015). The study also employed participant observation, attending services at each church more than three times. This allowed for informal interactions, identification of potential participants and immersion in the worship contexts where multiple church membership was most evident. The interview data were analysed using a structured thematic analysis process. First, all transcripts were read repeatedly to gain familiarity with participants' narratives. Initial codes were then generated inductively, capturing meaningful statements related to motivations, experiences and perceptions of MCM. These codes were compared across interviews and grouped into broader categories. These categories were further developed iteratively to create broad themes that represented common trends among participants. To make sure interpretations stayed rooted in participants' actual experiences, the study alternated between the data, codes and developing themes throughout the procedure.

Ethical considerations were central to the study. All participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study and provided voluntary consent before taking part. They were assured that participation was optional and that they could withdraw at any stage without force or coercion. To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms were used, personal details were eliminated from transcripts and data was safely preserved. Throughout the study's procedure, these precautionary measures ensured that participants' autonomy, privacy and dignity remained protected.

## IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Reasons for Multiple Church Membership

In the interviews conducted, church members are often drawn to other churches for specific events such as special prophetic services, anointing services, or concerts featuring guest ministers. One of the charismatic leaders from Grace Mountain said:

*We have noticed that our members often participate in programmes held by other churches, especially those featuring renowned guest ministers. These ministers often have unique teachings, deliver prophetic messages, or conduct powerful healing and anointing services that members find spiritually uplifting. While our church offers regular services, the appeal of experiencing different styles of worship and receiving messages from diverse voices in the Christian faith encourages members to explore beyond their home church (Church leader from Grace Mountain, personal communication, May 24, 2024).*

Members frequently attend other churches for specific events and special programmes, which they perceive as unique spiritual opportunities that may not be available in their home church. This trend highlights the appeal of charismatic and Pentecostal churches, which often feature dynamic guest speakers and special services that attract attendees from various denominations. This is reflected in the words of one of the charismatic church members, who noted:

*I strongly believe in the power of prophecy and the anointing, which are central to my spiritual growth. Whenever I hear that a church has invited a powerful guest minister, particularly one known for deep prophetic insights or deliverance sessions, I make it a priority to attend. Such services often provide life-changing moments where deep spiritual revelations are given, and breakthroughs occur. I do not want to miss these experiences because they bring a different dimension to my faith journey that I might not always get in my regular church setting. The unique encounters I have during these services make me feel spiritually recharged and reassured that God is working in my life (Church member from Grace Mountain, personal communication, May 16, 2024).*

Pentecostal and Charismatic movements emphasise the experience of the Holy Spirit and often feature events that promise personal encounters with divine power (Meyer, 2004). This experiential aspect is a significant draw for individuals seeking tangible spiritual experiences, which are often facilitated by guest ministers renowned for their prophetic and healing gifts. The appeal of prophetic services and high-quality worship aligns with religious economy models, which argue that in competitive markets, churches differentiate themselves through specialised spiritual products to attract and retain adherents. Family influence plays a crucial role in multiple church memberships. Members often attend services at different churches to support family members or to uphold familial traditions. A respondent noted attending their spouse's church to maintain family unity. This practice underscores the importance of familial relationships in religious participation and suggests that church membership can be fluid based on family dynamics. One of the Pentecostal church members interviewed stated:

*We have family ties with several churches, so we attend different services to stay connected with our relatives. For us, attending different church services is not just about personal spiritual growth but also about maintaining strong family bonds. On some Sundays or during special events, we join our relatives in their churches to worship together, celebrate milestones like baptisms or anniversaries, and stay involved in their faith journeys. This practice allows us to share in each other's spiritual lives while also broadening our exposure to different styles of worship. It is a way of reinforcing family unity while still maintaining our individual church commitments (Church member from ICGC Holy Ghost Temple, personal communication, May 22, 2024).*

Fiese and Tomcho (2001) discuss how religious rituals and church attendance can strengthen family bonds, particularly when family members share religious activities. The commitment to attending family members' churches demonstrates how religious participation is often interwoven with familial obligations and traditions. Long-standing affiliations or personal histories with certain churches can also motivate members to maintain dual memberships. Besides, many Christians who grew up or had significant spiritual experiences with certain churches continue to draw them back even after they have joined new congregations. Some of the interviewees mentioned their ongoing connection to their childhood or parent church even after marrying into another denomination and trying to go back whenever they can. These ties reflect deep-rooted connections that are not easily severed, illustrating the lasting impact of early religious experiences on lifelong faith practices. Hoge et al. (1994) argue that early religious experiences and church involvement significantly influence long-term religious commitment. Personal and historical ties to a church can provide a sense of continuity and belonging, which encourages ongoing participation even after members have joined different congregations. For instance, one of the respondents stated:

*ICGC is close to my house. I go there when I cannot go to Presby. Due to my daily responsibilities and the unpredictability of life, I sometimes find it difficult to make it to my church, especially when I am running late or dealing with unexpected obligations. Since ICGC is close, it becomes a convenient alternative for me to still participate in worship rather than missing church entirely. Even though it is not my main church, I appreciate the teachings and atmosphere there, as it helps me stay spiritually engaged when I cannot attend my home church (Church member from Presby Victory congregation, personal communication, May 28, 2024).*

Proximity plays a significant role in church attendance. Convenience can drive individuals to attend a nearby church, even if their primary affiliation lies elsewhere. According to Ammerman and Farnsley (2001), geographical proximity to places of worship is a critical factor in religious participation. This underscores the importance of accessibility in religious engagement and could suggest that churches aiming to increase attendance should consider location strategies. In Ghanaian urban settings, the proliferation of churches within communities aims to cater to convenience (multiplicity of denominational branches), reflecting a strategic move to embed religious practice into daily life. In the words of Gyekye (1996, p. 4), "one cannot detach oneself from the religion of the community" as it would suggest that one would be isolated from the group. Hence, disrupting the sense of communal membership. Another interviewee also noted:

*I worshipped with First Love when I was in school, and I like the flow there, so I go there sometimes. I developed a deep emotional and spiritual connection with the community there. The energy, the youthful atmosphere, and the dynamic preaching style really resonated with me. Even though I have moved on and currently attend another church, I still feel a strong attachment to First Love. Whenever I get the chance, I like to go back and worship with them because it reminds me of my spiritual journey during my school days. It feels like a second home to me, and I enjoy reconnecting with the worship experience that shaped a crucial part of my faith (Church member from Presby Victory congregation, personal communication, May 28, 2024).*

School affiliations can have a lasting impact on church attendance. The positive experiences and established connections during school years encourage continued involvement. Smith and Snell (2009) argue that religious practices and affiliations formed during adolescence and early adulthood often persist into later life, emphasising the long-term impact of early religious experiences. This highlights the influence of formative experiences and social connections in religious participation. Understanding this can help in designing engagement strategies that leverage past affiliations to foster sustained involvement. Some of the interviewees noted the issue of seeking "power, prophetic – spiritual ministries" as a motivating factor. This aligns with Wuthnow's (1988) concept of "seekership" in religious practice, where individuals attend various religious events and services that meet their specific spiritual needs and goals (i.e., shop for spirituality). The effectiveness of specific spiritual services, such as prayer meetings and prophetic sessions, motivates congregants to attend multiple churches. These services address immediate personal needs, leading to sustained engagement. For instance, an interview with one of the congregants stated:

*My initial visits to this church were occasional. I attended their Thursday prayer meetings because I had heard about the powerful intercessions and prophetic encounters that take place there. During these sessions, I received several prophetic words about my life, and as time went by, I saw those prophecies*

*being fulfilled. That experience strengthened my faith and convinced me that God was truly working in this church. Because of this, I gradually transitioned into attending more frequently, not just for the Thursday prayer meetings but also for regular Sunday services. The fulfilment of these prophecies reassured me that I was in the right spiritual environment where my faith could grow and be nurtured (Church member from ICGC Holy Ghost Temple, personal communication, May 22, 2024).*

Asamoah-Gyadu (2005) emphasises that in Ghana, the popularity of prophetic and prayer services stems from a deeply ingrained cultural belief in the power of spirituality to address real-life challenges. Many Ghanaians turn to these services for divine intervention in areas such as health, finances, relationships, and career success. This reflects a broader African religious worldview, where faith is expected to produce tangible results, reinforcing the need for prophetic guidance, healing, and breakthroughs. Ministry involvement was another motivating factor highlighted by interviewees. For instance, a congregant who regularly visited House of Glory Ministries as a secondary church noted:

*I play the keyboard, and over here I don't get to play all the time. So, I go to House of Glory, where I get to play anytime. I go, and they even give me some money for transport. I also play there for their special programmes (Church member from Grace Mountain Chapel, personal communication, May 16, 2024).*

Previous personal connections and opportunities for active involvement in ministry can drive church attendance. The ability to use one's talents and skills in meaningful ways fosters deeper engagement. Relational networks and opportunities for active participation are crucial in maintaining religious engagement, as they provide a sense of belonging and purpose. Omenyo (2006) argues that Ghanaian churches often build community ties and provide platforms for individuals to use their talent, which are key factors (typical charismatic features) in sustaining member involvement. These movements illustrate a key claim of religious mobility theory. They show that African Christian identities are dynamic and relational. Such identities emerge through pragmatic engagement with a wide range of spiritual resources. They are therefore shaped less by fixed institutional loyalties and more by flexible, practice-based participation across multiple religious spaces. Aesthetic preferences, such as musical quality, and specific worship practices, such as communion, can motivate individuals to attend multiple churches. These preferences reflect personal inclinations towards certain styles of worship and spiritual expression. A congregant noted:

*Music is a big part of my spiritual experience, and I find deep fulfilment in singing during worship. When I visited ICGC, I was immediately drawn to their well-organised choir and the quality of musical instruments they had. The way they coordinated their worship sessions was inspiring, and I felt that it was an environment where I could fully express my passion for singing. Unlike my previous church, where I had limited opportunities to participate in music ministry, ICGC offered a platform that encouraged and nurtured my talent. This was a key motivation for me to continue attending because it gave me an opportunity to serve God in a way that was personally meaningful to me (Church member from ICGC Holy Ghost Temple, personal communication, May 22, 2024).*

Understanding aesthetic and worship preferences can help churches tailor their services to meet the diverse needs of their congregants. This could involve enhancing musical quality or incorporating varied worship practices; expressive worship attracts many congregants, particularly the youth. McGuire (2008) argues that personal preferences in worship style and aesthetics significantly influence religious participation, as they resonate with individual spiritual needs and cultural tastes.

**Table 1**  
*Summary of Motivations for Multiple Church Membership*

Motivation	Description	Field Data Evidence
Special events & prophetic services	Attendance driven by guest ministers, healing services, deliverance sessions and anointing programmes.	Members seek "life-changing prophetic encounters" and diverse spiritual voices.
Family influences & obligations	Participation in relatives' churches to maintain unity, support spouses or honour family traditions.	Members attend baptisms, anniversaries and Sunday services with extended family.
Historical/emotional ties	Continued attachment to childhood churches or congregations associated with formative spiritual experiences.	Participants return to "parent churches" or school-based fellowships.
Convenience & proximity	Attendance at nearby churches when schedules, transport or life demands make primary church attendance difficult.	Members visit churches "close to home" when running late or busy.
Seekership & spiritual power	Desire for prophetic direction, healing, breakthroughs and spiritually potent environments.	Members attend churches known for "powerful intercessions" or fulfilled prophecies.
Ministry opportunities	Engagement in churches that offer platforms for service, talent expression or leadership roles.	Musicians, ushers and volunteers attend churches where they can actively serve.
Aesthetic & worship preferences	Attraction to musical excellence, expressive worship or specific liturgical practices	Members drawn to choirs, instruments or communion practices not found elsewhere

#### 4.2 Impacts on Spiritual Growth

Members believe that exposure to different teachings, worship styles, and church practices enhances their spiritual growth. A congregant noted:

*Attending multiple churches has enriched my spiritual life. Each church offers something unique – one might focus more on in-depth Bible study, while another emphasises vibrant worship and the workings of the Holy Spirit. This diversity has broadened my understanding and experience of God (Church member from Grace Mountain Chapel, personal communication, May 16, 2024).*

This quest for spiritual enrichment reflects a proactive approach to faith development, where individuals seek diverse inputs to deepen their understanding and experience of their spirituality. Roof (1999) argues that contemporary religious seekers often explore multiple religious traditions to enhance their spiritual journey. This approach aligns with the concept of “spiritual bricolage”, where individuals construct their spiritual lives from a variety of religious resources and practices (Altglas, 2014). Notably, an interviewee commented:

*The tradition and sacraments here have always been central to my spiritual life. However, I occasionally attend charismatic services for a more expressive form of worship. This has added a new dimension to my faith without detracting from my Catholic roots (Church member from St. John the Evangelist Catholic, personal communication, May 18, 2024).*

The responses from the interviews indicate a generally positive impact on spiritual growth from participating in multiple church communities. Congregants from both Charismatic/Pentecostal and mainline churches appreciate the different aspects each church offers, such as dynamic worship, deep theological teachings, and a sense of community.

Conversely, other respondents expressed concerns that differing doctrines and practices could lead to confusion and hinder spiritual growth. In practice, conflicting teachings on core beliefs might create doctrinal confusion. A member from the Grace Mountain church (personal communication, May 16, 2024) mentioned that “sometimes I get confused with the different teachings from various churches.” While attending multiple churches can offer spiritual enrichment, the benefits come with the caveat that doctrinal coherence is maintained. Church leaders from both denominations acknowledge this and emphasise the importance of a solid foundational faith. A respondent from the leadership group disclosed:

*The Catholic Church has a rich spiritual heritage that provides deep spiritual growth. Yet we acknowledge that laypeople might seek complementary spiritual experiences elsewhere. If these experiences are in harmony with Catholic doctrine, they can be beneficial (Ms Matilda Adzayao, St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church, personal communication, May 18, 2024).*

Differing teachings and practices can create internal conflicts for members trying to reconcile contradictory beliefs. This highlights a significant challenge for individuals navigating multiple religious affiliations. Coakley (2017) discusses the phenomenon of “orthodoxy versus orthopraxy”, where the emphasis on correct belief (orthodoxy) conflicts with the emphasis on correct practice (orthopraxy). A clear example is the issue of baptism. All see the act as a correct belief, but there are divergent views on its practice. While some think infant baptism is correct, others think that baptism by immersion is the right practice. Multiple church memberships can exacerbate this tension, as individuals encounter varying doctrinal emphases and religious practices.

On the contrary, Pargament (1997) asserts that varied spiritual engagements can offer psychological benefits, such as increased resilience and a sense of community. Pargament’s (1997) research suggests that individuals who participate in multiple religious communities may experience a more robust support system and greater personal growth. These patterns illustrate Social Identity Theory’s claim that individuals negotiate multiple group memberships to maintain belonging and identity coherence. The movement between churches is not random but reflects strategic identity management in a pluralistic Christian environment.

#### 4.3 Challenges of Multiple Church Membership

The phenomenon of multiple church membership presents several challenges for congregants and church leaders alike. The differing doctrines and practices across various churches can lead to a fragmented spiritual experience. For example, while some of the interviewees reported issues with having a feeling that their spiritual growth is all over the place, others indicated that it is hard for them to stay focused spiritually. While one church may focus mainly on Bible study, the other lays more emphasis on charismatic prayer. This inconsistency can hinder cohesive spiritual growth, causing confusion and a lack of depth in religious understanding. Bosch (2011, p. 196) argues that spiritual formation is a continuous process that benefits from consistency in teaching and practice. Multiple affiliations can disrupt this continuity, leading to a superficial understanding of faith. Similarly, theological anthropologists emphasise that Christian formation requires a unified narrative and embodied habits that shape the believer over time (Smith, 2009; Volf & Bass, 2002). Participating with several denominations with different theological doctrines can interfere with the continuity required for meaningful formation. This results in “liturgical incoherence”, where competing spiritual practices affect the believer in conflicting ways (Smith, 2016). However, understanding this fragmentation can help develop strategies to support holistic spiritual growth within the context of multiple church memberships.

Some of the interviewees highlighted the issue of conflicting loyalties and commitments. For example, one of the congregants disclosed that *“I feel torn between my commitments to different churches, especially when they have events on the same day”* (Church member from ICGC Holy Ghost Temple, personal communication, May 22, 2024). The divided loyalties can lead to conflicts in time management and commitment, which subsequently reduces participation and engagement in church activities, hence weakening the overall community. According to McGrath (2017), loyalty and active participation are crucial for the vitality of church communities. In practice, divided loyalties can diminish the effectiveness of both the congregant’s spiritual life and the church’s communal activities. Maintaining multiple church memberships in this sense may be a departure from what Gyekye (1996) termed “communal values” in African societies to fostering individualism over community solidarity. Moreover, individualism engenders self-seeking efforts as a condition for fulfilling one’s needs. Ultimately, when church attendance becomes inconsistent, it becomes very challenging for church leaders to track and engage members.

Members frequently face tensions and conflicts due to differing doctrinal teachings and church practices. The interview showed that some churches conduct membership classes or open question programmes to address doctrinal differences and ensure that all members understand and align with the church’s teachings. One church leader noted that *“the ICGC church has a membership class for church members where we make them understand our doctrines”* (Mr Boamah, personal communication, May 26, 2024). Another church leader disclosed that *“our members sometimes get confused because they hear different teachings from other churches they attend”* (Auntie Eugenia, personal communication, May 24, 2024). Exposure to varied doctrines can lead to confusion and misunderstanding of core religious tenets. This doctrinal dissonance can undermine the theological foundation of an individual’s faith. Pargament (2007) discusses the importance of coherent doctrinal teaching in fostering spiritual well-being. Conflicting teachings can cause cognitive dissonance, affecting spiritual stability. However, addressing doctrinal confusion is essential for fostering a clear and cohesive spiritual education.

Some of the interviewees identified resource allocation and support systems as a key challenge within the framework of multiple church membership. For instance, a congregant (church member from ICGC Holy Ghost Temple, personal communication, May 22, 2024) noted that *“sometimes I feel like I am spreading myself too thin, financially supporting different churches.”* This assertion was agreed upon by one of the church leaders (Matilda Adzayao, personal communication, May 18, 2024), who also revealed that *“multiple memberships can strain an individual’s resources, impacting their ability to contribute meaningfully to any single church.”* The allocation of resources (time, money, and energy) across multiple churches can lead to burnout and reduced effectiveness in supporting church initiatives. Smith and Emerson (2008) highlight that active engagement and financial support are crucial for church sustainability. Multiple affiliations can dilute an individual’s contributions, affecting the church’s operations and outreach. Understanding the strain on resources can help develop support structures for individuals to manage their commitments effectively. This insight is vital for creating sustainable models of church participation in the context of multiple memberships.

#### 4.4 Opportunities and Benefits

Multiple church memberships provide congregants with diverse spiritual teachings and practices, enhancing their overall spiritual experience. For instance, a congregant noted that *“I feel enriched spiritually because I get different perspectives and teachings from the churches I attend”* (Church member from Grace Mountain Chapel, personal communication, May 16, 2024). This variety allows individuals to explore different facets of their faith, contributing to a more comprehensive spiritual growth. According to Foster (1978), exposure to varied religious practices and teachings can lead to a more holistic spiritual development. By engaging with different theological perspectives, individuals can improve their spiritual lives and deepen their understanding of faith.

Multiple church memberships allow congregants to access a wider range of support systems and social networks. This broader community can provide emotional, spiritual, and even material support, enhancing the individual’s overall well-being. During the interview session, some of the key church leaders noted that they employ various strategies to manage non-committed members. This ranges from periodic check-ins and visitations to sending monthly scriptures and prayers depending on the church’s theme, as well as organising teachings explaining the essence of being ‘planted’ in a church. Asamoah-Gyadu (2005) emphasises the role of the church community in providing support and fostering social cohesion in Ghanaian society. Multiple church memberships can enhance this support system by expanding the network of care and solidarity available to individuals. One of the church leaders said that *“we do not consider them as members, so we hardly pay attention to them”* (Mr Mawuli Nutekpor, personal communication, May 26, 2024). This reflects an ‘individualistic perception’ associated with moving from one church to the other. Specifically, much credence is given to nurturing the internal commitment of active members who instigate natural growth of the church (Fletcher, 2006, p. 43).

Engaging with multiple churches provides congregants with numerous opportunities to participate in ministry and service activities. Some of the key church leaders indicated that this involvement allows them to utilise and develop their skills and talents in different contexts, enriching both their personal growth and the church communities.

Additionally, involvement in various ministry activities can enhance an individual's sense of purpose and fulfilment (Mr Mawuli Nutekpor, personal communication, May 26, 2024). Multiple church memberships can provide more avenues for meaningful service and contribution, benefiting both the individual and the church.

Similarly, the interviewees mentioned that special programmes and events at different churches can attract more attendees, increase church offerings and provide opportunities for converting non-committed attendees into regular members. These programmes serve as a magnet for a diverse congregation, drawing in individuals who might not attend regular services. The interviewees identified activities like revival meetings, musical concerts, youth programmes, and community outreach initiatives that appeal to a broader audience. According to one of the church leaders, "When churches organise youth concerts, they are effective in attracting new members and revitalising existing congregations" (Mrs Rama Williams, personal communication, May 28, 2024). One of the interviewed congregants also stated that their church's community welfare youth programme is a platform for showcasing the church's community involvement and spiritual vitality (Church member from ICGC Holy Ghost Temple, personal communication, May 22, 2024).

Special programmes tend to lead to higher attendance, which can result in increased financial contributions. According to some of the interviewed congregants, the music events create an opportunity for churches to present their missions and needs more compellingly, encouraging attendees to contribute financially. This observation is crucial for understanding the financial sustainability and growth strategies of churches. It suggests that special programmes are not only spiritual but also economic drivers for churches, contributing to their ability to fund various ministries and community services. Greenberg (2000) argues that events like fundraisers, charity drives, and special worship services have been shown to significantly boost church finances, enabling churches to expand their outreach and community services. One of the Presbyterian leaders also disclosed:

*Special programmes are a gateway for non-committed attendees to experience the church's community and spiritual environment. Organising music concerts often has been a first step in a deeper engagement to win souls for Christ and a way to increase our church membership (Mrs Rama Williams, personal communication, May 28, 2024).*

This finding underscores the role of special programmes in member retention and engagement strategies. It highlights the importance of designing inclusive and appealing events that can transition casual visitors into active participants. Bowler and Reagan (2014) note that Christian events are critical touchpoints that can lead to increased commitment and participation. These occasions provide a low-pressure environment for attendees to explore the church's offerings and become more involved over time.

#### **4.5 Church Responses to Multiple Memberships**

Divergent views were arrived at during the interview session of mainline churches and Pentecostal/Charismatic churches on their approach to multiple membership. The diverse responses to multiple memberships provide a comprehensive understanding of how different church traditions adapt to contemporary religious practices. Key church leaders from the Pentecostal/Charismatic Christian denomination generally pointed towards the adoption of an inclusive approach to multiple membership. Mr Boamah (personal communication, May 26, 2024) revealed that "We welcome members from other churches because we believe in a unified body of Christ." This view is a sign of the universal nature of the Christian faith and an opportunity for spiritual enrichment through diverse worship experiences. While the disposition of Pentecostal/Charismatic highlights its flexible and adaptive nature in responding to the spiritual needs of their members, it also underscores the potential for these to foster ecumenical relationships and broaden their influence through collaborative efforts. Scholars like Omenyo (2006) have noted that Pentecostalism's rapid growth is partly due to its inclusive and adaptive worship practices. This inclusivity extends to accepting members who engage with multiple congregations, thus enhancing the church's outreach and community engagement.

Conversely, one of the central points for the mainline churches' key leaders revolved around members remaining committed to their church to maintain spiritual stability. From the study findings, mainline churches tend to adopt a more conservative stance on multiple memberships. They emphasise the importance of commitment and loyalty to a single church community to foster spiritual growth and maintain a cohesive church environment. This stance highlights the potential challenges that multiple memberships pose to maintaining a unified and stable church community. It suggests that mainline churches may need to develop strategies to address divided loyalties and reinforce commitment among their members. Asamoah-Gyadu (2005) discusses the tension between traditional communal values and the modern mobility of church members in Ghana. Mainline churches' conservative response reflects a desire to preserve traditional values of loyalty and commitment within the changing landscape of religious practice.

There is a consensus among interviewees that there is little to no collaboration among different churches to address the phenomenon of multiple memberships. Most churches operate on a principle of survival, aiming to grow their membership independently. Collaboration is limited due to theological disagreements, competition for members and resources, leadership rivalries, branding priorities, and most especially, fear of losing congregants. Asamoah-Gyadu (2005) asserts the competitive dynamics among Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Ghana, noting that the drive for growth often supersedes the imperative for collaboration. This critique aligns with the interviewee opinions and

underscores the challenges faced in promoting unity within the Christian community. Also, some interviewees suggested that churches could collaborate on teaching the importance of loyalty to one church, although this is not currently a widespread practice. The opinions highlight a significant issue within the Christian community: the lack of inter-church collaboration, particularly in addressing multiple church memberships. This phenomenon is attributed to the competitive nature of church growth and the survivalist mentality among many churches. Asamoah-Gyadu (2005) highlights the competitive nature of religious organisations, particularly in how they operate within religious economies. Besides, the interviewees argue that churches often operate in a competitive market, striving to attract and retain members, which can inhibit collaborative efforts. The suggestion that churches could collaborate on promoting loyalty underscores a recognition of the problem yet indicates that practical steps towards collaboration are limited. Wuthnow (2004) emphasises the importance of inter-denominational cooperation in fostering community cohesion and addressing broader societal issues. However, he also notes that competitive dynamics can hinder such collaborations. Equally, Chaves (2004) explores the challenges of fostering loyalty within congregations, suggesting that churches need to develop more cohesive strategies to retain members and promote commitment.

The competitive nature and lack of collaboration among churches reflect broader trends in religious practice and institutional behaviour. This insight is crucial for the study, as it reveals the underlying challenges and barriers to fostering unity and cooperation within the Christian community. Additionally, the lack of collaboration to address multiple memberships suggests a gap in the churches' approach to congregational management. This finding is significant for the study, highlighting the need for strategic interventions to encourage cooperation and collective efforts in addressing congregational loyalty and engagement.

## V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

The phenomenon of multiple church membership in urban Ghana reflects a dynamic and evolving religious landscape in which believers actively navigate diverse spiritual, social and cultural expectations. This study demonstrates that multiple church membership is not merely a matter of convenience or curiosity; rather, it is a multifaceted response to the complex realities of contemporary Christian life. Individuals draw on multiple church congregational spaces to satisfy different spiritual needs. This ranges from doctrinal depth and sacramental continuity to charismatic empowerment, prophetic encounters and expressive worship. These overlapping affiliations reveal a form of religious identity that is fluid, pragmatic and deeply relational.

At the same time, the findings highlight tensions inherent in this fluidity. Divided loyalties, doctrinal inconsistencies and fragmented spiritual formation pose challenges for both congregants and church leaders. The coexistence of enrichment and confusion underscores the need for a more distinct understanding of how Christians negotiate belonging in a pluralistic religious marketplace. Social Identity Theory illuminates how believers manage multiple group memberships, yet the Ghanaian context, with its interplay of tradition, Pentecostal dynamism and communal expectations, invites further theoretical expansion.

Looking ahead, this study contributes to a growing body of scholarship on African urban Christianity. It demonstrates that MCM is not an aberration but a meaningful expression of African contemporary faith practice. As religious mobility intensifies and digital media expands access to diverse ministries, patterns of affiliation are likely to become even more fluid. Subsequently, it opens fertile ground for future research on how these shifts reshape pastoral care, ecclesial authority, youth religious formation and sustainability of congregational life. For church leaders and policymakers, understanding the implications of multiple affiliations will be essential. For instance, for nurturing coherent discipleship, encouraging inter-church cooperation and responding creatively to spiritual aspirations of an increasingly mobile Christian population.

### 5.2 Recommendations

The results of this research suggest a few useful, pastoral and policy-driven measures that churches may implement to positively address the increasing prevalence of MCM in Ghana's urban areas. Churches can invest in clearer discipleship pathways, catechetical teaching and small-group structures. This helps members develop theological grounding while navigating diverse worship spaces. Intentional teaching on ecclesiology, spiritual discernment and Christian identity may reduce confusion arising from exposure to conflicting doctrines. Pastors can adopt more flexible pastoral care models that acknowledge the reality of spiritual mobility rather than resisting it. This may include periodic check-ins with members who attend multiple churches, guidance on integrating diverse spiritual experiences and support for individuals seeking prophetic or healing ministries elsewhere.

Churches and denominational bodies can initiate ecumenical forums to discuss shared challenges, reduce competition and build mutual understanding. Joint programmes such as youth conferences, prayer retreats or ministerial fellowships can foster unity and reduce the perception of rivalry among congregations. Policy-driven measures by denominational councils or Christian education boards could include developing curricula that address contemporary

spiritual mobility, media-driven religious consumption and the rise of prophetic ministries. This would equip believers, especially the youth, with tools to navigate diverse teachings responsibly. Future research should examine multiple church memberships across different socio-economic groups and cities and explore their long-term effects on church growth, leadership and Christian formation.

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The author declares that he does not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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