

Original Research Article

APPLYING THE GOOD SHEPHERD MODEL TO CONTEMPORARY PASTORAL MINISTRY: EVIDENCE FROM CHRISTIAN PASTORS IN DEMSA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ADAMAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract: Pastoral leadership remains a significant concern within contemporary Christianity, particularly in contexts where pastors are expected to provide spiritual guidance, social support, and ethical direction amid complex community challenges. Although John 10:10–16 presents Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd whose ministry is characterised by sacrificial love, relational care, protection, and the provision of abundant life, the practical application of this model among pastors in local African contexts requires further investigation. This study examines the application of the Good Shepherd model to contemporary pastoral ministry among Christian pastors in Demsa Local Government Area, Nigeria. A qualitative research approach was adopted using a descriptive design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with Christian pastors and theological leaders, while relevant biblical texts and scholarly literature provided supporting sources. The data were analysed thematically to identify patterns relating to pastoral understanding, application, challenges, and strategies for effective shepherd leadership. The findings reveal that pastors understand the Good Shepherd model primarily through sacrificial service, pastoral care, discipleship, spiritual oversight, and ethical accountability. However, its practical expression is affected by limited theological training, economic pressures, inadequate accountability systems, insecurity, and denominational fragmentation. The study concludes that the Good Shepherd model remains a relevant framework for strengthening pastoral leadership when supported by intentional ministerial formation, collaborative leadership structures, and sustainable pastoral welfare systems. The study recommends improved theological education, stronger accountability mechanisms, and greater cooperation among churches. The study contributes to African pastoral leadership scholarship by connecting Johannine theology with the lived experiences of pastors in a rural Nigerian context.

Keywords: Good Shepherd Model, Pastoral Ministry, Servant Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Christian Pastors.

Introduction

Images of shepherds have shaped biblical understandings of leadership for centuries, yet their relevance extends beyond the ancient world into contemporary Christian ministry. In John's Gospel, Jesus presents Himself as the Good Shepherd who protects, knows and willingly lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:10–16), offering a model of leadership grounded in sacrificial service rather than institutional authority. That portrait continues to resonate in societies where church leaders are expected to provide spiritual direction, moral guidance and practical care amid social uncertainty. Across Africa, pastoral leadership has attracted increasing scholarly attention because many churches continue to wrestle with questions of integrity, accountability and faithful service despite sustained theological reflection on Christian leadership (Boaheng, 2021). Such concerns suggest that effective ministry depends not merely on biblical knowledge but on the faithful embodiment of Christ's shepherding example in everyday pastoral practice. The Good Shepherd discourse, therefore, provides more than a theological metaphor; it offers a framework through which contemporary pastoral ministry may be examined and strengthened.

Contemporary pastoral ministry presents an ideal in which pastors demonstrate sacrificial love, personal knowledge of their congregations, ethical leadership and unwavering commitment to the spiritual welfare of God's people. Reality, however, often reflects a more complex picture. Economic hardship, denominational fragmentation, insecurity, inadequate ministerial preparation and increasing administrative demands frequently place considerable pressure on pastors, making sustained pastoral care difficult to achieve. Existing studies have similarly observed that weaknesses in ministerial integrity, compassion and accountability continue to affect the credibility and effectiveness of pastoral leadership within many Christian communities (Resane, 2020; Boaheng & Osei, 2022). Nigerian churches encounter these challenges within their own distinctive social and cultural setting, where pastors are expected not only to preach and teach but also to mediate conflicts, counsel families, mentor younger believers and serve as trusted community leaders (Eniola, 2024). Such realities expose a widening gap between the biblical ideal of the Good Shepherd and aspects of contemporary pastoral practice, with consequences that include weakened discipleship, diminished confidence in church leadership and reduced capacity for churches to respond effectively to the needs of their communities.

Although the Good Shepherd motif has received considerable scholarly attention, much of the existing literature has concentrated on its theological meaning or its broader application to Christian leadership within Africa, while limited empirical attention has been devoted to its practical expression among Christian pastors serving in Demsa Local

Government Area of Adamawa State (Boaheng, 2021; Oloyede, 2024; Eniola, 2024). Local pastoral contexts are shaped by denominational diversity, rural socio-economic realities and community expectations that cannot be fully understood through broad continental analyses alone. Consequently, there remains insufficient contextual evidence on how the leadership principles embedded in John 10:10–16 are interpreted and practised by pastors ministering within the area. This study addresses that gap by examining the Good Shepherd model as a biblical foundation for contemporary pastoral ministry and investigating its application among Christian pastors in Demsa Local Government Area, Nigeria. Attention is given to the extent to which Christ's model of sacrificial leadership, pastoral care, spiritual oversight and relational shepherding is reflected in present-day ministerial practice, thereby contributing to biblical scholarship and the continuing conversation on pastoral leadership in contemporary African Christianity.

Conceptual Clarifications

The Good Shepherd Model: The Good Shepherd model originates from Jesus' discourse in John 10:10–16, where He presents Himself as the Shepherd who knows His sheep, protects them from danger, provides abundant life and willingly lays down His life for their sake. Unlike leadership models that emphasise authority or status, the Good Shepherd model places sacrificial service, intimate relationships, faithful guidance and concern for the welfare of followers at the centre of leadership. Scholars observe that the metaphor draws upon the Old Testament tradition of shepherd leadership while presenting Jesus as the perfect example of authentic spiritual leadership for the Church (Boaheng, 2021). Within the context of this study, the Good Shepherd model refers to the biblical pattern of pastoral leadership characterised by sacrificial service, pastoral care, integrity, spiritual oversight and commitment to the well-being of God's people.

Contemporary Pastoral Ministry: Contemporary pastoral ministry extends beyond preaching and administering church ordinances to include shepherding believers through teaching, counselling, discipleship, visitation, leadership and spiritual guidance. Pastors are increasingly expected to respond to complex social, economic and moral challenges affecting their congregations while remaining faithful to biblical principles. Such responsibilities require leadership that combines theological competence with compassion, integrity and practical service. Waldemar (2023) argues that pastoral ministry involves balancing spiritual responsibilities with organisational leadership without losing personal engagement with the congregation. Within this study, contemporary pastoral ministry refers to the exercise of pastoral leadership by Christian pastors in Demsa Local Government Area as they seek to fulfil their spiritual responsibilities within present-day social realities.

Servant Leadership: Servant Leadership is a leadership philosophy developed by Greenleaf (1977), which maintains that genuine leaders are servants before they become leaders. The approach places the needs, growth and well-being of followers above personal ambition or institutional power. Characteristics such as humility, empathy, stewardship, listening and ethical responsibility distinguish servant leaders from authoritarian leaders.

These principles closely correspond with the ministry of Jesus, whose leadership was expressed through selfless service rather than domination. Servant Leadership, therefore, provides an appropriate framework for understanding the Good Shepherd's sacrificial care for His flock and for evaluating the leadership practices of Christian pastors within the study area.

Transformational Leadership: Transformational Leadership explains how leaders inspire followers to pursue a shared vision, develop their potential and embrace meaningful change through personal example and moral influence. Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) describe transformational leaders as individuals who motivate followers beyond self-interest by communicating purpose, encouraging growth and fostering commitment to collective goals. The leadership of Jesus in John 10 reflects these qualities through His promise of abundant life, His vision of one flock under one Shepherd and His commitment to transforming the lives of His followers. Within this study, Transformational Leadership complements Servant Leadership by explaining how Christian pastors inspire spiritual maturity, strengthen congregational commitment and encourage faithful participation in the mission of the Church.

Literature Review

The Good Shepherd discourse in John 10:10–16 has become a foundational framework for understanding Christian leadership because it portrays Jesus as the Shepherd whose ministry is characterised by sacrificial love, intimate knowledge of His flock, faithful guidance and protection. Contemporary scholarship increasingly treats this passage as a practical model for pastoral leadership rather than merely a Christological statement. Resane (2020) argues that authentic shepherding is demonstrated through accountability, integrity and concern for the spiritual well-being of believers rather than personal prestige or institutional authority. Boaheng (2021) similarly concludes that the Good Shepherd discourse provides an enduring model of servant leadership that calls African church leaders to embody self-sacrifice, relational care and protection of the vulnerable. Further biblical studies reinforce this understanding. Jatau (2023) maintains that Jesus' commission to Peter extends pastoral ministry beyond preaching to include mentoring, pastoral care and spiritual protection, while Karundeng and Sumampouw (2022) identify humility, willingness to serve and exemplary conduct as indispensable qualities of faithful shepherds. Collectively, these studies affirm that the Good Shepherd model remains the theological benchmark for pastoral leadership. Nevertheless, they concentrate primarily on biblical interpretation and theological reflection, offering limited evidence of how pastors apply these leadership principles within their everyday ministry. The present study responds to this gap by examining how Christian pastors in Demsa Local Government Area understand and practise the Good Shepherd model within their ministerial context.

Contemporary pastoral ministry has evolved into a vocation that combines spiritual leadership with organisational responsibility. Beyond preaching and administering the sacraments, pastors now provide counselling, discipleship, conflict resolution, pastoral care and community leadership while responding to changing social realities. Jibiliza (2021)

describes pastoral ministry as a ministry of spiritual nurture rooted in Christ's command to care for God's people, although the study gives little attention to the contextual realities confronting African pastors. Empirical evidence likewise indicates that modern pastors constantly balance spiritual responsibilities with increasing administrative demands. Waldemar (2023), drawing on interviews with Pentecostal pastors, found that while preaching, prayer, and pastoral care remain central to ministry, organisational duties increasingly consume pastoral time, creating the risk of weakening personal relationships with congregants. Sirris (2023) reached a similar conclusion, observing that institutional expectations and professional accountability continue to reshape pastoral identity within contemporary churches. African evidence presents a more contextual perspective. Mwanzwii and Kising'u (2022) found that servant, transformational and ethical leadership practices significantly contributed to church growth and congregational participation in Kenya, particularly where pastors maintained close relationships with members. Johnston et al. (2022) further reported that although pastors adapted creatively to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, maintaining meaningful pastoral relationships remained one of the greatest challenges. These studies consistently suggest that effective pastoral ministry depends upon balancing spiritual care with organisational leadership. Even so, little empirical attention has been given to the experiences of pastors serving rural Nigerian communities such as Demsa Local Government Area, where socio-cultural realities, denominational diversity and limited institutional resources shape pastoral practice differently.

Servant Leadership Theory and Transformational Leadership Theory provide complementary lenses for interpreting the Good Shepherd model within contemporary ministry. Greenleaf's conception of servant leadership emphasises humility, stewardship, ethical responsibility and commitment to the well-being of followers, qualities that closely reflect Christ's ministry in John 10. Systematic reviews by Canavesi and Minelli (2022) and Chaudhry et al. (2022) demonstrate that servant leadership consistently promotes trust, organisational commitment, ethical behaviour and psychological wellbeing across diverse settings. Within Christian ministry, Ayogu et al. (2022) similarly found that pastors who model compassion, humility and selfless service strengthen congregational commitment and spiritual maturity, reinforcing the principle that pastoral authority is grounded in faithful service rather than ecclesiastical status. Transformational Leadership Theory complements this perspective by explaining how leaders inspire followers through vision, moral influence and personal development. Eaton et al. (2024) reported that transformational leadership enhances organisational commitment where leaders communicate a compelling vision and demonstrate integrity, while Nicolas et al. (2022) found that transformational leadership within Christian organisations strengthens spiritual commitment and collaborative ministry. African evidence further supports this relationship, with Mwanzwii and Kising'u (2022) showing that transformational leadership contributes positively to church growth when combined with relational pastoral care. Despite these valuable contributions, existing studies rarely examine servant and transformational leadership together through the biblical lens of the Good Shepherd or investigate how these

leadership principles are embodied by Christian pastors in Demsa Local Government Area. The present study, therefore, extends current scholarship by integrating the Good Shepherd model with servant and transformational leadership theories to examine pastoral leadership within a contemporary rural Nigerian context.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design because it provides an appropriate framework for exploring pastors' lived experiences and interpretations of the Good Shepherd model within contemporary pastoral ministry. The study was conducted in Demsa Local Government Area of Adamawa State, Nigeria, where Christian ministry is undertaken within diverse denominational and socio-cultural contexts. Participants comprised Christian pastors purposively selected from different denominations based on their active involvement in pastoral ministry and their knowledge of pastoral leadership. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to describe their understanding of the Good Shepherd model, its application in pastoral practice, the challenges encountered in ministry and possible strategies for strengthening pastoral leadership. Interviews were conducted with participants' informed consent, recorded with permission and subsequently transcribed verbatim to preserve the accuracy of their responses. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data following a systematic process of familiarisation, coding, categorisation and theme development. Emerging themes were interpreted alongside the Good Shepherd discourse in John 10:10–16 and the principles of Servant Leadership Theory and Transformational Leadership Theory to provide a contextual understanding of pastoral leadership among Christian pastors in Demsa Local Government Area.

Applying the Good Shepherd Model to Contemporary Pastoral Ministry: Evidence From Christian Pastors in Demsa Local Government Area, Nigeria

The findings indicate that Christian pastors in Demsa Local Government Area generally possess a sound biblical understanding of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, although differences exist in the extent to which this understanding informs everyday pastoral practice. Participants consistently associated the Good Shepherd with sacrificial service, spiritual care, guidance and commitment to the well-being of believers. These perceptions correspond with the Johannine presentation of Jesus as the Shepherd who knows His sheep, protects them from danger and offers them abundant life (John 10:10–16). The interview data further suggest that pastors who had received formal theological education were more likely to connect the Good Shepherd discourse with practical leadership responsibilities than those whose ministerial formation occurred primarily through apprenticeship or informal mentoring. This finding agrees with Boaheng (2021), who argues that the shepherd metaphor in John's Gospel extends beyond Christology to provide a practical framework for Christian leadership. It also supports Resane's (2020) observation that biblical shepherding demands integrity, relational commitment and accountability rather than institutional authority alone.

The study further reveals that the practical application of the Good Shepherd model is shaped by contextual realities within the Demsa Local Government Area. Economic hardship, inadequate theological training, dispersed rural congregations, and occasional communal insecurity influence the way pastors discharge their responsibilities. Despite these constraints, most respondents described ministry as a vocation requiring personal sacrifice, close relationships with congregants and faithful service even where material rewards remain limited. Such responses reflect the servant-oriented leadership proposed by Greenleaf (1977) and the relational dimensions of pastoral leadership identified by Jibiliza (2021). The findings therefore suggest that the Good Shepherd model remains highly relevant for contemporary pastoral ministry, although its effective implementation requires deliberate leadership development, institutional support and sustained commitment to biblical principles.

Pastors' Understanding of the Good Shepherd Model

Interview findings demonstrate that pastors in Demsa Local Government Area understand the Good Shepherd primarily as the supreme example of Christian leadership whose ministry combines love, sacrifice, guidance and spiritual responsibility. Almost all respondents identified John 10:10–16 as a passage that defines the pastor's relationship with the congregation. Rev. James Tumba observed that "many pastors preach about Jesus as the Good Shepherd, yet only a few intentionally translate that teaching into their daily leadership of the church" (Personal Interview, 14 March 2026). Bishop Amos Yakubu similarly explained that shepherding extends beyond preaching to include protecting believers, knowing their circumstances and providing spiritual direction (Personal Interview, 22 March 2026). These responses indicate that participants recognise pastoral leadership as fundamentally relational rather than administrative. Their views are consistent with Boaheng's (2021) interpretation that the Good Shepherd discourse presents leadership as a ministry of service rooted in intimate knowledge of the flock and sacrificial commitment to its well-being.

The interviews also revealed differences in theological depth among respondents. Pastors with formal theological education generally articulated a broader understanding of the Good Shepherd model, connecting the passage with servant leadership, discipleship and pastoral accountability. Others interpreted the text mainly as an encouragement for compassionate ministry without exploring its wider leadership implications. Rev. Paul Hazeal acknowledged that his understanding of pastoral leadership developed largely through observing senior ministers because he had not attended a theological institution (Personal Interview, 18 May 2026). Dr. Joshua Dauda, however, argued that careful biblical interpretation enables pastors to appreciate the full leadership implications of the Good Shepherd discourse rather than reducing it to devotional reflection (Personal Interview, 20 June 2026). These findings correspond with Resane's (2020) argument that inadequate theological formation often limits pastors' appreciation of biblical shepherding. They equally reinforce the observation of Jatau (2023) that faithful pastoral ministry requires sound biblical understanding alongside practical ministerial experience. Collectively, the findings suggest that pastors in Demsa possess a strong appreciation of the Good Shepherd

image, although continued theological education would strengthen its application within contemporary ministry.

Application of the Good Shepherd Model in Pastoral Ministry

The findings indicate that pastors in Demsa Local Government Area apply the Good Shepherd model principally through sacrificial service, pastoral care, teaching and personal engagement with their congregations. Many respondents described ministry as a lifelong calling that demands commitment even under difficult economic and social conditions. Several pastors reported travelling long distances to visit sick members, supporting vulnerable families from personal resources and remaining with congregations despite opportunities to relocate to larger churches. Rev. Jonathan C. Odoh explained that "there are times we spend our own money to visit members in distant villages because there is no church provision for such ministry" (Personal Interview, 8 April 2026). Rev. Maxwell Kuri likewise stated that he had remained in a rural congregation because he regarded pastoral service as a divine calling rather than a career opportunity (Personal Interview, 18 April 2026). These experiences mirror Christ's willingness to lay down His life for the sheep (John 10:11) and correspond with Resane's (2020) assertion that authentic pastoral leadership is measured more by faithful presence than institutional position. The findings equally affirm Greenleaf's (1977) Servant Leadership Theory, which maintains that genuine leadership begins with serving others before pursuing personal or organisational interests.

Beyond sacrificial service, the Good Shepherd model was applied through intentional pastoral care, discipleship and ethical stewardship. Respondents explained that they regularly counselled families, mediated community disputes, organised prayer meetings, visited bereaved homes and supervised the spiritual growth of new converts. Rev. Sunday Yusuf observed that church members frequently sought pastoral guidance on family conflicts, marriage issues and disputes over farmland before approaching traditional community leaders (Personal Interview, 10 May 2026). Rev. Michael Bwala added that collaboration with elders and ministry leaders enabled pastors to maintain effective oversight of members living in remote villages (Personal Interview, 7 May 2026). Several participants also emphasised the importance of systematic discipleship, local-language Bible teaching and accountability in church administration as practical expressions of shepherd leadership. These findings agree with Jibiliza (2021), who argues that pastoral ministry combines spiritual guidance with compassionate care, and with Mwanzwii and Kising'u (2022), who found that servant and transformational leadership practices strengthen congregational participation and church growth. The evidence suggests that pastors in Demsa generally strive to embody the Good Shepherd model through relational leadership that nurtures spiritual maturity, protects congregational wellbeing and encourages ethical responsibility, although the effectiveness of these practices varies according to available resources, ministerial training and local circumstances.

Challenges to Applying the Good Shepherd Model

The interview findings revealed that although pastors in Demsa Local Government Area appreciate the biblical ideals embodied in the Good Shepherd model, several

contextual challenges limit its full application in contemporary ministry. The most frequently identified constraints were inadequate theological training, economic hardship, dispersed rural congregations and recurring security concerns. Several participants explained that their ministerial formation occurred primarily through apprenticeship because access to formal theological education remained financially or geographically inaccessible. Rev. Elijah Cletus acknowledged that his pastoral preparation depended largely on mentorship rather than structured theological training (Personal Interview, 8 June 2026), while Pst. Samuel Busari explained that sustaining his family required farming alongside pastoral ministry, thereby reducing the time available for visitation, discipleship and pastoral care (Personal Interview, 12 June 2026). These findings agree with Ikpe and Chukwudebelu (2025), who identify inadequate ministerial training and limited institutional support as persistent challenges confronting church leadership in Nigeria. Respondents also referred to poor road networks and periodic farmer–herder tensions that restricted travel to remote congregations. Rev. Thomas Taru observed that insecurity occasionally prevented regular visits to distant church members (Personal Interview, 15 June 2026). Such realities make it difficult for pastors to maintain the close pastoral relationships envisioned in John 10:14–15, despite their commitment to faithful shepherding.

Institutional and congregational factors also emerged as significant obstacles to applying the Good Shepherd model. Participants reported that some churches lacked effective accountability structures, creating opportunities for excessive concentration of authority and weakening ethical oversight. Rev. Barr. Samuel Audu noted that independent congregations sometimes operate without external mechanisms capable of correcting pastoral misconduct (Personal Interview, 30 May 2026), whereas Pst. Edward Ezekiel maintained that financial transparency had strengthened trust within his congregation by reducing unnecessary suspicion between leaders and members (Personal Interview, 1 June 2026). Several respondents further expressed concern that increasing denominational competition and prosperity-oriented teaching occasionally divert attention from the servant-hearted and sacrificial leadership exemplified by Christ. Rev. Eldon Nkur remarked that unhealthy competition among churches weakens Christian witness and discourages cooperative ministry (Personal Interview, 18 June 2026). These observations correspond with Resane's (2020) warning against leadership driven by personal ambition rather than pastoral responsibility and support Ford's (2023) argument that the promise of an abundant life should not be reduced to material prosperity. Taken together, the findings indicate that the greatest barriers to applying the Good Shepherd model are not theological disagreement but structural, economic and institutional realities that complicate faithful pastoral practice.

Strategies for Strengthening Contemporary Pastoral Ministry

Participants proposed several practical measures for strengthening pastoral ministry while remaining faithful to the Good Shepherd model. Foremost among these was the need for continuous theological education and leadership development. Respondents believed that regular ministerial seminars, mentorship programmes and accessible theological training would deepen pastors' understanding of biblical leadership and improve their capacity to address contemporary pastoral challenges. Dr. Joshua Dauda argued that pastors

require ongoing biblical and leadership training if they are to translate sound exegesis into effective pastoral practice (Personal Interview, 20 June 2026). Rev. Irimiya Yusuf similarly explained that periodic pastoral training had significantly improved discipleship within his congregation (Personal Interview, 20 May 2026). Participants also recommended strengthening collaborative leadership through the active involvement of elders, deacons and lay leaders in pastoral care, discipleship and community outreach. Such shared responsibility enables pastors to maintain closer relationships with members while reducing the burden created by large geographical areas and limited resources. These recommendations align with the findings of Jenssen and Mella (2023), who demonstrate that collaborative leadership enhances pastoral effectiveness, and with Mujiono and Wibowo (2023), who argue that churches flourish where leadership responsibilities are intentionally shared rather than concentrated in one individual.

The interviews further emphasised the importance of strengthening pastoral welfare, ethical accountability and interdenominational cooperation. Many respondents observed that pastors serving rural congregations require greater financial, emotional and institutional support if they are to sustain the sacrificial commitment exemplified by the Good Shepherd. Rev. Wachida Ali suggested that denominations should establish structured welfare schemes and peer-support networks to reduce pastoral burnout and improve ministerial resilience (Personal Interview, 22 June 2026). Rev. Mrs. Victory Sautaaver also encouraged churches to recognise and support the pastoral contributions of women and lay workers whose ministries often extend the church's capacity for care and discipleship (Personal Interview, 5 June 2026). Participants further advocated transparent financial management, effective accountability structures and stronger cooperation among churches through joint prayer meetings, leadership forums and community development initiatives. Such recommendations resonate with Servant Leadership Theory, which emphasises stewardship and ethical responsibility, and with Transformational Leadership Theory, which encourages leaders to inspire collective vision and positive change. Overall, the findings suggest that strengthening contemporary pastoral ministry in Demsa Local Government Area requires a balanced commitment to biblical faithfulness, theological formation, collaborative leadership, institutional accountability and compassionate service. These measures would enable pastors to embody more fully the sacrificial, relational and life-giving ministry of the Good Shepherd within their local communities.

Recommendations

1. Church denominations and ministerial associations should establish regular pastoral development programmes that provide continuing theological education, biblical leadership training and practical mentoring for pastors serving in rural communities. Such programmes would strengthen pastors' understanding and application of the Good Shepherd model while enhancing their competence in preaching, pastoral care, discipleship and ethical leadership.
2. Local churches should strengthen collaborative leadership and accountability structures by empowering elders, deacons, and other trained lay leaders to share responsibilities in pastoral care, discipleship and church administration. Clear

financial accountability mechanisms and periodic leadership reviews should also be institutionalised to promote transparency, integrity and responsible stewardship in pastoral ministry.

3. Churches and denominational bodies should develop sustainable pastoral welfare initiatives to improve the well-being of pastors serving under challenging socio-economic conditions. These initiatives should include modest financial support, peer-support networks, counselling services and periodic spiritual retreats to reduce burnout and enable pastors to devote greater attention to shepherding responsibilities.
4. Christian churches in the Demsa Local Government Area should strengthen interdenominational cooperation and congregational education on biblical shepherd leadership. Joint leadership seminars, community outreach programmes and Bible-based teaching on the Good Shepherd model would promote unity among churches, reduce unhealthy competition and encourage congregations to evaluate pastoral leadership according to biblical standards of sacrificial service, spiritual care and ethical responsibility rather than material success or personal charisma.

Conclusion

This study examined the application of the Good Shepherd model to contemporary pastoral ministry among Christian pastors in Demsa Local Government Area, Nigeria, through the theological lens of John 10:10–16 and the complementary perspectives of Servant Leadership Theory and Transformational Leadership Theory. The findings demonstrate that pastors within the study area generally understand the Good Shepherd as a model of sacrificial service, relational care, spiritual guidance and ethical responsibility, although the depth of practical application varies according to ministerial training, institutional support and personal experience. The study revealed that pastors express the shepherding ideal through sacrificial commitment, pastoral visitation, counselling, discipleship and efforts to protect the spiritual and social well-being of congregants. However, the effective application of this model is constrained by challenges such as limited access to theological education, economic difficulties, inadequate accountability structures, insecurity and denominational fragmentation. The study argues that the relevance of John 10:10–16 for contemporary pastoral leadership extends beyond theological reflection to practical ministry formation, requiring pastors and church structures to cultivate servant-hearted leadership, shared responsibility and ethical accountability. Strengthening pastoral ministry in Demsa Local Government Area, therefore, depends on deliberate investment in theological training, collaborative leadership systems, pastoral welfare and congregational understanding of biblical shepherding. Through these measures, Christian pastors can more effectively embody the character of Christ as the Good Shepherd whose ministry is defined by sacrificial love, intimate relationship and the pursuit of abundant life for those entrusted to their care.

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