



Jumuga Journal of Education,
Oral Studies, and Human Sciences (JJEOSHS)
editor@jumugajournal.org
<http://www.jumugajournal.org>
Volume 8, Issue 1, 2025
<https://doi.org/10.35544/jjeoshs.v8i1.115>

The Great Commission and Presbyterianism: Showcasing Tumutumu Parish, Mathira Sub-County, Kenya

Monicah King'ori

<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-1994-6678>

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, School of Law, Arts and Social Sciences,
Kenyatta University

&

Josephine Gitome, PhD

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6564-6054>

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, School of Law, Arts and Social Sciences,
Kenyatta University

&

Julius Gathogo, PhD

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1223-4571>

Kenyatta University, RITR-University of South Africa & ANCCI University

Abstract

The research article examines the implementation of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16–20) in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), and focuses on Tumutumu Parish in Mathira Sub-County, Nyeri County, Kenya. It explores the way in which baptism, spiritual growth, and Christian education contributes to the fulfilling of the Great Commission, from conversion to mature discipleship, as theoretically guided by David Bosch's mission paradigm theory. Using a descriptive design, the study targeted 882 individuals, with 89 participants selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and Focus Group Discussions, and then analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively using Statistical Package for Social Sciences. Findings revealed that, despite the presence of mission oriented activities like baptism, spiritual growth initiatives, and Christian education in PCEA Tumutumu parish, these efforts have not led to a meaningful spiritual transformation among the congregants. This disconnect is mainly due to structural weaknesses, including inadequate discipleship, poor baptismal preparation, over-dependence on a single evangelist, and a lack of diverse, structured Christian education programs. It recommends improved baptismal preparations, implementation of structured discipleship, diversifying Christian education, empowering more leaders, and enhancing congregants' engagement so as to bridge the gap between ecclesiastical activities and spiritual transformation.

Key Terms: Christian education, Discipleship, Great Commission, Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Spiritual growth,

Introduction

Presbyterianism refers to the protestant wing of the Church that traces its origins from the Church of Scotland. It can also refer to the so-called English dissenter groups that emerged during the English Civil War. In turn, the English Civil War, also referred to as the Great Rebellion, was a contestation between the Royalists and Parliamentarians in the Kingdom of England, 1642 to 1651, and later in the Wars of the Three Kingdoms of 1639 to 1653, and the Third English Civil War, 1650 to 1652 (Clodfelter, 2002). Second, Presbyterianism is also viewed as one of the five ecclesiastical models that emerged after the sixteenth century protestant reformation. This refers to Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Congregational model, the Pentecostals and the

Charismatic model (Mugambi 1995). Third, Presbyterianism is historically viewed as the reformed protestant tradition which derives its name from its form of ecclesiastical polity. This refers to a phenomenon where a representative assemblies of *Presbuteros* (πρεσβύτερος, elders in Greek language) calls the tune, as they work hand-in-hand with *episkopos* (ἐπίσκοπος, the overseers) (Brown 2011). The uniqueness among the Presbyterians is seen through governance, as Presbyterianism is run at every level in an arrangement that brings together laity and the clergy from a bottom-up model. In this arrangement, a body called the Session, comprising of elected Elders from each congregation, as opposed to ecclesiastical ladders whose hierarchy flows from Archbishops, Bishops, Priests or Pope for that matter (Brown 2011). Hence, Presbyterianism does not embrace a top-down ecclesiastical model as with the episcopal models.

On the other hand, the Great Commission, as recorded in Matthew 28:18–20, serves as the foundational mandate for Christian mission, calling for global evangelization, discipleship, baptism, and the teaching of obedience to Christ's commands. While universally acknowledged as central to the Church's mission, its practical implementation varies significantly across different contexts (France, 2007). This paper explores how the Great Commission is being implemented within the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), specifically in Tumutumu Parish, and identifies both strengths and gaps in its practical application. The commissioning is a divine command that is deeply rooted in Christ's universal authority, calling for more than mere conversion, it demands the formation of mature disciples (Fanning, 2011). This formation includes baptism as a sacrament of initiation, the comprehensive teaching of Christ's commands, and an enduring reliance on Jesus' presence and power, as articulated in Matthew 28:18–20. Globally, Christian mission efforts have led to substantial numerical growth, particularly in Africa. However, as Isichei (1995) notes, "Christianity in Africa is a mile wide, but an inch deep." Despite the high number of Christians in countries like Kenya, widespread nominal Christianity, and spiritual immaturity remain prevalent. These issues often stem from inadequate discipleship and poor Christian education (Galgalo, 2015).

The Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) is rooted in the Protestant Reformation and adheres to Calvinist theology. The Church upholds the Westminster Confession of Faith and its catechisms, with governance provided by elders. Emphasizing the priesthood of all believers, the Church's structured ecclesiology supports both spiritual oversight and doctrinal teaching (Muita, 2003; Mutahi, 2010). Established in 1908, Tumutumu Parish has played a central role in spreading Presbyterianism throughout the Mt. Kenya region, contributing to the formation of numerous congregations, elders, and leaders. However, questions remain regarding the effectiveness of discipleship practices in ensuring sustained spiritual growth within the community.

Tumutumu Parish has programs that aim to fulfill the Great Commission, including baptism and confirmation, Christian education, and mission and social outreach initiatives. While baptism is a key entry point into the Christian faith, pre- and post-baptismal training often falls short, limiting deeper theological understanding and spiritual formation. Similarly, Christian education efforts such as Sunday schools and fellowship groups have made strides in fostering spiritual growth, yet gaps remain in transforming Christian confession into lived obedience. Furthermore, the Church's support for mission hospitals and schools for the deaf showcases a holistic approach to mission, addressing both physical and emotional needs (Galgalo, 2015). Despite these efforts, challenges persist. Spiritual formation remains inconsistent, and discipleship programs often lack depth. Moreover, there is limited research on how Churches like PCEA are implementing the Great Commission in the Kenyan context. This raises critical questions: Is the PCEA adequately forming its members? Are pre- and post-baptism programs effective? Are believers being taught to obey all of Christ's teachings? This gap calls for more intentional efforts and scholarly focus on missiology and discipleship, particularly within PCEA and similar Church communities, to ensure the Great Commission is not just preached but lived out.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this research was grounded in David Bosch's theory of mission, which integrates both the vertical dimension of faith (relationship with God) and the horizontal dimension of love (relationship with others). Bosch (2011) viewed mission as encompassing ministry to both non-Christians and Christians, aiming to foster growth in individuals and communities. His approach is shaped by historical *paradigm shifts*, a concept borrowed from Thomas Kuhn, which reflects evolving theological understandings over time. These shifts, adapted from Hans Küng's subdivision of Christian history, reflect distinct eras of Christian experience, such as the early Church, the Middle Ages, the Protestant Reformation, and the post-modern ecumenical paradigm (Bosch, 2011). This research article adopted Protestant Reformation paradigm, which emerged as a result of the Protestant split from the Catholic Church. Reformers like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Knox emphasized the Great Commission as a key mark of a true Church, thus adopting a missionary posture. In the 19th century,

this reformation spirit extended to global mission, including Africa, where missionaries not only evangelized but also addressed people's holistic needs—spiritual, social, economic, and intellectual (Whitford, 2012). The focus on holistic mission reinforced the reformers' desire to embody the fullness of the gospel in practical, transformative ways. The selection of Bosch's paradigm theory was appropriate for understanding mission in the PCEA context. It offered a relevant framework for interpreting how the Church adapts its mission amid modern cultural and theological transformations. As Greenwood (2002) notes, God is a mission God, and the Church is His instrument for fulfilling that mission. Bosch advocates for a multidimensional mission that addresses the whole person—spiritually and practically. This aligns with the study's emphasis on a contextual and comprehensive approach to Christian mission, which is rooted in the Great Commission and aimed at meeting diverse human needs (Corrie, 2016).

Conceptual clarifications

In conceptualising the Great Commission, it is worthwhile to consider several factors. First, the Great Commission is well articulated in Matthew 28:16-20, a phenomenon where Jesus instructed his followers to reach out to the global community via discipling. In turn, dicipling is a broad-based terminology whose scope encompasses modelling, taking the love of God to the neighbour, teaching, and socialising in the service of God and humanity. It was first outlined by Jesus on a Mountain in Galilee. Geographically, Galilee is a region that is situated in Northern Israel and borders Jezreel Valley on the south, just as it borders the Mountains of Lebanon in its northern side. It extends towards the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River on its eastern side, and the coastal mountain range on the western side. As Jesus delivered the Great Commission, the entire Galilean region was part of the Roman Province of Palestine (Strandes 1961, Kennedy 1966, Gathogo 2024).

Second, as a critical pillar in Christendom, the Great Commission found its footing in the early Church as not just a baptismal-creed and teaching discourses that simply renounces Satan, the world, and the flesh; but as the de-facto sustainability tool of ecclesiastical activities in its formative stages. It was not just a working methodology but also a survival tool. With education, that was well propounded therein, the early Church earned its genuine converts rather than mere proselytes (false converts). In particular, the Apostles used it to disciple the vast regions where they evangelised. Following their respective deaths, others who were observing their activities followed suit (Brown, 2011, Preus, 1984, Plekon, 2003). This includes the so-called Apostolic Fathers such as Clement of Rome - who became the third Bishop of Rome; Ignatius of Antioch - who wrote letters as he faced martyrdom in Rome, and emphasised the value of the Eucharist and episcopal authority; and Polycarp of Smyrna who was initially an Apostle of John, and ended up as the Bishop of Smyrna. In his teaching letter, the latter wrote to Philippians and stressed on the value of obedience and remaining faithful to the very end. Like others noted above, Polycarp obeyed the Great Commission by teaching through his own life. And as with the infamous Gandhian dictum, his life was his message (Strandes 1961, Kennedy 1966, Gathogo 2024).

Third, the value of the Great Commission is further underlined in the works of the successors of Apostolic Fathers. Indeed, the post-Apostolic Fathers included: Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria and Origen of Alexandria. Martyr, a philosopher-theologian, espoused the Great Commission by writing in defence of Christianity against the so-called philosophies and pagan beliefs. Being a philosopher gave him an advantage as he fought pagan-philosophies (Brown, 2011, Preus, 1984, Plekon, 2003). His first write-up, "First Apology", put up a strong argument on the philosophical and moral-ethical standards; and went on to pressurise Emperor Antonius Pius to stop Christian persecutions which were a commonplace. Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyons, wrote against heretical groups as he insisted on the traditional Christian doctrines. Writing in Latin, Tertullian made a very strong defence of the then misunderstood Christian faith. He is credited for telling the persecutors that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." other notable remarks by Tertullian include: "See how these Christians love one another" and "The first reaction to truth is hatred" (Gathogo 2024, 4, Kennedy 1966, 21). Like Origen, Clement propounded a form of Christian philosophy that ably integrated Greek philosophy with Christology. He argued that philosophy (which puts more emphasis on reason) is a critical ladder as we strive to reach out to a fuller revelation of truth in the God of Christendom. The "Seeds of the Logos" or the divine reason, he argued, were visible in Greek philosophy, and are necessarily consumed through the Christian education. In other words, just as John Mbiti saw the African indigenous resources as the raw materials for the gospel of Christ, Origen and Clement saw philosophy as an indispensable stepping stone towards authentic knowledge of God (Gathogo 2022). As a prolific writer, Origen brought out a complex theological hermeneutics that was spiced by allegory and philosophical concepts thereby broadening their understanding of the Great Commission. As noted in Julius Gathogo,

Tertullian went beyond this by insisting that the Gospel could not be expressed while using the thought forms of Greek philosophy, which differed with some of his contemporaries, as in the case of Origen, who saw it necessary to synthesize the Gospel with contemporary thought forms and eventually meet St. Paul's model of "becoming all things to all people so that by all possible means, I might save some" (1 Cor.9:22, RSV); and eventually deal with the world on its diverse contexts. Nevertheless, Tertullian saw Christian persecutions and/or martyrdom as a processes of building bold Christians rather than as a source of triggering migrations to safer places. Hence the blood of martyrs watered the faith in the God of Christendom rather than triggering mass movements to the 'safer' grounds (2024, p.4).

Fourth, after Apostolic Fathers and post-Apostolic Fathers, the Great Church Fathers (refer to Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Basil the Great, Athanasius, John Chrysostom, and Gregory of Nazianzus) espoused the Great Commission via theo-socio-intellectual means. Bishop Ambrose of Milan (the regional capital of Lombardy in the Italian Peninsula), from 374 to CE 394, espoused the Great Commission by fiercely promoting the Roman Christianity against Arianism (false teachings) and paganism (Brown, 2011, Preus, 1984, Plekon, 2003). Through his polished speeches, he played a key role in the development of Christian doctrine and liturgy. Born in Strido, Dalmatia (Croatia, South-eastern Europe), Saint Jerome, who was educated in Rome and baptised by Pope Liberius in 366, espoused the Great Commission via Bible translation into Latin (the Vulgate), and as a scriptural commentator. Born in CE 354 and died at the age of 75, in CE 430, St. Augustine of Hippo Regius, the ancient name of the modern city of Annaba, Algeria, in North Africa, significantly addressed the Great Commission, especially with reference to his insistence on making disciples (Brown, 2011, Preus, 1984, Plekon, 2003). Further, his Trinitarian theology is remarkable in the Christian history. He employed philosophical and scriptural arguments to explain the Trinitarian formula, and explained its significant place in understanding God's nature and the mission of Christ. In his view, the Great Commission provided a powerful framework for understanding the Trinity; hence his three-fold name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that is largely used during the baptismal sessions, did not imply three gods. Rather, it refers to three distinct persons within one Godhead. Their mutual love, he argued, remains the source of all creation and the de-facto foundation of redemption (Gathogo 2015).

Sixth, St. Augustine appears to have vouched for the notion of *perichoresis*; a noun which is derived from the Greek verb *choreo* (Gathogo 2015). It is largely used to propound the view that each person (in the triune God) participates in others. Complexity of social-ecclesial matters shows that an appeal to the notion of *perichoresis* is not an option but an imperative. Being informed by the notion of *perichoresis* (or *circumincession* or interpenetration) is critical in strengthening and understanding the Great Commission as a fellowship of participating in the neighbours' socio-spiritual concerns. Indeed, it is to learn from the three-fold nature of Trinity; and appreciate that the Great Commission cannot be understood in isolation, but as a mutual interpenetration across cosmological needs. In going beyond *perichoresis*,

[There] is the Greek word *circumincessio*, which is used to describe the persons of the Trinity, namely that of a divine dance. Certainly, this is a powerful metaphor which is often evoked in recent Trinitarian studies. In particular, Elizabeth Johnson (1992:220) writes that 'a divine round dance modelled on the rhythmic, predictable motions of the country folk dance are one way to portray the mutual indwelling and encircling of God's holy mystery'. Johnson (1992:221) says that 'a *perichoretic* movement summons up the idea of all three distinct persons existing in each other in an exuberant movement of equal relations: an excellent model for human interaction and freedom and other regards. [Likewise, the broad scope of the Great Commission translates to a very ambitious agenda that implies the need for collegiality of purpose; that is, a mutual rhythmic working spirit for the relevant players, which is well espoused in the above Greek concepts]' (Gathogo 2015, p.6).

Church and baptism

The literature on the Church and baptism underscores the necessity of proper preparation and doctrinal grounding for baptismal candidates to ensure long-term commitment to Church life. Ferguson (2017) reveals that many baptized individuals in the PCEA Tumutumu parish do not uphold their baptismal vows, attributing this partly to inadequate pre-baptismal preparation. This concern is echoed by Arnold (2004), who criticizes the shallow modern approach to new believer classes and advocates for a return to the rigorous, scripture-centered catechumenate model of the early Church. Ferguson (2009) adds a historical perspective, showing how baptism has traditionally been intertwined with catechism, which was used to instill repentance, faith, and a transformed life both before and after baptism. Catechism and the use of creeds are emphasized as critical tools in shaping theological understanding and spiritual maturity. Birds (2016) strongly support the Apostles' Creed as a framework for doctrinal teaching, spiritual formation, and reminding believers of their baptismal commitments. Nettle (2014) also supports catechism for imparting biblical knowledge and fostering a heart-level relationship with Christ, especially among children, while Taylor (2018) points to a broader decline in catechism due to denominational shifts, suggesting its revival could

address theological gaps caused by reduced Sunday school participation. However, Taylor stops short of recommending catechism for adult converts, a gap the current research addresses by calling for its application across all ages in PCEA.

Other scholars emphasize the ecclesiological implications of baptism and the need for deeper Church membership formation. Leeman (2012) identifies baptism as foundational to Church identity and membership, stressing faith, repentance, and baptism as essential criteria. Similarly, Dever (2013) warns that focusing on numbers rather than authentic conversion has led to Church stagnation, advocating for deeper discipleship centered on repentance and faith. Jungmann (1959), from a Catholic viewpoint, ties Church decline to the neglect of catechism, supporting the current study's assertion that catechism is indispensable for all baptized believers. Collectively, these works support the study's call for the PCEA to implement structured catechism programs before and after baptism to align with early Church practices and ensure sustained spiritual growth.

Spiritual Growth

Spiritual growth is presented as an intentional and structured process that Churches must actively facilitate. Barna (2011) highlights that small groups, mentoring, discipleship programs, and Christ-like leadership is key strategies that support spiritual development. This is reinforced by Odolopre (2023), who identifies how diverse groups grow through evangelism, school programs, and intergenerational mentorship. Similarly, Ogden (2016), stress that intense mentorship, where mature believers closely guide new converts, is most effective in cultivating spiritual maturity.

The role of community and relationships is strongly emphasized in fostering spiritual growth. Foster (2007) highlight how small groups provide platforms for accountability, encouragement, and mutual learning, which contribute to spiritual development. Johnson (2010) adds that human beings are created for community, and spiritual growth flourishes in communal participation rather than in isolation. Boa (2001) supports this by arguing that spiritual growth is a lifelong journey tailored to individual needs, requiring flexible approaches across different life stages, an insight adopted in the PCEA Tumutumu context.

Finally, the integration of discipleship and transformation within the Church structure is deemed crucial. Tang (2014) outlines three levels of spiritual growth: personal, communal, and missional stating they are interconnected and essential for Church impact. Earley & Rod (2013) advocate for organizing small groups as vehicles for transformation, especially among individuals from broken backgrounds. Brosius (2022) concludes by urging Churches to move beyond busy programming and adopt relationally grounded discipleship models. This aligns with the current research, which examined how PCEA Tumutumu parish applies such strategies for intentional spiritual growth among its members.

Christian Education

Christian education is portrayed as a holistic and inclusive process aimed at spiritual transformation for individuals of all ages within the Church community. Megill (1998, 2008) emphasizes that Christian education addresses the whole person and spans beyond formal Bible study to include various Church activities. It is not confined to a singular learning method but is multidisciplinary and context dependent, making it adaptable to different age groups and congregational settings. This view supports the notion that Christian education should integrate all aspects of Church life to nurture a deeper relationship with God. Planning, administration, and goal-setting are essential elements of effective Christian education. Seymour (1990) highlight the necessity of carefully organizing educational programs tailored to the spiritual and developmental needs of children, youth, and adults. He advocates for structured preparation and supervision, ensuring that Christian education moves beyond knowledge acquisition to spiritual transformation. However, Seymour's work lacks emphasis on evaluating outcomes, which this research addressed by assessing the impact of Christian education in the PCEA Tumutumu parish. Additionally, scholars such as Pazmino (2007), Tye (2002), and Barna (2009) underscore the purpose and content of Christian education. Pazmino stresses the importance of biblical grounding to help believers live out their faith, while Tye outlines the educational process, methods, teacher qualifications, and challenges. Barna (2009) warns that neglecting Christian education jeopardizes the Church's future, advocating for its strategic integration into Church life. This study contributed further by examining the educational resources and teacher roles in delivering effective Christian education in PCEA Tumutumu parish.

Methodology

Research Design

The study took a qualitative approach and a quantitative approach. Qualitative techniques were used to collect data from in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions. The data was then analysed thematically and presented in quotes and narratives. Quantitative research employed questionnaires as a tool for data collection. Data collected was then analysed

through the use of descriptive or inferential statistics. Thus, the research was carried through a descriptive survey to assess views, opinions and attitudes of members of the Presbyterian Churches in Tumutumu parish on their contribution on the implementation of the Great Commission.

Research Instruments

The research article utilises three main instruments for data collection: questionnaires, interviews, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Questionnaires were administered to 70 Church members and included both open and close-ended questions designed to capture general opinions and personal contributions related to the Church's mission. In-depth interviews were conducted with nine key Church leaders including the parish minister, moderator, elders, evangelist and departmental leaders to gain qualitative insights into their individual involvement and perspectives. Additionally, Focus Group Discussions were held with Church leaders from different congregations, with each group comprising five members. These discussions, guided by a structured format, provided detailed views and helped to validate and complement the data gathered from the questionnaires and interviews.

Data Processing and Analysis

In this research article, qualitative data was processed by reading and re-reading the responses to identify recurring ideas, which were then coded and sorted into categories and themes. The coded data was grouped under major themes, enabling the researcher to generate a comprehensive write-up. This process helped to identify the key themes and insights relevant to the research questions and objectives. For the quantitative data, responses from interviews and questionnaires were analyzed using statistical methods to measure numerical values and establish relationships. This allowed for the drawing of conclusions and making necessary recommendations. The data was then re-examined to ensure that the study's objectives had been fully addressed. To analyze the quantitative data, the researchers used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were employed to report the proportions of the independent variables, providing a clear view of the relationships and outcomes derived from the data.

Results and Findings

This section focuses on presenting the findings and analysis based on the study's objectives. It addresses the three main thematic areas of the research which includes: the contribution of PCEA in implementing the Great Commission through baptism, the Church role in fostering spiritual growth through discipleship, and the implementation of the Great Commission through Christian education within PCEA Tumutumu parish. In addition, the findings and discussions are compared with previous empirical studies to provide context and validate the results. The section highlights how the data aligns with or differ from existing research, offering insights into the impact and effectiveness of PCEA's efforts in these areas.

Baptism preparation practices in PCEA Tumutumu parish

The figure below illustrates the distribution of responses regarding who is primarily responsible for preparing candidates for baptism. Majority of the respondents at 96% identified the evangelist. 3% indicated the elders, and 1% cited the reverend.

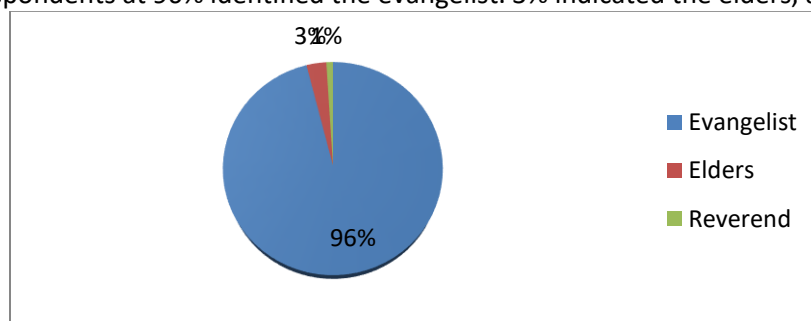


Figure 2: Respondents views on individuals involved in preparing baptism candidates in the PCEA

Source: Primary Data 2024

A central finding was that the evangelist plays a dominant role in preparing candidates for baptism, with minimal support from Church elders or other lay leaders. This underlines the practical and pastoral importance of evangelists in local congregations. Their central role likely reflects their accessibility, regular contact with Church members, and deep involvement

in grassroots ministry activities. In an interview the evangelist noted that, most baptismal instruction is conducted by him personally, and often within a very limited time frame, just a few hours of teaching. This practical challenge reflects broader concerns raised by Ferguson (2017), who attributes the failure of many baptized individuals in the PCEA Tumutumu parish to uphold their baptismal vows to inadequate and poorly supported pre-baptismal preparation.

According to FGD's participants' responses, the study further revealed that the baptismal preparation process lacks both depth and structure. Instruction is typically delivered in a single class, without any separation based on age or gender. This means children, youth, adults, and the elderly receive the same teachings through the same methods, which limits the ability to address their diverse spiritual and developmental needs. Such a uniform approach was viewed by many respondents as ineffective in fostering true understanding or spiritual formation. These findings resonate with Nettle (2014), who argues that catechetical instruction should be age-appropriate, especially for children, and that faith formation must address both cognitive understanding and heart-level transformation. Likewise, Birds (2016) emphasizes the formative power of structured doctrinal teaching such as the Apostles' Creed, particularly in helping believers grasp and live out their baptismal commitments. The absence of this structure in PCEA preparation practices reflects Taylor's (2018) concern over the broader decline in catechism and Sunday school programs, which has led to noticeable theological gaps across generations.

One Cleric highlighted the view that baptism in PCEA is open to all age groups; but is commonly practiced on infants of believing parents. He further noted that, baptism is seen as a symbolic act representing a union with Christ. Additionally, the reverend alluded that baptism also serves a practical purpose, where it is closely tied to Church membership. In many cases, baptismal classes are conducted alongside membership classes, further emphasizing this link. For infant baptisms, parents are given brief pre-baptism teachings and are then expected to take responsibility for their child's spiritual formation following the ceremony. In line with this, Leeman (2012) stresses that baptism is not merely symbolic but is a visible marker of Church identity and covenant, requiring a foundation of faith, repentance, and doctrinal clarity. Dever (2013) similarly warns against emphasizing Church growth without ensuring genuine conversion and deep discipleship, concerns clearly mirrored in the PCEA's brief, generalized instructional model.

Focus Group Discussions participants raised several concerns and suggestions for improvement. They criticized the short duration of preparation, often just one week as insufficient. They recommended extending the instructional period to allow candidates more time to understand the meaning and commitments associated with baptism. The suggestion aligns with Ferguson (2009), who critiques the inadequacy of short, unstructured baptismal classes, emphasizing that baptismal preparation should be comprehensive, addressing not only the doctrinal significance but also the pastoral and practical aspects of the Christian life that baptism entails.

Another notable issue raised was the lack of preparation for the congregation in anticipation of baptisms. Many Churches do not inform or involve the wider congregation in upcoming baptismal events, reducing the communal significance and support that baptism should ideally foster within the Church body. Similarly, Arnold (2004) critiques modern baptismal instruction for its lack of communal involvement and theological depth, advocating instead for a return to the early Church's catechumenate model, which involved the whole Church body in the spiritual formation of candidates. In addition, to the individual preparation, the Church body should also be prepared to support and nurture the baptized individual. This communal approach ensures that baptism is not just an isolated event but an integral part of the broader Church life.

Analysis of discipleship program implementation and effectiveness

The study further investigated the extent to which PCEA members had engaged in a formal discipleship program. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had previously engaged in such a program. As illustrated in Table 4, majority of the respondents (61%) reported that they had not participated in a formal discipleship program, while 39% of the respondents indicated that they had participated.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes, I have participated	27	39
No, I have not participated	43	61
Total	70	100

Table 4 Analysis of Discipleship Program participation

Source: Researcher, 2024

These findings revealed that participation in formal discipleship programs among members of PCEA Tumutumu Parish is relatively low, despite the programs' intended role in fostering spiritual growth. This aligns with concerns expressed in Ferguson (2017), who discusses how many contemporary Church discipleship efforts fail to engage their congregations due to time and commitment barriers. Arnold (2004) highlights that Church members often struggle to balance discipleship with the demands of their personal lives, leading to diminished involvement in such programs. These findings underscore the practical limitations that modern discipleship programs face in attracting and retaining active participants.

The findings from both interviews and Focus Group Discussions reveal significant gaps in the implementation and effectiveness of the discipleship program within the PCEA Tumutumu Parish. Participants consistently reported that the program had not been successful in fostering spiritual growth among members, citing the absence of formal discipleship structures and a lack of follow-up for new converts. This lack of sustained engagement undermines the program's potential long-term impact. The absence of a robust discipleship framework aligns with broader critiques in the literature regarding the insufficient structures for nurturing mature Christian faith in modern congregations.

To this end, Arnold (2004) criticizes contemporary discipleship efforts for their informality and lack of strategic vision, which mirrors the findings of the current study, where participants noted the absence of clearly defined discipleship objectives within PCEA Tumutumu. Arnold argues that discipleship must be intentional, with clear structures in place to ensure that believers progress in their faith. This mirrors the lack of formal discipleship structures noted by the participants in the study, suggesting that discipleship efforts in PCEA may be underdeveloped or poorly coordinated.

Similarly, Ferguson (2017) notes that the absence of follow-up for new converts is a significant barrier to sustained spiritual growth. Ferguson points to the critical role of ongoing mentoring and accountability relationships in ensuring that converts are integrated into the life of the Church. The lack of follow-up in the PCEA Tumutumu discipleship program, as highlighted by participants, reflects this broader concern that new believers are often left without the necessary support to deepen their relationship with Christ and become active participants in the life of the Church.

Additionally, the lack of formal evaluation mechanisms to assess whether the discipleship program's goals are being met further exacerbates the program's inefficacy. Dever (2013) highlights the importance of evaluation and accountability in discipleship programs, asserting that regular assessments ensure that programs are adapting and evolving to meet the needs of the congregation. The absence of evaluation in PCEA Tumutumu reflects a broader failure to measure spiritual growth and discipleship outcomes, which leads to stagnation and missed opportunities for improvement.

Analysis of Christian education practices in PCEA

Christian education in the PCEA is administered through a range of age-specific and program-based initiatives. As shown in Table 5, the most common method identified was Bible study (40%). Sunday school, seminars, and conferences collectively accounted for 12%, while 11% of respondents cited preaching as the primary mode of Christian education. Additionally, 7% noted youth services and theological training, 6% mentioned catechism classes, and 4% referred to other Church groups as avenues for Christian instruction.

Participants' responses	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
Through youth service	5	7%
In Sunday school	8	12%
In bible study	26	40%
Through theological education	5	7%
In preaching	7	11%
In catechism	4	6%
In seminars and conferences	8	12%
In age groups	3	4%

Table 5 Administration of Christian Education in PCEA Tumutumu Parish

Source: Researcher, 2024

The distribution of Christian education methods in PCEA Tumutumu Parish reveals a varied approach, but also indicates some areas of imbalance. The most common form of Christian education, Bible study (40%), suggests a strong emphasis on personal and group Bible engagement, which is crucial for spiritual growth. However, the relatively low participation in structured forms such as Sunday school, seminars, and conferences (12%) may point to a need for more frequent and targeted

programs for both children and adults. The 11% identifying preaching as the primary method of education suggests that while it plays a key role, it may not be enough on its own to foster comprehensive spiritual development.

Furthermore, the inclusion of youth services and theological education (7%) and catechism classes (6%) shows some institutional efforts to address specific groups, though these numbers suggest that such targeted initiatives may not be widespread or consistently implemented across the parish. The 4% citing other groups as avenues for education indicates that informal or unstructured educational methods are also in play, yet they may lack coordination and oversight.

The findings from the overall study suggests that the various educational methods in PCEA Tumutumu Parish are not fully integrated or consistently implemented. Literature on Christian education, such as Tye (2002) suggests that a more coordinated approach, combining Bible Study (BS) with targeted programs like Sunday school, seminars, and theological training, is necessary to foster holistic spiritual growth. As Johnson (2019) notes, a Church that prioritizes multiple forms of education, from preaching to structured Bible study and youth services, creates a more robust environment for discipleship. Moreover, addressing the imbalance between formal and informal education methods is crucial. Pazmino (2007) suggests that informal groups should be formalized and integrated into the larger Church educational strategy to ensure they complement other forms of teaching and are guided by a coherent curriculum. The research indicates a need for PCEA Tumutumu Parish to consider developing a comprehensive educational framework that integrates Bible study, youth services, theological training, and informal group learning into a cohesive strategy, ensuring all age groups are reached and appropriately educated.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The research article examined the implementation of the Great Commission in Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), specifically focusing on Tumutumu Parish in Nyeri County, Kenya. While the Church has integrated mission elements such as baptism, spiritual growth and Christian education, their overall effectiveness in nurturing spiritual maturity and transformation of congregants has been limited.

The research revealed that many Church members are not demonstrating Christ-like behavior, despite their participation in various Church programs. This indicates a gap between Church activities and actual spiritual transformation. This is mainly attributed to: over-reliance on one evangelist, inadequate baptismal preparation, and limited engagement with broader Church community, lack of structured discipleship programs, and unevenly distributed Christian education methods, with a heavy reliance on Bible study and limited use of structured programs like conferences and seminars.

To address these challenges, the study recommends: the need for a more structured, inclusive, and intentional approach to baptismal preparation, involving both clergy and lay leaders, and tailored to the spiritual needs of diverse candidates; developing and institutionalizing a formal discipleship program for all congregants, with regular assessments to monitor spiritual growth; and strengthening Christian education through a comprehensive and balanced education framework that strengthens structured programs, formalizes informal efforts, and ensures consistent implementation across all age groups to support holistic spiritual growth.

References

- Arnold, J. (2004). *Discipleship: The catechumenate model for today's Church*. New York: Herald Press.
- Barna, G. (2009). *Revolution: Finding vibrant faith beyond the walls of the sanctuary*. Cambridge: Tyndale House.
- Barna, G. (2011). *Maximum faith: Live like Jesus*. New York: George Barna Group.
- Birds, J. (2016). *The Apostles' Creed: A guide to the ancient beliefs of the Christian faith*. Michigan: Baker Academic.
- Boa, K. (2001). *Conformed to His image: Biblical and practical approaches to spiritual formation*. Michigan: Zondervan.
- Bosch, D. J. (2011). *Transforming mission: Paradigm shifts in theology of mission* (20th anniversary ed.). New York: Orbis Books.
- Brosius, M. (2022). *Relational discipleship: Replacing Church programming with intentional growth*. New York: Church Renewal Press.
- Brown, Stephen F. (2011). "Church Fathers". *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*. Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy. pp. 209–216. http://orcid.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9729-4_125

- Clodfelter, M. (2002). *Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Reference and Other Figures 1500-1999*. McFarland and Company.
- Corrie, J. (2016). *Missional theology: A contextual approach*. London: SCM Press.
- Dever, M. (2013). *Nine marks of a healthy Church*. Wheaton: Crossway.
- Earley, D., & Rod, D. (2013). *Small groups: Big impact*. Chicago: Moody Publishers.
- Ferguson, E. (2009). *Baptism in the early Church: History, theology, and liturgy in the first five centuries*. Michigan: Eerdmans.
- Ferguson, E. (2017). *The Church of Christ: A biblical ecclesiology for today*. Michigan: Eerdmans.
- Foster, R. J. (2007). *Celebration of discipline: The path to spiritual growth*. New York: HarperOne.
- France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT). Michigan: Eerdmans.
- Galgalo, J. D. (2015). *African Christianity: Development and challenges*. Nairobi: Uzima Publishing House.
- Gathogo, J. (2015). "Men battering as the new form of domestic violence? A pastoral care perspective from the Kenyan context". *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 71(3), 9 pages. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i3.2795>
- Gathogo, Julius. (2022). "John Mbiti's Ubuntu Theology: Was it Rooted in his African heritage?" *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 48(2), 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.25159/2412-4265/10292>
- Gathogo, J. (2024). "Migrants and Martyrs in Eastern Africa: A Historical Engagement," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 50 (3), 1-16, <https://doi.org/10.25159/2412-4265/15050>.
- Greenwood, R. (2002). *Transforming priesthood: A new theology of mission and ministry*. London: SPCK.
- Johnson, E.A., (1992). *She who is: The mystery of God in feminist theological discourse*. New York: Crossroad.
- Isichei, E. (1995). *A history of Christianity in Africa: From antiquity to the present*. Michigan: Eerdmans.
- Johnson, T. (2019). Holistic Christian education: Integrating Bible study, preaching, and discipleship. *Christian Education Journal*, 29(5), 234-249.
- Jungmann, J. A. (1959). *The good news of Jesus Christ: The foundation of catechetics*. Breisgau: Herder and Herder.
- Kennedy, William. 1966. "Christian Education Through History." In *An Introduction to Christian Education*, edited by M. J. Taylor, 19–24, Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- Leeman, J. (2012). *The Church and its mission: A biblical theology of mission*. Wheaton: Crossway.
- Megill, R. E. (2008). *Holistic education in the Church*. Sydney: Christian Education Press.
- Muita, I. (2003). *The role of evangelists in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa*. Nairobi: PCEA Publishing House.
- Mugambi, J. N. K. (1995). *From liberation to liberation*. Nairobi: East African Education Publishers.
- Mutahi, J. G. (2010). *Presbyterianism in Kenya: A historical study of the growth and development of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, 1891–2010*. Nairobi: Uzima Publishing House.
- Nettle, S. (2014). Teaching children the faith: Using catechism in modern ministry. *Zondervan*.
- Odolopre, P. (2023). Intergenerational mentorship and discipleship in African Churches. *Nairobi Theological Journal*, 12(2), 45–58.

- Ogden, G. (2016). *Transforming discipleship: Making disciples a few at a time*. New York: InterVarsity Press.
- Pazmino, R. (2007). *Foundational issues in Christian education: An introduction in evangelical perspective*. New York: Baker Academic.
- Plekon, Michael (2003). *Tradition Alive: On the Church and the Christian Life in Our Time: Readings from the Eastern Church*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Preus, J.A.O. (1984). "The Use of the Church Fathers in the Formula of Concord". *Concordia Theological Quarterly*. 48 (2–3): 97—112.
- Seymour, J. L. (1990). *Mapping Christian education: Approaches to congregational learning*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- Strandes, Justus. 1961. *The Portuguese Period of East Africa*. Trans. Jean F. Wallwork. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau.
- Tang, A. (2014). Spiritual formation: Three dimensions of growth. *Discipleship Journal*, 29(4), 18–27.
- Taylor, M. (2018). Reviving catechism in contemporary Church settings. *Evangelical Review*, 41(2), 56–72.
- Tye, K. (2002). *Basics of Christian education*. Nashville: Chalice Press.
- Whitford, D. M. (2012). *Reformation and the practice of mission: A historical and theological study*. Michigan: Baker Academic.

Acknowledgement:

The authors acknowledge the study participants who provided valuable data documented in this article. Further, they appreciate the valuable and swift inputs from the article reviewers and the editorial team for successful publication of this article.

Ethical pledge:

The researchers confirm that the all data collected was responsibly handled and accurately documented without manipulation of any kind or bias.

Competing interest:

The authors affirm that this research was conducted without impartially competing interests of any kind - financially, professionally and personally - that may have influenced the outcome of biased results or misinterpretations of data.

Authors' contribution:

The researchers are the sole authors of this article.

Disclaimer:

The views expressed in this research article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agencies of the authors or the journal itself.

Ethical consideration:

Ethical guidelines related to respect, honesty, anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were observed. The proposal was approved by Kenyatta University Postgraduate's committee and the research permit obtained from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI).