# Factors Influencing Church Membership Retention in Catholic Church: A Case Study of Catholic Diocese of Aguleri in Nigeria.

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## Abstract

This research proposed to investigate factors influencing Church Membership Retention within the Catholic Diocese of Aguleri in Nigeria. It provides a comprehensive review of literature on six key independent variables central to the study, including Church Commitment, Church Spirituality, Transformational Leadership, Culture, Church Evangelism, and Church Programs, with the dependent variable being Church Membership Retention. The research objectives were as follows: 1) to assess whether Church Commitment, Church Spirituality, Transformational Leadership, Culture, Church Program, and Church Evangelism serve as predictors for Church Membership Retention in the Catholic Diocese of Aguleri; 2) to examine the degree of impact among Church Commitment, Church Spirituality, Transformational Leadership, Culture, Church Program, Church Evangelism, and Church Membership Retention; 3) to provide valuable information about the model and variables to various stakeholders.

This research employs a quantitative approach and questionnaire was developed via google form and 400 valid respondents' answers were analyzed through JAMOVI software. This research applied Cronbach's Alpha, Descriptive and Inferential Statistics to evaluate the reliability of the questionnaire, analyze demographic information and test the hypotheses. The research findings indicated that Church Commitment, Church Spirituality, Church Programs, and Church Evangelism have significant effects on Church Membership Retention. However, Transformational Leadership and Culture show no significant effects on Church Membership Retention. Human capital is very vital for successful growth, sustainability and life of the Church. The study underscores the interconnectedness of factors influencing members' decisions to remain within the church community, providing insights for informed decision by church leaders and practitioners to enhance retention strategies.

**KEYWORDS:** Church Commitment, Church Spirituality, Transformational Leadership, Culture, Church Evangelism, Church Programs, Church Membership Retention, Catholic Diocese of Aguleri.

## 1. Introduction

The centrality of church membership/customer retention as a key marketing objective, strategically oriented towards averting the migration of clientele to competing services or denominations was underscored by Ramakrishnan (2006). This approach involves a deliberate focus on cultivating and sustaining existing relationships with customers or church members (Chapman, 2016). The metric employed in this practice assesses the number of customers or church members who maintain loyalty to a service provider over a specified timeframe, typically a year, as defined by Business Dictionary (2018).In the contemporary business landscape, the significance of customer or church member retention cannot be overstated, given the perpetual efforts of competitors to entice with more appealing offerings (Fluss, 2010). The ability to retain church members/customers directly influences customer lifetime value for long-term, presenting a more lucrative avenue for companies seeking sustainability, growth, or resilience against market downturns resulting from economic contractions (Mornay, 2011). Furthermore, Mornay (2009) observes that the sluggish nature of customer or church member acquisition in current market dynamics heightens the imperative for companies to retain their existing base. Thus, maintaining that church member/customer retention has become a paramount objective for businesses dedicated to fostering productive relationships, not only for

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financial gain but also as a strategic imperative amid evolving market conditions.

According to Richter and Francis (1999), the issue of retaining members or customers has deep historical origins and has taken different forms since the early days of the Christian Church. Biblical records illustrate occasions when individuals withdrew from the faith, perceiving the Christian life as excessively demanding and prioritizing other interests (Mark 4:1-20). Drawing from Ferreira (2012), the term "church member retention" is not explicitly used in Scripture, the concern for retaining members in the universal church or family of the Lord and within specific religious organizations is significant, resonating with contemporary challenges faced by Christian groups.

Exploring member retention in the Old Testament, Harre (1977) highlights two interconnected aspects: retention in the universal church or family of the Lord and retention in a particular denomination/religious organization aligned with the Lord. Individuals are prone to drift away if they perceive a disconnection between a religious organization and the Lord. Keil (1988) points out another challenge in member retention that are related to the fulfillment of prophecy, where immediate and complete manifestation of prophetic predictions was expected, contributing to wavering faith among the Hebrews. Moses, in particular, faced lack of faith among the Jewish tribes regarding the fulfillment of God's promises.

Transitioning to the New Testament, member retention remains a focal concern for writers such as St. Paul and St. Peter. Emphasizing the difficulties of winning souls, they recognize the high cost paid - the blood of Jesus (1 Cor 14:2–3). The biblical principle of the whole body's growth, dependent on the proper functioning of each individual part, underscores the collective responsibility for member retention (Eph. 4:8). Jesus, in particular, highlights the importance of abiding in Him for fruitful outcomes (Jn. 15:16). Ferreira (2012) interprets this as an emphasis on trusting in Jesus and maintaining unity with Him for healthy spiritual growth.

In the same vein, in our own contemporary age, out of ten baptized Catholics more than 35% leave the Church, some to other denominations while the rest stop going to Church at all. Catholic Diocese of Aguleri is not an exception and this affects the Church's life and growth. Therefore, it becomes more expedient in our time that something be done urgently to forestall the situation before it becomes out of hand.

The elevated attrition rate among Church attendees annually within the Catholic Diocese of Aguleri poses a substantial challenge to the vitality and expansion of the Church. The exodus of members is comparable to a hemorrhage, demanding intervention before irreversible consequences ensue. Member retention assumes critical importance for denominational growth, necessitating the formulation of effective strategies to retain individuals who constitute the future of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Aguleri. This research endeavour seeks to assess the underlying problems and propose viable solutions to curb the prevalent trend of Church members disengaging from church activities.

Addressing the dropout predicament demands dedicated resources, rigorous effort, and effective leadership. Commitment from church leaders could potentially enhance retention rates, fostering a sense of satisfaction among Church members, thereby anchoring them more firmly to church participation (Hoge et al., 1981). It is imperative to acknowledge and confront this issue, striving consistently to achieve the laudable objective of member retention. The pertinence of this project is underscored by the observable impact of a significant number of members discontinuing their church attendance, detrimentally influencing the overall growth trajectory. To remedy this situation, insights into the factors influencing retention can guide the development of programs and initiatives aimed at enhancing religious practices and spiritual growth among church members. This could include tailored educational programs, worship experiences, and community outreach efforts. These programs aim to fortify the engagement of church members, transforming them from passive participants to

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active contributors, thereby mitigating the risk of their becoming church dropouts.

## 1.1 Objectives of the Research

1. To assess whether Church Commitment, Church Spirituality, Transformational Leadership, Culture, Church Program, and Church Evangelism serve as predictors for Church Membership Retention within the Catholic Diocese of Aguleri.

2. To evaluate the degree of impact between Transformational Leadership, Church Commitment, Culture, Church Program, Church Evangelism, Church Spirituality and Church Membership Retention.

3. To provide valuable information about the model and variables to various stakeholders.

## 1.2 Research   Questions

In this study, the research questions were generated to align with the objectives and variables in question as detailed below:

1. Does Church Commitment have a significant influence on Church Membership Retention in Catholic Diocese of Aguleri?

2. Does Church Spirituality have a significant influence on Church Membership Retention in Catholic Diocese of Aguleri?

3. Does Leadership have a significant influence on Church Membership Retention in Catholic Diocese of Aguleri?

4. Does Culture have a significant influence on Church Membership Retention in Catholic Diocese of Aguleri?

5. Does Church Program have a significant influence on Church Membership Retention in Catholic Diocese of Aguleri?

6. Does Church Evangelism have a significant influence on Church Membership Retention in Catholic Diocese of Aguleri?

## 1.3 Significance of the study

First ever known study to examine the problems and scopes of membership retention in Catholic Diocese of Aguleri need to be defined or qualified through explanation. The pronounced attrition rate within the Catholic Diocese of Aguleri is adversely impacting the Church's vitality and expansion. Merely attracting new members or customers is insufficient; organizations must focus on retention and growth to address member or customer defection effectively (Werner et al., 2005). The prevalence of high member defection can be likened to adding water to a leaking bucket when new members are acquired.

This research project is pertinent as it highlights the impact on the Church's member growth rate, emphasizing the adverse effects of a significant number of members discontinuing attendance, leading to unsustainable growth. Understanding the factors influencing church members' retention can provide valuable information to church administrators for effective pastoral guidance, pastoral care, development of programs and initiatives aimed at enhancing religious practices and spiritual growth among church members. This could include tailored educational programs, worship experiences, and community outreach efforts.

The study's findings may inform decision-making at the diocesan level, helping administrators develop policies, training programs for priests and church leaders to enhance their understanding of member needs and concerns, and strategies that address challenges related to member retention, ultimately contributing to more effective leadership.

The outcomes of this study hold significance for the Catholic Diocese of Aguleri, offering valuable insights for the broader Catholic Church and the larger Christendom community. The findings are poised to contribute essential knowledge on effective strategies to manage and retain members, ultimately preventing their departure from the Church.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Church Member Retention (CMR)

The progression of member or customer retention over recent years emphasizes the utmost significance of this concept. Retaining employees or clients poses a substantial challenge for many organizations and institutions, irrespective of their geographical location, size, focus, or business approach (Chitra, 2013). Existing literature underscores the shared difficulties encountered by both businesses and religious organizations in maintaining their memberships (Ravhengani, 2010; Gberevbie, 2008; Cascio, 2003; Smith, 1992; Alshurideh, 2016). Smith (1992) likens member dropout to a treadmill, where the faster one runs, the further behind they fall. Both profit and nonprofit organizations compete regularly to maintain existing members while attracting new ones from competitors. Human resources stand out as the most crucial asset for improving organizational performance (Osuoha, 2016). Effectively managing and retaining customers and members constitutes a fundamental strategy for gaining a competitive advantage over competitors (Walker, 2001).

The success of any organization or institution hinges on its ability to retain human resources, considered the lifeblood of the organization (Olivier, 2019; Das & Baruah, 2013). Cutler (2001) underscores that while attracting new members is important, the true measure lies in the ability to retain them. Retaining members within an organization yields numerous advantages, contributing to its long-term survival, enhancing productivity, and reducing marketing costs (Baldoni, 2013). Furthermore, member retention serves as a gauge of organizational stability, with a lower number of members leaving indicating the need for additional strategies to foster institutional comfort and achieve a favourable retention rate. Significantly, around 80% of an institution's profits usually come from the top 20% of its current members or customers, highlighting the crucial role that customers/members play in ensuring the institution's survival (Lerzan Aksoy et al., 2005).

### 2.2 Church Commitment (CC)

The Scriptural importance of commitment is apparent in numerous occurrences. Instances encompass God's dedication to His people, Jesus' steadfast commitment to His mission and ministry, the disciples' loyalty in following Christ, and the apostles' unwavering resolve in their mission to propagate the good news and nurture disciples - all emphasizing the significance of commitment (Mathis, 2018). Within these overarching commitments lie a series of smaller choices that, collectively, yield substantial impacts.

Fully committing to God is emphasized as crucial and meaningful in Scripture, as exemplified by the verse, "Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act" (Psalm 37:5). The commitment to mentoring the youth in Christ is esteemed as immensely valuable, actively contributing to God's mission of sanctifying His people and advancing His kingdom through the dedicated endeavours of His followers (Mathis, 2018). Commitment is an action, not a mere word. It inspires a profound sense of purpose and concentration, representing a resolute strategy consistently paired with a declaration of intent (Sartre, 2012). Characterized as a compelling promise, commitment compels an individual to carry out a set of actions, encompassing devotion, diligent effort, and enduring resilience. Staying committed is recognized as a fundamental principle of success, applicable to diverse goals such as leading a healthier life, fostering better relationships, or achieving results in work. Remaining true to oneself is identified as a basic prerequisite of commitment. In the face of obstacles, staying true involves confronting challenges and persisting on the path toward life goals. Commitment necessitates alignment with one's values, ethics, and convictions. Furthermore, commitment entails establishing enduring objectives, along with a vision and a path to attain those objectives. This method aids in assessing advancement (Srivastava, 2018).

Finney (1978) integrates elements of conformity to group norms and consistency in behaviour and cognition, presenting a theory of religious

commitment that encompasses five dimensions. These dimensions, structured within the theory, consist of (a) ritual practice, (b) knowledge, (c) experience, (d) belief, and (e) devotional practice. The initial dimension, ritual practice, involves outward and observable religious actions, where significant behaviours include attending church. Other examples of commitment in ritual practice encompass participation in church prayer groups or choir, engagement in church administration, financial contributions, and teaching catechism.

Commitment, in this context, is conceived at a level abstracted beyond religious or political orientation. In a general sense, commitment can be defined as a process in a second choice made and maintained with a certain level of firmness through relevant conditions until that choice is either ended or replaced by another alternative (Wimberley, 1978). In a study conducted by Dudley (2000) involving Wesleyan, United Methodist, and American Catholic youths, finding that withdrawal from the church was most precisely forecasted by negative church experiences, limited engagement, inadequate devotional life, unengaging homily and religious restrictions on lifestyle. Another study by Hoge and Petrillo (1978) among Catholics, Southern Baptists, and Methodists revealed that church participation and attendance were primarily effected by parental attendance, the type of youth leader, peer pressure, and the quality of religious education.

In an attempt to discern the factors influencing disengagement or sustained commitment among late adolescents within the Catholic Church, a thorough survey was conducted. The study found that people who are more committed to the church tend to have stronger relationships with Jesus Christ, feel like they are important to their church community and at the same time are influenced by their peers. The study also found that these factors can be used to predict whether or not a late adolescent will stop going to church. The study suggests that church leaders can help to keep late adolescents involved in the church by focusing on these factors (Dudley, 2000). The absence of genuine commitment to the church is a crucial factor influencing dropout rates,

underscoring the crucial role of church commitment and connection to God in retention efforts.

## 2.3 Church Spirituality (CS)

Spirituality is gaining recognition as a crucial source of strength in the realms of social work and positive youth development. Even though this recognition exists, innovations in the realm of social work linked to spirituality have primarily focused on adults. Cheon and Canda (2010) aim to bridge this gap by providing a conceptualization of spirituality concerning youth. They underscore the significance of spirituality in strengths-based social work, elucidating its role in augmenting the development of youth. This involvement includes addressing aspects like identity and meaning, managing risk factors, and leveraging both environmental and personal religious and spiritual resources.

In a highly competitive world, where practical utility often takes precedence, the modern education system tends to emphasize the values of modern sciences. However, Srivastava et al. (2019) argue for the importance of incorporating moral and spiritual teachings among students. Such teachings, they contend, instill inherent goodness and prove valuable in equipping individuals to navigate the conflicting instincts of violence and humanity throughout their lives.

In a research, Cohen (2002) explores the association between religion and happiness, investigating various facets of religiosity and their correlation with life satisfaction. The studies indicate that congregational support and public practice of religion have similar correlations with life satisfaction across individual religions. Yet, when it comes to predicting contentment, the quality of spirituality, religious beliefs, and religious coping is more effective for Catholics and Protestants than for Jews.

Spirituality, as Chickering (2006) notes, seeks authenticity within oneself, implying consistency in actions and words. It involves finding a sense of

purpose in life and fostering connections within a community. Unlike spirituality, religiousness tends to focus more on traditions. Büssing (2006) identifies five dimensions in religiousness and spirituality, including asking for the meaning of life, prayer, the search for insight and wisdom, transcendence, and trust in God. In a world riddled with various challenges affecting the psychological well-being and happiness of the youth, Singh et al. (2017) highlight the prevalence of issues such as postmodernism, individualism, materialism, peer pressure, bullying, substance abuse, and more. These problems contribute to a state of spiritual disconnection among the youth. Religious beliefs and practices are identified as essential buffers against the psychological impact of stressful life events (Reese et al., 2012).

Dudley (2015) distinguishes between spirituality and religion, defining spirituality as the pursuit of meaning and purpose in life, a sense of connection with oneself, others, and the universe, and the ability to transcend immediate experiences towards a larger entity, often recognized as a higher power beyond human control. Practices rooted in the contemplative tradition provide young adults with awareness of the divine presence, depth, and a path to prayer. Regular engagement in contemplative practices within the congregation can empower individuals to: (a) witness the transformation of their perceptions, responsiveness, and overall ways of being in the world, (b) nurture their spiritual lives through practices, worship, and/or education, (c) interpret or simply be present to their lived experiences of the divine, (d) uncover and cultivate their untapped inherent strengths and spiritual resources, (e) recognize factors that hinder or support their awareness and responsiveness to the divine, and (f) discern and comprehend their unique relationship with the divine. Noel and Gaddis III (2013) argue that contemplative spirituality enhances the spiritual lives of young adults and their retention in the church.

Twenty years ago, Dudley (1999) emphasized the vital significance for Christian communities to integrate their children into the behaviours and beliefs of those communities. A persistent theme in social philosophy, traced back to Plato's Republic, revolves around societies' concern about the potential failure of the young to embrace essential wisdom and values. The preoccupation with generational matters is readily understandable: "If society is to continue its existence beyond one generation, the members must transmit what they consider to be necessary knowledge and values. The continuity of a social system, by definition, requires transmission between generations" (Weiting, 1975).

## 2.4 Transformational Leadership

The biblical assertion that "where there is no vision, people perish" (Prov 29:18) underscores the critical importance of effective leadership. Organizations lacking sound leadership are destined for eventual extinction, as leadership plays a pivotal role in fostering growth and motivating followers to enhance productivity (Dunne et al., 2016). Startups, in particular, face an 85% failure rate due to leadership and management issues (Turner & Endres, 2016). Leadership is a key determinant of organizational survival, contributing significantly to improved performance and productivity. Existing literature underscores the role of leadership in enhancing organizational or institutional performance and influencing competition relative to other entities. The influence of leadership spans various organizational realms, encompassing religious institutions. According to Daft and Lane (2011) leadership plays a role in cultivating an environment of effectiveness and stability, motivating individuals toward shared objectives, and consequently improving organizational and institutional performance. Transformational leadership, identified by Levine (2000) as the most satisfactory style for educational institutions, plays a vital role in inspiring teams or organizations to rally around shared visions or goals. Although extensively explored, leadership remains a complex and contentious subject, with more than fifty distinct leadership theories classified into categories such as classical, contingency, situational, behavioural, and contemporary or emerging theories.

Transformational leadership, as described by Ibraheem et al. (2011), involves a process that significantly impacts individuals' attitudes, behaviours, beliefs, and commitment to organizational tasks, aims, and strategies. The leadership approach, first introduced by Burns (1978) and further developed by Bass (1996), has brought about a transformation in organizations, institutions, and industries, inspiring and reshaping them to achieve higher levels of productivity. Schieltz (2019) identifies three areas where the importance of transformational leadership is evident: organizational development and change, individual development and growth, and increased performance. Transformational leadership fosters individual development by transcending self-actualization and self-interest for the collective good. Leaders who adopt this style synchronize their values and principles with those of the organization, nurturing followers' moral development. It is acknowledged for its capacity to generate interest, establish clear goals, and broaden leadership theory by recognizing motivational, symbolic, and emotional behaviours (Robbins & Coulter, 2007; Ergeneli et al., 2007).

Transformational leadership inspires critical thinking among followers, encouraging them to contemplate diverse approaches to workplace problems and personal lives. Alfayad's (2016) study affirms the positive impact of transformational leadership on employees' performance, emphasizing its role in enhancing organizational effectiveness and employee retention.

Several studies have consistently shown that leadership is a strong predictor of retaining members. In a study by Kyndt et al. (2008) which focused on organizational member retention, they identified leadership as a pivotal factor in retaining both employees and other organizational members. Another investigation by Paul and Vincent (2018) delved into the determinants of members' decisions to remain with an organization, highlighted leadership as a key factor. According to other studies, leadership creates an atmosphere that motivates and inspires members to maintain their commitment to the organization (Kumar & Mathimaran, 2017).

In a research conducted by Osuoha (2016) within the healthcare sector specifically on employee retention, revealed that the transformational leadership style significantly influences employee retention. A study by Mohammad et al. (2011) examined the influence of transformational leadership on the retention of nurses in private hospitals in Jordan. The results revealed a statistically significant positive association between the five dimensions of transformational leadership and the two dimensions of job satisfaction. Among the five dimensions of transformational leadership, intellectual stimulation showed the strongest correlation with internal job satisfaction. Weberg (2010) tackled the prevalent challenges of stress out and attenuation among nurses in healthcare settings. The findings indicated that transformational leadership played a significant role in boosting satisfaction, improving well-being of staff, reducing overall stress among nurses, lowering burnout, and minimizing attrition. Furthermore, Alatawi (2013) established a direct and significant link between transformational leadership style and managerial-induced turnover or attrition.

## 2.5 Culture

According to Mashal and Saima (2014), culture constitutes a blend of values, sets, beliefs, communications, and simplified behaviours that offer guidance to individuals. The foundational idea of culture arises from shared learning processes grounded in the fair distribution of resources. The cognitive capacity of humans, crucial for improved thinking and decision-making, is influenced by the culture of the organization. It is a compilation of diverse behaviours and values seen as a roadmap for success. Culture encompasses the beliefs, behaviours, and values inherent in a society. In essence, culture embodies the values, knowledge, beliefs, explanations, behaviours, and communication of numerous individuals at specific times and places. According to Li and Karakowsky (2001) culture is the aggregate of learned behaviours

within a group, typically considered the tradition of that group and transmitted across generations. It forms a shared mental programming that distinguishes one group of people from another. Culture is also described as the acquired and shared patterns of behaviour and beliefs specific to a particular social, age, or ethnic group. It encapsulates the comprehensive entirety of collective human beliefs within a structured stage of civilization, often unique to a nation or time period. Humans utilize culture to adapt to and reshape the world around them. Culture includes norms, language, beliefs, values, and more, collectively shaping the way of life for a people. It is a blend of elements that influence individuals' thoughts, actions, and identity, encompassing architecture, history, accepted behaviour, and other facets (Long-Crowell, 2015). Schein (1990) further elaborates that culture comprises diverse values and behaviours functioning as a roadmap for success and embodying beliefs, behaviours, and values inherent in society. In the modern era, the application of the culture concept extends to organizational contexts (Kotter & Heskett, 1992).

Aluko (2003) asserts that culture is a universal phenomenon, present in every historical society, although it does vary across societies. Research on formal organizations, conducted in both Western and non-Western societies, has shown how diverse cultures affect organizational operations and performance. In various cultural contexts, multinational organizations are increasingly mindful of the potential influence of a host country's culture on organizational performance. Spencer-Oatey (2012) defines culture as a configuration of attributes that articulate an organization and set it apart from others, representing the collective mindset that differentiates one group's members from another. Gordana (2016) emphasizes that culture assists members of an organization in discerning the meaning of concepts, events, and things, thereby facilitating decision-making and actions. The behaviour of members within an organization corresponds with their interpretations of reality, guiding their decisions, actions, and interactions.

Zalami (2005) emphasizes that the impact of culture on institutional transformation depends on its compatibility with the objectives of proposed changes. This viewpoint is echoed by O'Donnell (2006), highlighting the role of culture in facilitating innovative initiatives and creating a conducive environment for nurturing enterprise leaders in the public sector.

In order to examine the connection between culture and retention, it is crucial to grasp the concept of culture as an independent variable. Culture encapsulates the shared mindset that distinguishes one group's members from another, encompassing behaviours guiding success and a collection of values. It embodies ingrained behaviours, beliefs, and values within society. Fakhar et al. (2012) cited various scholars, including Schein (1990) and Kotter and Heskett (1992), asserting that culture is a configuration of attributes that characterizes an organization, setting it apart from others. Aluko (2003) drew a comparison between culture and organizational performance. Zakaria (1997) and Tayeb (1994) and other scholars contended that organizations operate within distinct cultures, highlighted the vital but frequently neglected link between culture and organizations. The prevailing literature has progressively delved into the correlation between culture and organizational performance that leads to retention. According to Mashal and Saima (2014) the pivotal role of organizational culture in achieving objectives, asserted that higher uncertainty avoidance within an organization positively correlates with better performance. They underscored organizational culture as the most influential variable impacting organizational performance, success and retention of members/employees. The influence of organizational culture on employee behaviour and performance is rooted in three fundamental principles (Bulach et al., 2012). 1). Comprehending the organization's culture empowers employees to grasp its history and operational approach, providing insights into anticipated future behaviours. 2). It cultivates a commitment to the values, philosophy of the organization and fostering shared goals. 3).

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Through its norms and shared practices, organizational culture acts as a control mechanism, directing behaviours towards desired outcomes and away from undesirable ones. This control is reinforced by selecting, recruiting, and retaining employees whose values aligned with that of the organization. Adhering to such organizational culture principles can enhance efficiency and performance, which is crucial for retaining employees/members. Barney (1991) contends that organizational culture offers a sustainable competitive advantage, provided it meets the criteria of viability, rarity, and imperfect imitability.

## 2.6 Church Programs

The church, due to its inherent nature, stands as one of the most influential institutions within society, operating across physical, social, mental, and spiritual spheres. In its diverse role, the church acts as a setting for carrying out the great commission and the great commandment, enabling transformative and redemptive connections between individuals and their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (Segler, 1960). To efficiently and effectively carry out its mission, the church employs various events, activities, and programs that equip and empower its members in living out their Christian faith. This involves embodying the principles of loving God and loving one's neighbor, ultimately fostering the development of disciples of Jesus Christ.

Church programs, encompassing preaching, teaching, and service, that serve as instrumental means through which the church impacts both its members and society at large. According to Harwento (2016), teaching from the Gospel and the book of Acts serves a twofold purpose within church programs. Initially, it uplifts believers, nurturing a robust connection between individuals and Jesus Christ. Additionally, to equip believers to actively participate in spreading the gospel to those who do not yet believe. An examination of the New Testament, particularly the book of Acts, unveils a dual approach to church programs within the apostolic church—namely, vertical and horizontal. The vertical approach involves activities such as worship, praise, and prayer, constituting believers'

responses to God's grace and mercy. The horizontal approach, represented by fellowship and breaking of bread, strengthens the bonds among believers, contributing to spiritual nurturing and fostering cohesive relationships among members (Harwento, 2016). Church programs play a pivotal role in guiding the church toward measurable goals based on its biblical nature. Additionally, they significantly impact church member retention by creating a platform that encourages active engagement in ministry, fostering a sense of belonging among members. This sense of belonging enhances the overall effectiveness of the church in fulfilling its functions and mission.

While opinions vary on the influence of church ministry programs on church membership retention, some scholars argued that these programs indeed have an impact. Wielhouwer's study (2004) examined religious commitment among African-Americans, encompassing church involvement, private devotions, and the significance of religion in their lives. The findings revealed that active participation in discipleship and ministry programs were strong indicators of church membership retention. Numerous researches have emphasized the notable correlation between personal devotion, worship, spirituality, and the retention of church membership. In an examination by Erwich (2012) the influence of spirituality on church membership retention was explored, uncovering that spirituality plays a pivotal role in assisting members in sustaining a connection to the faith community. This is achieved by augmenting their self-esteem and feeling a sense of worth, belonging and comfort from God within the Christian community. In a study conducted by Chaney (2008) focusing on the advantages of church engagement, the result suggested that the positive impacts of church involvement on the retention of members are not a universally applicable phenomenon. He argued that the retention of church members is contingent upon individual experiences and perspectives, emphasizing that the influence on retention is not an automatic outcome of involvement.

## 2.7 Church Evangelism

In "Why the Church Exists," Mbui (2018) contends that the primary purpose of the church is to make disciples, a viewpoint supported by Petit-Homme (2018). Both authors align on the significance of evangelism as a key mechanism for fulfilling this mission. According to Charles et al. (2012) evangelism is characterized as a fervor for the lost and a method employed by the church to address the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of individuals. Westerhoff (1994) interprets evangelism as the church's proactive dissemination of the gospel of God's salvation through both spoken words and tangible actions to those beyond its existing community. Petit-Homme (2018) further elucidates evangelism as the process of leading people to Jesus Christ and facilitating their transformation into responsible disciples prepared to encounter Jesus. According to Reid (2009) evangelism encompasses consistently addressing people's needs, empowering well-trained volunteers, and involving significant organizational oversight. In simple terms, evangelism entails presenting the good news of Jesus' love, outlining His accomplishments for humanity, with the aim of drawing individuals toward Him. Petit-Homme (2018) provides additional clarity on evangelism, defining it as the journey of guiding individuals to Jesus Christ and enabling their transformation into responsible disciples who are prepared to encounter Jesus. Reid (2009) expands the concept of evangelism, encompassing, the consistent addressing of people's needs, and the involvement of significant organizational oversight. In essence, evangelism involves presenting the good news of Jesus' love, elucidating His accomplishments for humanity, with the objective of drawing individuals toward Him.

The significance of evangelism extends beyond mere church growth; it plays a crucial role in member retention. As emphasized by Mbui (2018) fervent witnessing establishes a connection among believers as they share their experiences with others, cultivating an atmosphere of interdependency and interconnectedness. This not only contributes to sustained growth but also enhances retention. Evangelism is significant not only because of its connection to the spiritual challenges inherent in every Christian's journey but also as the primary means for fulfilling the mission of a spiritual community tasked with spiritually engaging to displace the dominions of darkness (Rankin and Stetzer, 2010). Additionally, according to Parks (2012) the significance of evangelism is underscored by six reasons: (a) it heightens the likelihood of encountering persecution for the gospel, thereby fostering church growth, (b) it prevents the assumption within the church that those around it are already saved, (c) evangelism, when properly motivated, nurtures love for God and neighbor, (d) it ensures that the gospel remains central in the life of the church, (e) it enhances the comprehension of fundamental truths in Scripture, and (f) it elicits unexpected questions and objections that can deepen faith. Eckenroth (1954) underscores the significance of evangelism from both individual and collective perspectives: (a) it maintains a close connection between the soul winner and God, and (b) the church flourishes when its members actively participate in evangelistic activities.

Many centuries in the past, Christians were entrusted with a significant mandate referred to as "The Great Commission." This directive is documented in Matthew 28:19-20 of the Holy Bible, where Jesus Christ instructed His disciples to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,

baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (Carver, 2015; New Revised Standard Version Bible, Catholic Edition (NRSV), 1989).

In contrast to the aforementioned commission, numerous Christian denominations are not actively participating in proactive evangelical initiatives to enhance the retention of church members (Hunter, 2003). Building significant and personal connections is highlighted as a strategic method for church leaders to draw individuals into the Church (Kinneman & Lyons, 2007). Watson and Stepteau-Watson (2015) stress the importance of establishing outreach ministries that positively contribute to

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community life as a means to both attract and retain church members. Outreach ministry, as defined by Ford (2012) encompasses actions involving the dissemination of the gospel to communities. This includes purposeful initiatives such as community outreach services addressing wellness programs and healthcare support (Watson & Stepteau-Watson, 2015; Osinski, 2005; Ford, 2012). Certain denominations broaden their outreach endeavours to address housing needs, low-income housing, offering extended-stay motels, and flats for those who are displaced (Osinski, 2005).

Acknowledging the importance of building relationships with neighbors, Johnson et al. (2008) proposed that church leaders should take the initiative to reach out to people in their communities, utilizing outreach programs as a method for attracting new members (Osinski, 2005; Hunter, 2003). McGavran (1990) asserts that evangelism or outreach is an indispensable aspect of Christian organizations, emphasizing its role in

reaching the public. Therefore, Carver (2015) defines evangelism as a process. In line with Fasipe's (2010) mission, this initiative aims to engage unbelievers/non-churchgoers with the gospel message, encouraging them to make a personal decision to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. Carver (2015) and Harney, (2011) emphasized the role of church members as conduits of outreach, expressing love for their community and making sacrifices to reach out to people and encourage them to join the church. While Hunter (2003) highlighted the potential of proactive outreach ministry to attract and retain church members, Kinneman and Lyons (2007) emphasized the importance of cultivating genuine connections, and Watson and Stepteau-Watson (2015)

**Figure1.** Conceptual framework

Additionally, the formulation of research hypotheses is grounded in the conceptual framework, aiming to ascertain the extent to which the factors outlined exert a notable impact on the retention of Church Membership within the Catholic Diocese of Aguleri. The hypotheses of this study are:

underscored the role of outreach ministries in enhancing community well-being and fostering church retention. In essence, outreach ministry entails actively sharing the gospel message with individuals across diverse communities (Ford, 2012).

## 3. Research Methodology and Materials

### 3.1 Research Framework

This study attempts to determine the factors influencing the conceptual framework, which was developed based on previous research, theoretical concepts and testing literatures. Included in the factors to assess, which also represent the independent variables, are Transformational Leadership, Church Commitment, Culture, Church Program, Church Evangelism, and Church Spirituality and their significant influence on the dependent variable Church Membership Retention. The conceptual framework showing the relationship between Transformational Leadership, Church Commitment, Culture, Church Program, Church Evangelism, Church Spirituality, and Church Membership Retention is shown in figure 1
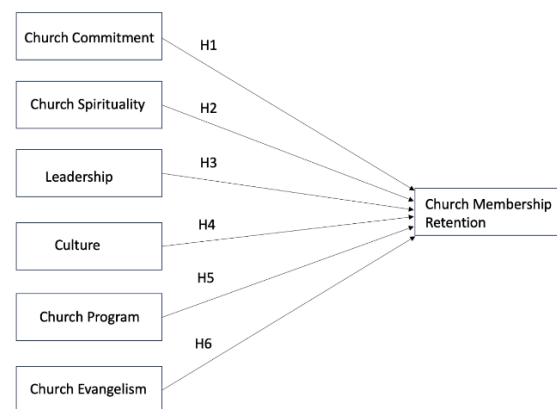


Hypotheses H1o: There is no significant causal relationship between Church Commitment (CC) and Church Membership Retention in Catholic Diocese of Aguleri.

Hypotheses H2o: There is no significant causal relationship between Church Spirituality (CS) and

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Church Membership Retention in Catholic Diocese of Aguleri.

Hypotheses H3o: There is no significant causal relationship between Transformational Leadership (TL) and Church Membership Retention in Catholic Diocese of Aguleri.

Hypotheses H4o: There is no significant causal relationship between Culture (C) and Church Membership Retention in Catholic Diocese of Aguleri.

Hypotheses H5o: There is no significant causal relationship between Church Program (CP) and Church Membership Retention in Catholic Diocese of Aguleri.

Hypotheses H6o: There is no significant causal relationship between Church Evangelism (CE) and Church Membership Retention in Catholic Diocese of Aguleri.

## 3.2 Research Methodology

The quantitative research was carried out through the creation of a survey questionnaire, comprising three sections with a total of 47 questions. The first section comprised 3 screening questions that ensured only Catholics who are 18 years and above and have been worshiping with Catholic Diocese of Aguleri for the past 6 months were included. The second section included 5 demographic questions composed of gender, age, marital status, occupation, and educational background, to gather background information about the respondents. Lastly, the third section Likert scale questions contained 39 questions. The Likert scale is employed for assessing the impact of each factor on Church Membership Retention, ranging from 5 denoting "Strongly Agree" to 1 representing "Strongly Disagree." The questionnaire utilizing the Likert scale encompasses a total of 39 questions. This includes five questions dedicated to gauging Church Commitment, adapted from Ernst Saint (2020), another five questions assessing Church Spirituality from the same source, seven questions evaluating Leadership based on William J. Jean-Charles (2020), and six questions appraising Culture, also derived from William J.

Jean-Charles (2020), five questions to determine Church Programs adapted from William J. Jean-Charles (2020), six questions to determine Church Evangelism adapted from William J. Jean-Charles (2020), and five questions to determine Church Membership Retention adapted from William J. Jean-Charles (2020). The questions were formulated using Google Forms and subsequently distributed to a subset of respondents for pilot testing, aimed at assessing the reliability of the questionnaire. This process was undertaken as a preliminary step before conducting the actual research.

### 3.2.1 Population and Target Sample

The Catholic Diocese of Aguleri is made up of four (4) Local Government Areas (L.G. A), with a population of 1,857,060 of which 357,965 are Catholics as of February 13, 2023, according to 2023 statistics (Jude Atemanke, 2023). For this research, the target population are Catholics who are 18 years and above, and have been worshipping with the Catholic Diocese of Aguleri for the past six months. Utilizing the specified target population, the appropriate sample size, with a 5% margin of error, is determined to be 400 respondents, as derived from the table of Krejcie and Morgan (1970).The study focuses on Catholics who are 18 years and above, and have been worshipping with the Catholic Diocese of Aguleri in Nigeria for the past six months, thus non-probability sampling Techniques were employed using quota, Convenience and snowball sampling methodologies to expedite the data collection process and also for their cost effectiveness. The data collection period was from the third week of September to the third week of October, 2023.

### 3.2.2 Reliability Test

Cronbach's Alpha, as asserted by Bardhoshi and Erford (2017), stands out as the most widely accepted and distinguished indicator for measuring and assessing the reliability of a research questionnaire prior to its distribution to the intended audience. A variable demonstrating $\alpha \geq 0.6$ at a 5%

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margin of error is deemed to exhibit acceptable and excellent internal consistency, and therefore, can be accepted as reliable (Cronbach, L J., 1951). Cronbach's Alpha values of the independent and dependent variables in the pilot testing of 40 respondents were recorded and all were in the acceptable range or above indicating that the questionnaire was reliable. The resulting Cronbach alpha for Church Commitment (CC) with five items assessed was $\alpha = 0.933$. The five items assessed for Church Spirituality (CS) resulted in $\alpha = 0.960$. The seven items assessed for Transformational Leadership (TL) resulted in $\alpha = 0.944$. The six items assessed for Culture (C) resulted in $\alpha = 0.898$. The five items assessed for Church Programs (CP) resulted in $\alpha = 0.852$. The six items assessed for Church Evangelism (CE) resulted in $\alpha = 0.881$. The 5 items assessed for Church Membership Retention (CMR) resulted in $\alpha = 0.786$.

### 3.2.3 Data Analysis

The quantitative methodology was employed for analyzing the research findings through the utilization of JAMOVI software. To ensure questionnaire reliability, Cronbach's Alpha was applied, aiming to identify any perplexing items, inconsistencies, or errors within the variables. The outcomes of this assessment are presented in Table 1. Descriptive data analysis was conducted to examine the demographic information and background of the respondents. Additionally, statistical analyses, using Multiple Linear Regression, were conducted to ascertain the relationship between dependent and independent variables. Multiple Linear Regression was specifically employed to evaluate the significance and nature of the relationship among the independent variables such as Transformational Leadership, Church Commitment, Culture, Church Program, Church Evangelism, and Church Spirituality towards the dependent variable, Church Membership Retention.

**Table 1.** *Cronbach Alpha Reliability Analysis with pilot test (40)*

| No. of Items | Variables | Cronbach's α | Strength of Association |
|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | Church Commitment (CC) | 0.933 | Excellent |
| 5 | Church Spirituality (CS) | 0.960 | Excellent |
| 7 | Transformational Leadership (TL) | 0.944 | Excellent |
| 6 | Culture (C) | 0.898 | Good |
| 5 | Church Program (CP) | 0.852 | Good |
| 6 | Church Evangelism (CE) | 0.881 | Good |
| 5 | Church Membership Retention (CMR) | 0.786 | Acceptable |

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Demographic Profile Summary

Following the collection of respondents' demographic information, descriptive statistics were applied to analyze these data, providing a detailed overview of the general characteristics of each individual respondent. This research has 400 respondents 137 of which were male with a percentage of 34.3 and 232 female respondents accounting for a percentage of 58.0 and prefer not to say 31 respondents accounting for a percentage of 7.7. It is important to note that the number of females were more than half of the population in the sample; 231 amounting to 57.8% as shown in figure 2.

**Figure 2**: Sample Population Gender

**Figure 3**: Sample Population Age
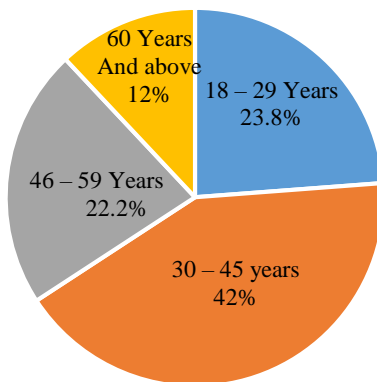


The predominant proportion of the 400 sampled respondents fell within the age bracket of 30 to 45 years old with 42.0% which equals 168 respondents, while the 18 to 29 years old consisted 23.8% which equals 95 respondents, followed by 46 to 59 years with 89 respondents at 22.2% and 60 years and above with 48 respondents made up the remaining 12.0% as shown in figure 3.
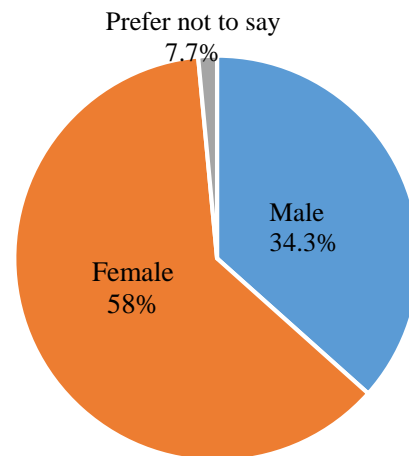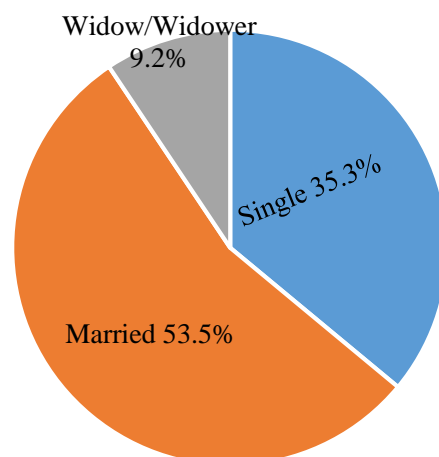
Figure 4 shows that among the 400 sample respondents, 53.5% were married which equals 214 respondents, while 37.3% were single which equals 149, and the remaining 9.4% which equals 37 of the respondents were Widows/Widowers. The married respondents were more than half of the sample population; 214 accounting for 53.5%.

Figure 5 shows that 26.0% of the 400 sample respondents were Civil Servant with 104 respondents, followed by 24.5% of Business owner with 98 respondents, 17.2% of Student with 69 respondents,

**Figure 4**: Sample Population Marital status

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14.8% of private employee with 59 respondents, while Others had 10.5% with respondents, while Others had 10.5% with 42 respondents and the remaining 7.0% are Farmers with 28 respondents.
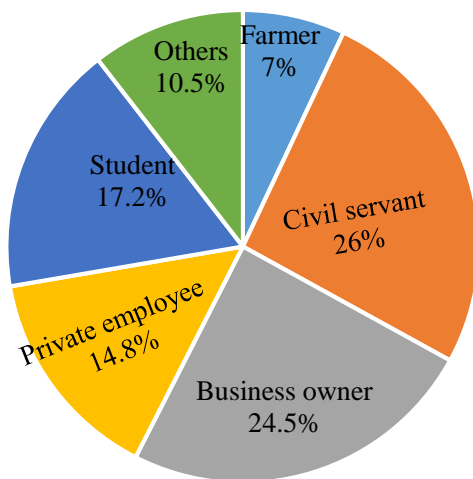


**Figure 5**: Sample Population occupation

As illustrated in Figure 6, derived from a sample of 400 respondents, Bachelor's degree had the highest number of respondents of 210 with 52.5%, followed by Secondary having 79 respondents with 19.7%, Master's degree/ Doctorate degree had 69 respondents with 17.2%, while Others had 35 respondents with 8.8% and Primary had the remaining 1.8% with 7 respondents.

## 4.2 Hypotheses Testing

Multiple Linear Regression serves as a statistical analysis technique employed to ascertain the relationship and correlation existing between independent and
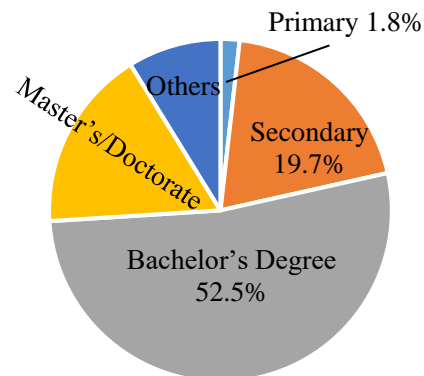


**Figure 6**: Sample Population Educational Background

dependent variables. Additionally, it was utilized to evaluate the level of significance exhibited by the independent variables in relation to the dependent variable. Furthermore, the same analytical method was applied to determine the coefficient of determination, denoted as R square ($R^2$), representing the statistical measure indicating the proportion of variance in the dependent variable explained by the independent variable.

In the current study, Multiple Linear Regression is employed as a statistical analysis approach to investigate the relationship, correlation, and significance levels of independent variables, including Church Commitment, Church Spirituality, Transformational Leadership, Culture, Church Programs, and Church Evangelism, in relation to the dependent variable, Church Membership Retention.

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**Table 2**: *Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Summary*

| Hypotheses | Variables/Predictor | B | t-stat | Sig./ p-value | VIF | Result |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H1o | Church Commitment | 0.234 | 5.050 | < .001* | 1.51 | Rejected |
| H2o | Church Spirituality | 0.192 | 2.821 | = 0.005* | 2.23 | Rejected |
| H3o | Transformational Leadership | -0.043 | -0.569 | = 0.570* | 3.52 | Fail to reject |
| H4o | Culture | 0.051 | 0.808 | = 0.419* | 2.80 | Fail to reject |
| H5o | Church Programs | 0.209 | 4.225 | < .001* | 1.78 | Rejected |
| H6o | Church Evangelism | 0.332 | 6.832 | < .001* | 2.14 | Rejected |

*Note: $R^2 = 0.518$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.511$, $p* < 0.01$, $t > 1.96$, Dependent Variable =* Church Membership Retention

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Table 2 shows that the predictors composed of Church Commitment, Church Spirituality, Transformational Leadership, Culture, Church Programs, and Church Evangelism have an R² value of 0.518 (51.8%) at a 99% confidence level which implied that Church Membership Retention could be explained by the said predictors by 51.8%. It also shows a standard coefficient of 0.234 (23.4%) for Church Commitment, 0.192 (19.2%) for Church Spirituality, -0.043 (-4.3%) for Transformational Leadership, 0.051 (5.1%) for Culture, 0.209

(20.9%) for Church Programs, and 0.332 (33.2%) for Church Evangelism which suggests that an increase of 1% in the independent variables would correspondingly lead to an increase in Church Membership Retention. Notably, the highest Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) recorded was 3.52, associated with Transformational Leadership, while the lowest was observed for Church Commitment at 1.51. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) test assesses multicollinearity among factors, indicating the level of collinearity. A VIF value equal to or exceeding 5.0 signifies problematic high correlation, making values less than or equal to 5.0 preferable, ensuring no overlapping variables (Akinwande et al., 2015). Consequently, no evidence of multicollinearity was found among the variables. The outcomes of the multiple linear regression, as presented in Table 2, were subsequently utilized to identify the significant variables influencing Church Membership Retention in the Catholic Diocese of Aguleri in Nigeria, discussed in the following section.

**Hypothesis 1**

H1o: Church Commitment (CC) has no significant influence on Church Membership Retention (CMR).
H1a: Church Commitment (CC) has a significant influence on Church Membership Retention (CMR).
As indicated in Table 2, the significance level for Church Commitment is < 0.001, which is below the threshold p-value of 0.05 at a 95% confidence level. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected, leading to the conclusion that Church Commitment

significantly influences Church Membership Retention.

**Hypothesis 2**

H2o: Church Spirituality (CS) has no significant influence on Church Membership Retention (CMR).
H2a: Church Spirituality (CS) has a significant influence on Church Membership Retention (CMR).
As per the findings in Table 2, the significance level for Church Spirituality is 0.005, falling below the designated p-value of 0.05 at a 95% confidence level. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected, leading to the conclusion that Church Spirituality significantly influences Church Membership Retention.

**Hypothesis 3**

H3o: Transformational Leadership (TL) has no significant influence on Church Membership Retention (CMR).
H3a Transformational Leadership (TL) has a significant influence on Church Membership Retention (CMR).
Based on the data presented in Table 2, the significance level for Transformational Leadership is 0.570, exceeding the predetermined p-value of 0.05 at a 95% confidence level. This indicates a failure to reject the null hypothesis, leading to the conclusion that Transformational Leadership does not exert a significant influence on Church Membership Retention.

**Hypothesis 4**

H4o: Culture (C) has no significant influence on Church Membership Retention (CMR).
H4a: Culture (C) has a significant influence on Church Membership Retention (CMR).
Based on the data presented in Table 2, the significance level for Culture is 0.419, surpassing the predetermined p-value of 0.05 at a 95% confidence level. Consequently, there is a failure to reject the null hypothesis, leading to the conclusion that Culture does not possess a significant influence on Church Membership Retention.

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**Hypothesis 5**

H5o: Church Programs (CP) has no significant influence on Church Membership Retention (CMR).

H5a: Church Programs (CP) has a significant influence on Church Membership Retention (CMR).

Examining Table 2, the significance level for Church Programs is < 0.001, falling below the designated p-value of 0.05 at a 95% confidence level. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected, leading to the conclusion that Church Programs significantly influences Church Membership Retention.

**Hypothesis 6**

H6o: Church Evangelism (CE) has no significant influence on Church Membership Retention (CMR).

H6a: Church Evangelism (CE) has a significant influence on Church Membership Retention (CMR).

Analyzing the data presented in Table 2, the significance level for Church Evangelism is < 0.001, indicating a value below the specified p-value of 0.05 at a 95% confidence level. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected, leading to the conclusion that Church Evangelism significantly influences Church Membership Retention. Notably, four factors—Church Evangelism, Church Commitment, Church Programs, and Church Spirituality—have been identified as significantly influencing Church Membership Retention in the Catholic Diocese of Aguleri in Nigeria, based on the results of their respective p-values.

**4.3 Discussions**

The examined factors in this study encompassed Church Commitment, Church Spirituality, Transformational Leadership, Culture, Church Programs, and Church Evangelism. The reliability of the research questionnaire was affirmed through the pilot testing, as indicated by the Cronbach's alpha results. A VIF value of 1 indicates that there is no correlation between the independent variables, while values greater than 1 indicate some degree of correlation. In general, a VIF value of 5 or higher indicates a high degree of multi-collinearity, which

can affect the accuracy and stability of the regression coefficients. The Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) obtained were below 5.0, indicating the absence of multicollinearity among the variables. The R-squared value provides an estimate of how well the independent variables can predict the dependent variable. Higher values of R-squared indicate a better fit of the model to the data, while lower values indicate a poorer fit. R-squared only measures the proportion of the variance in the dependent variable that is explained by the independent variables and does not provide information about the causal relationships between the variables or the accuracy of fit of the model. Hence, the R-value stands at 51.8%, suggesting that, at a 99% confidence level, the predictors can explain Church Membership Retention. However, through hypothesis testing, it was revealed that only Church Evangelism, Church Commitment, Church Programs, and Church Spirituality exerted a significant influence on Church Membership Retention in the Catholic Diocese of Aguleri in Nigeria, as indicated by the results of their respective p-values. The independent variable/factor that has strongest relationship with Church Membership Retention was Church Evangelism ($\beta = 0.332$) followed by Church Commitment ($\beta = 0.234$), Church Program ($\beta = 0.209$), and then finally Church Spiritualty ($\beta = 0.192$).

These findings are consistent with earlier research conducted by Buzzell and Gale, (1987); Reinartz et al., (2005); CMO Council, (2009); Wielhouwer, (2004); Erwich (2012), and Chaney (2008) for Church Programs; Noel and Gaddis III (2013) and De Souza, (2009) for Church Spirituality; Pierre-Antoine (2019); Hunter, (2003); Watson and Stepteau-Watson (2015); and Osinski, (2005) for Church Evangelism, and Stevens et al. (2008); Dudley (2000); and the principles outlined in Matthew 28:16-20 and Acts 1:8 for Church Commitment.

On the other hand, the result of Transformational Leadership ($\beta = -0.043$) and Culture ($\beta = 0.051$) from the outcome of this study did not receive support and were incongruent with the results of prior researches

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by Paul and Vincent (2018); Osuoha, (2016); and Olivier, (2019) for Transformational Leadership, and Mashal and Saima, (2014) and Bulach et al., (2012) for Culture. The non – significant influence of transformational leadership on membership retention might be as a result of unaccounted-for confounding variables or that the respondents are biased, while that of culture might be as a result of high variability or important factors or interactions might be missing in the model.

## 5. Conclusions

Understanding the factors influencing church members' retention can provide valuable information to church leaders for effective pastoral guidance and pastoral care. This knowledge can contribute to strategies that foster a sense of belonging and commitment among members, potentially leading to church growth. A thriving church community can have positive effects on the broader community. The study's findings may help identify practices that contribute to a strong sense of community and engagement, potentially influencing the broader social fabric of the area. Insights into the factors influencing retention can guide Church leaders to develop programs and initiatives aimed at enhancing religious practices and spiritual growth among church members. This could include tailored educational programs, worship experiences, and community outreach efforts. It may inform decision-making at the diocesan level, helping leaders develop policies and strategies that address challenges related to member retention. This can contribute to the overall effectiveness of the Catholic Church not only in the Aguleri Diocese but also in the region. Training programs for church leaders and pastoral staff to enhance their understanding of member needs and concerns, ultimately contributing to more effective leadership.

The study emphasizes the vital role of skilled human capital in achieving successful business objectives (Maamari & Alameh, 2016). Maintaining an excellent pool of skilled human capital requires intentional efforts to provide products that ensure high customer satisfaction. The prevailing belief that "satisfied

employees or members are more likely to continue their association with an organization than dissatisfied ones" (Locke & Latham, 1990) is supported by this study's findings, as demonstrated by the participants' responses. The findings of this research underscore the crucial role of proactive measures aimed at enhancing member satisfaction within the church, as reflected in their readiness to make personal sacrifices for the success of the church's ministry and mission in the Catholic Diocese of Aguleri in Nigeria.

The Church leaders should Plan evangelical programs strategically and recognize their role as "fishers of men" and avoid being critical of those joining the church from diverse backgrounds, understanding that God is the one who transforms lives. Actively, they should seek opportunities to build relationships and befriend newly baptized individuals, new converts, those in need and sick, facilitating their integration into the church's communal life. Intentionally create a welcoming and loving environment where everyone feels accepted, valued and sense of belonging, to ensure that church programs are inclusive, reaching beyond seasoned members to actively involve newcomers.

This study is limited to Catholics who are 18 years and above in the Catholic Diocese of Aguleri in Nigeria who have been actively participating in the church activities for at least six months Hence, it is essential not to interpret the findings as indicative of the Catholic Church in a broader or general context. The primary aim of this research was to explore the factors influencing Church Membership Retention specifically within the Catholic Diocese of Aguleri in Nigeria. Therefore, this study can be replicated in different settings, using diverse populations and samples to test the validity of the research findings or Construct a fresh model by integrating supplementary variables like fellowship, spiritual gifts assessment, and the involvement of local leaders. Future research within the same context could replicate the study from the viewpoint of former members, delving into their experiences of satisfaction and dissatisfaction influencing their decisions to depart from the church. Such investigations might yield distinct conclusions

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and offer unique insights into Church Membership Retention.

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