

THE CHURCH NURTURE OF CHILDREN IN THE KABERAMAIDO ARCHDEACONRY

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M22BO9/015

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE BISHOP TUCKER SCHOOL OF DIVINITY AND
THEOLOGY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF
THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF DIVINITY OF UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY**

June, 2025



**UGANDA CHRISTIAN
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DECLARATION

I, PETER OPIO, hereby declare that this is my original work, it is not plagiarized, and it has never been submitted to any other Institution of higher education for an award.

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11/06/2025

DATE

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Almighty God for His unlimited guidance, strength, and support throughout the process of completing my studies at the Uganda Christian University. It is by His grace that I was able to undertake this rewarding experience.

I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, Rev. Can. Prof. Christopher Byaruhanga, for his constructive feedback and support. His expertise and mentorship played a crucial role in shaping my experience and knowledge during this research.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to Rev. Can. Rose Ekirunga my discipleship mentor, Prof. Elly Kansime, my Sunday placement Supervisor, Prof. Peter Nyende my Block placement Supervisor, and all the Lecturers at Bishop Tucker School, whose unwavering support and kindness helped me accomplish my Bachelor of Divinity course at the University.

I also wish to acknowledge the Diocese of Soroti, especially our Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Capt. Kosea Odong, Diocesan Secretary Rev. Can. Samuel Ediau for their support and encouragement, which made my time at school enlightening and enjoyable.

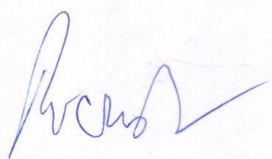
Lastly, I would like to thank my family for their love and encouragement, which inspired me to strive for excellence in this endeavor.

May God bless you all abundantly.

APPROVAL:

This is to certify that this research by Opio Peter has been under my supervision and is ready for submission to the Uganda Christian University Academic Board in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of a Bachelor of Divinity Degree of Uganda Christian University for consideration.

Signed:



Date: 11/06/2025

REV. CAN. PROF. CHRISTOPHER BYARUHANGA
UNIVERSITY SUPERVISOR.

DEDICATION.

I would like to dedicate this research to my Archdeacon, Rev. Daniel Ekau, whose unwavering encouragement and support have been instrumental throughout this academic journey. His guidance and mentorship have provided me with both the spiritual foundation and professional confidence needed to pursue this study with dedication and purpose.

Rev. Ekau's belief in my abilities, even during challenging moments, has been a constant source of motivation. His thoughtful insights and willingness to engage with my ideas have significantly enriched the quality of my study.

I am deeply grateful for his leadership, wisdom, and the countless hours he has devoted to supporting not only this research endeavor but also my personal and spiritual growth. This work stands as a testament to his positive influence in my life and academic pursuits.

ABSTRACT

This research explores the role of the church in nurturing children's development within the Kaberamaido Archdeaconry. The study examines how church institutions shape children's spiritual growth and moral values, while analyzing the various support structures provided for children and their families. The research explores educational programs, mentorship opportunities, and community services designed to foster holistic development. Additionally, it addresses challenges faced by the church in promoting community engagement and social responsibility among children, while examining the theological foundations that support the church's approach to child nurturing. Through comprehensive data collection and analysis, this study aims to identify effective practices, address gaps in existing approaches, and provide recommendations for enhancing the church's impact on children's development within the community. The findings contribute to understanding the intersection of religious institutions, child development, and community welfare, with implications for both religious practice and child-centered community initiatives.

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1. CHAPTER ONE

1.1. Introduction

Children are priceless treasures and precious gifts from God. According to Genesis 1:27, God created humanity "*male and female*" in His image. Children are a means of continuing this divine image, as illustrated in Genesis 5:1-3 when Adam became the father of a son, Seth, in his likeness and image. The future of any church is greatly influenced by how children are appreciated in the present. It is important to ensure their dignity is respected and their spirituality is nurtured. The nurture of children within religious institutions plays an important role in their spiritual, moral, and social development. This research proposal aims to assess the effectiveness of church-based nurture programs for children in the Kaberamaido Archdeaconry in eastern Uganda. By examining current practices, challenges, and opportunities, this study seeks to provide insights that can improve the quality of children's ministry in the region.

1.2. The Background

According to Waite Maurice (2007), Oxford Dictionary, nurture means to care for and protect someone or something while they are growing and developing. In the context of churches, children's nurture refers to the intentional spiritual care and education provided to children within faith communities (Allen, 2018). Whereas, a child is a young human being below the age of full physical development (Waite, 2007). Churches worldwide know the importance of nurturing children as part of their mission, creating initiatives personalized for various age groups that focus on biblical teachings, character development, and social skills (Johnson, 2020).

In Africa, the church plays a key role in nurturing children by integrating local cultural practices with community principles, often stepping in to support education and healthcare where government resources are limited. However, in Uganda, many parents struggle to maintain their children's spiritual paths, leading to alarming statistics on child marriage, drug abuse, and teenage pregnancies.

Kaberamaido Archdeaconry in eastern Uganda faces distinct challenges and opportunities in nurturing children. Efforts through Sunday school, Vacation Bible Schools, and youth groups exist, but issues like child neglect, drug abuse, and school dropouts call for the urgent need for care regarding children's safety. Additionally, cultural influences may conflict with values and identity formation for today's youth. This study aims to assess children's spiritual

development in the Kaberamaido Archdeaconry, identifying strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for enhancing their spiritual formation and holistic growth within the church context.

1.3. Problem Statement:

Kaberamaido Archdeaconry in eastern Uganda faces significant challenges in nurturing children. Despite diverse church programs like Sunday school and youth groups aimed at engaging children spiritually and emotionally, issues such as child neglect, abuse, and high drop-out rates hinder effective nurturing. Child marriage, rising drug abuse, teenage pregnancies, and children running away from home indicate the need for heightened vigilance regarding children's safety.

Cultural influences and socio-economic factors complicate values and identity formation among youth. Limited resources, inadequately trained personnel, and insufficient programs tailored to children's spiritual needs further worsen these challenges. Ineffective collaboration among church leaders, parents, and the community has resulted in gaps in children's education and faith formation, leaving many without a solid foundation in Christian teachings.

The absence of structured child protection policies within the church exposes children to exploitation and neglect. This study aims to assess the current state of children's ministry in Kaberamaido, identify challenges, and recommend strategies to strengthen the church's role in spiritually, emotionally, and socially nurturing children.

1.4. The Purpose of the Study

This study aims to discover the church's role and significance in nurturing children in Christian values in the Kaberamaido Archdeaconry.

1.5. The Objectives:

1. To assess the role of the church in nurturing children's spiritual growth and moral values within the Kaberamaido Archdeaconry.
2. To identify the various support structures provided by the church for children and their families, including educational programs, mentorship, and community services.
3. To find out the challenges of the church in promoting community engagement and social responsibility among children in the Kaberamaido Archdeaconry.

1.6. Research Questions:

1. What practices and programs do the church implement to nurture children's spiritual and moral development in the Kaberamaido Archdeaconry?
2. How do parents and caregivers perceive the church's role in the education and upbringing of their children?
3. What challenges does the church face in effectively nurturing children, and how can these challenges be addressed to improve child welfare within the community?

1.7. The Scope of the Study

Geographical Scope

The research will focus specifically on the Kaberamaido Archdeaconry in Kaberamaido District, Uganda. This area comprises various congregations and communities with distinct cultural and socio-economic backgrounds that influence church practices and child-nurturing approaches.

1.8. Significance of the Study

The research aims to provide recommendations for improving the effectiveness of child nurturing practices within the church, contributing to policy formulation for church programs, and encouraging a supportive environment for children in Kaberamaido Archdeaconry, by highlighting effective practices, challenges faced, and potential areas for improvement.

1.9. Justification of the study.

This study examines the church's role in shaping children's spiritual, educational, and social growth in the Kaberamaido community. It examines how religious institutions influence cultural and spiritual development, focusing on their nurturing practices and contributions to moral and personal formation.

Additionally, the research considers the church's impact on broader community dynamics, particularly its role in addressing social challenges and supporting children's holistic growth, even though there are economic constraints. It extends beyond spiritual instruction, looking at educational opportunities and intergenerational relationships.

The study aims to document effective localized practices, providing valuable knowledge for church leaders, educators, and policymakers to improve child development and community

resilience. Focusing on Kaberamaido's unique cultural landscape fills a gap in the existing literature and offers a refined understanding of faith-based child nurturing.

1.10. Literature Review

This section comprises information from primary writers who have published about the “Church Nurture of Children.” It includes literature applicable to the study's specific objectives.

Miles and Josephine-Joy (2006) present perceptions from World Vision, accenting that when children are effectively protected, nurtured, and instilled with hope, they can emerge as a new generation with a clear identity. This generation has the potential to become agents of change and visionaries for a better future. Additionally, Isaiah 61 stresses God's transformative power to turn individuals into instruments of healing and transformation in the world, mentioning them as ‘oaks of righteousness’ (V. 3b).

Cooper (2025) underlined the importance of establishing a church dedicated to children, referencing an important statement made nearly two centuries ago by Rev. Cotton Mather. He stated, "The Lord did not create churches merely for a small group of elderly Christians to seek comfort in each other during their lives and then take the church with them upon their passing. Instead, He intended for churches to nurture successive generations as devoted followers of the Lord, preparing them to serve in His kingdom after their predecessors are gone. If we fail to uphold a covenant that encourages conversion and the offering of grace, the church will unavoidably face a slow decline." Therefore, nurturing children should be viewed as a vital responsibility of the church.

Fraze (2010) deliberates ways to help children grow in their faith by providing ideas for churches to develop a solid faith for young people. The term "solid faith" refers to the type of spirituality children need to cultivate a vibrant and lasting relationship with their beliefs. This faith includes three dimensions: the head (knowledge), the heart (deep emotion), and the spirit (trust in God's guidance when faced with uncertainty or feelings of weakness). According to Frazee, this kind of faith naturally develops when the entire faith community seriously addresses the knowledge of God's word and the developmental needs of children.

April Segura (2016) offers values and guidelines for the church to consider in its efforts to protect children and youth from potential abuse while engaging in God's mission. This is primarily grounded in a strong biblical foundation that emphasizes the rights of children. In

summary, children's rights originate from their inherent humanity and the belief that all individuals are created in the image of God (imago Dei), as stated in Genesis 1 (ESV).

1.11. Methodology

This section presents the general procedure of the study on the Church Nurture of Children. The research shall adopt a qualitative approach that is designed, intensive, descriptive, and holistic in terms of analysis of a problem being deliberated. Therefore, the researcher shall collect qualitative data through document review. The study shall rely on secondary data. The documents to be reviewed in the study shall include journals, published magazines, and other publications on the Church Nurture of Children. The Documents shall be selected for analysis depending on their applicability to the present study, and the most recent reports shall be considered first. The reliability of secondary data shall be based on the period when the data was collected to ensure that the data set is reliable.

The data shall be analysed using content analysis to conclude meanings that arose as the researcher read the testimonies and submissions from the secondary data set. As the researcher reads the descriptions, he shall summarize and take notes on the incidental meaning. The reliability of secondary data shall be based on the period when the data was collected to ensure that the data set is reliable.

1.12. Research limitations

Data quality. The researcher may not know how reliable or binding the data is, which is why it is important to choose sources carefully. Only use data from credible sources, ideally, ones that do not have a financial interest in the data's findings shall be used.

Less control. The researcher is at the mercy of the available data and cannot alter it to his needs. There is no opportunity to ask follow-up questions or address specific research needs.

Possible bias. Some sources may include biased findings and outdated information, leading to inaccurate conclusions. The researcher can alleviate the risk of bias by relying only on credible sources or verifying evidence with numerous sources.

1.13. Chapter Synopsis Overview.

A chapter synopsis offers a brief yet informative summary of the content, key points, and primary arguments found within a specific chapter of a larger work. Its main purpose is to equip readers with a clear understanding of the chapter's central themes and contributions,

allowing them to grasp the important ideas without the need to read through the entire chapter in detail. The study will be structured into six distinct chapters.

Chapter One. This outlines the study. It includes an introduction, background information, the research problem, and the study's purpose and goals. The chapter lists the research questions and defines the study's scope. It explains the research's importance and potential contributions, reviews existing literature to identify gaps, and outlines the methodology. Finally, it summarizes key points to prepare for the next chapters.

Chapter two delivers a detailed examination of the church's role in shaping children's spiritual growth and moral values within the Church. This section examines the various ways in which church teachings and activities contribute to the development of ethical behavior and spiritual understanding among children in this community.

Chapter three focuses on the various support structures that the church offers to children and their families. It covers crucial aspects such as educational programs, mentorship opportunities, and community services designed to foster growth and well-being.

Chapter four comprises information on the challenges of the church in promoting community engagement and social responsibility among children in the Kaberamaido Archdeaconry.

Chapter five explores the theological foundations of the role of the related church in nurturing children. It will dig into the principles and beliefs that guide the church's mission to support and educate young community members.

Chapter Six will provide a comprehensive overview of the findings, draw conclusions based on the data, offer recommendations, and identify potential areas for further research.

2. CHAPTER TWO.

2.1. The role of the church in nurturing children's spiritual growth and moral values.

Introduction.

This chapter examines the role of the Church in nurturing spiritual growth and establishing moral foundations among young individuals, examining both direct educational approaches and indirect socialization mechanisms.

Training Children in the Way of God. The position of teaching children about God is stressed in Scripture. Proverbs 22:6 states, *"Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not turn from it."* Additionally, Deuteronomy 6:6-7 teaches that, *"These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down, and when you get up."* These verses underline the responsibility of children's ministry and the commandment to educate children in God's ways. While some may argue that this directive originated with Moses, it is important to recognize that Moses spoke as a mouthpiece for God. He clearly stated in Deuteronomy 6:1, *"These are the commands, decrees, and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe."* Eventually, it is God who commands His people to teach their children His commands, decrees, and laws. He instructs His followers to guide their children on the right path, making God the source of this instruction. (Georgina Tabi, 2020)

The Church is to guide children to become followers of Christ. As noted by Georgina Tabi in 2020, the Lord desires a universal kingdom and calls His followers to spread His word to everyone. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus commands, *"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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of age"* (ESV). Every church and every Christian must recognize their responsibility in nurturing children. Each believer is not only instructed to go or take actions to share the gospel in distant lands but also to fulfil the stated aim. They are to develop disciples, or learners, for Christ. They have come to Christ's school and are to be instructed before becoming His Disciples. This mission benefits not just the Jews but all nations. Christ came to be the Redeemer of the world. His message is for everyone. In the Great Commission, He looks beyond Judea and instructs that the Gospel should be presented to all nations.

Prepare the future leaders. Children are the future leaders who need to be prepared for leadership. Teaching is the means to prepare the younger generation for future responsibility. The result of obeying the command to teach children is to have a people prepared to take over from the older generation. Cutty thus affirms that “the Bible is a mode of God’s self-disclosure. Through these writings he is making his nature known to man.” (Cutty, 1952). The future of the children depends on the training they receive today. God’s word, which came to His people through Moses, was received and practiced among God’s people. Moses repeated the instruction as a reminder to the people when he got close to the end of his life. In an attempt to fulfil God’s word, the Israelites established synagogue schools. It was the practice that every Jewish child was to be trained in the synagogue school from a very tender age. Past events were told and retold to enable listeners to shade a spiritual picture of the event in their minds. The event of the crossing of the Red Sea was to be preserved and narrated to their children’s children. God commanded them to pick up twelve stones from the middle of the river. These stones were going to be the point of reference to their posterity about what God did for them. All proper care should be taken to keep in mind the mercies of the Lord, and to transmit knowledge of them to their children and all coming generations.

Moral Values. The role of the church is to teach the children moral values by promoting values such as faith, honesty, kindness, and respect. Luke’s simple statement, “*And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature,*” (Luke 2:52, ESV) shows how the church helped in nurturing Jesus’ development through the ages and stages of childhood. Even more important, the statement recognizes wisdom (mental) and stature (physical) as separate areas of development. But Luke adds, “and in favour with God and man,” suggesting spiritual and social growth or faith development (Cutty, 1952).

Providing leadership. According to the research carried out by Daniel Omony on the impact of church leadership on children’s ministry growth. (Daniel, 2024), The role of the church is to identify and train leaders for children’s ministry. He has indicated that strong and well-organized leadership in a church can greatly influence the general prosperity and efficiency of children’s ministry initiatives. Church leaders who actively participate in and support children’s ministry programs are more likely to witness growth and promising outcomes within their ministry.

Spiritual Growth. The Church serves as an important setting for spiritual development among children. According to Stella Maris (2022), the Church pays attention to the holistic education

of children through active participation in church services and Sunday schools, taking into consideration the ethical means that lead to moral formation. The Church is called to cooperate with parents through suitable pastoral initiatives, assisting them in the fulfilment of their educational mission. However, she does not provide the specific ways the parents can collaborate with the church for the holistic growth of the children.

The church is supposed to connect children to God. The early involvement of the church nurtures a foundational relationship with God, which is essential for their spiritual maturity. Arifin, I. and Hermino, A. (2018) note that the existence of the church's role in the development of early childhood education was found to support local authorities and the basis of education in the family. In addition, children who engage regularly in church activities demonstrate a deeper understanding of biblical teachings, thereby enhancing their spiritual lives. Nevertheless, there is a gap as they do not provide the specific activities in the church that contribute most significantly to children's spiritual growth. How do the church's teachings influence the educational practices in families? What evidence supports the claim that children involved in church activities have a deeper understanding of biblical teachings?

The church plays a noteworthy role in promoting community responsibility and social cohesion. According to Naseri (2014:44), "It is the mission of the Church to educate and to ensure strong Christian character formation." This explains why some churches are interested in a commitment to spiritual guidance and the development of ethical values within the community.

Community Engagement. The church is to be involved in various community initiatives that enhance the spiritual and moral development of children. The church is often seen as a partner in educating children and providing spiritual support to families (Darmawan et al., 2021). Churches usually provide religious education programs such as Sunday School classes, youth groups, and family activities designed to assist in children's spiritual development (Sitanggang, 2023). To ensure that the education at home will overlap with church teaching, Sunday School teachers and parents as partners should develop mutual respect and communication. If everyone is involved in children's ministry, directly or indirectly, it could cultivate this joint responsibility and help children grow in fear of God and be better people. As the future generation, improving the quality of our ministry for children will eventually create a better church, now and later.

In conclusion, the Church plays an important role in nurturing children's spiritual growth and imparting moral values. Through direct educational efforts such as children's ministry and Sunday School, alongside indirect mechanisms like community engagement, the Church offers a foundational environment for children to develop a deep connection with God and strong ethical principles. The Bible emphasizes the importance of teaching children God's ways, and the Church, in partnership with parents and communities, is responsible for ensuring these teachings are carried out. By preparing future leaders, fostering spiritual growth, and promoting moral values, the Church contributes meaningfully to shaping the character and faith of the next generation. Finally, a well-supported and holistic approach to children's spiritual education strengthens the church and nurtures a future society rooted in Christian values.

3. CHAPTER THREE.

3.1. To identify the various support structures provided by the church for children and their families, including educational programs, mentorship, and community services.

3.1.1. Introduction

This section examines the various support structures that religious institutions, particularly churches, provide for children and their families. Religious organizations have throughout history served as community supporters offering spiritual guidance, practical assistance, and educational opportunities. Understanding these support systems is central for both communities and policymakers as they represent a considerable social setup that complements public services. This review aims to identify, categorize, and analyze churches' various forms of support, including educational programs, mentorship initiatives, and community services. By examining these structures through both historical context and contemporary practice, we can better understand their impact on child development, family stability, and community unity.

Inclusion in worship. In his book "Helping Our Children Grow in Faith" (2008), Robert emphasizes the importance of including children in congregational worship. He notes that participation in worship provides valuable opportunities for children to develop their faith. By providing an environment where children learn about, love, and embody the principles of their faith, we support their spiritual growth and help them understand the values that God desires for them.

Sacraments. Josh Swanson (2015:139), a Pastor of Family Ministries, notes that the church supports and nurtures children's spiritual development through the use of sacraments such as baptism and communion. For instance, baptism serves as an initiation into the faith community, welcoming the child into a group of believers. On the other hand, Holy Communion is administered after the child has grasped key Christian doctrines and has a foundational understanding of the faith. This process not only promotes a sense of belonging but also nurtures a deeper knowledge of God, contributing significantly to the child's spiritual growth.

The roles of godparents in the contexts of baptism, instruction, and confirmation are significant, as highlighted by Kevin E. Lawson in 2011. He noted that both parents and godparents are expected to teach children and godchildren the essential doctrines of the faith.

Specifically, it is the responsibility of godparents to present their godchildren to the bishop for confirmation. Furthermore, adults wishing to serve as godparents undergo an examination of their knowledge of the necessary prayers, with the possibility of being disqualified if they do not demonstrate adequate understanding. By promoting a sense of responsibility among both parents and godparents, children receive spiritual and moral guidance in a nurturing and faith-centered environment.

Involvement of Parents. Involving parents in ministry work is essential for the growth and well-being of children within the church community. As emphasized by James Cooper (1884), “An ounce of true mother is worth a pound of priest,” which highlights the central role of parents in nurturing their children’s spiritual lives. However, it is equally important for the church to take an active role in facilitating direct ministries aimed at children. The church acts as a nourishing mother figure for all its members, providing guidance and support that helps individuals of all ages progress spiritually. Given the great importance of children’s development, the church should prioritize their needs as part of its mission.

Educational Programs. Churches have long been involved in the education of children, often establishing formal and informal learning opportunities that extend beyond religious instruction. Sunday School programs, which originated in the 18th century as a means to provide basic literacy education to working children, have changed into inclusive religious education systems that teach not only theological concepts but also moral reasoning, social skills, and cultural awareness (Boylan, 2019). These programs typically employ age-appropriate curricula designed to engage children at different developmental stages.

Many churches have expanded their educational offerings to include weekday preschools and kindergartens. These early childhood education programs often integrate religious values with standard educational content and frequently serve families regardless of their religious affiliation. Studies have shown that church-based early childhood education can provide quality instruction while being more affordable than many private alternatives (Bassett, 2018).

In addition to early childhood education, churches frequently offer after-school programs that provide homework assistance, tutoring, and enrichment activities. These programs serve a serious need, particularly in underserved communities where working parents may struggle to find affordable after-school care. The educational support provided by churches extends to seasonal programs as well, with vacation Bible schools and day camps combining

recreational activities with opportunities for continued learning during school breaks (Johnson & Smith, 2021).

More recently, some churches have responded to the homeschooling movement by offering supportive learning environments where homeschooled children can gather for group instruction and socialization. These church-based homeschool support groups provide resources, structure, and community that might otherwise be difficult for individual families to access (Williams, 2020).

Youth groups. Youth groups represent the support structure provided by churches for children and families. Youth groups serve as primary venues for relationship-building between adolescents and adult mentors, creating spaces where teenagers can explore questions of identity, purpose, and values under the guidance of caring adults. Research has consistently shown that positive non-parental adult relationships significantly impact youth development, providing adolescents with additional resources for overcoming challenges (Powell et al., 2022).

Many churches formalize mentorship through programs designed to pair children with adult mentors. These relationships often focus on specific populations, such as children in single-parent homes, those experiencing academic difficulties, or youth facing particular challenges. Programs like "Big Brothers/Big Sisters in Christ" adapt the secular mentoring model to include spiritual dimensions while maintaining a focus on holistic child development (Garcia, 2020).

Intergenerational ministry. This involves intentionally creating opportunities for children to form relationships with older adults in the congregation. These connections provide children with access to wisdom and perspective while giving older adults meaningful opportunities to contribute to the next generation. Studies indicate that such intergenerational relationships benefit both parties, strengthening community unity and providing children with diverse role models (Allen & Ross, 2019).

Family mentoring initiatives extend the mentorship model to entire families, pairing established families with those facing challenges or new to the community. These relationships provide practical support, modeling of family-changing aspects, and emotional resources that strengthen family systems. In immigrant communities, church-based family mentoring often helps newcomers overcome unfamiliar cultural and institutional landscapes (Nguyen, 2021).

Community Services. Churches frequently serve as centers for community services that support children and families. Food assistance programs, including food storerooms, community meals, and vessel programs that send food home with children for weekends, address immediate nutritional needs. These services often operate with fewer administrative barriers than government programs, making them accessible to families who might otherwise fall through gaps in the social safety net (Cnaan & Curtis, 2018).

Health services. This is church-based family support, with congregations hosting health screenings, wellness education, and even primary care clinics. These services address barriers to healthcare access, including cost, transportation, and cultural factors. Mental health support, including counseling services, support groups, and referral networks, has gained prominence as churches recognize the impact of psychological well-being on family functioning (Chatters et al., 2022).

Crisis intervention services. The services provided by churches include emergency financial assistance, disaster response, and support during family transitions such as divorce or bereavement. These services often employ a case management approach that addresses immediate needs while connecting families to longer-term resources. The effectiveness of church-based crisis intervention frequently stems from congregations' ability to mobilize quickly and their established presence within communities (Taylor, 2020).

Specialized Support Programs. Churches have developed specialized programs addressing particular family needs or circumstances. Providing care and adoption support ministries offer resources for families involved in the child welfare system, from relief care for foster parents to support groups and material assistance. These ministries often bridge gaps between formal child welfare systems and families' daily needs (Lee et al., 2021).

Support for families with children who have disabilities. This is another specialized area, with congregations offering relief care, modified religious education, and social opportunities designed for inclusion. These programs not only support the children directly but also provide resources for parents and siblings struggling with the challenges associated with disability (Carter, 2019).

Teen parent programs offer practical assistance and emotional support to adolescents raising children. They often combine education with tangible resources such as diapers, clothing, and childcare during educational activities. These programs take a nonjudgmental approach

focused on supporting young parents rather than branding their circumstances (Reynolds, 2018).

3.1.2. Conclusion

Churches offer various support structures for children and families that go beyond just spiritual guidance. These include educational programs, mentorship initiatives, and community services. Such support plays an important role in social dynamics, complementing public services and filling gaps in available resources. The effectiveness of church-based family support originates from several key factors: their established presence in communities, their ability to involve volunteers, their emphasis on dignity and personal relationships, and their focus on addressing needs in a holistic manner rather than in isolated groups.

4. CHAPTER FOUR

4.1. The challenges of the church in promoting community engagement and social responsibility among children in the Kaberamaido archdeaconry.

4.1.1. Introduction

This section deals with the challenges of the church in nurturing social responsibility and community engagement among children in the Kaberamaido Archdeaconry. Churches face complicated challenges in developing meaningful programs that effectively connect young individuals with community service and social awareness. Although Churches have traditionally been essential institutions in community development, providing social support and moral education, some indicators show that the landscape of community engagement has dramatically changed in recent decades, presenting incomparable challenges for churches seeking to involve children in social responsibility initiatives.

Youth Church Participation. Youth church participation is significantly declining in the Kaberamaido Archdeaconry, creating considerable barriers to implementing community engagement programs. The younger generations display reduced interest in traditional religious institutional structures, making attracting and retaining children in social responsibility activities increasingly difficult.

Cultural Changes. The culture shift also has significant implications for the church's nurturing of children's spiritual responsibilities in the Kaberamaido Archdeaconry. There is increasing diversity within society, presenting churches and religious communities with the challenge of effectively reaching children from various cultural backgrounds. This may require that children's ministries recognize and respect these cultural differences by developing programs that are inclusive and welcoming to all participants.

The universal influence of digital technologies has compellingly altered children's engagement patterns in the Kaberamaido Archdeaconry. This is evident, as smartphone usage and social media platforms compete directly with traditional community service opportunities, crushing children's attention and reducing their willingness to participate in church-sponsored social initiatives.

Reduced Parental Influence. Parents are influential in nurturing children; however, in the Kaberamaido Archdeaconry, guardians are increasingly less concerned with Christian and Biblical teachings. Additionally, the quality of ministry itself has been identified as a contributing factor to the decline in youth participation. Many activities tailored for young people are gradually being overshadowed by alternatives that do not align with the values and interests of the youth. As a result, there has been a noticeable decrease in young people's engagement in ministerial activities.

Contemporary Social Environments. This further presents complicated challenges for churches attempting to design inclusive community engagement programs in the Kaberamaido Archdeaconry. The churches must direct increasingly diverse demographic settings, requiring culturally competent approaches to connect children from varied cultural and socio-economic backgrounds meaningfully.

Churches Priorities. Many churches in the Kaberamaido Archdeaconry prioritize securing funding for large commercial ventures or building extravagant church structures, often neglecting the critical task of nurturing children. This is witnessed with some churches being more focused on attracting large adult congregations rather than dedicating significant effort to the spiritual and moral development of young individuals. In light of this, churches need to shift their focus toward advocating for the spiritual support and overall well-being of children.

Financial and Personnel Limitations. Many churches in the Kaberamaido Archdeaconry face significant financial and personnel limitations when developing inclusive community engagement strategies. The limited resources often restrict the opportunity and effectiveness of social responsibility programs targeting children.

4.1.2. Conclusion

The challenges facing churches in Kaberamaido Archdeaconry in promoting community engagement among children are complicated and complex. Success requires adaptable, innovative approaches that respond to developing social and changing aspects while maintaining fundamental ethical and community-oriented values.

5. CHAPTER FIVE

5.1. Theological reflection on the church nurture of children

This chapter will explore various stories that feature children and their distinct position within God's Kingdom, aiming to establish a foundation for discussing spiritual nurturing, particularly focusing on examining the spiritual potential of children and the inherently personal aspect of young people, along with the interpersonal obligations that Scripture places on adults

While Scripture does not provide specific parenting guidelines or recommended consequences for typical childhood misbehaviour, it presents a deep understanding of children as integral members of God's covenant community and stresses their inclusion and the importance of their spiritual growth. Children play important roles in Biblical stories, are central to Jesus' ministry, and are often essential to God's intentions, especially when the adults surrounding them have failed to recognize God's work in them. In *"Life in the Spirit,"* Jeffrey Greenman and George Kalantzis describe spiritual nurturing as *"our ongoing response to the reality of God's grace shaping us into the likeness of Jesus Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit, in the community of faith, for the sake of the world."* Greenman (2010). Biblical teachings affirm that children are gifts from God (Psalm 127:3) and should be nurtured within the context of their faith community. This nurturing involves teaching them about God's love, instilling moral values, and providing opportunities for active participation in church life.

Valuing Children. According to Fernando (2016), biblical teachings highly value children, possessing unique dignity within God's creation. They are complete individuals with a significant relationship with God, essential to His plan for the world. Genesis 1:27 states that God created humanity *"male and female"* in His image. Children continue this divine image, as seen in Genesis 5:1-3, where Adam, fathered a son, Seth, in his likeness. This lineage shows the importance of children in God's design. The Bible firmly emphasizes every child's inherent value and significance, even before they enter the world. Psalm 139:13 powerfully states that children are intentionally crafted by God in the womb and are known to Him from

the very beginning. Furthermore, the gospel of Luke 1:13-17 records the angel Gabriel's prophecy concerning the unborn John, who will prepare the way for Jesus by turning parents' hearts to their children and guiding the disobedient toward wisdom. This shows that children are not mere products of chance or biology but purposefully created and acknowledged by God. When we recognize children as bearers of God's image and understand their inherent value, we lay a strong foundation for their care, protection, well-being, and empowerment. This understanding empowers us to advocate for their rights and nurture their potential with unwavering conviction.

Protecting Children from Harm. Child's, at. Al. (2020) notes that the Bible provides the urgent need to protect children from harm and exploitation. Children are gifts from God, and He condemns the torture and killing of the innocent. Passages like Job 24:9, Nehemiah 5:5, and Joel 3:3 denounce the selling and trading of children as commodities. In Jeremiah 19:4-5, God calls the shedding of innocent blood a grave sin, and other verses, including Jeremiah 32:35 and Ezekiel 16:20, 20:31, and 23:37-39, express His anger toward those who harm children. The horror of deliberately killing children is evident in Psalm 94:6-7, which says, *"They kill the widows and sojourner and murder the fatherless and they say, 'The Lord does not see; the God of Jacob does not perceive.'"* The Bible also highlights the protection of vulnerable children, especially orphans. For instance, Isaiah 10:2-3 warns against mistreating the fatherless. In Old Testament Israel, laws were established to safeguard widows and orphans, as seen in Exodus 22:22-24, which states, *"You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child"* and that exploiting them will draw God's punishment. It is clear that children, especially the vulnerable, must be protected from harm and mistreatment. These teachings remind us to actively ensure the safety and rights of children.

Education and Nurture. Wright (2019) highlights that the Bible acknowledges that children are in a state of transition, with their development influenced by various factors, including parents, family, and the community. During this vulnerable period, children require nurture, education, and guidance. Parents hold the primary responsibility for training their children in the right way, appropriately disciplining them, and teaching them about God's faithfulness, as illustrated in Proverbs 22:6 which states that, *"train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it."* Adults are tasked with ensuring that children receive a proper education and preparation for life. Luke 2:52 emphasizes that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, gaining favour with both God and man. In addition to education, parents must create a nurturing environment for their children, as highlighted in Ephesians 6:4:

“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in discipline and instruction of the Lord.” Children are also active participants in their development. Throughout this process, they encounter both good and evil, the latter of which can be harmful. Therefore, parents, families, and the church must provide protection and nurturing to help children grow into well-adjusted, responsible adults capable of facing life's challenges.

Empowering Children to Participate and Enrich Community Life. McGowan (2018) explains that children play a vital role in God's connection with people, illustrating to adults what God desires. In Matthew 18:2-4, Jesus points to a child to teach his disciples about the essence of the kingdom of heaven. By placing a child at the centre of a serious discussion, Jesus challenges the notion that kids should be marginalized in public life. He highlights the significance of childlike qualities, such as humility, trust, and openness, as essential for entering the kingdom. Additionally, children actively engage in community life. In Matthew 19:14, Jesus rebukes his disciples for attempting to dismiss children, insisting that "the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." We also witness children participating in Jesus' mission when they cry out *"Hosanna to the Son of David"* in the temple courts in Matthew 21:15. Furthermore, children are depicted as creative problem-solvers in John 6:1-14, where a young boy offers five loaves and two fish to help feed a large crowd, demonstrating that even small contributions can have a significant impact. Through these actions and teachings, Jesus underscores the necessity of empowering children to be involved in and enhance community life. Encouraging children to participate enriches our communities and fosters their growth.

Children of believers are important members of the Christian community. Pawel Bartosik (2023). *Children as a Part of the Church* emphasises that children are not just an addition; they are a key part of the church family. The Bible clearly shows that children should be involved in worship and community life (Deuteronomy 31:12, 14:25, Joshua 8:35, 2 Chronicles 20:13, Ezekiel 10:1, Nehemiah 12:43, Joel 2:15-16). The Bible says, *“Gather the people, including men, women, and little ones, as well as the sojourners in your towns, so they may hear and learn to revere the Lord your God, and be diligent in following all the words of this law”* (Deuteronomy 31:12). Joshua made sure that every command from Moses was read to all of Israel, including women, children, and others from different nations (Joshua 8:35). The Apostle Paul speaks directly to children in his letter to the Colossians, showing they belong in the community (Colossians 3:20). He repeats this message in his letter to the Ephesians, highlighting their importance (Ephesians 6:1-3). Gathering for Sunday worship is the central act of our community, and it must include everyone (Acts 2:42, Hebrews 10:24-

25). Therefore, children should actively take part in weekly worship. This participation is essential for their spiritual growth. Engaging in prayer, listening to God's Word, singing, and participating in communion helps build their faith and character. Parents who focus on their child's education, language skills, and growth show their love and commitment to raising faithful individuals. Every effort to nurture children helps strengthen their foundation and shape their future in faith.

In summary, nurturing children is an essential aspect of Christian life that requires ongoing commitment from individuals and communities alike. Through this collective effort, we honor God's gift of children while preparing them for lives rooted in faithfulness.

6. CHAPTER SIX

6.1. Summary, conclusion, recommendations, and areas for further research

6.1.1. Summary

This research explores the various ways religious institutions, particularly churches, support children and families, emphasizing their role in spiritual growth, community engagement, and practical assistance. Churches provide a wide range of support structures, including educational programs, mentorship initiatives, and community services, which contribute significantly to child development and family stability. Participation in worship, the administration of sacraments, and the involvement of godparents and parents in the faith community are key aspects of a child's spiritual growth. Additionally, churches offer educational opportunities such as Sunday School, preschool programs, after-school care, and youth groups, all supporting religious and academic development. Intergenerational ministry and specialized programs like family mentoring, adoption support, and disability services further strengthen family systems and offer direct assistance to those in need. Moreover, churches play a pivotal role in providing health services, crisis intervention, and food assistance to families.

However, churches in the Kaberamaido Archdeaconry face several challenges in promoting social responsibility and community engagement among children. Declining youth participation, cultural shifts, and the influence of digital technologies hinder efforts to involve children in church-based social responsibility initiatives. Additionally, there is a decrease in parental involvement, as many guardians show reduced concern for their children's spiritual development. Churches often prioritize large-scale ventures over children's ministries, and financial and personnel limitations further restrict the effectiveness of community engagement programs. Addressing these issues requires innovative approaches and a shift in priorities to better support children and families.

6.1.2. Conclusions

The role of the church in nurturing children goes beyond mere spiritual guidance; it includes educational, social, and emotional support. Churches provide essential resources that fill gaps in public services, ensuring children's development is nurtured holistically. However, churches in the Kaberamaido Archdeaconry face significant challenges in maintaining youth engagement and adapting to contemporary social environments. There is a pressing need for churches to reorient their priorities, focusing more on the spiritual and developmental needs of children rather than on material expansion. Effective programs should incorporate cultural sensitivity, technological awareness, and better support for families.

6.1.3. Recommendations

Re-evaluation of Priorities: Churches in the Kaberamaido Archdeaconry must reassess their children's ministry priorities. This involves identifying current challenges while seeking innovative solutions that resonate with today's families. For instance, prioritize funding for children's ministries to ensure resources are allocated to programs that nurture children's spiritual, emotional, and academic growth. Efforts should focus on creating engaging programs that blend biblical teachings with relevant content appealing to children. Throughout this process, it is crucial to remain grounded in core beliefs and values, ensuring the ministry promotes spiritual growth while addressing the needs of modern families. This approach will enhance both children's ministry and the overall church community.

Collaboration with Families: Establishing strong partnerships with families is crucial for the spiritual development of children. Churches in the Kaberamaido Archdeaconry should actively engage in building relationships with parents by offering a variety of resources and support systems tailored to their specific needs. This includes organizing workshops and educational seminars that equip parents with tools and strategies for fostering spiritual growth at home. Additionally, churches can create community events that encourage family participation, allowing parents to connect and share experiences. By providing these resources, churches empower families, enabling them to take an active role in their children's spiritual education, rather than placing the entire responsibility on them. This collaborative approach enhances the overall spiritual growth of children and strengthens the church community as a whole.

Embracing Technology Wisely: In today's digital age, churches in the Kaberamaido Archdeaconry face the challenge of integrating technology into their ministry in a way that improves, but reduces their personal connections. Church leaders need to develop thoughtful

strategies that utilize technology effectively while prioritizing the cultivation of relationships within the community, especially among children. This could involve creating engaging online content that supplements in-person activities, using video conferencing tools for youth group meetings, or developing interactive apps that encourage participation and spiritual growth. By ensuring that technology serves as a bridge rather than a barrier, churches can nurture faith and foster a sense of belonging in the lives of the younger generation. Balancing these aspects will lead to a more meaningful and impactful faith experience.

Creating Inclusive Environments: Developing inclusive environments where individuals from all generations feel valued and respected is essential in bridging gaps between age groups. By encouraging a culture of understanding and appreciation, churches in the Kaberamaido Archdeaconry can promote interactions between young children and their older counterparts. This can be achieved through various strategies, such as implementing mentorship programs that allow for the sharing of knowledge and experiences, as well as organizing intergenerational activities that encourage collaboration and dialogue. Additionally, ensuring that meeting spaces, events, and programs are accessible and welcoming for everyone can significantly contribute to a sense of belonging. Ultimately, cultivating such environments not only enriches the experiences of young individuals but also promotes community cohesion and mutual respect among all ages. Addressing these challenges requires intentionality from church leadership and active involvement from congregants at all levels. By recognizing these issues as opportunities for growth rather than impossible obstacles, churches can cultivate an environment conducive to nurturing future generations in faith.

Volunteer Training: Volunteers, particularly those involved in mentorship and teaching in the Kaberamaido Archdeaconry, should be adequately trained to provide spiritual, academic, and emotional support to children, ensuring they are equipped to guide them effectively.

6.1.4. Areas For Further Research

Impact of Digital Platforms: Research should focus on how digital platforms and social media affect children's participation in church activities and their spiritual growth.

Cultural Adaptation of Church Programs: Further studies should explore how churches can adapt their programs to cater to increasingly diverse cultural backgrounds and what impact this has on children's engagement.

By using these recommendations and exploring these areas for further research, churches can better meet the evolving needs of children and families, ensuring they remain vibrant centers for spiritual and community support.

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