

Participation in ICARE Fellowship and Congregational Faith Quality at the International Full Gospel Fellowship Ungaran: A Correlational Study

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Description

This article is a quantitative correlational study that examines the relationship between the level of congregational participation in the ICARE fellowship and the quality of congregational faith at the International Full Gospel Fellowship Ungaran.

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Abstract

This study examines the association between participation in the ICARE Fellowship and congregational faith quality at the International Full Gospel Fellowship (IFGF) Ungaran. Employing a quantitative correlational design, data were collected from 40 active participants using validated Likert-scale questionnaires measuring levels of ICARE participation and indicators of faith quality. Statistical analysis using Pearson correlation and simple linear regression reveals a very strong and statistically significant positive association between the two variables ($r = 0.841$, $p < .001$). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.708$) indicates that participation in ICARE Fellowship accounts for a substantial proportion of variance in congregational faith quality within this sample. While causal inference is not claimed, the findings suggest that structured, relational fellowship may function as a significant contextual correlate of faith formation. The study contributes to empirical practical theology by providing quantitative support for community-based discipleship models..

Keywords: ICARE Fellowship; Faith Quality; Congregational Participation; Relational Discipleship; Practical Theology.

Abstrak

Studi ini menganalisis hubungan antara partisipasi dalam Persekutuan ICARE dan kualitas iman jemaat di International Full Gospel Fellowship (IFGF) Ungaran. Menggunakan desain korelasi kuantitatif, data dikumpulkan dari 40 peserta aktif menggunakan kuesioner skala Likert yang valid untuk mengukur tingkat partisipasi ICARE dan indikator kualitas iman. Analisis statistik menggunakan korelasi Pearson dan regresi linier sederhana menunjukkan hubungan positif yang sangat kuat dan signifikan secara statistik antara kedua variabel ($r = 0.841$, $p < .001$). Koefisien determinasi ($R^2 = 0.708$) menunjukkan bahwa partisipasi dalam ICARE Fellowship menjelaskan proporsi yang signifikan dari variasi kualitas iman jemaat dalam sampel ini. Meskipun tidak diklaim adanya hubungan kausal, temuan ini menyarankan bahwa persekutuan yang terstruktur dan relasional dapat berfungsi sebagai korelasi kontekstual yang signifikan dalam pembentukan iman. Studi ini berkontribusi pada teologi praktis empiris dengan memberikan dukungan kuantitatif untuk model pembinaan komunitas berbasis komunitas.

Kata kunci: ICARE Fellowship; Kualitas Iman; Partisipasi Jemaat; Pembinaan Relasional; Teologi Praktis.

INTRODUCTION

Church life in today's global context faces major challenges related to declining involvement and active participation of congregations in church activities. Social transformation, digital developments, and changes in modern lifestyles have shifted the patterns of spiritual fellowship that have long been at the core of religious life. Churches around the world are experiencing a decline in member commitment to fellowship and ministry, which has a direct impact on the quality of congregational faith.

In the national context, particularly in Indonesia, the dynamics of congregational life face similar challenges, where the tide of modernization and individualism is shifting the orientation of faith from communal to personal. Local churches are now trying to develop more contextual and relational models of spiritual development in order to maintain the quality of their congregations' faith (Runtuwene, 2025). In his research, Sihombing argues that without worship, prayer, and participation in cell communities, the growth of congregational faith can be hampered (Indrayani Sihombing, 2022). Rahayu, Hadi, and Arifianto argue that the process of faith growth requires deep understanding, which can be built through interaction within the church community (Rahayu et al., 2023). Previous research shows that "faith development through cell groups can increase congregational involvement and support their faith growth" (Parhusip, 2019). Baskoro and Arifianto highlight that cell communities can enhance the value of fellowship and close-knit families, which in turn supports church growth (Baskoro & Arifianto, 2021). Without involvement in these groups, congregants tend to lose opportunities for spiritual growth and deepening their understanding of faith. Thus, community growth becomes a vital element in maintaining and improving the quality of congregants' faith.

Theoretically, this study is based on the concepts of discipleship and *koinonia*, which emphasize the importance of community involvement in shaping and maintaining the quality of faith. Discipleship emphasizes a process of spiritual growth that involves interpersonal relationships, teaching, and shared experiences within the faith community (Nel & Schoeman, 2019). Meanwhile, *koinonia* emphasizes the aspect of fellowship as a manifestation of living faith through togetherness and service to one another (Azzara, 2019). In a methodological context, this study uses a correlational quantitative approach to examine the relationship between the two variables, namely participation in the ICARE Fellowship as the independent variable and the quality of congregational faith as the dependent variable, with the aim of empirically measuring the strength and direction of the relationship between the two (Smothers et al., 2023). In the context of local churches such as the International Full Gospel Fellowship (IFGF) Ungaran, ICARE has become a strategic tool for reviving the spirit of fellowship and the congregation's responsibility of faith amid the challenges of modernity (Fredrik Warwer et al., 2023).

The academic and practical urgency of this issue lies in the need to develop a model of faith development that can strengthen social-spiritual cohesion within Christian communities. Several studies show that collaborative and relational spiritual fellowship activities can strengthen faith commitment and participation in church ministry (Filomeno, 2020). However,

there is still a gap in understanding the extent to which involvement in activities such as fellowship contributes to the quality of a person's faith. In the Indonesian context, churches oriented towards community development models such as ICARE Fellowship seek to address these challenges through a systematic, small group-based approach to faith development that emphasizes interpersonal relationships and social support (Betakore et al., 2023). The urgency of this research lies in the need for empirical evidence linking the level of participation in fellowship with the quality of the congregation's faith, not merely subjective spirituality.

Previous studies have highlighted various forms of church activities that contribute to the growth of congregational faith. Betakore, Boiliu, Zakaria, and Pribadi found that effective praise and worship services can significantly increase congregational faith (Betakore et al., 2023). Meanwhile, Widjaja and Simanungkalit showed that spiritual education management through cell groups strengthened the quality of faith among congregation members in the GBI Graha Pena environment (Widjaja & Simanungkalit, 2020). Research by Pakpahan, Aritonang, and Hendratmo observed that although the digitization of worship during the COVID-19 pandemic increased access, the quality of fellowship remained stronger in face-to-face interactions (Pakpahan et al., 2024). In addition, Warwer, Aninam, and Fatlolona highlight the important role of the congregation council in strengthening Christian family fellowship as a concrete form of improving the quality of faith (Fredrik Warwer et al., 2023). In the context of creative ministry, Rupiyo emphasizes the importance of collaboration and participation in music ministry as a means of deepening the spirituality of the congregation (Rupiyo, 2025). Runtuwene adds that contextual faith approaches such as eco-theology can increase congregational involvement in spiritually-based ministry that is applicable (Runtuwene, 2025).

Previous research has shown a shift from a normative approach to an empirical one in studies of congregational life. Contemporary studies such as those conducted by Filomeno show that the involvement of faith communities in cross-institutional collaborative activities contributes to the formation of strong social spirituality (Filomeno, 2020). On the other hand, research by Smothers et al., highlights the importance of spiritual resilience in facing the pressures of ministry during the pandemic, which reflects the value of participation as a form of strengthening communal faith (Smothers et al., 2023). The methodological approach widely used is qualitative-descriptive with interviews, observations, and surveys to assess the dynamics of congregational faith, pointing towards stronger correlational research as conducted in this study.

Existing studies on small-group ministry, cell communities, and discipleship within practical theology have largely affirmed the importance of communal fellowship for faith development. However, much of this literature remains either normative-theological or descriptive-pastoral, with limited empirical operationalization of how participation itself functions as a formative ecclesial practice. Empirical investigations that do exist often treat small-group involvement as a generic or auxiliary variable, without differentiating between informal fellowship, instructional Bible study, and intentionally structured relational discipleship models. As a result, the theoretical mechanisms through which relational

participation contributes to faith quality remain insufficiently specified and underexamined, particularly within non-Western ecclesial contexts.

Moreover, there is a notable gap between theological affirmations of *koinonia* and discipleship as communal practices and their translation into measurable constructs suitable for empirical analysis. While contemporary practical theology increasingly calls for the integration of lived ecclesial practices with empirical inquiry, few studies have offered conceptually grounded models that can be both theologically articulated and empirically examined. In response to this gap, the present study introduces the ICARE Fellowship as an operationalized relational discipleship model that conceptualizes participation not merely as program attendance but as a multidimensional formative practice. By empirically examining the association between ICARE participation and congregational faith quality, this study contributes to practical theology by bridging ecclesiological theory, discipleship praxis, and quantitative analysis within a concrete congregational setting.

The theoretical distinctiveness of ICARE lies in its integrative architecture. By embedding the principles of *Invest, Care, Acknowledge, Relate, and Encourage*—together with the structured “4-I” agenda of *Intimate, Inspiration, Influence, and Information*—ICARE moves beyond loosely organized fellowship toward a structured ecosystem of mutual formation (Global, 2024, pp. 8–10). This framework aligns with contemporary practical-theological perspectives that conceptualize spiritual formation as a socially embedded and practice-oriented process, while offering a more operationalized model than many existing relational discipleship approaches. Therefore, it situates ICARE not simply as a contextual ministry strategy but as a theoretically informed relational discipleship model that expands existing understandings of how communal practices function as loci of faith formation within contemporary church life.

Thus, this study explicitly aims to analyze the relationship between participation in the ICARE Fellowship and the quality of faith of the congregation at IFGF Ungaran. The research questions are: (1) What is the level of congregation participation in the ICARE Fellowship program at IFGF Ungaran? (2) What is the level of faith quality among the congregation in the same environment? (3) To what extent is there a significant relationship between participation in ICARE Fellowship and the quality of faith among the congregation? This study contributes theoretically to the development of community-based faith formation by reframing small-group participation as a measurable expression of lived ecclesiology rather than as a programmatic ministry activity. Methodologically, it employs a correlational design that deliberately avoids causal claims while rigorously examining the strength and direction of associations within a defined congregational context. Empirically, the study provides quantitative evidence that structured relational discipleship participation accounts for a substantial proportion of variance in congregational faith quality within the examined sample, thereby offering a data-informed foundation for further comparative and longitudinal research and practical insights for contemporary local church ministry strategies.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the association between participation in the ICARE Fellowship and congregational faith quality at the International Full Gospel Fellowship (IFGF) Ungaran. A correlational approach was selected to identify the strength and direction of the relationship between variables without implying causal determination. Accordingly, the study does not seek to establish causal effects but to assess the extent to which variation in congregational faith quality is statistically associated with variation in ICARE Fellowship participation within the examined sample (Sugiyono, 2015, p. 14).

Research Variables and Operational Definitions

Two primary variables were examined. The independent variable was *participation in ICARE Fellowship*, defined as the degree of congregational engagement in structured small-group fellowship activities. Operationally, this variable was measured through five indicators derived from the IFGF LEAD Module (2024): (1) consistency of attendance, (2) engagement with the 4-I agenda (Intimate, Inspiration, Influence, and Information), (3) active contribution during group discussions, (4) informal relational communication among group members, and (5) commitment to discipleship and leadership development.

The dependent variable was *congregational faith quality*, defined as the extent to which individuals demonstrate spiritual maturity as reflected in their beliefs, practices, and daily faith embodiment. This construct was operationalized using five dimensions: perseverance in faith during challenges, growth in holiness, spiritual intimacy with God, engagement in service and ministry, and application of faith principles in daily life. These dimensions reflect commonly accepted indicators of faith quality within practical theological and congregational studies literature.

Population and Sampling

The target population consisted of 50 members of IFGF Ungaran who actively participated in ICARE Fellowship. Given that the population size was fewer than 100 individuals, a total sampling (census) technique was employed, involving all members who met the inclusion criteria. Respondents were required to have participated consistently in ICARE Fellowship for a minimum of six months to ensure adequate exposure to the fellowship structure. A total of 40 valid responses were obtained and included in the final analysis.

Instrumentation, Validity, and Reliability

Data were collected using structured Likert-scale questionnaires with five response options ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Instrument development involved a two-stage validation process. Construct validity was assessed through expert judgment by three scholars with expertise in theology and research methodology, resulting in high conceptual alignment across items. Empirical validity was tested using Pearson Product–Moment correlation, with all items exceeding the critical r-value ($r > 0.361$, $p < .05$). Reliability

analysis using Cronbach's Alpha yielded coefficients of 0.910 for the ICARE Participation scale and 0.940 for the Faith Quality scale, indicating excellent internal consistency (Priyatno, 2013, p. 33).

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 23.0. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondent characteristics and variable distributions. Prior to inferential analysis, assumptions of normality and linearity were examined using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test and ANOVA-based linearity testing. The primary statistical analysis employed Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) to assess the strength and direction of the association between ICARE Fellowship participation and congregational faith quality (Noor, 2012, p. 163).. Additionally, simple linear regression analysis was used to estimate the proportion of variance in faith quality that is statistically associated with ICARE participation within the sample. The coefficient of determination (R^2) is therefore interpreted as the percentage of variance explained *within this sample*, rather than as evidence of causal influence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 40 active members of the International Full Gospel Fellowship (IFGF) Ungaran participated in this study. Respondents represented both genders, various age ranges, and diverse ministry backgrounds, reflecting the overall demographic composition of the congregation.

Level of Congregational Participation in the ICARE Fellowship Program

The findings indicate that congregational participation in the ICARE Fellowship program at IFGF Ungaran is positioned at a moderate level, with a mean score of $M = 68.93$ ($SD = 6.41$). Distribution analysis shows that the largest proportion of respondents (30%) falls within the moderate participation category, followed by high (25%) and very high participation levels (20%). This pattern suggests that while a substantial segment of the congregation is actively engaged in ICARE activities, participation intensity varies across members.

Item-level analysis further demonstrates that relational and spiritual engagement dimensions—such as attentiveness to Scripture sharing, mutual prayer, and interpersonal connectedness—received consistently high agreement. Conversely, consistency of attendance under demanding personal conditions revealed relatively lower agreement, indicating that external factors (e.g., work schedules and personal responsibilities) may function as moderating constraints on sustained participation.

From a pastoral-theological perspective, this finding aligns with small-group ministry literature, which argues that participation levels are often shaped not only by spiritual motivation but also by structural and situational dynamics within congregational life. Thus, ICARE Fellowship functions effectively as a participatory spiritual formation space, though its

formative potential may be enhanced through contextual adjustments that address congregational rhythms and availability.

Level of Faith Quality among the Congregation

The analysis of faith quality among ICARE participants reveals a high to very high level of faith maturity, with a mean score of $M = 71.05$ ($SD = 6.26$). Frequency distribution shows that 52.5% of respondents fall within the “good” and “very good” categories, indicating a robust internalization of Christian faith expressions among participants.

Indicators related to trust in God, dependence on divine guidance, perseverance in ministry, and the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit scored particularly high. However, spiritual discipline practices such as regular Bible reading and prayer exhibited comparatively lower yet still positive agreement levels, suggesting an area for targeted spiritual formation emphasis.

These results affirm theological frameworks that conceptualize faith quality as encompassing both orthodox belief and orthopraxic embodiment, manifested in ethical conduct, ministry involvement, and relational spirituality. ICARE Fellowship, therefore, emerges not merely as a social or instructional platform but as an ecclesial space facilitating holistic faith development.

Relationship between ICARE Participation and Faith Quality

Correlation and regression analyses demonstrate a strong and statistically significant relationship between participation in ICARE Fellowship and faith quality among the congregation.

Correlations			
		TOTAL_X	TOTAL_Y
TOTAL_X	Pearson Correlation	1	.841**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	1604.775	1317.150
	Covariance	41.148	33.773
	N	40	40
TOTAL_Y	Pearson Correlation	.841**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	1317.150	1527.900
	Covariance	33.773	39.177
	N	40	40

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 1. SPSS Output Correlation Test Table

Based on the statistical analysis, the significance value was found to be $p < 0.001$, which is below the established threshold of 0.05. This result indicates that variable X has a statistically significant effect on variable Y. Furthermore, Pearson’s correlation analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.841$, signifying a strong positive relationship between the two variables (Sugiyono, 2003, p. 231).

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	14.478	5.925		2.444	.019
	TOTAL_X	.821	.086	.841	9.589	.000

Table 2. Table Coefficients

Pearson correlation analysis yielded $r = 0.841$ ($p < .001$), indicating a very strong positive association. Furthermore, the coefficient of determination (R^2) obtained from the analysis was 0.708, indicating that approximately 70.8% of the variance in congregational faith quality can be explained by participation in the ICARE Fellowship at the International Full Gospel Fellowship (IFGF) Ungaran. The remaining 29.2% of the variance is attributable to other factors not examined within the scope of this study.

The direction of the correlation is positive, indicating that higher levels of congregational participation in the ICARE Fellowship are associated with corresponding increases in faith quality. Conversely, lower levels of participation are associated with declines in faith quality. The linear regression analysis produced the equation $Y = a + bX$ ($Y = 14.478 + 0.821X$), suggesting that for every one-unit increase in ICARE participation, faith quality is expected to increase by 0.821 units from its current level.

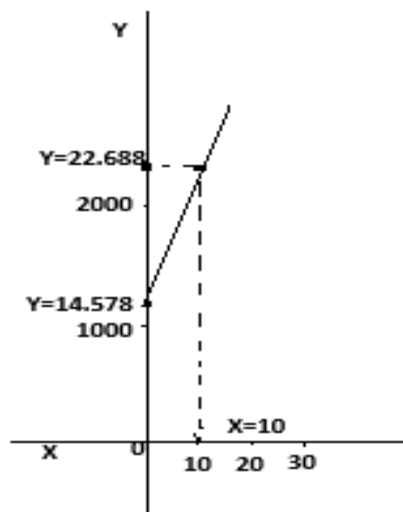


Figure 1. Linear Equation of a Line

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate a very strong positive association between participation in the ICARE Fellowship and congregational faith quality within the IFGF Ungaran context. Rather than suggesting a deterministic causal relationship, this association highlights the formative potential of structured, relational small-group fellowship as an ecclesial space in which faith practices, theological reflection, and communal accountability intersect. The data support the view that faith formation is most effectively nurtured within relational and participatory contexts, aligning with practical-theological frameworks that emphasize *koinonia* as a lived and communal dimension of ecclesial life rather than a purely doctrinal or individual experience.

When examined in relation to international empirical research on small-group discipleship and congregational spirituality, the magnitude of the observed relationship ($R^2 = 0.708$) appears comparatively high. Studies in congregational studies and practical theology often report more moderate explanatory power for participation-based variables, typically ranging between 30% and 50% of variance in spiritual maturity or faith-related outcomes. The comparatively elevated R^2 in this study may reflect the integrative and intentionally structured nature of the ICARE Fellowship, which combines relational intimacy, spiritual instruction, mutual encouragement, and consistent participation within a cohesive congregational setting. This suggests that under certain contextual conditions, relational discipleship structures may function as a central locus of faith formation rather than as an auxiliary ministry program. Nevertheless, such comparative interpretations must be approached cautiously, given the contextual specificity of the present study.

Importantly, the strength of the observed association invites critical reflection on alternative explanations. Given the correlational design, it is plausible that congregants with higher levels of intrinsic religiosity or pre-existing faith maturity are more likely to participate actively in ICARE Fellowship, thereby inflating the strength of the relationship. In addition, reliance on self-reported measures within a faith-based communal environment may introduce social desirability bias, particularly in items related to spiritual discipline, commitment, and obedience. These factors underscore the need to interpret the results as contextually embedded associations rather than as universal or causally definitive claims about discipleship efficacy.

From a theological perspective, the findings nevertheless resonate with ecclesiological models that conceptualize the church as a formative community in which faith is shaped through shared practices, mutual responsibility, and relational proximity. The ICARE model operationalizes this ecclesiology by embedding spiritual formation within structured interpersonal engagement, thereby translating theological commitments regarding *koinonia* and discipleship into measurable communal practices. As such, the results contribute to the growing body of empirical practical theology that seeks to bridge theological reflection with observable congregational dynamics, while simultaneously affirming the necessity of methodological humility in interpreting faith-related outcomes.

Practically, the findings suggest that churches seeking to cultivate mature and resilient faith communities may benefit from prioritizing structured, relational small-group ministries as intentional spaces of formation. However, the effectiveness of such fellowships should not be assumed to be automatic or transferable without contextual adaptation. Factors such as congregational culture, leadership support, group facilitation quality, and member readiness may significantly shape the formative impact of small-group participation. Consequently, ICARE Fellowship should be understood not as a universally prescriptive model, but as a contextually effective example of relational discipleship whose formative potential emerges through sustained participation within a supportive ecclesial ecosystem.

The present study provides strong empirical evidence that structured and relational participation in small-group fellowship exerts a significant formative influence on congregational faith quality. The very strong positive correlation ($r = 0.841$, $p < .001$) demonstrates that engagement in ICARE Fellowship is not merely associative but substantively connected to measurable spiritual maturity among participants. This finding reinforces the premise that faith development is optimally nurtured within relational and communal ecclesial spaces rather than through individualistic spiritual practices alone.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to practical theology and congregational studies by offering quantitative validation of community-based discipleship as a formative theological practice. The results affirm that spiritual formation is deeply embedded in relational ecclesiology, supporting frameworks that view the church as a participatory faith-shaping community rather than a solely instructional institution. The strong statistical relationship observed in this study reinforces theological arguments that faith maturity emerges through lived, communal praxis rather than isolated doctrinal transmission (Azzara, 2019; Richard R. Osmer, 2008, pp. 4–12).

Practically, the findings carry significant implications for pastoral leadership and church ministry design. Churches implementing the ICARE Fellowship or similar small-group models should prioritize consistent participation, intentional mentoring, and relational depth as core ministry metrics. The demonstrated impact of fellowship participation on faith quality suggests that small groups can function as strategic instruments for pastoral care, leadership formation, and spiritual resilience, particularly within urban and postmodern congregational contexts characterized by fragmentation and individualism (Stark & Finke, 2000, pp. 213–227).

Moreover, the results imply that structured fellowships such as ICARE can serve as effective platforms for leadership multiplication and congregational sustainability. By embedding spiritual formation within relational networks, churches may foster resilient faith communities capable of enduring sociocultural pressures and ecclesial transitions. Consequently, the ICARE Fellowship should be understood not as a supplementary program but as a theologically grounded and empirically validated locus of discipleship within contemporary Christian ministry.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is subject to several limitations that should inform the interpretation of its findings and guide future research. First, the relatively small sample size and single-congregation setting limit the generalizability of the results beyond the IFGF Ungaran context. Second, the correlational and cross-sectional design does not permit causal inference or assessment of longitudinal faith development trajectories. Third, reliance on self-reported questionnaires may be affected by social desirability and response bias, particularly in faith-related constructs. Future research would benefit from multi-site comparative designs, larger and more diverse samples, and longitudinal or mixed-method approaches that integrate qualitative insights with quantitative measurement. Such designs could more effectively disentangle causal pathways, assess the sustainability of small-group discipleship outcomes over time, and evaluate the transferability of the ICARE model across differing ecclesial, cultural, and denominational contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates a very strong and statistically significant association between participation in the ICARE Fellowship and congregational faith quality within the IFGF Ungaran context. The findings indicate that higher levels of engagement in structured, relational small-group fellowship are associated with higher levels of reported faith maturity, with participation accounting for a substantial proportion of variance in faith quality within the examined sample. These results support the view that faith formation is closely intertwined with communal and relational ecclesial practices, while stopping short of asserting causal determination.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to empirical practical theology by reinforcing ecclesiological frameworks that understand discipleship and *koinonia* as lived, participatory practices embedded within community life. The ICARE Fellowship emerges as a contextually effective model of relational discipleship that integrates spiritual reflection, mutual accountability, and interpersonal engagement into measurable congregational outcomes. However, the strength of the observed association should be interpreted in light of methodological constraints, including the correlational design and contextual specificity of the study.

Practically, the findings suggest that churches seeking to cultivate mature and resilient faith communities may benefit from prioritizing intentional small-group structures as spaces of ongoing spiritual formation. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of such models cannot be assumed to be universally transferable and should be evaluated within diverse ecclesial and cultural contexts. Future research employing longitudinal, comparative, and mixed-method designs is necessary to further examine causal pathways, assess sustainability over time, and explore the applicability of relational discipleship models across broader congregational settings.

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