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Discipleship as a Leadership-Formation Problem: An Empirical Case Study of the Africa Inland Church in Nairobi, Kenya

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Abstract—Despite sustained growth in attendance, worship participation, and ministry programming across Africa Inland Church (AIC) congregations in the Nairobi area, discipleship-the intentional, relational process of forming believers into mature, reproducing followers of Christ-appears comparatively underdeveloped relative to the Church's stated mission. Framed by Coleman's (1963/2010) discipleship model and transformational leadership theory (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2021), this qualitative case study (Yin, 2018) treats discipleship weakness principally as a leadership-formation problem rather than a doctrinal one. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with four purposively sampled AIC-Nairobi leaders spanning lay-committee, pastoral, and long-tenured senior roles, and analysed using node-based thematic coding (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003) with cross-case triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Findings show unanimous theological clarity about discipleship's meaning but consistent structural weakness: absent or nominal discipleship structures, untrained leaders, scarce contextualised materials, and discipleship confined largely to youth ministry and catechumen preparation. Weak discipleship was linked, with full convergence across participants, to spiritual immaturity, diminished evangelistic confidence, weak leadership development, member dependency on clergy, disunity, and heightened vulnerability to sin. The study concludes that discipleship weakness in AIC-Nairobi congregations reflects a crisis of structure and leadership formation rather than of belief, and proposes leadership-focused, contextually grounded strategies-dedicated discipleship structures, mandatory leader training, milestone-based follow-up pathways, and the governance of already-existing nominal resources-for congregational and denominational renewal. The study contributes an empirically grounded, leadership-first account of discipleship weakness within an under-researched African evangelical denominational context, and a transparent node-based coding method for small, purposively sampled qualitative leadership studies.

***Index Terms*—Africa Inland Church, disciple-making, discipleship, Great Commission, qualitative case study, spiritual formation, transformational leadership.**

1. Introduction

Jesus Christ commissioned His Church with a singular, enduring mandate: "go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:18-20, New International Version). This Great Commission is not one ministry activity among many but the defining purpose of the Church's existence. Yet across much of the contemporary church landscape, sustained numerical growth, elaborate worship services, and expanding programmatic ministry have not reliably produced mature disciples who follow Christ steadfastly and, in turn, disciple others. Willard (2006) described this as a great omission of the Great Commission itself, arguing that many churches make converts and members but rarely disciples in the biblical sense. Putman and Harrington (2013) similarly observed that many congregations have shifted, often unintentionally, from a disciple-making culture to a program-attendance culture, mistaking activity for formation. This study takes that diagnosis as its point of departure and asks, empirically and contextually, whether and why this gap persists within Africa Inland Church (AIC) congregations in Nairobi, what it costs the Church, and what can be done about it.

A terminological clarification is necessary at the outset. This study concerns the Africa Inland Church (AIC), a historically mission-founded evangelical Protestant denomination in Kenya—not the broader scholarly category of "African Instituted" or "African Initiated Churches" (also abbreviated AICs in the literature), which denotes indigenous, prophet-founded movements such as the Kimbanguist, Zionist, and Aladura traditions (Anderson, 2001; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013). The two bodies share an acronym but differ substantially in origin, polity, and theological orientation, and conflating them would misdirect both the literature review and the study's findings. The Africa Inland Church traces its origins to the Africa Inland Mission (AIM), an interdenominational evangelical mission founded by Peter Cameron Scott in 1895, which formally constituted the Africa Inland Church as a distinct ecclesial body in Kenya in 1943 and transferred full governance and property to African leadership on 21 October 1971 (Omulokoli, 1995; Young, 2017). Since that handover, the AIC has grown into one of Kenya's largest Protestant denominations, combining a historically mission-founded evangelical theology with African leadership, worship idiom, and pastoral practice (Omulokoli, 1995; Young, 2017). It is this denomination evangelical in doctrine, historically mission-founded, and currently under full indigenous leadership whose

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Nairobi-area congregations form the object of the present study.

Within this specific ecclesial context, sustained numerical growth, elaborate worship, and expanding programmatic ministry appear, based on practitioner literature and the researcher's own pastoral observation, not to have reliably produced mature, reproducing disciples; this apparent gap is the empirical question the present study was designed to investigate rather than assume. Ogden (2003/2016) argued that much of the Western and Western-influenced church has substituted information transfer—sermons, classes, and curricula for the transformational, life-on-life mentoring that produced disciples in the New Testament. Barna Group (2015) research on discipleship pathways, based on a United States sample and used here only as an illustrative comparator rather than as evidence for the Kenyan context, found that a majority of practising Christians could not articulate a clear, intentional discipleship pathway within their own congregation despite regular attendance.

Empirical literature focused specifically on discipleship practice within the Africa Inland Church in Kenya remains scarce. The closest proximate precedent identified in the review for this study is Ndunjo's (2024) qualitative study of discipleship among evangelical Christians including AIC members alongside Presbyterian, Methodist, and Anglican congregants—in the Tharaka community of Kenya, which used focus group discussions and interviews to document how the persistence of traditional worldviews undermines consistent discipleship practice. While methodologically instructive and geographically Kenyan, Ndunjo's study is not denomination-specific to the AIC and is centred on a different sub-region and cultural context than Nairobi; it therefore functions here as a methodological precedent rather than direct evidence for the Nairobi AIC context, and its narrow applicability underscores the empirical gap the present study addresses. More broadly, discipleship scholarship situated in comparable African evangelical and Pentecostal contexts, for example, Asamoah-Gyadu's (2013) account of Ghanaian Pentecostal congregations suggests a recurring pattern in which vibrant worship and pastoral care coexist with underdeveloped, non-sequential discipleship pathways. Whether this pattern held within Nairobi's AIC congregations specifically was an empirical question this study was designed to answer, not a finding it presupposed.

A. Problem, Purpose, and Objectives

Although attendance, membership, and ministry activity are reported to be growing in AIC congregations in Nairobi, practitioner literature and preliminary pastoral observation suggested without this having yet been empirically confirmed for the specific AIC-Nairobi context that authentic discipleship, understood as the intentional development of believers into mature, reproducing followers of Christ, might be comparatively weak (Willard, 2006; Putman & Harrington, 2013). Left unaddressed, such a pattern would risk producing congregations that are numerically robust but formationally shallow communities that make converts without making disciples, with consequences extending beyond individual spiritual maturity to leadership succession, family discipleship, evangelistic durability, and the Church's credibility as a transformative moral and social presence. The problem this study addresses is therefore twofold: first, to establish empirically whether, to what extent, and through what specific leadership and structural factors discipleship is weak within AIC-Nairobi congregations; and second, to determine what biblically grounded, leadership-focused, and culturally appropriate strategies might strengthen discipleship's place as the Church's central mission.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the nature and extent of, and the factors contributing to, weak discipleship within AIC congregations in Nairobi, and to develop biblically grounded, leadership-focused, and practically viable strategies for strengthening disciple-making ministry within these congregations. Five objectives guided the inquiry: (a) to examine the biblical and theological foundation of Christian discipleship; (b) to assess the extent and nature of, and the leadership and structural factors contributing to, weak discipleship within AIC-Nairobi congregations; (c) to assess the impact of weak discipleship on believers' spiritual development and congregational health; (d) to investigate current discipleship practices, structures, and materials, and the leadership philosophy underlying them; and (e) to develop biblically based, leadership-focused, and contextually relevant means of strengthening disciple-making ministry. Each objective corresponds to a research question reported in the Findings section (RQ1–RQ5).

The study is expected to benefit church leaders and pastors, by providing an evidence-based diagnosis of discipleship gaps and practical, leadership-focused models for intentional disciple-making; discipleship coordinators and small-group leaders, by identifying specific hurdles to spiritual formation and mentoring; Bible colleges and theological institutions, by contributing empirically grounded scholarship on discipleship within an under-researched Kenyan evangelical denominational context; Christian mission and para-church organisations, by strengthening frameworks for leadership development and follow-up ministry; and the academic fields of practical theology and leadership studies, by extending Coleman's discipleship model and transformational leadership theory into a specific African evangelical denominational context in which they remain comparatively untested. The study is bounded to AIC congregations accessible to the researcher within the Nairobi region and to current rather than historical discipleship practice; it does not aim to produce a statistically generalisable account across all AIC congregations nationally, still less across other denominations, but seeks the analytic and theoretical insight characteristic of qualitative case study design, which may transfer with appropriate contextual judgement to comparable settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

2. Literature Review

This section reviews empirical journal literature bearing on discipleship, leadership, and mentoring within African and Kenyan church contexts, organised thematically around the study's objectives. It supplements, rather than repeats, the

foundational and historical sources already discussed above.

A. Discipleship Practice in African and Kenyan Church Contexts

A growing body of journal literature documents discipleship practice within Kenyan and wider East African congregations, though rarely within the Africa Inland Church specifically. Ngala (2021), in a descriptive survey of Redeemed Gospel Church congregations in Kangundo District, Machakos County, found that mentoring relationships, leaders who modelled Christlikeness, formal discipleship curricula, and small-group fellowship each had a measurable positive association with members' spiritual transformation, and recommended that churches strengthen their teaching ministries accordingly. Ruhongeka (2023), writing in the *East African Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, argued from a biblical-theological standpoint that community-based, relational discipleship following the pattern of Jesus' method with the Twelve produces transformed disciples rather than mere converts, and that programmatic approaches divorced from relationship and community fall short of this standard. Nsengiyumva (2024), studying 160 local church leaders in the East Central Rwanda Field of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, found that a lack of structured spiritual training was the primary factor behind leaders' disengagement from disciple-making responsibilities, and that discipleship at the local-leadership level as distinct from denominational programming had received disproportionately little scholarly attention despite its evident link to congregational health. Ndunjo (2024), as discussed above, documented within the Tharaka community of Kenya how unresolved tension between traditional worldviews and evangelical teaching produces nominal, inconsistent discipleship despite regular church attendance. Taken together, this literature converges on a pattern consistent with the wider international literature reviewed above (Willard, 2006; Putman & Harrington, 2013; Ogden, 2003/2016): discipleship weakness is repeatedly associated with an absence of structured, relational, leader-modelled formation rather than with any deficit in attendance or programming activity as such.

B. Leadership, Mentoring, and Discipleship

A second cluster of journal literature examines the leadership dimension of disciple-making directly, reinforcing this study's treatment of discipleship as fundamentally a leadership-formation concern. Lolepo and Mutai (2024), in a study of the Pentecostal Assemblies of God church in the Turkana region of Kenya, examined mentoring strategies for developing Christian leadership and found that spiritual guidance, role modelling, and group mentoring were the dominant models in use, but that mentoring frameworks remained under-structured and mentor training inadequate, a finding that anticipates this study's proposition regarding accountability structures. Feller and Lombaard (2018), writing in *Koers: Bulletin for Christian Scholarship*, theorised the relationship between Pentecostal leadership formation and discipleship more directly, arguing that spiritual formation within Pentecostal leadership functions as a mode of discipleship in its own right, and that leadership development and disciple-making cannot be analytically separated in practice. This theoretical convergence between leadership and discipleship scholarship lends independent support to this study's decision to treat transformational leadership theory (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2021) as co-equal with Coleman's (1963/2010) discipleship model, rather than as a secondary framework.

C. Empirical Literature on the Africa Inland Church Specifically

Empirical, peer-reviewed literature focused specifically on the Africa Inland Church remains limited, and what exists is concentrated on organisational and institutional performance rather than on discipleship as such. Munyao et al. (2020), in the most directly relevant denomination-specific study identified, examined the effects of strategic direction and strategic leadership on the performance of AIC theological training institutions in Kenya, and found that institutions receiving clearer strategic direction from their leadership performed significantly better, while under-resourcing and curriculum misalignment were recurring constraints. Although that study addresses institutional and educational performance rather than congregational discipleship, its findings are directly relevant here: it establishes, within the AIC context specifically, that leadership behaviour is empirically associated with formational outcomes, and that the AIC institutions responsible for training the pastors and coordinators who lead congregational discipleship face documented leadership and resourcing constraints of their own. Mwanzwii and Kising'u (2022), studying pastoral leadership styles across denominations in Mombasa County, Kenya, found that transformational leadership style had a statistically significant positive effect on church growth alongside servant, ethical, and strategic leadership styles, evidence, from a proximate Kenyan context, that the leadership behaviours transformational leadership theory identifies are empirically consequential for congregational outcomes in Kenya, even though that study did not measure discipleship specifically.

D. Summary and the Gap This Study Addresses

This body of journal literature establishes three things relevant to the present study. First, across multiple Kenyan and East African denominational contexts, discipleship weakness is consistently associated with under-structured mentoring, insufficient leadership modelling, and the absence of accountability—not with any shortage of programming or attendance (Ngala, 2021; Ruhongeka, 2023; Nsengiyumva, 2024; Ndunjo, 2024). Second, leadership behaviour and discipleship outcomes are treated in the literature as substantively linked rather than separable (Lolepo & Mutai, 2024; Feller & Lombaard, 2018), supporting this study's conceptual framework. Third, and most directly relevant to the present gap, the only identified peer-reviewed study focused specifically on the Africa Inland Church in Kenya addresses institutional strategic leadership rather than congregational discipleship practice (Munyao et al., 2020); no denomination-specific empirical study of discipleship within AIC

congregations in Nairobi or elsewhere was identified in the course of this review. This is precisely the gap the present study was designed to close.

3. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

A. Coleman's Discipleship Model

The study is anchored primarily in Robert Coleman's discipleship model, articulated in *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Coleman, 1963/2010). Analysing the ministry method of Jesus, Coleman identified eight interlocking principles selection, association, consecration, impartation, demonstration, delegation, supervision, and reproduction through which Christ formed a small group of ordinary men into disciples capable of continuing and multiplying His mission after His departure. Coleman's central claim that Jesus deliberately prioritised depth of relational investment in the few over breadth of impersonal reach to the many provides the study's principal analytic lens for evaluating contemporary AIC-Nairobi discipleship practice against a biblically derived standard.

B. Transformational Leadership Theory

The study additionally draws on transformational leadership theory (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2021), which conceptualises leadership as a relational process of raising followers' motivation, moral engagement, and capacity through idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration. Applied to discipleship, this theory illuminates the leadership behaviours modelling, mentoring, and personalised attention through which pastors and discipleship coordinators either enable or inhibit the formation of mature, reproducing believers within their congregations. Because discipleship is treated throughout this study as a leadership discipline rather than merely a programmatic or curricular one, transformational leadership theory functions here not as a secondary or supporting framework but as co-equal with Coleman's model: Coleman describes what disciple-making looked like in Christ's practice, while transformational leadership theory explains the leadership behaviours through which contemporary pastors either reproduce or fail to reproduce that pattern.

C. Conceptual Framework

Integrating these two frameworks, the study conceptualises discipleship strength within a congregation as a function of three interacting variables: (a) leadership philosophy and modelling (program-centred versus disciple-centred), (b) the presence and quality of intentional mentoring relationships, and (c) the existence of structured accountability mechanisms. Because discipleship in congregational life is enacted principally through pastoral and small-group leadership, leadership philosophy and modelling is treated as the primary analytic lens through which the other two variables are understood: the quality of mentoring relationships and the presence of accountability structures are, in practice, substantially downstream of how pastors and coordinators lead.

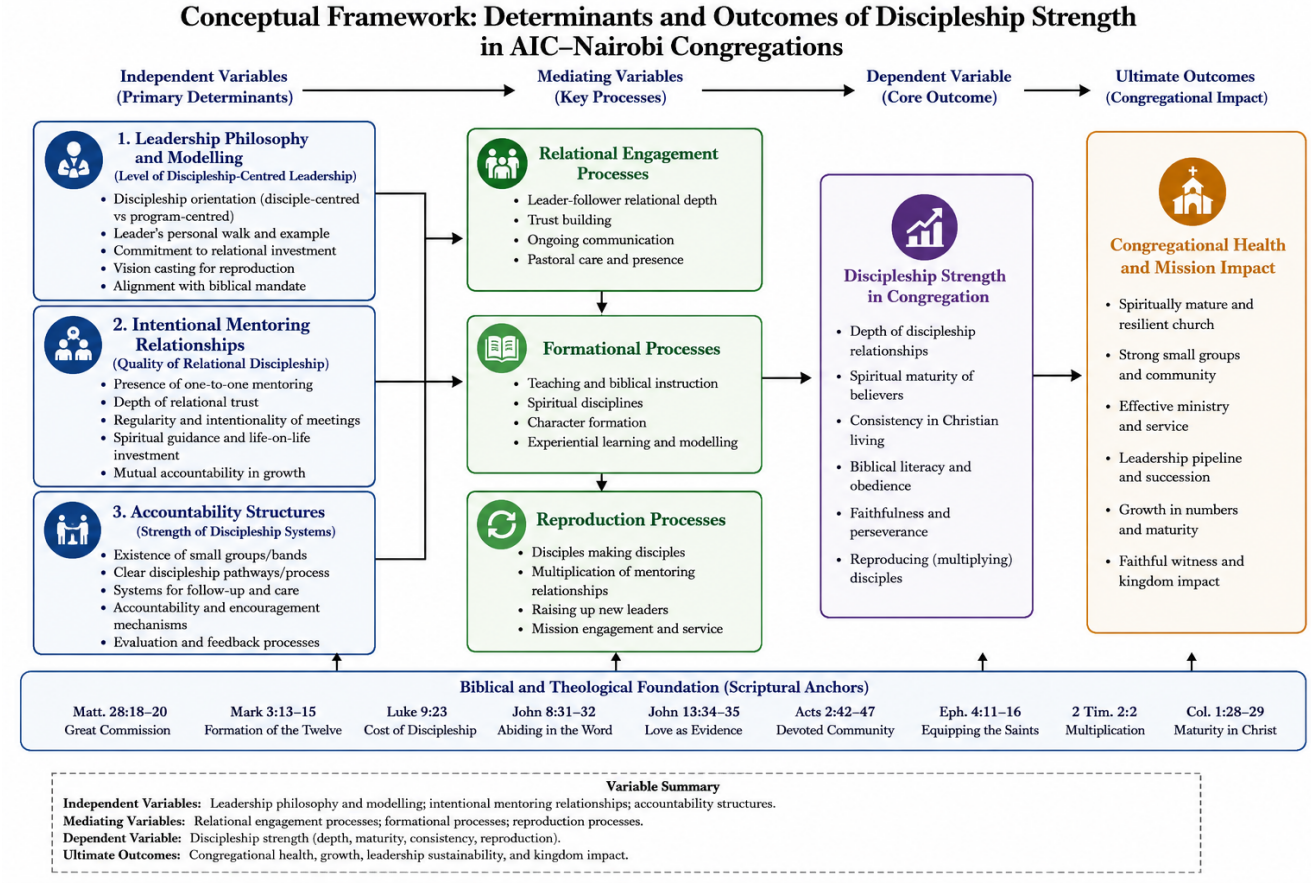


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework: determinants and outcomes of discipleship strength in AIC-Nairobi congregations.

As Fig. 1 illustrates, these determinants act through relational, formational, and reproduction processes to shape discipleship strength, with consequences for congregational health, leadership succession, and mission impact. Weakness in any of the three primary domains is theorised to produce the pattern of shallow, non-reproducing discipleship this study sought to document and address.

D. Biblical and Theological Grounding

The study is grounded throughout in Scripture, with particular reliance on nine texts that together form its theological backbone: the Great Commission as the Church's founding mandate (Matthew 28:18–20); Jesus' appointment and formation of the Twelve (Mark 3:13–15); the cost of discipleship as daily cross-bearing (Luke 9:23); continuing in Christ's word as the mark of true discipleship (John 8:31–32); sacrificial love as evidence of discipleship before a watching world (John 13:34–35); the early Church's model of devoted, formational community (Acts 2:42–47); the equipping of the saints for works of ministry and mutual maturity (Ephesians 4:11–16); the multiplication of faithful disciples across generations (2 Timothy 2:2); and the goal of presenting every believer mature in Christ (Colossians 1:28–29). These texts converge on a consistent biblical vision: discipleship is relational, costly, reproducing, and oriented toward maturity rather than mere adherence, a vision against which the study evaluated contemporary AIC-Nairobi practice.

4. Methodology

A. Research Paradigm and Design

The study was situated within a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, which holds that meaning regarding discipleship practice is socially constructed and best understood through the perspectives and lived experience of those directly engaged in it (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This paradigm suited the study's aim of understanding how pastors, discipleship coordinators, small-group leaders, and mature members interpret and enact discipleship within their own congregational context, rather than measuring discipleship against a predetermined external metric. The study employed a qualitative case study design (Yin, 2018), bounded by the AIC-Nairobi congregational context, to permit an in-depth, multi-perspectival examination of discipleship practice as it actually occurs, well suited to research questions of the "why" and "how" variety within a real-life, contemporary context over which the researcher had no control.

B. Population, Sampling, and Data Collection

The target population comprised pastors, associate pastors, discipleship coordinators, small-group leaders, and mature members drawn from AIC congregations in Nairobi. Purposive sampling was used to select information-rich participants with substantial experience in discipleship ministry, continuing until data saturation was reached, the point at which additional interviews ceased to yield new thematic content (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Four participants were retained for the case analysis reported here: a committee-level lay leader (P1), a veteran ordained pastor (P2), a serving pastor-in-charge (P3), and a long-serving senior church leader (P4), whose combined profiles are summarised in Table 1. This deliberately stratified small sample allowed the study to read across differing levels of formal authority and tenure, from three years to twenty-nine years in discipleship-related ministry.

Data were collected through three complementary methods, permitting methodological triangulation: semi-structured interviews with pastors and discipleship coordinators, exploring their discipleship philosophy, leadership practice, and perceived challenges; focus group discussions with small-group leaders and mature members, surfacing shared and divergent perceptions of congregational discipleship practice; and document analysis of church discipleship materials, curricula, and policies, providing an artefact-based check on interview and focus-group accounts.

C. Data Analysis

The four interview transcripts were treated as four bounded cases (P1–P4) and coded deductively against the study's five research questions (RQ1–RQ5), mirroring the structure of an NVivo project in which each research question functions as a parent node and recurrent concepts within it as child nodes, consistent with the Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) coding framework. Coding proceeded in four stages: familiarisation, in which each transcript was read in full against the interview guide's RQ-alignment table; open coding, in which responses were coded and labelled at the idea level rather than the question level; node development, in which labels were grouped into parent nodes (one per RQ) and recurrent child nodes; and matrix coding, in which a case-by-node matrix (participants × themes) was produced for each RQ to assess whether themes converged across the four independent accounts or were distinctive to one or two respondents. Triangulation in this study denotes data triangulation across four purposively selected respondents holding different levels of formal authority, allowing convergent themes to be read as more trustworthy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) than themes voiced by a single respondent. The study reports theme-convergence counts (e.g., 4/4, 3/4) as a transparency device for the qualitative coding rather than as inferential statistics; with four participants, such counts are demonstrative of pattern strength within this purposive sample and are not intended to be

Table 1
Summary of participant roles and experience

Participant	Role	Years in ministry	Years in discipleship ministry
P1	ICT, Media, and Transport committee member	5 years	3 years
P2	Ordained pastor	28 years	Over 20 years
P3	Pastor-in-charge	19 years	10 years
P4	Senior church leader (self-described as "a senior")	Long-tenured; exact years not specified	29 years

statistically generalisable.

D. Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

The study's rigour was evaluated against Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria for trustworthiness in naturalistic inquiry: credibility, established through methodological triangulation across interviews, focus groups, and documents; transferability, supported through thick, contextual description of the AIC-Nairobi setting; dependability, maintained through a clear audit trail of coding and analytic decisions; and confirmability, safeguarded through reflexive attention to the researcher's own positionality as an ordained minister and practitioner within this ministry field. The study was conducted in accordance with International Leadership University's research ethics requirements and standard qualitative research ethics principles (American Psychological Association, 2020). Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection, with a clear explanation of the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and the participant's right to withdraw without penalty. Confidentiality was protected through pseudonymisation of participants and congregations in all records and reporting, and data were stored securely and accessed only by the researcher and supervisory committee. Particular sensitivity was exercised given the researcher's dual role as both investigator and ordained minister within the broader ministry community, and reflexive measures were maintained throughout to mitigate any resulting bias.

5. Findings

Four AIC-Nairobi leaders participated in semi-structured interviews addressing the study's five research questions. Table 1 summarises their roles and experience.

The four participants were selected to represent a spectrum of expertise and authority in AIC-Nairobi congregations, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of the triangulated themes. P4's twenty-nine years in discipleship-related work, the longest in the sample, supplied a long-view institutional perspective alongside P1's committee-level viewpoint and P2 and P3's pastoral vantage points.

A. RQ1: Biblical and Theological Conception of Discipleship

All four participants understood discipleship as a Word-centred change of everyday living, not an event or a body of knowledge. P1 framed it as helping a believer to base decision-making in Scripture; P2 spoke of grounding people in the knowledge of God's word; P3 framed it as helping an immature believer to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ; and P4 defined it as sharing the gospel and walking with a person to maturity such that they, in turn, can share the same with others. All four rooted this understanding in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20, with P4 also citing Acts 1:8), and all four explicitly distinguished discipleship from church attendance, Christian education, or Bible study alone, P4 articulated this most sharply, describing discipleship as a deliberate programme that releases people into church work, whereas other approaches leave the rest of the congregation dependent on the discipled person. This echoes Willard's (1988) and Hull's (2006) insistence that discipleship is formation into Christlikeness rather than information transfer. Maturity was continuously framed in terms of character and the fruit of the Spirit rather than knowledge tests, P4 particularly referenced 1 Corinthians 13:4–8a and Ephesians 5–6, in line with what Coleman (1963) stressed as replicable, life-on-life formation. All four also felt that their congregation's operational understanding of discipleship fell short of this biblical model, with P4 specifically attributing the gap to structure and polity rather than theology. Every theme in this cluster achieved full 4/4 convergence across participants.

B. RQ2: The Extent and Causes of Weak Discipleship

There was substantial agreement about the prevalence and causes of weak discipleship. All four participants reported discipleship structures that were absent, informal, non-functioning, or confined to one ministry (commonly youth), leaders who had received no formal training to disciple others, and discipleship losing out to competing priorities (4/4 convergence on each theme). P1 cited an over-emphasis on giving and social-gathering-style programmes; P2 cited the sheer volume of non-discipleship-related activities; P3 cited disproportionate investment in Christian Education Department (CED) groups; and P4 reported that a discipleship budget line and committee exist on paper but are "not working," and that CED and Bible study activities are confused with discipleship rather than constituting it, rating leadership's prioritisation of discipleship at around 20 percent. Three of the four participants named materials scarcity as a direct cause (3/4); P4's account of RQ2 focused instead on structure, history, and denominational background rather than materials specifically. One difference concerned the character of leaders: only P1 directly attributed leader pride and a "superiority complex", viewing leadership positions as prestigious rather than as service, as a cause (1/4), whereas P2, P3, and P4 pointed instead to leaders themselves never having been discipled or trained, a related but theologically distinct diagnosis (a formation deficit rather than a character posture), consistent with Bass and Riggio's (2006) observation that transformational influence cannot be modelled by leaders who have not themselves been formed by it. All four participants also cited cultural or generational barriers (4/4).

C. RQ3: Effects of Weak Discipleship on Maturity and Congregational Health

Every effect probed achieved full 4/4 convergence. Weak discipleship was linked with spiritual immaturity and shallow scriptural understanding, lowered evangelistic confidence (P1: members "ashamed" to identify as born again; P2: difficulty sharing faith; P3: "inconsistent" faith; P4: "you can't share what you don't have"), weaker leadership formation, increased dependency of members on pastors in basic Christian decision-making, disunity, and increased vulnerability to sin. P4's testimony was the harshest in the sample, describing a church "dying slowly and slowly", including marriages and families, and pointing to tribalism, fragmentation, and mass exodus caused by unresolved strife. Read alongside P2's example of leadership wrangles and financial mismanagement and P3's

Table 2
Triangulation matrix—RQ5: leadership strategies for restoration

Theme (node)	P1	P2	P3	P4	Count
Leadership and servant-leadership training required	✓	✓	✓	✓	4/4
Dedicated discipleship structure with reporting/accountability	✓	✓	✓	✓	4/4
Intentional resource and time allocation	✓	✓	✓	–	3/4
Materials relevant to contemporary generation	✓	–	✓	✓	3/4
Mentorship and relational accountability	✓	✓	✓	✓	4/4
Integration across all ministries, not just youth	✓	✓	✓	✓	4/4

account of a worship leader who left over being denied a microphone, P4's account illustrates Ogden's (2003) warning that congregations without a discipleship culture default to programme consumption and personality-driven conflict rather than formation-driven maturity, and suggests, at the most senior end of the sample, that the cost compounds over time rather than plateauing.

D. RQ4: Current Discipleship Practices, Structures, and Materials

Existing practice was described as modest and narrow. All four participants named catechumen or baptism-preparation classes as the one practice reliably in place, alongside isolated, ad hoc new-convert programmes and standard CED or Bible study groups, and all four confirmed that there was no structured pathway for follow-up, mentoring, or integration of new believers beyond that initial contact (4/4 on both themes). Resources were youth-restricted (P1's Kuza and Royale curricula, described as effective but not extended church-wide), outmoded (P2), or absent (P3, P4-P4 answered "none" to every materials-related question in this section). No participant stated formal criteria for selecting or preparing discipleship leaders; selection was instead described as informal, depending on relationship with the pastor (P1), assumed maturity in the sense of eldership (P3), or simply absent (P4). Three of the four participants (P2, P3, P4) indicated they had no monitoring or assessment mechanism in place; P1's narrative revealed a partial exception in that the youth-focused Kuza cohort structure carried an implicit, completion-based expectation of comprehension. Both P1 and P4 identified small groups and fellowships as under-realised, P1 described them as functionally "dead" and P4 observed that it was "not clear" whether members even understand their role, calling it "a wake-up call", while P2 and P3 described their potential more positively, with no evidence that this potential is currently realised.

E. RQ5: Leadership Strategies for Recovering Biblical Discipleship

Recommendations converged substantially on leadership formation and structure. All four participants called for dedicated leadership training in discipleship (P1 specifically named servant leadership; P4 named discipleship-and-evangelism training and a refresher course for all pastors and elders), a named discipleship structure with clear reporting or supervisory lines (P4 proposed a dedicated discipleship calendar and month with periodic reporting forums), and stronger mentorship and relational accountability, P4 framed this as "ownership, evaluation and improvement." All four also called for discipleship to be integrated across every ministry rather than remaining a youth-only track (4/4 on each of these three themes, summarised in Table 2). Two points of partial disagreement emerged. First, on deliberate resource and time allocation, P1, P2, and P3 reported this explicitly (3/4), while P4's recommendations concerned training, manuals, and reporting structures more than budget or time allocation perse, notable given that P4 had earlier reported an existing but unused discipleship budget line, suggesting that the felt need is less about acquiring resources than about governing and using them. Second, P1, P3, and P4 spoke of materials contextualised to present requirements, with P4 specifically calling for a handbook developed with expert support (3/4), while P2's stated need for "finances and materials" did not specify contextualisation. Taken together, these findings are congruent with Bass and Riggio's (2006) transformational leadership components particularly idealised influence and individualised consideration operationalised through Coleman's (1963) repeatable, relational discipleship pattern.

F. Cross-Cutting Synthesis

Reading across all five research questions, three convergent patterns dominate the triangulated data. First, there is definitional unanimity: all four participants, despite differing roles and tenure, described a biblically based, formation-oriented understanding of discipleship centred on the Great Commission; the weakness identified was implementation failure rather than theological uncertainty. Second, there is structural consensus that discipleship is consistently under-resourced, under-supervised, and confined to pockets primarily youth ministry, catechumen classes, and CED groups rather than functioning as a whole-church pathway; P4's account adds that structures can exist nominally (a budget line, a committee, an allocated pastor) while remaining non-functional in practice, sharpening rather than contradicting this pattern. Third, there is leadership-formation consensus: leaders in all four cases were themselves reported as poorly trained or discipled, and participants causally linked this to weak modelling, weak accountability, and, ultimately, weak congregational health. P4's long tenure twenty-nine years in discipleship-related ministry makes this the most striking finding in the sample, since even sustained institutional presence had not produced a functioning discipleship structure. The recurring divergences whether leader pride or a formation deficit is the more accurate diagnosis of leader shortcomings; whether materials scarcity is itself a root cause or a downstream symptom of deeper

structural neglect; and whether resource allocation or the governance of existing resources is the more pressing need are best read as complementary rather than contradictory, and inform the recommendations below.

6. Discussion

Read alongside the study's theoretical framework Coleman's (1963/2010) repeatable discipleship model and Bass and Riggio's (2006) transformational leadership theory, the findings support four conclusions.

A. Discipleship Weakness Is Structural and Formational, Not Doctrinal

All four participants expressed a biblically coherent, Great-Commission-centred understanding of discipleship, consistent with Willard (1988), Hull (2006), and Bonhoeffer's (1959) traditional focus on costly, formative discipleship. The weak link identified by this study is therefore not theological uncertainty but the absence of the institutions, training, and resourcing needed to transfer that understanding into congregational practice. The Great Commission is affirmed in principle and largely omitted in operation—a pattern consistent with the wider Kenyan and East African literature (Ngala, 2021; Ruhongeka, 2023; Nsengiyumva, 2024; Ndunjo, 2024) reviewed above, and one that extends Willard's (2006) diagnosis of a "great omission" from the broader Western-influenced church into this specific AIC-Nairobi denominational setting.

B. Untrained Leadership Reproduces Itself

In each of the four cases, leaders reported receiving little to no formal preparation to disciple others, including the most tenured participant, with twenty-nine years in discipleship-related ministry. Consistent with Bass and Riggio's (2006) emphasis on modelling, congregations in this study appeared unable to reproduce mature disciples at scale: leadership formation functioned as the binding constraint on congregational discipleship, its absence inherited by the next generation of leaders it failed to train. This finding both corroborates and sharpens Munyao et al.'s (2020) evidence of leadership and resourcing constraints within AIC theological training institutions, extending that institutional-level finding down to the congregational level. Notably, the constraint persisted even where nominal mechanisms, a budget line, a committee, a designated pastor, already existed, suggesting a deficiency of governance and formation rather than of resourcing alone.

C. Isolated Success in Youth Ministry Signals Transferability, Not Exception

Participants' observations of the comparative effectiveness of youth-focused materials (Kuza, Royale) suggest that structured, resourced, and supervised discipleship works where it exists; the binding constraint is scope rather than approach. This finding is consistent with Coleman's (1963) claim that a replicable pattern of discipleship, once established, can be exported to other segments of the congregation rather than reinvented for each.

D. Weak Discipleship Carries Measurable Congregational Costs

The fully triangulated effects reported in the Findings, diminished evangelistic witness, member dependency on clergy, disunity, and vulnerability to sin, indicate that weak discipleship is not a neutral gap but an active source of congregational fragility. This affirms the study's central proposition that discipleship functions as a leading, rather than trailing, indicator of congregational health, and lends empirical weight, from the AIC-Nairobi context specifically, to Ogden's (2003/2016) and Putman and Harrington's (2013) broader claims about the costs of program-centred over disciple-centred ministry.

Taken together, these conclusions offer an empirically triangulated, leadership-first account of discipleship weakness as a problem of structure and leadership formation rather than of doctrine, with direct implications for how denominational and congregational leaders diagnose and respond to it. Methodologically, the study also demonstrates how an NVivo-style node hierarchy and matrix-coding triangulation, built on the Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) framework, can serve as a transparent approach to establishing pattern strength in small, purposively sampled qualitative leadership studies, an approach that may be of use to researchers working with similarly constrained access in ministry settings elsewhere in Africa.

7. Implications for Practice and Policy

A. Congregational Practice

- Establish a dedicated, resourced discipleship structure, a named leader or committee with clear reporting lines on equal footing with existing CED and stewardship programmes rather than subordinate to them.
- Require formal, compulsory training for all discipleship leaders in biblical foundations, servant leadership, and mentoring practice, in place of informal selection based on proximity to the pastor.
- Develop a planned, milestone-based follow-up pathway for every new believer beyond the initial post-conversion or catechumen contact.
- Adapt or construct discipleship materials for adult and eldership audiences, contextualised to present-generation challenges, building on the demonstrated success of existing youth curricula (Kuza, Royale).
- Implement basic monitoring and evaluation of discipleship activity, attendance, progress, and observed character change to assess efficacy rather than presume it.
- Where a discipleship budget, committee, or defined pastoral function already exists on paper, prioritise activating and governing it before requesting additional resources; nominal structures without leadership follow-through were a distinct failure mode in this study.
- Pair leadership training with explicit teaching on servant leadership, to guard against the pride and superiority dynamic identified by one participant.

B. Denominational Leadership

- Commission or support contextualised discipleship curricula for adult and eldership audiences, addressing the materials gap reported uniformly across congregations in this study.
- Establish and disseminate a denomination-wide minimum standard for discipleship-leader training, to reduce reliance on informal, relationship-based leader selection.

8. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

As a qualitative case study, the findings of this research generate contextual, analytic insight rather than statistically generalisable conclusions; transferability to other settings depends on the reader's judgement regarding contextual similarity. The sample was designed to be diverse in seniority and role but is limited to four purposively selected leaders and does not include the viewpoints of congregants, whose reports of discipleship practice and impact may differ from those of leadership; as with all interview-based designs, the results reflect self-report by participants rather than independently observed congregational practice. A further limitation is the continuing scarcity of empirical literature focused specifically on discipleship within the Africa Inland Church; the study draws on proximate Kenyan (Ndunjo, 2024) and comparable African evangelical and Pentecostal (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013) literature where denomination-specific sources are unavailable, and this reliance is itself part of the rationale for the present study rather than a settled evidentiary base. The researcher's own standing as an ordained minister and active practitioner within related ministry networks offers valuable contextual insight but also required deliberate reflexive management to guard against interpretive bias, and access to participants was constrained by congregational scheduling, geographic dispersion, and the sensitivity some leaders may feel in candidly discussing perceived weaknesses in their own discipleship practice.

Future research should broaden data collection to a larger, stratified sample of AIC-Nairobi leaders and lay members to examine whether the convergent themes identified here hold at population scale; investigate the viewpoints of congregants rather than leaders, to triangulate leadership accounts against members' lived experience; and conduct a focused comparative analysis of the design features of successful youth-targeted discipleship materials (Kuza, Royale) to identify elements transferable to adult and eldership curricula.

9. Conclusion

The Church was commissioned not merely to gather congregations but to make disciples who observe everything Christ commanded (Matthew 28:20). Where discipleship is neglected, the Church risks remaining busy in ministry while failing in its primary mission. This study set out to determine why discipleship, the express requirement of the Great Commission, functions in practice as the weak link in congregational life within AIC-Nairobi. The evidence gathered from four purposively selected leaders, triangulated across roles and tenure, points not to a crisis of belief but to a crisis of structure and leadership formation: a disconnect between what AIC-Nairobi leaders profess discipleship to be and what their congregations are presently equipped to do about it. Bridging that divide is, on this evidence, principally a leadership task, one of training, organisation, and deliberate resourcing, rather than a theological one. By examining the causes and consequences of weak discipleship and proposing practical, leadership-focused, and contextually appropriate strategies for its renewal, this study contributes to the theological, practical, and denominational renewal of the Church's mission and to the formation of mature, reproducing followers of Jesus Christ.

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