



The Church as a Transformative Community: A Scoping Review of Ecclesial Community Life and Social Change

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Abstract

This scoping review maps how the Church, understood as a lived ecclesial community rather than merely an institution, has been conceptualised, structured, and evaluated as an agent of social transformation across theological, ecclesiological, and community development literature. Following PRISMA-ScR guidance and the Arksey and O'Malley (2005) framework as refined by Levac et al. (2010), a systematic search of five databases on 3 July 2026 identified 3,600 records; 47 underwent detailed screening, and 29 articles, dissertations, and empirical reports met the inclusion criteria and were thematically synthesised. Six themes of markedly uneven depth emerged. Church-based development and advocacy initiatives, and institutional barriers to transformative engagement, were dominant; leadership, governance, and lay participation was substantially represented; Base Ecclesial Communities and Small Christian Communities, and worship and sacramental life, were moderately represented; and digital and dispersed ecclesial community was the most sparsely evidenced. The Church emerges as a structural and spiritual hybrid; simultaneously an institution, a diaconal organisation, and a network of grassroots cells, whose transformative capacity is theorised to reflect the interaction between participatory structures, institutional constraints, and spiritual conviction; this interaction is, however, more often theorised than demonstrated through comparative empirical measurement in the reviewed literature. A synthesised conceptual definition of the Church as transformative community is proposed. Key gaps include limited cross-regional and cross-denominational comparison, insufficient attention to gender, a scarcity of longitudinal studies, weak integration between ecclesiological and community development evaluation methods, and limited research on digital ecclesial community. Screening was conducted by a single reviewer, and ten of the 29 included sources (34%) are practitioner-authored or insider-positioned; both constraints should be borne in mind when interpreting the findings.

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Introduction

The Church, understood not merely as an institution but as a lived community, has long been theorised as a locus of social transformation. From base ecclesial communities in Latin America to parish-based development initiatives across Africa and Asia, the local church functions simultaneously as a worshipping community, a site of formation, and an agent of structural change (Evans, 2020; Kalungu et al., 2025). This field examines how ecclesial community life (its structures, relationships, leadership, and practices) enables or constrains transformative



engagement, attending to the Church's dual identity as a spiritual body oriented towards communion and a social organisation embedded in particular political, economic, and cultural contexts (Eurich, 2020; Inguanez & Froehle, 2024).

The literature has grown considerably in recent years, spurred by renewed attention to synodality within global Catholicism, to structural poverty and austerity in the United Kingdom and Western Europe, to racial justice in the United States, and to the ecological turn within African Initiated Christianity (Inguanez & Froehle, 2024; Shannahan & Denning, 2023; Stork & Öhlmann, 2025). Base Ecclesial Communities (BECs) and Small Christian Communities (SCCs) have long been recognised as grassroots structures through which spiritual communion and social action are held together, from the *comunidades eclesiales de base* of 1960s and 1970s Latin America to the SCCs of contemporary East Africa (Del Castillo, 2022; Evans, 2020; Kalungu et al., 2025).

Despite this interest, no comprehensive scoping review maps how the Church, as a lived ecclesial community, has been conceptualised, structured, and evaluated as an agent of social transformation. Ecclesiology and community development literatures each address dimensions of the topic, but few reviews have mapped their intersection, leaving open the question of how community structures, leadership models, and participatory practices translate communion into social change. Existing scholarship is dispersed across practical theology, missiology, community development studies, and the sociology of religion; definitions of "transformative community" vary widely; and the relationship between worship, sacramental life, and structural engagement is theorised more often than investigated. This review responds by mapping systematically how the Church has been understood and structured as a transformative community.

The review is guided by one general question: How has the Church been understood and structured as a transformative community capable of enabling social change? Specifically, it aims to (1) identify and compare definitions and models of the Church as a transformative community; (2) map the leadership, governance, and participatory structures associated with transformative ecclesial communities; (3) examine the role of Base Ecclesial Communities (BECs) and Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in social transformation; (4) assess how worship, sacramental life, and communal fellowship sustain transformative engagement; and (5) identify the institutional and structural barriers limiting the Church's transformative capacity.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Eight frameworks were identified a priori during protocol development and applied as the conceptual lens for the search and synthesis. Of these, the ecclesiology of communion, BEC/liberation theology, and social capital (bonding/bridging) frameworks are explicitly engaged in the Findings below; the remaining frameworks informed the search and screening but were not separately tested against the synthesised evidence, and this limitation is revisited in the Limitations section.

The Second Vatican Council's *ecclesiology of communion* (Second Vatican Council, 1964), conceiving the Church as the People of God bound in *koinonia* rather than a strictly hierarchical institution, provides the rationale for treating the Church as a lived, participatory community; it is engaged most directly by Inguanez and Froehle (2024) in their analysis of synodality. The theology of *Base Ecclesial Communities*, developed by Boff (1986) and formalised through the Latin American Episcopal Council at Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979), accounts for how small, lay-led communities combine prayer, Bible reflection, and collective action; BECs and their African and Asian analogues recur throughout the literature as concrete structures linking formation to grassroots engagement (Del Castillo, 2022; Evans, 2020; Kalungu et al., 2025). Liberation theology, through the preferential option for the poor and the see-judge-act method (Gutiérrez, 1988), grounds an account of the Church as oriented towards structural transformation rather than private devotion (De Beer, 2023; Evans, 2020; Shannahan & Denning, 2023). *Catholic Social Teaching*,



through the common good and subsidiarity, provides a normative framework for relating parish- and diocese-level structures to broader transformation (Kalungu et al., 2025).

Practical theology of congregational life, attending to the day-to-day life of congregations rather than to doctrine or polity in the abstract, provides the methodological orientation for the review's parish-level case studies (Hamu et al., 2023; Krull, 2020; Powell, 2024). Putnam's (2000) *social capital theory*, which distinguishes bonding from bridging capital, offers a sociological lens on how congregational participation generates the trust, networks, and reciprocity that underpin collective action, most evident in studies of cross-denominational or cross-racial cohort structures (Coley et al., 2023; Hove & Moyo, 2022). *Community development theory*, including asset-based and participatory approaches, positions congregations as agents of grassroots development rather than recipients of aid (Coley et al., 2023; Msebi, 2022). Finally, *African ecclesiology and Small Christian Communities* frame the SCC as a distinctively African expression of church as a community of communities, integrating prayer, mutual aid, and civic engagement at the neighbourhood level (Kalungu et al., 2025), echoed by Stork and Öhlmann's (2025) account of African Initiated Churches as homegrown grassroots actors.

Research Design

A systematic scoping review design was adopted to synthesise empirical, conceptual, and practice-based evidence on the Church as a structure, agent, and sustaining community for social transformation, given a literature spanning ecclesiology, practical theology, missiology, liberation theology, and community development studies. A scoping design was selected over a systematic review because the objective was to chart the range and nature of available evidence and identify key concepts and gaps, rather than to answer a narrow empirical question; scoping reviews suit fields with high definitional variability (Peters et al., 2020). The review followed PRISMA-ScR (Tricco et al., 2018) and the framework of Arksey and O'Malley (2005) as refined by Levac et al. (2010).

Search Strategy and Selection

Two Boolean strings were developed, each combining three concept blocks. The first combined ecclesial community terms ("church community" OR "ecclesial community" OR "base ecclesial communities" OR "small Christian communities" OR congregation) with transformation terms ("social transformation" OR "social change" OR development OR justice) and disciplinary terms (theology OR ecclesiology OR ministry OR parish). The second combined congregational terms ("parish" OR "faith community" OR "church-based") with practice terms ("community development" OR "social action" OR "transformative community" OR "collective action") and tradition terms ("Catholic social teaching" OR "liberation theology" OR ecclesiology). Both were adapted to each database's field-tag syntax while preserving the same Boolean logic. Consistent with PRISMA-ScR item 8 (Search), the verbatim ATLA Religion Database string is reproduced in Appendix D; strings for the remaining databases are available on request. PRISMA-ScR item 7 (Information sources) is addressed separately below through the list of databases, coverage, and search date.

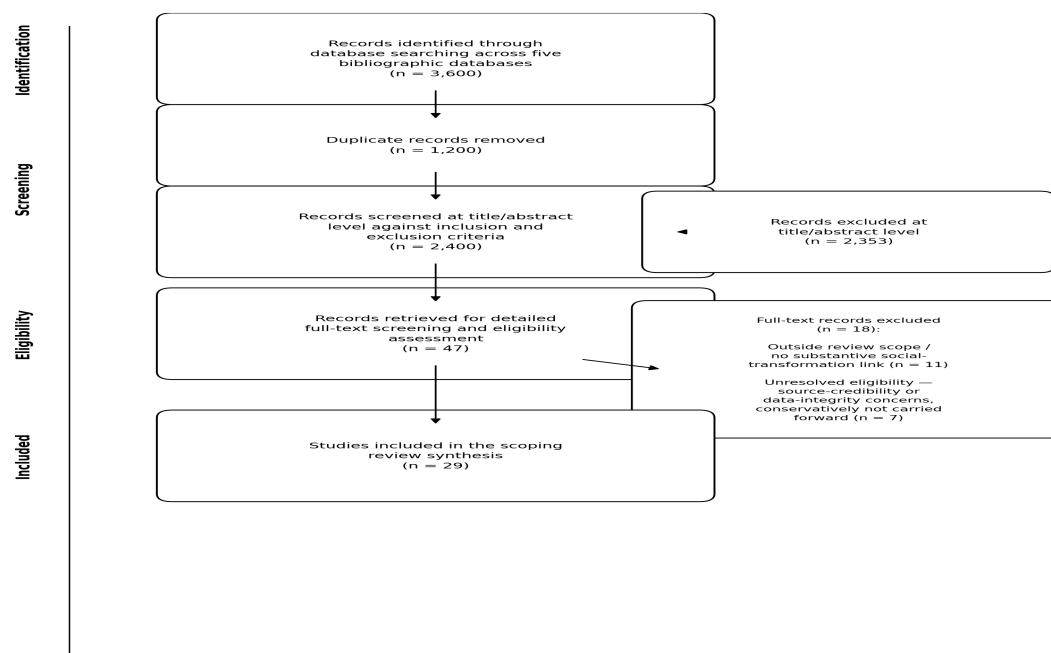
Searches were conducted on 3 July 2026 across five databases (ATLA Religion Database, Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, and Google Scholar), selected for interdisciplinary coverage across theology, religious studies, and the social sciences. Because Google Scholar does not support field-tag syntax, caps result sets, and does not return a stable, reproducible list (Gusenbauer & Haddaway, 2020), it was treated as a supplementary source: the first 200 relevance-ranked results were screened, contributing three of the 29 included sources; the remaining four databases were searched exhaustively. For the purposes of this review, social transformation was operationally defined, prior to screening, as any documented or theorised change in material welfare, social relations, institutional structures, or civic participation



attributable to church-related activity, thereby excluding purely internal spiritual or liturgical change with no external referent. Literature was included if it addressed the Church, parish, congregation, or ecclesial community as a structure or agent of social transformation, so defined, within theological, ecclesiological, pastoral, or community development contexts, and was published between 2020 and 2026; both conceptual and empirical work was eligible. Literature was excluded where church life was addressed exclusively in terms of internal liturgical practice, doctrine, administration, canon law, or individual spirituality with no substantive connection to social transformation, engagement, advocacy, or development; where full text was not retrievable; or where publication fell outside the date window; no records were excluded on non-retrievability grounds, so this criterion, though stated, was not operative in the present search.

Database yields were as follows: ATLA Religion Database (n = 812), Scopus (n = 1,145), Web of Science (n = 967), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (n = 476), and Google Scholar, first 200 results screened (n = 200); duplicate records across databases (n = 1,200) were removed prior to title and abstract screening, leaving 2,400 unique records screened at title and abstract, from which 47 were subjected to detailed screening, with reasoned decisions and thematic-cluster mapping recorded for each and supported by a running screening log and a structured extraction form. Of the 47, 29 met the inclusion criteria, 11 were excluded because they fell outside the review's scope or lacked a substantive social transformation link (matching the "Outside review scope" category in Figure 1), and seven were provisionally marked "maybe" pending verification of publication venue, citation integrity, or methodological coherence (Figure 1). Screening surfaced a distinct evidentiary-reliability concern among these seven: three displayed inconsistencies between reported and analysed sample sizes, two contained citations that did not support the claims attributed to them, one duplicated an unattributed passage from an unrelated source, and one could not be matched to a verifiable venue. Because verification could not be completed within the timeframe, all seven were conservatively excluded rather than definitively assessed; this should not be read as a finding that their claims are false, only that they could not be confirmed.

Figure 1: PRISMA-ScR Flow Diagram of the Identification, Screening, Eligibility, and Inclusion Process



Note. Search date: 3 July 2026; records published 2020–2026; total records identified: n = 3,600; records screened in detail: n = 47; sources included in synthesis: n = 29.



Data Extraction, Synthesis, and Appraisal

Extraction used a standardised framework capturing author and year, context, methodology and sample, engagement with each specific objective, thematic-cluster mapping, and identified limitations (Appendices A, B, and C). Given heterogeneity of design, tradition, and disciplinary context, meta-analysis was inappropriate; thematic synthesis followed Thomas and Harden (2008). Descriptive codes were generated inductively, line by line, from all 29 sources; these descriptive codes were then grouped deductively against the six thematic clusters anticipated a priori (listed in Appendix B) to produce the six analytical findings reported below. The review therefore combines an inductive coding stage with a deductive grouping stage rather than applying either method in isolation, or it should be read with the possibility of confirmation bias toward the anticipated clusters in mind.

Quality appraisal was pragmatic and interpretive, suited to a sample spanning case studies, ethnographies, mixed methods studies, conceptual essays, and practitioner-reflective doctoral projects. No single standardised instrument was applied, because the criteria of such instruments are not uniformly applicable across these source types; this is a deliberate choice consistent with scoping review guidance to prioritise breadth of mapping over uniform grading. Sources were assessed for clarity of purpose, methodological appropriateness, transparency, credibility, and relevance, with conceptual essays additionally assessed for analytical depth. Quality was used qualitatively to contextualise how much interpretive weight individual claims could bear, flagging single-author, non-empirical claims as illustrative rather than representative; it did not determine exclusion. On this basis, Evans's (2020) estimate of three to four million Latin American BEC participants and Berry's (2021) figure of 25.3% of United States congregations engaging in social-service delivery are both flagged in the Findings below as illustrative, single-source estimates rather than representative figures.

Two caveats are noted and revisited under the Limitations section. First, ten of the 29 included sources (34%) are authored by practitioners or process insiders writing about their own ministry, congregation, or institution (Dunlop, 2025; Hove & Moyo, 2022; Katongole, 2022; Mutambasere, 2022; Njuguna, 2021; Thiani, 2024; Dewerse et al., 2023; Schroeder, 2025; De Beer, 2023; Oghenekevwe & Omosor, 2024), raising insider positionality and social-desirability considerations tracked systematically during screening. Second, screening was conducted by a single-author (the sole author of this manuscript) without an independent second reviewer; to mitigate this, the first 50 records returned (46 excludes, 4 includes at the base inclusion rate) were re-screened by the same author two weeks later as a self-calibration check, with 96% intra-rater agreement (48/50) and the two disagreements resolved against the eligibility criteria. No chance-corrected coefficient (kappa) was calculated, and because only 0.81% of the full sample (29 of 3,600) was ultimately included, a rule of excluding every record would itself achieve approximately 99.2% agreement with the final classification; the 96% intra-rater figure should therefore be read as a weak, non-independent check and not as evidence of inter-rater reliability. This does not substitute for independent duplicate screening.

Findings

Across ecclesiology, practical theology, missiology, liberation theology, and community development studies, the literature converges on the Church as a community whose transformative capacity is jointly shaped by the interaction of grassroots participatory structures, institutional constraints, and spiritual conviction. Some studies work within a named grassroots structure such as a BEC or SCC; others describe equivalent dynamics as diaconal ecclesiology, missional community, public pastoral care, or holistic evangelism. Two of the six themes reported below, church-based development and advocacy, and digital and dispersed ecclesial community, do not map one-to-one onto the five specific objectives stated above; they are retained because they emerged strongly from the inductive coding stage, and the objectives are revisited against



this mismatch in the Discussion. Six themes, corresponding to the anticipated clusters, are presented in descending order of evidentiary depth (26, 25, 23, 6, 5, 2 sources respectively, per the corrected Appendix A counts below); the correspondence between anticipated clusters and emergent findings is summarised in Appendix B. Because most sources address more than one theme, the counts are not mutually exclusive and do not sum to 29.

Institutional Barriers to Transformative Engagement

The most extensively represented theme, in 26 of the 29 sources, marginally more than church-based development and advocacy, is documentation of the barriers limiting transformative capacity. Clericalism recurs as the most consistently named: Inguanez and Froehle (2024) theorise it as a monarchical exercise of power without shared decision-making, documenting Roman Curia patronage and a core-periphery structure mapped onto the global Catholic Church, while Del Castillo's (2022) Filipina BEC leaders describe their own leadership as deliberate de-clericalisation. Prosperity-gospel theology is identified as a distinct barrier, critiqued by Akpanika and Udoh (2020) as undermining diaconal capacity and by Stork and Öhlmann (2025) as undercutting environmental engagement through an anthropocentric soteriology.

A second cluster concerns resource constraint and dependency: Thiani (2024) documents professionalised diaconal organisations failing repeatedly through foreign-aid dependency and hierarchical interference, while Berry (2021), citing Association of Religion Data Archives figures at second-hand via a doctoral dissertation with no wave or year specified, reports (as an illustrative rather than representative figure) that only 25.3% of United States congregations engage in social-service delivery. Jagger and Fry (2023) detail how discernment panels, Diocesan Directors of Ordinands, and theological education institutions produce classed barriers gatekeeping working-class clergy's access to ordination. A third cluster locates barriers in the Church's own composition. Krull (2020) shows that a liberal congregation's commitment to inclusivity, rather than to church-state separation, becomes a fundamental barrier to a public justice voice. Powell (2024) documents South African congregants' fear of lost income, heritage constraints, and a consumer mindset obstructing engagement with spatial injustice. Shannahan and Denning (2023) find congregational distance from lived poverty limiting advocacy under austerity. Notably, Hamu et al. (2023) treat liturgical centredness itself, rather than resource deficit, as a potential barrier.

Church-Based Development and Advocacy Initiatives

The most extensively evidenced theme, in 25 of the 29 sources, concerns parish-, diocesan-, and denominational-level initiatives through which the Church acts as a welfare, developmental, and political agent. Oghenekevwe and Omosor (2024) provide the most granular single-diocese catalogue; schools, a health centre, disaster and pandemic relief, widows' empowerment schemes, and a women's-wing water factory in the Anglican Diocese of Ugheli, Nigeria while Kalungu et al. (2025) document a comparably extensive portfolio across Nairobi County Catholic parishes: education and health institutions, civic and human rights education, lobbying through pastoral letters and parliamentary memoranda, and prophetic resistance to authoritarianism during the Moi era. Cudjoe Adadey and Yisa (2024) extend the theme into Pentecostalism through the Church of Pentecost's PENTSOS welfare institutions and the Redeemed Christian Church of God's eight-sector corporate social responsibility programme.

Several sources document initiatives operating through explicit theological frameworks rather than ad hoc charity. Katongole (2022) reconceives church-based development as integral ecology, enacted through social love at the Bethany Land Institute. Coley et al. (2023) apply a Human Ecology Framework to a faith-academic community partnership that produces five social change projects. Thiani (2024) develops philanthropic-diakonia as a synthesis of divine self-giving love and social service. A smaller cluster operates transnationally or ecumenically (Hove & Moyo, 2022; Mutambasere, 2022), while Msebi (2022) and Magezi and Nanthambwe (2022) supply the



conceptual scaffolding, framing community development as integral rather than secondary to *missio Dei* and proposing public pastoral care as the mechanism through which congregational practice becomes developmental.

Leadership, Governance, and Lay Participation

Represented across 23 of the 29 sources, this theme concerns the leadership, governance, and participatory decision-making models that enable or constrain transformative community life. Carter (2021) documents, through life-history interviews with 12 religious leaders, how educational pathways shape capacity for social advocacy in Ferguson, Missouri, after the 2014 unrest. Dunlop (2025), using theological action research in an Anglican team ministry, identifies a connection between traditional parish congregations and contextual worshipping communities as a distinct leadership competency enabling shared mission.

Several sources document de-clericalisation or lay empowerment as the mechanism sustaining engagement. Del Castillo (2022) shows Filipina *bai* (women servant leaders) enacting a new way of being Church through lay-led catechesis and simple liturgical celebration, while Kalungu et al. (2025) document SCCs functioning as a grassroots parliament for deliberation on poverty, domestic violence, and unemployment. Schroeder (2025) extends this into a racial register, documenting a mismatch between congregational diversity, approximately 45% people of colour, and predominantly White children's-ministry leadership. In Putnam's (2000) terms, the cross-denominational structures documented by Hove and Moyo (2022) and the cross-racial cohorts documented by Coley et al. (2023) function as bridging capital, while the single-tradition governance structures reported elsewhere in this theme are better characterised as bonding capital; the distinction is not otherwise coded across the remaining sources and should be treated as illustrative rather than systematic. A further cluster documents governance at diocesan scale: Presbyteral and Pastoral Councils and a binding Diocesan Representative Council in Malta as attempts to institutionalise synodal governance (Ingunez & Froehle, 2024); a German parish's *Gemeindebeirat*, networking members with local political and civil-society representatives (Eurich, 2020); and council-led governance with Te Tiriti partnership reshaping congregational identity in Aotearoa New Zealand (Dewerse et al., 2023).

Base Ecclesial Communities and Small Christian Communities

Represented centrally or analogously across six sources, this theme concerns the grassroots structures in which formation and collective action are most closely fused. Evans (2020) provides a single-source historical account, reporting (as an illustrative rather than representative estimate) that Latin American comunidades eclesiales de base grew to an estimated three to four million active participants at their 1970s–80s height, functioning as social incubators that built organisational and leadership skills among peasants, labourers, and Indigenous people engaged in strikes and petitioning campaigns. Del Castillo (2022) extends the thread into a contemporary Philippine setting, documenting a shift among BEC leaders from individualism to community, from sacramentalism to integral faith, and from non-involvement to co-responsibility, while Kalungu et al. (2025) trace SCCs across Nairobi County parishes from 1963 to 2023 as sites of both prayer and social action, and of politicisation during election periods. De Beer (2023) situates BECs comparatively across Latin American, Asian, and African expressions, and two further sources document analogous but unnamed structures: African Initiated Churches as homegrown grassroots actors (Stork & Öhlmann, 2025) and cross-denominational fellowship groupings in rural Zimbabwe (Hove & Moyo, 2022).

Worship and Sacramental Life as Sustaining Practice

Represented across five sources, this cluster concerns the role of liturgy, sacraments, and communal prayer in grounding transformative engagement. Dewerse et al. (2023) frame renewal itself as a form of worship-grounded discernment of vocation, while Njuguna (2021) treats baptism



and theosis as doctrines of ongoing incorporation into divine life and mission. Del Castillo's (2022) BEC leaders describe sacramental worship as needing to be culturally contextualised and deepened through catechesis before celebration; worship as a practice requiring active cultivation rather than passive reception. Thiani's (2024) philanthropic-diakonia synthesis, discussed above under church-based development, is not coded to this theme in Appendix A and is not repeated here, correcting a source/theme mismatch identified in review. Two sources complicate a straightforwardly sustaining account. Krull (2020) documents a liturgical blessing for justice-movement participants becoming a contested site of debate over the visibility of congregational activism. Hamu et al. (2023) invert the framing: an exclusively liturgy-centred pastoral model in rural Indonesia, in which priests make brief, infrequent visits to scattered rural stations, has itself become a barrier, producing congregations that are Catholic by identity but lack deeper diaconal or catechetical formation.

Digital and Dispersed Ecclesial Community

The most sparsely evidenced theme, in only two sources, concerns emerging virtual or hybrid forms of church community. Oluwasola and Akoh (2025) reframe the Church's communicative posture from transmitter of doctrine to facilitator of social transformation, through three cases: church-affiliated community radio for post-election-violence peacebuilding in Kenya, an interfaith mediation centre in Nigeria, and faith-based digital engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. The same source documents clergy fear that open digital participation may weaken doctrinal control or expose institutional failings, alongside technological, socio-economic, and gendered barriers to access. Eurich (2020) documents emergent new church locations, such as Amsterdam's Oranjekerk, as small, non-territorial, network-embedded worshipping and serving communities loosely analogous to dispersed ecclesial cells. The theme's thinness suggests that sustained analysis of the digitally mediated community as a distinct vehicle of transformation, rather than as a channel for existing congregational activity, remains largely undeveloped.

Proposed Conceptual Definition

Drawing on the six findings, the following definition is proposed:

The Church as transformative community is a structurally hybrid ecclesial body that combines three features: (1) worship, sacrament, and communion; (2) diaconal welfare and development activity; and (3) grassroots participatory structures with accountable, de-clericalised leadership. On this definition, a church counts as a transformative community to the degree that all three features are jointly present and structurally linked; a church exhibiting only the first feature, without diaconal activity or participatory structure, would not meet the definition. This boundary condition is proposed as testable against sources outside the present corpus, rather than as a settled finding.

The definition integrates four elements that the literature collectively yields but rarely together: worshipping institution, developmental organisation, participatory network, and site of institutional contestation. Its central claim, that transformative capacity is jointly produced rather than flowing automatically from spiritual conviction, distinguishes the strongest strand of the literature (Eurich, 2020; Kalungu et al., 2025; Thiani, 2024) from idealised accounts in which communion is assumed rather than shown to translate into social change. One limitation on the definition's independence should be noted: it derives from the same 29 sources used throughout the synthesis, a majority of which are themselves attempts by practitioners or embedded scholars to characterise the Church as a transformative community, so it may, in part, restate the self-understanding of the literature it summarises. It rests on convergence across a cross-regional, cross-denominational, and methodologically heterogeneous body of sources, but has not been validated against evidence independent of that literature. It is therefore presented here as a heuristic for future testing rather than as a validated finding; future research applying it to newly identified sources, particularly those not authored by practitioners, would help test its robustness.



Discussion

The Church as Structural and Spiritual Hybrid

The strongest strand of the literature rejects both purely institutional and purely spiritual accounts, instead describing a structural hybrid that combines a worshipping institution, a diaconal organisation, and a participatory network, anchored in Eurich's (2020) organisation-network hybrid and Thiani's (2024) philanthropic-diakonia. This hybridity is, however, more often theorised than demonstrated through comparative empirical measurement, and the Abstract's characterisation of transformative capacity has been revised accordingly to reflect this limitation rather than assert a tested dependency. Coley et al.'s (2023) Human Ecology Framework and Kalungu et al.'s (2025) four-lens analysis are among the clearest attempts to operationalise, rather than assert, how spiritual and structural dimensions interact.

Insider Positionality and Practitioner-Authored Evidence

Ten of the 29 included sources (34%) from the same insider-authored group identified in the Methodology contribute the review's most vivid and theologically rich findings, in which the author reflects on their own parish, diocese, or initiative. These provide unusually granular first-hand access to ecclesial community life, but the concentration of insider-authored evidence raises a recurring concern: claims about programme success, community reception, or institutional impact are rarely corroborated by independent, external, or beneficiary-perspective data. Only a minority of sources (Carter, 2021; Del Castillo, 2022; Kalungu et al., 2025) incorporate the perspectives of lay congregants or service recipients directly rather than relying on clergy, leadership, or the author's own account.

Geographical and Denominational Distribution

Transformative capacity is documented across a genuinely wide geographical range, spanning sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, South and Southeast Asia, the United Kingdom, continental Europe, the United States, and Aotearoa New Zealand (Appendix C), a strength relative to much single-region ecclesiological scholarship. Denominational representation, however, is markedly uneven: Roman Catholic and Anglican sources dominate; Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity is represented by a single conceptual source (Cudjoe Adadey & Yisa, 2024) despite its demographic scale in the Global South; and explicitly ecumenical or interfaith structural analysis is confined to a small number of sources (Hove & Moyo, 2022; Oluwasola & Akoh, 2025).

The Sacramental-Social Tension

While most of the literature treats worship and sacramental life as a resource grounding transformative engagement (Del Castillo, 2022; Njuguna, 2021; Thiani, 2024), Hamu et al.'s (2023) finding that an exclusively liturgy-centred model can itself become a barrier complicates any assumption that greater liturgical intensity straightforwardly produces greater social engagement. The worship-transformation relationship is better understood as contingent on balance and integration with the other ecclesial functions diakonia, kerygma, koinonia, and martyria than as a uniform, linear resource, with direct implications for pastoral formation and parish structural design.

Research Gaps

Five gaps represent priority areas for future inquiry. First, very few sources are designed to compare ecclesial community structures across regions or denominations within a single study; most (Akpanika & Udoh, 2020; Hamu et al., 2023; Njuguna, 2021) document a single parish, diocese, or national church, and De Beer's (2023) survey across Latin America, Asia, and Africa remains a conceptual synthesis rather than an empirical comparative design. Second, although several sources document women's leadership prominently (Del Castillo, 2022; Kalungu et al., 2025), gender is rarely the sustained analytical focus; Jagger and Fry's (2023) acknowledgement that their working-class clergy sample was entirely White, precluding intersectional analysis,



exemplifies a broader dominance of single-axis analyses of leadership access. Third, most empirical sources (Coley et al., 2023; Hamu et al., 2023; Powell, 2024) rely on cross-sectional interviews or short fieldwork rather than longitudinal designs; Kalungu et al.'s (2025) 60-year span is a notable exception but relies on retrospective data, and Coley et al. (2023) explicitly acknowledge that it remains too early to measure their initiative's effect quantitatively. Fourth, sources grounded in community development theory (Coley et al., 2023; Msebi, 2022) and in ecclesiology (Inguanez & Froehle, 2024; Njuguna, 2021) rarely draw on one another's evaluative methods, limiting the field's capacity to assess on comparable terms whether theologically distinctive models of church-based development achieve materially different outcomes from secular approaches. Fifth, only two sources substantively address digital or dispersed ecclesial community, and neither offers sustained empirical evaluation of digitally mediated community as a distinct vehicle of transformation. This is a significant gap given the acceleration of church digital adaptation during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Limitations

Several limitations must be acknowledged. The final sample of 29 sources is limited in comprehensiveness, and the six findings may not represent the full range of understandings across all traditions and contexts. Predominantly English-language sources were retrieved, introducing a language bias that likely excludes scholarship in Spanish, Portuguese, and French, particularly consequential given liberation theology's and the BECs' roots in Latin American and Francophone African contexts. Screening was conducted without an independent co-reviewer, and seven records marked "maybe" were conservatively excluded. This is a substantive constraint on the funnel's reliability, particularly since some of the seven displayed citation integrity concerns rather than being merely topically borderline. The compensating steps taken here a full audit trail, consistently applied criteria, and the self-calibration reported above do not substitute for independent duplicate screening. Ten of the 29 included sources (34%) are practitioner-reflective accounts of the author's own ministry, so some of the most detailed findings rest on self-reported rather than independently verified evidence. Denominational representation is uneven, with Roman Catholic and Anglican sources dominating over Pentecostal and Orthodox sources. Several sources were very recently published at the time of the search (Dunlop, 2025; Schroeder, 2025; Stork & Öhlmann, 2025; Kalungu et al., 2025; Oluwasola & Akoh, 2025) and remain subject to post-publication correction; this applies in particular to Kalungu et al. (2025), the most heavily used source in the manuscript. Finally, several sources share geographical or institutional context, notably the Southern and East African diocesan-development cluster, so apparent thematic convergence may partly reflect a shared regional research tradition rather than fully independent corroboration.

Conclusion

The Church's transformative capacity is consistently conceptualised as jointly produced by grassroots participatory structures, accountable and de-clericalised leadership, and the confrontation of institutional barriers, rather than flowing automatically from communion or doctrinal commitment. It is documented across a wide range of denominational and geographical contexts, showing both structural flexibility and persistent vulnerability to clericalism, resource dependency, and internal social composition. A consistent pattern emerges. While church-based development, institutional barriers, and leadership and governance are richly documented, systematic comparative research, longitudinal evaluation, and digital or dispersed ecclesial communities remain underdeveloped, indicating a divergence between the field's case-study richness and its evaluative rigour.

For theory, the findings reinforce communion ecclesiology, BEC theology, and liberation ecclesiology (Boff, 1986; Gutiérrez, 1988; Second Vatican Council, 1964), contributing an evidence-based account of how structural hybridity, spiritual grounding, and institutional barriers interact.



This said, the structural hybridity claim itself still needs consolidation, since it currently rests more on conceptual synthesis than on comparative empirical demonstration. For practice, an effective transformative ecclesial community requires moving beyond generic pastoral or liturgical provision towards structures that are accountably linked to sustained social engagement, such as the SCC model documented by Kalungu et al. (2025) or the diaconal ecclesiology framework of Thiani (2024). Lay leadership and de-clericalisation also warrant strengthening as designed features of congregational governance (Del Castillo, 2022). Liturgical intensity should be integrated with, rather than substituted for, diaconal and catechetical engagement (Hamu et al., 2023). For policy, denominational and diocesan authorities should develop enabling frameworks that support locally initiated, bottom-up diaconal structures rather than foreign-aid-dependent or centrally directed models, which have been shown to be vulnerable to interference and collapse (Mutambasere, 2022; Thiani, 2024). Investment should also be aligned with the comparative, longitudinal, and digital-community gaps identified here. Finally, structures making working-class, female, and lay access to ordination and formation more equitable should be prioritised (Jagger & Fry, 2023; Schroeder, 2025).

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Appendices

Appendix A: Evidence Matrix: Alignment of Included Sources with Specific Objectives and Themes

Author (Year)	Source type	SO1	SO2	SO3	SO4	SO5	Themes
Akpanika & Udoh (2020)	Journal article	●	●	○	●	●	T4, T5
Evans (2020)	Journal article	●	●	●	●	●	T1, T4, T5
Powell (2024)	Journal article	●	●	●	●	●	T2, T4, T5
Njuguna (2021)	Journal article	●	●	●	●	●	T3, T4, T5
Dunlop (2025)	Doctoral thesis	●	●	●	●	●	T2, T4, T5
Oghenekevwe & Omosor (2024)	Journal article	●	●	●	●	●	T2, T4, T5
Katongole (2022)	Journal article	●	●	●	●	●	T2, T4, T5
Thiani (2024)	Doctoral dissertation	●	●	●	●	●	T2, T4, T5
Del Castillo (2022)	Journal article	●	●	●	●	●	T1, T2, T3, T4
Hamu et al. (2023)	Journal article	●	●	●	●	●	T2, T3, T4, T5
Cudjoe Adadey & Yisa (2024)	Journal article	●	●	●	●	●	T2, T4, T5
Carter (2021)	Doctoral dissertation	●	●	●	○	●	T2, T4, T5
Jagger & Fry (2023)	Empirical report	●	●	●	●	●	T2, T4, T5
Schroeder (2025)	Journal article	●	●	○	●	●	T2, T5
Inguanez & Froehle (2024)	Journal article	●	●	●	●	●	T2, T5
Eurich (2020)	Journal article	●	●	●	●	●	T4, T5, T6
Stork & Öhlmann (2025)	Journal article	●	●	●	●	●	T1, T4, T5
Krull (2020)	Journal article	●	●	○	●	●	T2, T3, T5
Msebi (2022)	Journal article	●	●	●	●	●	T2, T4, T5
Berry (2021)	Doctoral dissertation	●	●	●	●	●	T2, T4, T5
Oluwasola & Akoh (2025)	Journal article	●	●	○	○	●	T4, T5, T6
Coley et al. (2023)	Journal article	●	●	●	●	●	T2, T4
Kalungu et al. (2025)	Journal article	●	●	●	●	●	T1, T2, T4, T5
Hove & Moyo (2022)	Journal article	●	●	●	●	●	T1, T2, T4
Dewerse et al. (2023)	Journal article	●	●	●	●	●	T2, T3, T5
Shannahan & Denning (2023)	Journal article	●	●	●	●	●	T2, T4, T5
De Beer (2023)	Journal article	●	●	●	●	●	T1, T2, T4, T5
Mutambasere (2022)	Journal article	●	●	●	●	●	T2, T4, T5
Magazi & Nanthambwe (2022)	Journal article	●	●	○	●	●	T2, T4, T5

Note. ● = addressed; ○ = not addressed. SO1 = definitions and models of the Church as transformative community; SO2 = leadership, governance, and participatory structures; SO3 = contribution of BECs/SCCs and parish structures; SO4 = role of worship, sacramental life, and fellowship; SO5 = institutional, cultural, and structural challenges. T1 = base ecclesial and small Christian communities; T2 = leadership, governance, and lay participation; T3 = worship and sacramental life; T4 = church-based development and advocacy; T5 = institutional barriers; T6 =



digital and dispersed ecclesial community. SO3 (contribution of BECs/SCCs and parish structures) is coded more broadly than the T1 theme: SO3 is marked wherever a source makes any reference to BEC/SCC or parish structure, while T1 is reserved for sources in which BECs or SCCs are a central or analogous focus of the source as a whole; the two columns are therefore not expected to agree, and this distinction has been added to the note above to prevent misreading.

Appendix B: Synthesis of Anticipated Thematic Clusters and Emergent Findings

Anticipated cluster	thematic	Emergent synthesis finding and key sources
Church-based development and advocacy initiatives		Fully confirmed as the second most extensively elaborated theme. 25 of 29 sources contribute, spanning diocesan welfare institutions, Pentecostal corporate social responsibility programmes, and transnational and diaspora giving networks (Cudjoe Adadey & Yisa, 2024; Mutambasere, 2022; Oghenekevwe & Omosor, 2024).
Institutional barriers to transformative engagement		Fully confirmed as the most extensively elaborated theme. 26 of 29 sources contribute, with clericalism, prosperity-gospel theology, and resource dependency recurring as the most consistently named barriers (Berry, 2021; Inguanez & Froehle, 2024; Thiani, 2024).
Leadership, governance, and lay participation		Fully confirmed and substantially elaborated. 23 of 29 sources contribute, with strong evidence for de-clericalisation and lay-empowerment mechanisms (Del Castillo, 2022; Kalungu et al., 2025) and for diocesan and synodal governance reform (Dunlop, 2025; Inguanez & Froehle, 2024).
Base ecclesial communities and small Christian communities		Confirmed, with moderate depth. Six of 29 sources contribute; BECs/SCCs and their African analogues are consistently documented as grassroots structures fusing prayer and social action, though contemporary evidence (Del Castillo, 2022; Kalungu et al., 2025) is concentrated in the Philippines and Kenya relative to the theme's historical Latin American centre (Evans, 2020).
Worship and sacramental life as sustaining practice		Partially confirmed and complicated. Five of 29 sources contribute; worship is documented as a sustaining resource (Njuguna, 2021; Thiani, 2024) but also, in one source, as a potential institutional barrier when liturgy-centredness crowds out diaconal engagement (Hamu et al., 2023).
Digital and dispersed ecclesial community		Only minimally confirmed. Two of 29 sources contribute (Eurich, 2020; Oluwasola & Akoh, 2025); systematic research on digitally mediated ecclesial community as a distinct vehicle of social transformation remains sparse and is identified as a substantive gap.
Emergent: worship-centredness as both sustaining resource and institutional barrier		Not anticipated; emerged through the synthesis itself. Hamu et al. (2023) is the only source treating an exclusively liturgy-focused pastoral model as a barrier to, rather than a resource for, diaconal and catechetical engagement, indicating that the worship-engagement relationship is contingent on balance rather than uniformly positive.



Appendix C: Characteristics of Included Studies (n = 29)

Author (Year)	Country/Region	Source type and design	Tradition/context
Akpanika & Udoh (2020)	Nigeria	Journal article; conceptual-historical	Diaconal ministry; mainline
Eurich (2020)	Germany	Journal article; conceptual	Mainline Protestant diaconia
Evans (2020)	Latin America (regional)	Journal article; conceptual-historical	Roman Catholic; Base Ecclesial Communities
Krull (2020)	United States	Journal article; ethnographic (26 interviews)	Liberal Protestant congregation
Berry (2021)	United States / Germany	Doctoral dissertation; mixed qualitative	Cross-denominational Protestant
Carter (2021)	United States	Doctoral dissertation; phenomenological	Black Protestant congregations, Ferguson
Njuguna (2021)	England	Journal article; practitioner-conceptual	Church of England; deprived urban parish
Del Castillo (2022)	Philippines	Journal article; phenomenological (n = 30)	Roman Catholic; Basic Ecclesial Communities
Hove & Moyo (2022)	Zimbabwe	Journal article; practitioner reflection	Lutheran rural parish
Katongole (2022)	Uganda	Journal article; practitioner narrative	Roman Catholic; rural land-based institute
Magezi & Nanthambwe (2022)	Sub-Saharan Africa	Journal article; conceptual	Cross-denominational
Msebi (2022)	South Africa	Journal article; document analysis	Missional church
Mutambasere (2022)	United Kingdom / Zimbabwe	Journal article; multi-sited ethnography	Roman Catholic diaspora congregation
Coley et al. (2023)	United States	Journal article; mixed methods	Multi-denominational Protestant
De Beer (2023)	South Africa	Journal article; conceptual	Cross-denominational urban theology
Dewerse et al. (2023)	Aotearoa Zealand	Journal article; participatory case study	Baptist inner-city congregation
Hamu et al. (2023)	Indonesia	Journal article; qualitative case study	Roman Catholic rural diocese
Jagger & Fry (2023)	England	Empirical report; qualitative (50 interviews)	Church of England clergy
Shannahan & Denning (2023)	United Kingdom	Journal article; triangulated qualitative	Ecumenical; poverty and austerity
Cudjoe Adadey & Yisa (2024)	Ghana / Nigeria	Journal article; conceptual review	Pentecostal/Charismatic churches
Inguanez & Froehle (2024)	Global Catholic Church / Malta	Journal article; conceptual	Roman Catholic synodal governance
Oghenekevwe & Omosor (2024)	Nigeria	Journal article; mixed methods	Anglican diocese
Powell (2024)	South Africa	Journal article; empirical qualitative	Suburban Anglican/Protestant congregations



Author (Year)	Country/Region	Source type and design	Tradition/context
Thiani (2024)	Kenya	Doctoral dissertation; empirical qualitative	African Orthodox Church
Dunlop (2025)	England	Doctoral thesis; action research	Anglican team ministry; mixed ecology
Kalungu et al. (2025)	Kenya	Journal article; qualitative case study	Roman Catholic; Small Christian Communities
Oluwasola & Akoh (2025)	Kenya / Nigeria	Journal article; case synthesis	Multi-denominational; interfaith
Schroeder (2025)	United States	Journal article; practitioner intervention	Multicultural Church of Christ
Stork & Öhlmann (2025)	Sub-Saharan Africa (7 countries)	Journal article; mixed methods	African Initiated Churches

Note. Studies are listed chronologically; source types and contexts are as reported in the original studies. Each study's aim, methodology, conceptualisation, key finding, and limitation are set out in Appendix D. Foundational works cited throughout (e.g., Boff, 1986; Putnam, 2000) informed the framework but were not primary studies.



Appendix D: Summary of Evidence Synthesised from Included Studies (n = 29)

Included study	Aim	Methodology	Conceptualisation	Key finding	Limitation
Akpanika & Udoh (2020)	Examine diaconal ministry as a vehicle for poverty alleviation	Conceptual/theological; hermeneutical and historical method	Church as a community of love whose diaconal identity is holistic	Prosperity-gospel-driven clericalism structurally undermines diaconal capacity	No empirical data; no case study
Evans (2020)	Assess the Catholic Church's role in defending human rights in Latin America	Conceptual/historical synthesis of secondary literature	Church as constructive agent via post-Vatican II social mission	BECs functioned as social incubators reaching 3–4 million participants	No primary data
Powell (2024)	Explore a praxis of spatial justice for suburban congregations	Empirical qualitative; interviews and focus groups with ministers	Jubilee/Kingdom-of-God theology grounding spatial justice	Fear of lost income, apathy, and NIMBYism constrain engagement	Leadership perspective only; no lay-congregant voice
Njuguna (2021)	Theorise discipleship and mission as interwoven in a deprived parish	Conceptual/theological with practitioner case description	Baptism and theosis as doctrines of transformative incorporation	Wide-reaching social projects showed little effect on numerical growth	Single parish, single-author case; no formal empirical design
Dunlop (2025)	Investigate ecclesiology of the mixed ecology in a team ministry	Empirical; theological action research over two cycles	Five ecclesiological instincts, including missio-ecclesiology and catholicity	Connection between congregations and worshipping communities enables shared mission	Demographically homogeneous co-researcher teams
Oghenekevwe & Omosor (2024)	Examine social action within holistic evangelism in a Nigerian diocese	Empirical; survey, observation, and interviews with diocesan leaders	Evangelism without social action is theologically counterproductive	Documents schools, health centres, and disaster relief as diaconal structures	Reactive budgeting; reliance on insider testimony
Katongole (2022)	Reflect theologically on a rural land-based faith community	Practitioner narrative/autoethnography	Integral ecology as ecclesiology: church as field hospital for the poor	Institution-building is itself theological practice	First-person account; participant impact not yet assessed
Thiani (2024)	Examine philanthropic-diakonia in a national Orthodox Church	Empirical; interviews, observation, and document analysis	Philanthropic-diakonia: liturgy as the liturgy after the Liturgy	Foreign-aid dependency and hierarchical interference undermine local diaconal work	Insider-researcher; social-service activity largely undocumented
Del Castillo (2022)	Explore the lived religion of Filipina BEC servant leaders	Empirical phenomenology; open-ended survey (n = 30)	BECs as a new way of being Church shifting from clericalism to lay-centredness	De-clericalisation and women's servant leadership drive BEC vitality	Non-representative sample; leadership



Included study	Aim	Methodology	Conceptualisation	Key finding	Limitation
Hamu et al. (2023)	Examine pastoral ministry style in a rural Indonesian diocese	Empirical qualitative case study; observation, interviews, documents	Holistic-transformative model: koinonia, diakonia, liturgia, kerygma, martyria	Liturgy-only pastoral model crowds out diakonia and catechesis	perspective only Single parish/diocese; no cross-diocesan comparison
Cudjoe Adadey & Yisa (2024)	Examine Pentecostal churches' contribution to West African development	Conceptual; critical analytical literature review	Imaginary social space theorising a shift to explicit transformation theology	PENTSOS and RCCG corporate social responsibility programmes reach large-scale welfare provision	No original empirical data; two well-resourced denominations only
Carter (2021)	Examine how education shapes religious leaders' advocacy strategies	Empirical qualitative; hermeneutical phenomenology, 12 interviews	Religious leaders positioned as agents of social change	Formal and informal leadership education shapes advocacy capacity after unrest	Small, senior- and male-skewed sample
Jagger & Fry (2023)	Explore the wellbeing of working-class clergy	Empirical qualitative; 50 interviews, 4 focus groups	Institutional Church as culturally dominant requiring transformation	Discernment panels and appointment processes gatekeep working-class access	Entirely White sample; clergy perspectives only
Schroeder (2025)	Foster inclusive spiritual formation in a multicultural congregation	Practitioner-led intervention; focus groups and curriculum evaluation	Ethnorelative ecclesiology grounded in imago Dei	Persistent gap between congregational diversity and ministry leadership	Single congregation; no systematic outcome data
Inguanez & Froehle (2024)	Analyse synodality as ecclesial governance reform	Conceptual/sociological; theology integrated with structure-agency theory	Synodality as integral, organic transformation of the whole church	Clericalism functions as monarchical power without shared decision-making	Thin original survey data; single-country illustrative case
Eurich (2020)	Analyse local church-diakonia partnerships in Western Europe	Conceptual; organisational theory with illustrative interviews	Church shifting from institution towards a diaconal organisation/network hybrid	Divergent organisational logics, not moral failure, obstruct cooperation	Second-hand interview material; no service-user perspectives
Stork & Öhlmann (2025)	Explore African Initiated Churches as ecological actors	Empirical mixed methods; interviews, focus groups, survey	AICs as homegrown grassroots actors analogous to BECs/SCCs	Environmental action typically precedes rather than follows theological reflection	Convenience samples; uneven country representation



Included study	Aim	Methodology	Conceptualisation	Key finding	Limitation
Krull (2020)	Analyse how a liberal congregation navigates justice-movement involvement	Empirical qualitative; year-long ethnography plus 26 interviews	Inclusivity constructed as the congregation's defining religious identity	Inclusivity itself, not church-state separation, limits a public justice voice	Single, predominantl y White congregation
Msebi (2022)	Analyse the missional church's role in community development	Conceptual; qualitative document analysis	Missional community integrating development into missio Dei	Religious pluralism and racial polarisation obstruct development work	Purely conceptual; no case study or primary data
Berry (2021)	Propose a civic ecclesiology for cross-congregational transformation	Mixed qualitative; original survey and practitioner interviews	Ekklesia reclaimed as a civic assembly oriented to the common good	Only 25.3% of US congregations engage in social-service delivery	Limited transparency on sample and coding
Oluwasola & Akoh (2025)	Examine participatory communication as a church community mechanism	Conceptual; secondary-source case synthesis	Church repositioned from transmitter of doctrine to facilitator of transformation	Clergy resistance to open participation reflects fear of losing doctrinal control	Secondary case material; general multidisciplin ary outlet
Coley et al. (2023)	Evaluate a faith-academic-community asset-based development curriculum	Empirical mixed methods; pre/post surveys, focus groups, two cohorts	Congregations as agents of asset-based transformation via a Human Ecology Framework	Produced five concrete social change projects across cohorts	Outcomes largely self-reported; too early to measure impact
Kalungu et al. (2025)	Examine Catholic Church strategies for social change in Nairobi County	Empirical qualitative case study; interviews, observation, documents	Church as moral, social, and political agent across four theoretical lenses	SCCs function as a parliament at the grassroots for community deliberation	Long historical span raises recall-bias concerns; single-county sample
Hove & Moyo (2022)	Reflect on pastoral ecumenical leadership in a rural Zimbabwean parish	Practitioner reflection with conceptual literature	Local ecumenism from below enacted through five pastoral roles	Cross-denominational savings and irrigation projects sustain shared development	Single-author autobiographi cal account; no independent data
Dewerse et al. (2023)	Document a regenerative development process for church renewal	Empirical participatory case study; co-authored by process insiders	Renewal as discernment of place-sourced vocation rather than numeric growth	Council-led governance and Te Tiriti partnership reshape congregational identity	Insider-authored; outcomes are commitments rather than measured impact



Included study	Aim	Methodology	Conceptualisation	Key finding	Limitation
Shannahan & Denning (2023)	Examine church responses to poverty during UK austerity	Empirical triangulated qualitative; interviews, survey, six ethnographic cases	Poverty as multidimensional structural violence requiring liberative response	Congregational distance from lived poverty limits structural advocacy capacity	UK-specific; agency- and parish-level cases
De Beer (2023)	Construct a praxis-based urban theology of liberation	Conceptual/theoretical; three decades of practitioner reflection	Praxis-theory liberation theology committed to incarnational solidarity	Loss of theological interlocation with the urban poor since 1994	No primary empirical data; Tshwane-centred
Mutambasere (2022)	Examine transnational charitable giving in a diaspora congregation	Empirical multi-sited ethnography; 20 interviews across UK and Zimbabwe	Congregation as agent of development from below via person-to-person giving	Customs delays and distrust of centralised redirection caused committee collapse	Single-denomination case; author was a congregation member
Magezi & Nanthambwe (2022)	Explore public pastoral care as a development-positioned ministry	Conceptual; critical literature analysis integrating development theory	Pastoral care extended from individual and ecclesial focus into public space	Historical evangelical retreat from social action still shapes theological resistance	Purely conceptual; no named congregation or empirical case

Note. Full citations for all included studies appear in the References section.