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PASTORAL COUNSELLING AND HOLISTIC CHURCH DEVELOPMENT IN THE ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF OSUN NORTH EAST, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This article explores the transformative role of pastoral counselling as a catalyst for holistic church growth and development within the Anglican Diocese of Osun North East, Nigeria. While the diocese has experienced notable structural and numerical expansion since its establishment in 2009, a critical gap persists between outward growth and the deep spiritual, emotional, and relational health of its congregants. Drawing on Scripture, Anglican ecclesiology, and contemporary pastoral theology, the study argues that pastoral counselling, understood as a theologically grounded, integrative ministry of healing, reconciliation, and discipleship, is essential to nurturing a mature, resilient, and missional church. The study situates pastoral counselling within the biblical model of Christ as the Great Physician and the early church's practice of koinonia, where care for the whole person fostered both spiritual vitality and evangelistic credibility. It further demonstrates how counselling addresses key barriers to church growth emotional trauma, family conflict, and leadership burnout, while enhancing member retention and authentic community life. Contextual challenges, such as limited training, cultural stigma around mental health, and theological suspicion of psychology, are acknowledged, alongside strategic opportunities rooted in Yoruba values like *omoluwabi* and the diocese's connection to the wider Anglican Communion. The study concludes with practical recommendations for integrating pastoral

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counselling into theological education, parish life, and diocesan policy. Ultimately, it contends that a church committed to both proclamation and deep personal care embodies the fullness of the Gospel and becomes a compelling witness in a suffering world. Pastoral counselling, therefore, is not ancillary but central to the church's mission and its journey toward Christ-like maturity.

Introduction

The contemporary church, particularly in the Global South, stands at a significant crossroads. While it often maintains a strong public presence and engages in vigorous spiritual activity, a deeper, more troubling concern has emerged: the stagnation or even decline in the church's intrinsic vitality and transformative power. This phenomenon is not merely about fluctuating attendance figures but speaks to a more profound dissonance between external religious fervour and internal spiritual health. Congregations may be filled on Sundays, yet their members frequently remain emotionally wounded, relationally disconnected, and spiritually immature, unable to fully embody the Gospel in their daily lives[102]. This paradox is acutely felt in the Anglican Diocese of Osun North East, Nigeria, a region marked by both fervent faith and a palpable sense of pastoral need. Established in March 2009 as a missionary diocese carved out from the Diocese of Osun, it has witnessed commendable structural and numerical expansion, evidenced by the regular creation of new archdeaconries, parishes, and out-stations to serve its growing membership[103]. Yet, beneath this outward growth lies a critical pastoral gap. Diocesan training records and synodal observations reveal a striking imbalance: while clerical formation heavily prioritizes liturgy, church history, biblical studies, and administrative competencies, the discipline of pastoral counselling receives limited, if any, dedicated attention.[3] Instead, it is routinely subsumed under broad, non-specialized categories such as "pastoral work" or routine "visitations," leaving clergy to navigate complex human crises ranging from marital breakdown to severe anxiety without formal training or structured supervisory support[104].

Furthermore, parish-level dynamics consistently reflect this gap. Diocesan and local leadership report being overwhelmingly consumed by the immediate demands of financial stewardship, building projects, and the logistics of large-scale evangelistic campaigns, often echoing the episcopal mandate to remain "on the front line of evangelism" and pursue a "revival agenda."[105] In this high-pressure environment, the

[102] Nancy J. Ramsay, ed., *Pastoral Care and Counseling: Redefining the Paradigms* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 23.
[103] Peter Jasper Akinola, "The Creation of New Dioceses in the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)," *The Church of Nigeria News*, March 2009, 4.
[104] "Minutes of the 13th Session of the Diocesan Synod of Osun North East," January 2022, 15.
[105] Rt. Rev. Ebenezer Akorede Oduwole, "Episcopal Charge to the 13th Session of the Diocesan Synod of Osun North East," Ode-Omu, Nigeria, January 2022, 8.

"soft," long-term, and deeply relational work of counselling is frequently deprioritized in favour of more visible, quantifiable metrics of institutional success. The human cost of this disconnect is observable in the congregation: new converts, particularly those transitioning from African Traditional Religions or Islam, often face intense familial and communal pressure, leaving them vulnerable to disillusionment and quiet attrition without intentional emotional support. Long-standing members similarly navigate unprocessed grief, family estrangement, and leadership burnout, yet cultural stigmas surrounding mental health, coupled with lingering theological suspicions of psychology, often discourage them from seeking help[106]. Many are instead funneled toward purely spiritual quick-fixes, leaving deep-seated wounds unaddressed and hindering authentic *koinonia*. A growing chorus of concern from both clergy and laity underscores this critical disconnect: the diocese possesses a clear, energetically pursued mandate for evangelistic expansion and structural growth, but lacks a comprehensive, intentional framework for the deep personal and relational care required to sustain it.

In this context, the ministry of pastoral counselling is experiencing a well-deserved resurgence in theological and practical relevance. No longer viewed as a marginal or remedial service, it is increasingly recognized as a core apostolic function that addresses the whole person, spirit, soul, and body, in a world characterised by unprecedented levels of anxiety, trauma, and social fragmentation[107].

This study employs a qualitative, desk-based research design grounded in practical theology, utilizing the description-interpretation-normativity-praxis cycle to systematically analyze theological literature, historic Anglican formularies, African contextual scholarship, and official diocesan documents (1958–2025). Through a Theological-Contextual Integration Framework that synthesizes documentary analysis, cultural hermeneutics (notably Yoruba omoluwabi), and practical-theological diagnostics, the research transparently maps the diocese's structural growth alongside its implicit pastoral care gaps. While acknowledging the absence of primary empirical data as a limitation, this rigorously structured, criteria-driven methodology ensures academic reproducibility and establishes a solid normative foundation for future congregational-level field studies and evidence-based diocesan policy.

[106] Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 110.

[107] Seward Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958), 14; The Anglican tradition, with its historic commitment to the *via media* and its integrative use of Scripture, tradition, and reason, offers a uniquely fertile theological soil for a counselling ministry that is both confessionally faithful and contextually astute. When practised with theological depth and pastoral sensitivity, counselling can move the church from a state of mere maintenance or numerical growth into a dynamic, Spirit-led reality of authentic development. It serves as a powerful conduit for divine grace, healing the internal fractures that sap a congregation's energy for mission, restoring broken relationships that are essential for *koinonia* (fellowship), and equipping believers for a life of resilient discipleship in their families, workplaces, and communities.

Conceptual and Theological Foundations

Meaning and Scope of Pastoral Counselling

To engage in a serious theological discourse on this subject, it is imperative to define the discipline of pastoral counselling with precision and to delineate its scope from related fields such as secular psychotherapy and a narrowly defined "biblical counselling." James L. Framo, a foundational figure in family systems theory, argued that all therapy is, at its core, a process of creating a "corrective emotional experience" within a new relational context[108]. While the pastor-counsellor is not a clinical therapist, this insight helps frame the pastoral task: to provide a safe, confidential, and grace-filled relationship where a parishioner can explore their struggles, process their pain, and find a new, redemptive narrative for their life in light of the Gospel.

Pastoral counselling is best understood as a specialised, professional application of the church's ancient ministry of pastoral care (cura pastoralis). It is the intentional, relational, and theologically informed process through which a pastor accompanies a person or family through a period of crisis, transition, or personal struggle, with the ultimate goal of facilitating their encounter with God and their journey toward wholeness in Christ[109]. Its scope is intentionally broad, as it seeks to serve the whole person in their concrete life situation. It can address a vast array of human concerns, from crises of faith and vocational discernment to the emotional fallout from grief, marital conflict, family estrangement, anxiety, and depression. It also engages with the collective traumas inflicted by societal ills such as poverty, political violence, and social injustice, which are all too real in the Nigerian context[110].

The uniqueness of pastoral counselling lies in its integrative, theistic worldview. As Seward Hiltner, a pioneer of the field in the twentieth century, famously argued, the pastor's role is not to be a psychotherapist but to be a "sustainer, healer, reconciler, and guide" for their flock[111]. The pastor-counsellor operates from a theological anthropology that sees the human person as a creature who bears the *imago Dei* (image of God) (Gen. 1:27) yet lives in a world profoundly damaged by sin and its systemic consequences (Rom. 3:23). Therefore, healing is understood not as a purely human achievement but as a work of divine grace in which the counsellor is a humble co-labourer with God.

This integrative stance provides a clear distinction from its related disciplines. Secular counselling (or clinical psychotherapy) is grounded in a naturalistic, scientific worldview. It draws its methods and theories from various schools of psychology (e.g., cognitive-behavioural, psychodynamic, humanistic) and is focused on goals of human well-being,

[108] James L. Framo, "A Critical Look at Some Popular Strategic-Family Therapy Concepts," in *The Family Therapy Reader*, ed. John H. Weakland and William F. Ray (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1983), 426.
[109] A. M. Allchin, *Pastoral Care and the Ministry of Reconciliation* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1989), 17.
[110] Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 102.
[111] Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology*, 16.

emotional regulation, and behavioural change without any necessary reference to a transcendent reality or divine purpose[112]. While its insights into human behaviour are invaluable, its ultimate frame of reference is anthropocentric.

Biblical counselling, a movement that emerged primarily within conservative North American evangelicalism in the latter half of the twentieth century, often takes a starkly different approach. Championed by figures like Jay E. Adams, it posits that the Bible is a complete and sufficient guide for all of life's problems and therefore rejects the foundational premises of secular psychology as fundamentally at odds with a biblical worldview[113]. In this model, psychological and emotional distress are viewed almost exclusively through the lens of personal sin, and the prescribed path to healing is a process of repentance and strict obedience to biblical commands.

Pastoral counselling, as practised within the mainline Protestant and Anglican traditions, occupies a more nuanced and integrative middle ground. It affirms the supreme authority of Scripture and the centrality of God's grace in Christ for salvation and healing, while simultaneously acknowledging that God's general revelation has granted humanity valuable insights into the complexities of the human psyche and social behaviour through the discipline of psychology[114]. It does not see psychology as a rival to theology but as a complementary source of knowledge that can help a pastor understand the intricate mechanisms of human suffering and resilience. This approach allows the pastor to be a more effective "healer" and "guide," using a full range of God-given resources to care for their flock.

Theological Basis for the Counselling Ministry

The mandate for pastoral counselling is not a modern accommodation to a therapeutic culture but is deeply and irrevocably rooted in the very self-revelation of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ, as attested in Holy Scripture. A robust theological foundation provides the essential rationale, ethical boundaries, and ultimate telos (goal) for this sacred ministry.

Jesus Christ as the Model Counsellor

The Gospels are, in many ways, a chronicle of Jesus' masterful practice of pastoral counselling. His interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-42) stands as a paradigmatic example. He does not meet her with a sermon or a moralistic rebuke for her complex marital history. Instead, he engages her in a respectful, probing dialogue that moves from a simple request for water to a profound theological discussion about

[112] Ramsay, *Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 45.
[113] Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 14.
[114] Robert E. Webber, *The Secular Saint: A Case for Evangelical Social Responsibility* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 121.

worship and Messiahship. He confronts her with a gentle yet piercing truth ("you have had five husbands," John 4:18), not to shame her, but to create a space for authentic encounter. His goal is her liberation and her new identity as a witness to the living water he offers. As Raymond E. Brown notes in his commentary on John, this narrative "shows Jesus as the one who can satisfy the deepest thirst of the human heart, a thirst that is both physical and spiritual."[115]

Similarly, on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), the Risen Christ embodies the perfect pastoral guide for the despairing disciples. He joins them on their journey of grief and confusion, listens attentively to their story of shattered hopes, and then interprets the Scriptures in a way that makes their hearts "burn within them" (Luke 24:32). His method is one of empathetic presence, theological reframing, and the creation of a sacred space where revelation can occur. These Christological narratives establish a clear pattern for pastoral practice: it must be relational, truth-telling, empathetic, and ultimately Christocentric, aiming for a transformation of the whole person.

The Role of the Holy Spirit

The counselling ministry is fundamentally a pneumatological (Spirit-driven) activity, not a mere exercise of human skill or technique. Jesus himself promised his disciples that he would send "another Advocate (Parakletos), to be with you forever" (John 14:16). The Greek term *Parakletos* is rich in meaning, carrying connotations of one who is "called alongside" to help, which can be translated as "Counsellor," "Advocate," "Helper," or "Comforter."[116] The Spirit's specific role, as Jesus explains, is to "teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26) and to "guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13). This theological truth is the bedrock of pastoral counselling. The pastor-counsellor is not the ultimate source of wisdom, healing, or insight. Their primary vocation is to be a faithful vessel and a humble midwife, creating a safe and prayerful environment where the Holy Spirit can speak directly to the heart of the counsellee, convicting, comforting, illuminating, and leading them into a deeper relationship with Christ. This understanding protects the ministry from becoming a form of human manipulation and keeps it firmly anchored in the economy of divine grace.

The Early Church's Pastoral Care Model

The life of the primitive church in Jerusalem, as described in the Acts of the Apostles, provides a powerful ecclesiological model where pastoral care was inextricably linked to explosive growth. The community was "devoted to the apostles' teaching and to

[115] Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (I–XII): Introduction, Translation, and Notes, The Anchor Yale Bible 29* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 174.
[116] Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (I–XII), 642.

fellowship (koinonia), to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). This *koinonia* was not a casual social gathering but a profound, mutual commitment that manifested in a radical sharing of material resources to ensure that "there were no needy persons among them" (Acts 4:34)[117].[17] This holistic care, which addressed both the spiritual and physical needs of its members, was a direct and visible outworking of their faith in the Risen Lord. It was this tangible love and care that made them "enjoy the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). Their growth was a divine response to their authentic communal life. Furthermore, the church's strategic wisdom is evident in the appointment of the seven deacons in Acts 6:1-6. The apostles recognised that a failure to address the pastoral and practical needs of a marginalised group (the Hellenistic widows) was threatening the very unity and health of the church. Their decision to appoint a dedicated team to "wait on tables" was made so that they themselves could "give their full attention to prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). This demonstrates a mature ecclesiology in which the health and growth of the church depend on a well-structured and delegated system of pastoral care that frees all ministers to fulfil their unique callings.

The Concept of Church Growth and Development

A theological argument for pastoral counselling as a catalyst for growth must be grounded in a biblically and theologically sound understanding of what "church growth" truly signifies. A reductionist view that equates growth solely with increasing membership numbers is not only pastorally dangerous but theologically shallow. A more robust and faithful concept is one of holistic development, which integrates spiritual, numerical, and socio-communal dimensions into a single, dynamic process.

The Biblical Concept of Growth

The New Testament consistently celebrates the numerical expansion of the church. Luke, the author of Acts, notes with regularity that the word of God spread and that the number of disciples increased (Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20). However, this quantitative growth is never presented in isolation. It is always the fruit of a church that is spiritually healthy, deeply unified, and living in the power of the Holy Spirit. The goal of this growth is not a larger religious institution but a more mature and Christ-like Body. The apostle Paul provides the definitive theological vision for this in his letter to the Ephesians. He writes that Christ has given various ministries to his church "to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of

[117] Allchin, *Pastoral Care and the Ministry of Reconciliation*, 22.

Christ" (Eph. 4:12-13)[118]. This passage redefines the very purpose of the church. Its "building up" is a process of growth "into him who is the head, into Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Eph. 4:15-16). A mature church, therefore, is not merely large; it is a network of healthy, interdependent relationships where every member is functioning in their God-given role, and the entire community is growing together in Christ-centred love. Its vitality is measured by its capacity for mutual care, its ability to "speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15), and its collective journey toward spiritual maturity.

Theological Perspectives on Holistic Development. Building upon this biblical model, a comprehensive theology of church development encompasses three interconnected and mutually reinforcing dimensions[119].

Spiritual Growth: This is the foundational and primary dimension. It concerns the deepening of individual and corporate faith, the cultivation of a vibrant life of prayer and worship, the growth in holiness and moral character, and a lived, experiential knowledge of God's love and grace in Jesus Christ. It is the inward transformation that is the wellspring of all other forms of growth.

Numerical Growth: This is the quantitative dimension that arises organically from a spiritually healthy community. It is the result of effective evangelism and the conversion of new believers. However, in a holistic model, numerical growth is not the primary goal but a natural and healthy byproduct of a church that is so full of the love of God that it cannot help but overflow into its surrounding community. A church that is not growing numerically may be failing in its mission, but a church that is growing numerically without a corresponding spiritual depth is building on sand.

Social/Communal Growth: This dimension speaks to the church's internal and external social health. Internally, it involves the development of strong, supportive, reconciled, and loving relationships among its members, the authentic *koinonia* of the early church. Externally, it is the church's active engagement with its community through acts of mercy, justice, service, and advocacy, seeking the shalom (the comprehensive peace and wholeness) of the city (Jer. 29:7). This is the church's public witness, its social embodiment of the Gospel.

A church that is strong in only one of these dimensions is fundamentally unbalanced and unsustainable. A large but spiritually shallow church is a crowd, not a communion. A spiritually deep but socially isolated church is a monastic sect, not an apostolic

[118] Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (I–XII), 642.
[119] Jesse N. K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Theology in the Twenty-First Century* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1995), 112.

community. Pastoral counselling, as this study will now demonstrate, is a uniquely powerful ministry that directly catalyses growth in all three of these vital dimensions.

Pastoral Counselling and the Church Growth Nexus

Having established the solid scriptural and theological groundwork, this section will now delineate the direct, causal, and multifaceted links between a strategically implemented pastoral counselling ministry and the holistic growth and development of the church. It will argue that counselling is not a separate, inward-focused activity but a central engine that drives and sustains the church's entire mission.

Counselling as a Ministry of Healing, Restoration, and Discipleship

Within the Anglican tradition, pastoral counselling is not a replacement for the core means of grace, the Word and Sacraments, but its vital companion and enabler. It is a specialised expression of the church's fundamental ministry of healing and reconciliation, which is at the very heart of its apostolic identity. The church is, in the classic phrase of St. John Chrysostom, a "hospital for sinners," and its primary task is to be a place where the sick are not only welcomed but actively healed[120]. This healing is not a narrow, spiritualized concept but a holistic restoration of the person to the wholeness for which they were created by God.

Counselling creates a "thin place" in the modern world, a sacred, confidential space where individuals can bring their deepest shames, doubts, and sorrows without fear of judgment or a quick-fix spiritual platitude. In many African and Nigerian church cultures, there exists a strong pressure to project an image of unassailable spiritual victory and strength. The pastor's office, when it becomes a place of radical honesty and vulnerability, offers a powerful countercultural alternative. It is a space where the biblical injunction to "confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed" (James 5:16) can be lived out in a safe and structured way. This process of being truly known and accepted is itself a profound channel of God's grace, often leading to a deep and lasting sense of liberation. As Henri Nouwen, himself a priest and a profound pastoral theologian, wrote, "When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand."[121] Pastoral counselling embodies this ministry of shared pain and tender presence. This healing ministry is inextricably woven into the fabric of Christian discipleship. A disciple is, by definition, a learner on a journey to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). However, this journey is often profoundly obstructed by the debris of past

[120] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York: Image Books, 1979), 90.
[121] Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 88.

trauma, unresolved grief, or a self-image that has been shattered by life's hardships and is at odds with the truth of their identity as a beloved child of God. A person who carries deep emotional wounds may find it nearly impossible to trust in a God who is a loving Father, no matter how many sermons they hear on the subject. Pastoral counselling helps to clear these internal roadblocks. By providing a safe relationship in which these wounds can be named, grieved, and reinterpreted in the light of the Gospel, the counsellor helps to create the internal space necessary for a person to hear God's call, embrace his truth, and step into their vocation. In this sense, the pastor-counsellor acts as a spiritual midwife, assisting the Holy Spirit in the birthing of the "new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:24). It is a form of kerygmatic and catechetical ministry that moves the faith from the head to the heart, from intellectual assent to lived, embodied experience.

How Pastoral Counselling Addresses Key Growth Barriers

The health and growth of any local church are often its own worst enemy, hindered not by external opposition but by a host of internal pathologies. A strategically deployed pastoral counselling ministry is a powerful diagnostic and therapeutic tool for identifying and dismantling these critical barriers to holistic development.

Emotional Wounds and Spiritual Stagnation

A vast number of Christians live with deep, unprocessed emotional injuries from their past, childhood neglect, abuse, abandonment, or the chronic stress of poverty and insecurity. These psychological wounds create a formidable barrier to a deep, intimate relationship with God. They can foster a distorted view of God as a remote, harsh, or untrustworthy figure, which in turn leads to a faith that is dry, legalistic, performative, or purely intellectual. Such a faith is incapable of producing the fruit of the Spirit and offers no compelling witness to the world. Pastoral counselling, with its blend of psychological insight and theological reflection, provides a structured and safe pathway for these individuals to confront their pain, grieve their losses, and, through the pastoral relationship, begin to experience the patient, healing love of God in a new and personal way. As these emotional wounds are brought into the light and addressed, the spiritual stagnation that has held them captive begins to dissolve, making way for a vibrant, resilient, and life-giving faith that is the very source and spring of all true church growth.

Family and Relational Conflicts

The family is the foundational cell of both society and the church. When families within a congregation are in crisis, through marital discord, parent-child conflict, or generational estrangement, the entire church community suffers. These conflicts create an

atmosphere of tension, division, gossip, and mistrust that is toxic to the church's internal health and its external witness. The church's credibility in the wider community is severely damaged if it appears unable to help its own members navigate their most intimate relationships. Pastoral counselling, through intentional pre-marital preparation, marriage enrichment, and therapeutic intervention in times of crisis, plays a crucial preventative and restorative role. By strengthening the foundational unit of the family, the church builds a more stable, loving, and resilient base for its own communal life and for its mission in the world. A congregation where marriages are thriving, where parents and children are in healthy relationships, and where reconciliation is a lived reality is a powerful, tangible sermon on the transformative power of the Gospel. In the Nigerian context, where extended family structures are paramount and marital stability is a key social value, a church that excels in this area will be a highly credible and attractive community of faith.

Leadership Burnout and Crisis

Church leaders, particularly the clergy, are among the most vulnerable to burnout, compassion fatigue, depression, and moral failure. They often labour under immense pressure from their congregations, face heavy workloads with little support, and can experience a profound sense of isolation. Their calling, which requires deep emotional and spiritual investment, can leave them personally depleted. This is a critical issue for church growth because, as the adage goes, "Everything rises and falls on leadership." A burnt-out, depressed, or morally compromised pastor is incapable of providing the spiritual vision, emotional stability, and pastoral care that a congregation needs to thrive. The health of the shepherd directly determines the health of the flock. Pastoral counselling is therefore essential not only as a crisis intervention but as a vital preventative measure for leaders. A formal, confidential, and theologically grounded counselling support system for clergy provides them with a safe harbour, a place to process their own struggles, receive honest feedback, and be reminded of their own worth and identity in Christ, which is separate from their ministerial performance or their congregation's success metrics. A diocese that invests strategically in the personal and spiritual care of its clergy ensures a more stable, healthy, and sustainable leadership pipeline, which is one of its most valuable assets for long-term growth and development.

Integration of Counselling into the Mission and Evangelism of the Church

A persistent misconception is that pastoral counselling is an inward-looking, maintenance-focused activity that diverts energy and resources away from the church's outward, missional calling. In reality, a healthy, well-cared-for church is its most effective form of evangelism. The integration of counselling into the very heart of the church's mission is a powerful and strategic evangelistic approach.

In a world increasingly plagued by anxiety, depression, loneliness, and broken relationships, the church's capacity to offer genuine, long-term, and compassionate care is one of its most compelling and unique assets. When the broader community observes that a church is a place where its members are truly known, deeply loved, and consistently healed in their times of crisis, it creates a powerful gravitational pull for those who are hurting from the outside. The church's *koinonia* becomes its most potent apologetic for the truth of the Gospel. As the early church father Tertullian famously reported, the pagans of his day would say of the Christians, "See how they love one another."[122] A church that demonstrates this love through a robust ministry of care embodies this ancient witness in a modern context. A person in crisis is far more likely to be drawn to a quiet, consistent act of Christ-like care from a fellow believer during the week than to a polished but impersonal sermon on a Sunday morning.

Furthermore, a counselling-informed approach to evangelism is inherently more sensitive, respectful, and effective. It recognises a fundamental truth: people's intellectual questions about God are often deeply rooted in their personal pain and lived experience. A pastor who has been trained in basic counselling skills is far better equipped to be a good listener. They can first seek to understand a person's story, their wounds, and their worldview before presenting the Gospel. This allows them to frame the message of Christ not as a set of abstract theological propositions but as a personal, healing, and hope-filled answer to the specific, felt needs of their interlocutor. In this way, pastoral counselling becomes the essential bridge between the world's deep and often hidden pain and the church's glorious message of redemption and restoration.

The Role of Counselling in Discipleship and Retention of Members

Numerical growth is a hollow and ultimately unsustainable victory if those who decide for Christ are not effectively integrated, nurtured, and discipled into mature members of the Body of Christ. This is the crucial juncture where pastoral counselling plays a pivotal and strategic role in both the discipleship process and the long-term retention of members.

The initial decision to follow Christ is merely the first step on a lifelong journey of transformation that is fraught with significant challenges. New believers invariably bring with them a host of old habits, thought patterns, and relational dynamics from their past lives that are incompatible with their new identity in Christ. Without a supportive structure to help them navigate this often-turbulent transition, they are at a high risk of becoming disillusioned, discouraged, and quietly slipping away. Pastoral counselling provides that essential structure. It offers a safe and confidential space for new converts to ask their difficult and often "unspiritual" questions, to process their doubts and fears,

[122] Tertullian, Apology, 39.7, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1951), 3:46.

and to learn how to apply the truths of Scripture to the concrete, messy realities of their daily lives. This is discipleship in its most practical and personal form. In the Nigerian context, where new converts from other religious backgrounds (particularly from African Traditional Religions or Islam) can face intense family and community pressure, the pastoral counsellor can be a vital lifeline, providing not only spiritual guidance but also practical wisdom for navigating their complex social reality.

For long-time, established members, counselling serves a critical function of re-igniting a faith that may have grown cold, routine, or legalistic. It also provides crucial support for those navigating a profound "dark night of the soul", a crisis of faith that could otherwise lead to their departure from the church. A member who is experiencing a deep personal loss, a financial crisis, or a spiritual dryness needs more than a general prayer from the pulpit; they need a pastor who will walk with them. In a church where people have a lived experience of receiving such personal, compassionate, and non-judgmental care in their time of need, they develop a powerful sense of belonging and loyalty. They know they are not just a number but a valued member of a community that is committed to their well-being. A church that demonstrably invests in the holistic health of its members is a church that its members will be committed to staying in and growing with. This deep, relational bond is a key, often overlooked, factor in long-term member retention and the development of a stable, intergenerational community of faith.

Literature-based Insights on Counselling and Congregational Vitality

A wide and compelling body of scholarly and practical literature from the fields of practical theology, sociology of religion, and church growth studies strongly supports the central thesis of this study: that a strong, intentional ministry of pastoral care is a defining characteristic of a vital and healthy congregation.

Eugene Peterson, the renowned pastor-theologian, spent his career calling the church back to its foundational identity. In his seminal work 'The Contemplative Pastor: Returning Ministry to Its Roots', he argues that the modern pastor has been dangerously recast as a "shopkeeper" or a "CEO" focused on church growth techniques and market-driven strategies[123]. He calls for a recovery of the pastor's true vocation as a "pastor" (a shepherd) and a "minister" (a servant), whose primary task is a deep, attentive presence with the people. He writes, "The primary task of the pastor is to keep the community at its work of being a community of faith, to be a constant reminder in that community of the reality of God."[124] This "keeping" is the essence of pastoral counselling, a ministry of attentive, prayerful, and patient presence. A pastor who masters this art fosters a

[123] Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*, 31.
[124] Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*, 32.

community that is grounded in the reality of God, not in the metrics of a success-driven culture.

In the academic field of practical theology, Nancy J. Ramsay has argued that in our contemporary "counselling society," the church's unique theological contribution is its narrative of hope, redemption, and a God who is present in suffering[125]. She contends that while secular therapy can offer coping mechanisms, it cannot provide the ultimate framework of meaning and purpose that the Gospel offers. When the church integrates this grand, redemptive narrative into its care for its members, it creates a truly countercultural space of healing that the world cannot replicate. This is a powerful argument for the church's distinctiveness in caring for souls.

Empirical and observational research on healthy churches consistently identifies strong pastoral care and a deep sense of authentic community as non-negotiable characteristics. Lyle E. Schaller, a leading church consultant of the twentieth century, noted in his study of growing congregations that a common feature was a clear distinction between the "pastor of care" and the "pastor of programming."[126] This specialisation, even if achieved through a strong lay care team in a smaller church, signals a high strategic value placed on the personal and spiritual well-being of the congregation. This finding has been corroborated by more recent studies, which show that churches with strong small-group ministries, where care and accountability are built in, are far more effective at retaining new members and fostering spiritual growth than those without them.

Finally, in the African theological context, the work of scholars like Jesse N. K. Mugambi and Mercy Amba Oduyoye provides a crucial corrective to a church that is overly focused on otherworldly salvation. They have long argued for a theology that is deeply engaged with the "here and now" of the African experience, a theology that seeks to address the concrete realities of human suffering, poverty, and oppression[127]. Mugambi's concept of a "Reconstruction" theology for Africa after the era of liberation calls for the church to be an agent of building up, of healing, and of holistic human development[128]. Pastoral counselling is precisely such a ministry, an incarnational, practical expression of the church's commitment to the wholeness of its members in this present life, which is an integral part of its eschatological hope for the life to come. A church in Osun North East that takes this incarnational mission seriously will be a church that grows not just in size, but in authenticity, depth, and transformative societal impact.

[125] Ramsay, *Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 18.
[126] Lyle E. Schaller, *The Change Agent: The Church's Greatest Need* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 178.
[127] Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, 5.
[128] Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, 1.

The Anglican Context and Implications for Osun North East Diocese

The powerful theological and practical framework established in the preceding sections must now be applied with specificity and sensitivity to the unique context of the Anglican Diocese of Osun North East. Understanding its ecclesiological heritage, its current pastoral praxis, and its particular socio-cultural challenges is essential for developing actionable and relevant recommendations.

Overview of Anglican Ecclesiology and Pastoral Practice

The Anglican Communion, through its historic formularies, the 'Book of Common Prayer (BCP)', the 'Thirty-Nine Articles', and the Ordinal, provides a clear, theologically rich, and practically oriented foundation for pastoral ministry. At the heart of Anglican ecclesiology is the conviction that the church is a community constituted by the Word of God and the Sacraments of Christ, where the divine presence is encountered through the liturgical life, the preached word, and the shared fellowship of the faithful. The ministry of the priest (presbyter) is central to this life, serving as a steward of these mysteries and a shepherd of the flock.

The 'Ordinal', the liturgy for the ordination of deacons and priests, offers the most direct and authoritative Anglican definition of the priestly vocation, and it is profoundly pastoral in its orientation. During the ordination of a priest, the bishop delivers a charge that is both a job description and a spiritual commission: "Will you be diligent in prayers, and in reading of the Holy Scriptures... Will you be ready, with all faithful diligence, to banish from you all erroneous and strange doctrine... Will you be diligent in visiting the sick, in comforting the afflicted, in feeding the hungry, and in all the works of a good and faithful pastor?"[129] This charge inextricably links the intellectual duties of the priest (prayer, Scripture, sound doctrine) with their practical, relational duties (visiting, comforting, feeding). The priest is explicitly called to be a "good and faithful pastor," a shepherd who is deeply and personally present with his or her flock in their joys, sorrows, and material needs. This vision is perfectly congruent with a robust pastoral counselling ministry, which is the modern, specialised extension of this ancient charge to "comfort the afflicted."

Furthermore, the Anglican via media, with its commitment to the "three-legged stool" of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason, provides a uniquely flexible yet stable framework for the practice of pastoral care[130]. This method allows Anglican ministers to be both confessionally orthodox and contextually intelligent. They can confidently affirm the authority of Scripture and the centrality of Christ for salvation while also being open to the valuable insights of the human sciences, including psychology and sociology, as part

[129] *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church According to the Use of the Church of England* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1662), 352.
[130] Webber, *The Secular Saint*, 105.

of God's general revelation to humanity through the faculty of reason. This integrative approach allows for a pastoral counselling ministry that is both theologically grounded and practically effective in addressing the complex realities of the human condition.

Within the traditional Anglican parish system, the rector or vicar held the "cure of souls" for a defined geographical area. This meant they had a comprehensive responsibility for the spiritual and, by social extension, the general well-being of everyone in their parish[131]. While the realities of modern urban sprawl, rural-urban migration, and a mobile population have rendered a strict geographical "cure of souls" largely obsolete, the underlying principle remains a powerful ideal: the parish priest is not just a functionary who conducts services but a pastor who is in a deep, covenantal relationship with a specific community of people.

The Diocesan Mandate for Growth and Pastoral Care

The Anglican Diocese of Osun North East was inaugurated on March 5, 2009, by a decree of the then Primate of the Church of Nigeria, Archbishop Peter Jasper Akinola, as a missionary diocese carved out from the Diocese of Osun[132]. Its creation was a direct response to the rapid growth of the Anglican Church in the region and the need for more localised episcopal oversight. The diocese, with its cathedral at All Saints' Cathedral in Ode-Omu, has since been under the leadership of its pioneer bishop, the Rt. Rev. Ebenezer Akorede Oduwole.

The public ministry of Bishop Oduwole and the diocese's official communications reveal a clear and strong mandate for church growth, primarily framed in terms of evangelism, church planting, and spiritual revival. In his episcopal charge at the 2022 Synod, Bishop Oduwole emphasised a "revival agenda" and a call for his clergy to be "on the front line of evangelism."[133] The diocese's structural growth is evident in the regular creation of new archdeaconries, parishes, and out-stations to serve its expanding membership across its territory in Osun State.

This energetic focus on numerical and structural expansion is a significant and commendable achievement. However, a careful analysis of the diocese's public documents and training priorities suggests a gap between its evangelistic zeal and a comprehensive strategic framework for the deep, personal, and relational care that is necessary to sustain such growth over the long term. The mandate for growth is clearly articulated, but the mandate for the pastoral care that undergirds it appears to be more implicit than explicit. For instance, while the diocese has a robust program for the training of clergy and lay leaders, a review of its formation priorities and public reports indicates

[131] Allchin, *Pastoral Care and the Ministry of Reconciliation*, 56.
[132] Akinola, "The Creation of New Dioceses," 4.
[133] Rt. Rev. Ebenezer Akorede Oduwole, "Episcopal Charge to the 13th Session of the Diocesan Synod of Osun North East," Ode-Omu, Nigeria, January 2022, 8.

that the discipline of pastoral counselling receives limited attention, often being subsumed under a general category of "pastoral work" or "visitations."[134] The training seems to focus more heavily on liturgy, church history, biblical studies, and administrative skills. This is a critical gap. Without a corresponding investment in the skills and structures needed to provide deep, healing care, there is a genuine risk that the church is building a large structure on a weak foundation, a broad but shallow faith that may prove vulnerable to the pressures of a rapidly changing and often hostile society.

Challenges and Opportunities for Counselling Ministry in the Diocese

The path to establishing a robust and sustainable pastoral counselling ministry in the Diocese of Osun North East is not without significant challenges, but it is equally rich with latent opportunities that can be strategically leveraged.

Limited Access to Formal Training: The most immediate and substantial barrier is the lack of accessible, affordable, and theologically sound training in pastoral counselling for the diocese's clergy and lay leaders. Most of the diocese's clergy were formed in a system where formal counselling skills were not a core part of the curriculum. They are often left to learn "on the job" or through their own personal initiative, which can leave them feeling ill-equipped and anxious when faced with complex issues like severe depression, trauma, or family systems in crisis.

Cultural and Theological Stigmas: In many Yoruba and wider Nigerian cultural contexts, there is a powerful stigma attached to mental and emotional health issues. Seeking help from a professional can be perceived as a sign of personal or spiritual weakness, a lack of faith, or even an admission of involvement with occult forces[135]. This cultural reality can prevent parishioners from seeking the help they need. It can also make clergy hesitant to proactively offer counselling, for fear of being accused of "casting out demons" when a professional medical or psychological intervention is required, or of accusing a parishioner of hidden sin.

Administrative and Missiological Priorities: Diocesan and parish leadership are often overwhelmed with the urgent demands of administration, financial stewardship, building projects, and the logistics of large evangelistic events. In this high-pressure environment, the "soft" and long-term ministry of counselling can be easily deprioritised in favour of more visible, immediate, and quantifiable projects that offer a quicker return on investment in terms of public recognition and numerical growth.

Theological Suspicion of Psychology: A lingering, albeit often unspoken, suspicion of psychology as a "secular" or even "anti-Christian" discipline can be a barrier. This can stem from a well-intentioned but theologically narrow view that all human problems are

[134] "Minutes of the 13th Session of the Diocesan Synod of Osun North East," January 2022, 15.
[135] Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, 110.

purely spiritual in origin and can be solved solely through prayer, fasting, and scriptural admonition, without the need for psychological insight or professional intervention.

Opportunities

Strong and Visionary Episcopal Leadership: The single greatest asset for change is the office of the bishop. A diocesan bishop who is a clear and consistent champion for a holistic vision of ministry can be a powerful catalyst for systemic transformation. If Bishop Oduwole were to publicly and strategically articulate the theological and missional importance of pastoral counselling and allocate diocesan resources for its development, it would have an immediate and profound ripple effect throughout the entire diocese.

A Growing Awareness Among a New Generation: There is a growing awareness and openness, particularly among a new generation of younger clergy and educated laity in Nigeria, to the importance of mental and emotional health. This generation is more likely to have been exposed to psychological concepts through their education and is more comfortable integrating them into their faith. This provides a ready and receptive audience for a new, more integrative approach to pastoral care.

The Resources of the Anglican Communion: The diocese is not an island. It is part of the Church of the Province of West Africa (CPWA) and the worldwide Anglican Communion, which possesses a wealth of resources on pastoral care. Theological institutions in Ghana, such as Trinity Theological College in Legon, and in Nigeria, such as the Archbishop Vining College of Theology in Akure, have faculty and programs that could be tapped for training and consultation. The global communion can provide a platform for sharing best practices, developing contextual resources, and building a network of support for pastoral carers across provinces.

A Culture of Community and *Omoluwabi:* The Yoruba culture, with its deep-seated values of family, community support, mutual responsibility, and the ideal of *omoluwabi* (a person of excellent character who is generous, respectful, and a builder of community), provides a natural and powerful cultural bridge to the Christian concept of *koinonia*[136]. A pastoral counselling ministry that is framed not as an individualistic, clinical exercise but as an act of communal care, restoration, and the building up of the community's collective well-being can find a very receptive soil in this cultural context. It can be presented as a fulfilment of the highest Yoruba virtues within the framework of the Christian faith.

Discussion and Theological Reflection

This study has traversed a rich and complex terrain, from the foundational ministry of Jesus Christ on the roads of Galilee to the specific, contemporary challenges of a Nigerian

[136] Kola A. Owolabi, *The Concept of Omoluwabi in Yoruba Culture* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 2000), 23.

Anglican diocese. It is now time to synthesise these diverse strands and engage in a deeper theological reflection on the ultimate nature and purpose of pastoral counselling. The central argument can be distilled into a single, profound claim: pastoral counselling is not merely a supportive ministry; it is a form of mission praxis. It is the tangible, frontline work of God's kingdom being enacted in the personal and relational spaces of human suffering and hope[137].

The kingdom of God, as proclaimed by Jesus, is not a distant, ethereal reality reserved for the afterlife; it is a present, dynamic, and invading power that seeks to establish God's healing, justice, and peace in the here and now[138]. Theologian John P. D. Dunn, in his work on the kingdom, argues that its presence is marked wherever the powers of sin, death, and brokenness are being confronted and overcome by the power of God's grace[139]. Pastoral counselling is a direct engagement with this kingdom work. In the confidential space of the counselling room, the pastor-counsellor stands alongside a parishioner as they confront the oppressive realities of their own internal and external worlds, their anxiety, their grief, their broken relationships, and their sense of hopelessness. Through the tools of empathetic listening, the illumination of Scripture, and the power of prayer, the counsellor becomes an agent of the kingdom, participating in the divine work of "setting the oppressed free" (Luke 4:18).

This perspective fundamentally transforms our understanding of the counselling space. It is not a sterile, clinical office for a technical problem-solving exercise. It is a sacred sanctuary, a modern-day 'holy of holies', where the divine and human meet in a profound way. It is a contemporary manifestation of the Upper Room in Jerusalem, where the Risen Christ met his confused and fearful disciples, listened to their story of despair, and "opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45). The pastor-counsellor is not a neutral, detached technician. They are a witness to the resurrection, a fellow pilgrim, and a guide who points their companion toward the one who is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

The integration of this ministry into the life of the church in Osun North East, therefore, is not an optional programmatic add-on or a capitulation to a therapeutic culture; it is a theological necessity. A church that claims to be the Body of Christ in the world must, by

[137] A critical ethical challenge in the diocesan context is maintaining confidentiality within the highly relational, closely knit parishes of Nigerian Anglican communities, where personal, familial, and ecclesial boundaries are often fluid. This interconnectedness, while supportive, complicates pastoral care by fostering informal information sharing and dual relationships that deter parishioners from seeking help due to fears of stigma or reprisal. Theologically, confidentiality is not a barrier to *koinonia* but its essential safeguard, rooted in Anglican pastoral discretion and the biblical mandate to "bear one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2) without exploitation. Practically, this requires culturally sensitive informed consent, clear boundaries between healthy accountability and harmful gossip, ongoing peer supervision, and diocesan guidelines for secure documentation and ethical practice. When reframed as a sacred stewardship rather than professional detachment, confidentiality becomes an act of pastoral integrity that models a refined *omoluwabi*, honouring trust, protecting the vulnerable, and preserving the parish as a sanctuary for healing rather than exposure.

[138] John P. D. Dunn, *The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Man* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1963), 45.

[139] Dunn, *The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Man*, 52.

its very nature, reflect the character of its Head. The Jesus of the Gospels is the ultimate listener, the divine healer, the great reconciler, and the perfect guide. He is the Good Shepherd who "lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11) and who leaves the ninety-nine to search for the one that is lost (Luke 15:4). He is the Great Physician who declared that he "has not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32). A church that neglects this deeply personal, healing, and reconciling dimension of its ministry has, in a very real sense, lost its way. It may be a successful religious organisation by worldly standards of size and influence, but it is not a faithful community following its Lord in the way of the cross and the empty tomb.

Evaluating the success of pastoral counselling as a catalyst for holistic transformation requires a paradigm shift in our metrics of success. Its fruit is not to be measured by the number of hours spent in sessions or the number of cases closed, but by the qualitative, Spirit-led changes that ripple out into the life of the entire church. Success is seen in the marriage that, on the brink of collapse, is restored through a process of grace and truth and becomes a beacon of hope for other couples in the parish. It is seen in the leader who, on the verge of burnout and despair, receives the care they need and is able to return to their ministry with a renewed sense of calling and compassion. It is seen in the new believer who, instead of drifting away in their confusion, is discipled through a process of personal guidance and becomes a strong, mature, and contributing member of the Body of Christ. These are the tangible fruits of a ministry that is truly at the heart of God's missional agenda.

The theological implications of this vision are profound for every aspect of church life. For leadership, it demands a re-conception of the pastoral office from that of a CEO or a program director to that of a shepherd and a healer. A bishop and his clergy must be leaders whose primary identity is found in their deep, personal care for their people. For discipleship, it requires a movement away from a purely didactic, classroom-based model to a more holistic, relational journey where the challenges of real, embodied life are addressed within the safety and accountability of a faith community. And for church development, it means that a mature and growing church is defined not by the size of its buildings or the scale of its events, but by the depth of its love, the health of its relationships, and its capacity to be a healing community for a broken world. In this light, pastoral counselling is not a luxury but the very lifeblood of a church that is truly alive in Christ.

Recommendations

Based on the comprehensive theological, conceptual, and contextual analysis presented in this study, the following concrete, actionable, and contextually relevant recommendations are offered to the leadership of the Anglican Diocese of Osun North

East. These proposals are designed to move the diocese from recognising the need for a stronger counselling ministry to strategically implementing it as a core component of its mission for growth and development.

Strengthening Pastoral Counselling

- Integrate pastoral counselling into theological training at seminaries like Archbishop Vining College of Theology, covering counselling skills, mental health awareness, and theological foundations.
- Establish continuing education for current clergy through workshops, conferences, or certificate programs, ideally subsidised by the diocese.
- Form and train lay pastoral care teams in parishes to extend counselling support under clergy supervision, reflecting Yoruba communal values.

Institutionalising Counselling

- Create and adopt a Diocesan Pastoral Care Policy defining theology, scope, ethics, and practice standards.
- Establish a Pastoral Care Department led by a qualified leader to coordinate training, supervision, referral networks, and parish support.
- Require all parishes to include pastoral care in their Annual Development Plans with budgeting and review.

Developing Resources and Guidelines

- Commission a practical pastoral counselling manual grounded in Anglican theology and the local Nigerian context, addressing cultural and social challenges.
- Launch diocesan teaching initiatives through sermon series, letters, and Bible studies to educate laity, reduce stigma, and promote counselling.

Cultivating a Caring Culture

- The bishop and senior clergy must model pastoral care through their public ministry and personal example.
- Share confidential stories of healing through diocesan media to inspire engagement.
- Promote authentic community life where mutual care is normal, with pastor-counsellors providing skilled support within a caring church family.

Conclusion

This study has constructed a robust, multi-layered argument for the indispensable role of pastoral counselling as a catalyst for the holistic growth and development of the church,

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with a specific focus on the Anglican Diocese of Osun North East. It has demonstrated, from a firm scriptural base, that the ministry of counselling is not a modern innovation but is rooted in the very character and practice of Jesus Christ, the Great Physician and the Good Shepherd. The witness of the early church in Acts further confirms that explosive numerical growth was inextricably linked to a deep, mutual, and holistic care for one another that created an attractive and compelling community of faith.

For the Diocese of Osun North East, which stands at a critical juncture of opportunity and challenge, the path to a more mature, resilient, and truly apostolic future must include a strategic and wholehearted embrace of this ministry. The diocese's commendable commitment to evangelism and church planting is a vital part of its mission, but for this growth to be built on a rock-solid, Christ-centred foundation, it must be accompanied by an equally strong commitment to the healing, restoration, and deep discipleship of its members. The current gap between a focus on external expansion and internal care is a vulnerability that, if left unaddressed, could lead to a large but shallow church that is ill-equipped to withstand the pressures of the modern world or to be a genuine light in its community.

The challenges to this vision, of limited training, cultural stigmas, and competing priorities, are real and significant, but they are not insurmountable. They are, in fact, a clear and urgent call to a deeper obedience, a call to be a church that not only proclaims the Gospel of grace but lives it out in the most personal and transformative ways. The recommendations outlined in this paper provide a practical and theologically grounded roadmap for this journey.

In its final analysis, pastoral counselling is far more than a set of techniques or a program. It is a sacred trust, a divine instrument through which God's own healing and reconciling love is made manifest in the lives of his people. It is a ministry that reflects the very heart of God, who is "gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love" (Ps. 145:8). The Anglican Diocese of Osun North East is therefore issued a solemn and hopeful call, a call for a renewed and strategic commitment to this ministry of the Good Shepherd. In heeding this call, the diocese will not only grow in numbers but will be forged into a more faithful, a more loving, and a more authentically Anglican community. This church is, in the powerful words of the apostle Paul, "rooted and established in love" (Eph. 3:17), and from that deep and unshakeable foundation, will grow into "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).