

Musengimana J 2025, 'Assessing Women's Leadership in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda: Challenges and Opportunities for Governance', *African Theological Journal for Church and Society*, vol. 6, no. 1 pp. 124-147

Assessing Women's Leadership in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda: Challenges and Opportunities for Governance

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Abstract

This paper assesses the challenges and opportunities for woman leadership within the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda, specifically in governance roles. Drawing upon a document analysis and survey, the study examines the barriers faced by women leaders within the presbyterian church in attaining to leadership positions and the opportunities available for their advancement. It discusses two positions about the correct roles for females in church leadership and rejects the complementarian position, which believes that women should not be allowed to participate in leadership positions initially reserved for males. This study supports the egalitarian position, which asserts that men and women should share equally in church leadership. Though presbyterian women face various challenges, like the low number of women with theological degrees and their cultural context, they are now in different church leadership positions. The Presbyterian Church in Rwanda has a good number of opportunities available to women, including access to theological training, eldership, and deaconship. This study shows that empowering women within the church not only benefits the individual women themselves but also enriches the entire faith community and contributes to the church's mission of serving the broader society. The study recommends that the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda should continue to expand access to theological education for women by offering scholarship support for their studies, implementing policies and practices that promote

gender equality within its governance, and creating opportunities for women leaders to collaborate and network with one another, as well as with women leaders from other denominations and organisations.

Introduction

The issue of woman leadership in the church is not new. According to Paul's letters to the Corinthians, early Christian churches struggled to discern God's plan for the correct roles of female believers in church ministry and leadership. Believers spent much time wondering if God wants men and women to have distinct roles in the church or if men and women should share equally in church leadership. For many centuries, believers and scholars debated incessantly between two views: complementarianism, which states that women should not be allowed to participate in ministry or leadership positions initially reserved for males, and egalitarianism, which states that men and women are equal and should be accorded the same opportunities for ministry positions and leadership without regard to gender. Worldwide, churches lack a common understanding about women's inclusion in church leadership (Sumner 2007:250–251). This confusion motivated the researcher to conduct this study in order to contribute to the existing literature.

The Presbyterian Church in Rwanda was started by Protestant missionaries from Germany in 1907 (Twagirayesu and Van Butselaar 1982:25–36). Their first stations included Zinga in Eastern Province, opened on 3 August 1907, Kirinda, opened on 28 August 1907, Rubengera in Western Province, opened in 1909, and Remera in Southern Province, opened in August 1912 (Nsengimana 2023:4–5). Unfortunately, the German missionaries due to the left due to the First World War. They were replaced by the Belgian Society for Protestant Mission in Congo (Nsengimana 2023:5). Given that that society did not have enough church workers, it decided to rely on missionaries from other Western countries including the Netherlands and Switzerland who were from a Reformed background. In 1959, the Protestant mission in Rwanda became an independent church and received a legal recognition on 23 August 1960. The church adopted the Presbyterian polity of church governance, which accepts equality in Christ (Nsengimana 2023:5; Twagirayesu and Van Butselaar 1982:25–36).

Politically, the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda accepts rules about gender equity. From the top level, the structure of the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda accepts the equality of men and women in Christ. Starting with the general synod, when the moderator is male, the vice-moderator must be female, and vice versa. The general synod includes persons of both sexes. The church is organised into seven presbyteries which coordinate all parishes located within their jurisdictions. From the presbytery level to the grassroots of the church, men and women have an equal right to serve as pastors, elders, and deacons.

Theologically, women's inclusion in church leadership takes into account the cultural and societal context of Rwanda. Presbyterian church governance recognises the contribution of women within Rwandan society and their importance within the church as part of holistic ministry and witness. Presbyterian theology emphasises the importance of recognising the spiritual gifts and callings of all members (Smith and Kemeny 2019:1–2). This theological perspective leads to an openness to women serving in leadership roles based on their gifts.

In Africa, the ordination of women did not come quickly with the beginning of the missionary period. Kariuki (2024:2), referencing Mbiti, said that

the relationship between Christianity and culture has remained complex. The mainline churches were influenced by the traditions, wisdom, art, and way of life of worship that the Africans practiced before the advent of Christianity.

In Rwanda, the role of women in the presbyterian church has evolved over the years.

The Presbyterian Church was the first denomination in Rwanda to embrace women's ordination in 1976. And women Pastors are equally treated as men in the ministry. However, the number of women pastors is still insignificant. It was observed during the centenary celebration in 2007 that ordained women in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda accounted just about twelve percent. (Mukamakuza 2009:51)

Women have equal access with men to education and administration. During the election period, the general synod requests that each parish prioritise gender equality. In cases where there are few candidates, preference is given to women to ensure that they also progress alongside their male counterparts.

However, despite these advances and efforts by the general synod to prioritise gender equality, societal norms and patriarchal cultural practices continue to hinder women from fully realising their leadership potential within the church. Though the structural policies advocate for the inclusivity of women in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda, cultural resistance often undermines these efforts, creating a gap between policy and practice. Women face many challenges including limited representation in the leadership and governance within the church. Little has been published about the specific challenges and opportunities faced by women in church leadership in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda. This paper assesses the evolving role of women in leadership in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda, exploring both the challenges and opportunities for creating a more inclusive governance structure.

In so doing, this paper asks: What initiatives and strategies have been implemented by the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda to promote gender equality and women's leadership in governance? What institutional barriers and challenges exist within the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda that hinder women's participation in governance roles? And what opportunities for leadership development are available to women within the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda? This paper employs both feminist theory and organisational theory to assess women's leadership in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda.

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory began as a prominent framework for analysing gender dynamics, power structures, and social inequalities (Tong 2009). This perspective synthesises key concepts within feminist theory, examining its historical development, theoretical underpinnings, and contributions to various disciplines. Based on a range of scholarly literature, this study explores foundational feminist concepts such as patriarchy, social structure, theological training, and cultural context (Collins 2000). Additionally, this review discusses

recent developments and debates within feminist theory, including postcolonial feminism and transnational feminism. This study aims to deepen understanding of feminist theory and its implications for the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda.

According to Yale University (2020), feminist theory focuses on gender equality and the representation of women in all spheres of society, including religious organisations. Feminist theory has a good number of pioneers like Naomi Weisstein, who was a feminist psychologist, and Lawrence Kohlberg, who deepened the research on boys and young men, and later compared men and women on their levels of moral development.

Feminist epistemologies – feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint theory, and feminist postmodernism – focus on the question of who can know, or who is the knower (Elizabeth 2014:50–54). Each epistemology suggests its own approach to investigation. Feminist empiricists conduct what most people understand as ‘science’ (Campbell and Wasco 2000:774–777). Feminist standpoint theorists point out how traditional approaches to science fail to acknowledge the influence of the context and the perspective of the ‘knower’ (Naples 2008:11–13). They argue that women’s experiences have not been adequately represented by mainstream research because they have been framed within, and interpreted by, dominant (i.e. men’s) conceptual categories. That is, women’s experiences have been understood in concepts and language largely developed by educated white men (Wigginton and Lafrance 2019). Feminist theory provides a powerful framework for analysing the challenges and opportunities faced by women leaders within the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda regarding governance roles.

Organisational Theory

Organisational theory is the sociological study of formal social organisations, such as businesses and bureaucracies, and their relationship with the environment(s) in which they operate. In *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities* (4th ed.), W. Richard Scott examines organizational theory through three primary perspectives. First, the rational systems view defines organizations as collectivities oriented toward specific goals, characterized by highly formalized social structures. Second, the natural

systems perspective sees organizations as collectivities where participants share a common interest in the system's survival and engage in informally structured collective activities. Third, the open systems approach conceptualizes organizations as interdependent flows and activities involving shifting coalitions of participants embedded in broader material-resource and institutional environments (pp. 27-28).

Morgan (2006:22) argues that organisational theory is the study of the structure, functioning, and performance of organisations and the behaviour of groups and individuals within them. Organisational theory analyses the organisational structures of institutions and their barriers, leadership programmes, and change management.

With regard to this research on women's leadership in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda, organisational theory allows us to identify structural and institutional factors that shape women's opportunities for governance roles within the denomination. It provides valuable insights into the structural and institutional factors that influence women's leadership within the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda. Using organisational theory, this study examines the governance structures, policies, and practices within the church that either facilitate or inhibit women's participation in leadership roles. It demonstrates that, by promoting gender equality and inclusivity, the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda can create a more equitable and effective leadership environment.

Conceptual Framework

Throughout this paper, the term 'leadership' is used in the context of gender issues. 'Leadership' refers to holding an official position within the church, such as that of pastor, elder, or deacon. These positions usually involve some type of formal recognition or ordination. Instead of using the term 'gender', this paper uses the terms 'male' or 'men' and 'female' or 'women' in their biological sense. Particularly important for this paper are the concepts of complementarianism and egalitarianism.

Complementarianism

Complementarianism generally holds that, while God equally values both men and women, certain church leadership positions are restricted exclusively to

men. Complementarianism argues that men are to be leaders in the family and in the church. Complementarians cite key Bible verses that fall into three general categories: verses that refer to male headship, verses that seem to prohibit female church leadership, and verses that analogise church leadership to the family structure (Pagan 2019:17). Key verses for the complementarian concept include 1 Timothy 2:11-12 (KJV)

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence

and 1 Corinthians 14:34–40:

Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant. Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order.

Complementarianism also appeals to 1 Timothy 3:1–7 about the election of elders:

If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive.

Complementarianism asserts 1 Timothy 2:11–12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34–40 prohibited female leadership in the church. It also asserts that use of masculine pronouns in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 to refer to elders excludes women from church leadership positions. Finally, they also note how Paul compares church leadership to the family structure, a structure in which men are to lead.

Based on these verses, complementarians argue that women can hold no position of authority over men in the church. Women cannot hold official offices in the church, and may not publicly preach when males are present (Pagan 2019:15–16).

Egalitarianism

Egalitarianism asserts that men and women are equal in the family and the church. Domestically, husband and wife submit to one another. In the church, both men and women can take up leadership positions. Female members can be ordained as pastors, elders, and deacons. They can also be senior pastors. Key verses relied upon by egalitarianism include Galatians 3:27–28, Ephesians 5:21, Genesis 1:27, and verses that seem to indicate that women held leadership positions in the New Testament church (Pagan 2019:17).

Egalitarians argue that there are a good number of women who served the church in a leadership capacity and/or in prominent roles. Among these are Deborah (Judges 16:3), Esther (Esther 8:3–12), Phoebe (Romans 16:1), Junia (Romans 16:7), and Priscilla (Romans 16:3). Passages such as 1 Corinthians 11:2–11 do not disapprove of women praying and prophesying in public; rather they assume that women will pray and prophesy in the church. Egalitarians surmise that these examples from scripture provide evidence of the appropriateness of women to various positions in church leadership in the New Testament church (Pagan 2019:13–14).

Egalitarianism believes that there are no distinct gender roles in either the church or the family. Their analysis leads them to conclude that in Paul's instructions to the churches there is no universal prohibition against women serving in church leader positions. Egalitarians affirm that church leadership positions, whether held by males or females, should be based on a person's spiritual gifts and calling, not based on gender. They rely on key verses such as

Galatians 3:26–29 which asserts that there is no lasting distinction between men and women:

For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave or free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

According to this passage, there is no differentiation in humanity's destiny on the basis of gender, race, or status. Women, as well as gentiles and slaves, have a shared destiny of authority and rule. The restrictions placed on females in church leadership are not God's ultimate plan for reconciliation of all people (Pagan 2019:29). However, most evangelical egalitarians seek to distance themselves from the radical feminist position that denies any gender distinction. They also seek to distance themselves from the secular philosophies of the feminist movement.

Theological Considerations

A theological reflection on the topic of assessing women's leadership in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda must take into account the biblical perspective on gender equality, the role of women in ministry, and the potential challenges and opportunities for governance.

Genesis 1:27 emphasises the equal dignity of male and female as both are created in the image of God. This equality provides the theological foundation for affirming women's leadership within the church and calls for mutual partnership in ministry. Luke 10:38–42 and John 4:1–42 highlight the inclusion of women by Jesus Christ himself. The gospels demonstrate that Jesus Christ elevated women to positions of importance and entrusted them with proper roles in his ministry. This is shown by the conversations he had with them, the respect he demonstrated, and the role they played during his ministry.

The New Testament provides a good number of women who contributed a lot to the growth of the early church. Priscilla (Acts 18:2), Phoebe (Romans 16:1-

2), and Junia (Romans 16:7) are good examples to illustrate the role of women in church leadership today. 1 Corinthians 12:7 indicates that the Holy Spirit distributes gifts to all believers – both men and women – for the common good. It is therefore necessary to accept that women are also recipients of these gifts and of God's call within the church.

In texts such as Galatians 3:26–29, the apostle Paul sought to emphasise the unity of all believers and the lack of distinctions among them. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul was laying the groundwork for the church, through the ages, to move from the reality he observed with his natural eyes to the reality he undoubtedly was given the grace by God to observe through his spiritual eyes. To adequately assess God's plan for women in church leadership, we must view God's word as an expression of his will, not only for the time in which it was written and delivered but for all time. His clear desire is that his people would live in communities where there are not distinctions between male and female (Galatians 3:29). Women, as well as men, should be able to participate in church leadership positions. Although there are some challenges to the inclusion of women in church decision making, this study shows that women have played a significant role in the church's history.

In the United States, women have been active in various areas of ministry and leadership. Since 1956, when the Presbyterian Church in the USA ordained its first woman minister, the number of women serving as ministers has increased significantly (Harrison 2020:2). The leadership positions in which women have served have also expanded. Women have been elected to serve on various committees and boards within the church, and have been elected to serve as moderator of the general assembly. They have served as missionaries, educators, and pastors. Many women have also been involved in social justice and advocacy work, including the fight for equal rights for women and minorities. Women have played a crucial role in the church's history, and their involvement in ministry and leadership continues to expand (Hunter 2016:1–2).

Female participation in church leadership in European churches has increased gradually in the past several decades. In some Protestant churches like the Church of England and the Lutheran church, women are well-respected and play an essential role because they are given space. They have been ordained

as priests and bishops, and they serve the church very efficiently (Lutheran World Federation 2022:11). This trend reflects a broader shift in European churches towards recognising the contributions and gifts that women bring to ministry and leadership roles (Dijkhuizen 2022:266–267). Though many European countries have policies valuing gender equality in church leadership, some conservative denominations do not understand the inclusion of women in church leadership. Fortunately, there is ongoing dialogue and advocacy for change. Nowadays, many church leaders and scholars understand well the importance of including women in church leadership (Peterson 2019:289–291).

The Asian continent is another context for female participation in church leadership. As argued by Kim (2023:1-2), Asian churches are increasingly promoting gender equality and inclusivity. In countries such as the Philippines and South Korea, women have assumed prominent roles in various church ministries, including pastoral leadership, teaching roles, and administrative positions. This improvement towards greater inclusion has been motivated by theological reinterpretations and a commitment to gender justice within the church. However, like in European churches, women in Asia face the challenges of traditional views on gender roles and of institutional resistance (Yih 2023:2–3).

Despite a patriarchal tradition, Africa has done its best to include women in church leadership. This is confirmed by the Anglican Church of South Africa (2016) which asserts that, in many African nations, Anglican, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches have increased the presence of female church leaders, including as pastors and bishops. However, African women face the essential challenge of lacking theological education and of traditional interpretations of scripture in the African cultural context (Gahamanyi and Zacharia 2023:327). To address these challenges, churches in Africa can offer scholarships and leadership training to women in order to promote equality within church structures. Nevertheless, the trend towards recognising the benefits of women in church leadership in Africa is evolving (Oyewole 2022).

In sub-Saharan Africa, female participation in church leadership has experienced notable growth in recent years, though it still faces numerous obstacles. There has been a gradual shift towards embracing gender equality

in church leadership. For example, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa elected its first female bishop in 2016 (Anglican Church of South Africa 2016). The United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe has taken steps to ordain more female pastors and integrate them into various leadership roles (United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe 2023:1-2). Some churches excel at providing scholarships and leadership training to women in theology.

In East Africa, female participation in church leadership is an evolving area with significant potential for growth and impact. In Kenya, the Anglican Church is ordaining more females as priests. In Tanzania, the Lutheran Church emphasises gender equality by ordaining more female pastors and promoting their inclusion in decision-making bodies. This goes with the rise of women in religious institutions (Anglican Church in Kenya 2023; Lutheran Church in Tanzania 2024).

The government of Rwanda has very good policies on gender equality. It has been supportive of gender equality initiatives, which has pushed or inspired churches to greater understanding of the importance of including women in leadership structures. There is a growing number of women taking on leadership roles such as pastors, deacons, and elders. Despite these advancements, challenges remain, including cultural perceptions and limited access to theological education for women. Nevertheless, the church has decided to send more females to theological institutions at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. There is a certain number of women in the church leadership (Mukamurera and Twagirimana 2019:151).

A Survey of Women's Leadership in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda

For this study, 32 pastors and theological students, all of whom are members of the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda, were surveyed. Twenty-five persons (or 78%) responded. The survey included six closed-ended questions and one open-ended question. All participants received informed consent which explained the purpose of the survey, the nature of the questions, and the time it may consume. Participants were assured of the voluntary nature of their participation and of their freedom to withdraw from the survey at any time

without any repercussions. To ensure confidentiality, all data has been anonymised.

Sex of the Respondents

Sex of respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Male	17	68%
Female	8	32%
Total	25	100%

The distribution of respondents based on gender reveals that 68% of the respondents were male, while 32% were female. This reflects the reality of the field where men often outnumber women almost in all positions of authority within the church (Dill et al. 2021:120) As Ng, Chin, and Jin (2020:2–3) argue, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership roles within many denominations.

Leadership Roles within the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda

Leadership Roles within the Presbyterian Church	Frequency	Percentage
Pastors	14	56%
Theology Students	11	44%
Total	25	100%

The second question of the survey was about the leadership role of respondents within the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda. More than half of the respondents identified themselves as pastors, indicating a significant representation of clergy members in the survey sample (56% of respondents). This finding shows that the study was concerned with the hierarchical structure of the church where pastors hold prominent leadership positions and play a central role in guiding congregations (Dill et al.2021:121–122).

The presence of theology students also indicates the involvement of individuals in training for future leadership roles within the church. Forty-four percent of respondents identified themselves as theology students. Their presence in the survey accredits the survey because they form a group of individuals engaged in theological education and training for future leadership roles within the church (Hartman and Connolly 2020:14).

Understanding of Respondents on Inclusion of Women in Church Leadership

Believe that women’s inclusion contributes to church health	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	25	100%
No	0	0%
Total	25	100%

The respondents were asked to give their opinion on whether the inclusion of women in leadership roles contributes to the overall health of the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda. The data revealed unanimous agreement among respondents, 100% expressing belief in the positive contribution of women’s inclusion to the overall health of the Presbyterian Church. This finding aligns with Ng, Chin, and Jin (2020) who assert that recognition of the value and importance of gender diversity in church leadership and decision-making processes contributes to vibrant growth. The reality of the Presbyterian Church

in Rwanda shows that the inclusion of women in church leadership positions contributes to the health of the church because both men and women are gifted for the benefit of the church and community. Working together absolutely enhances organisational effectiveness and fosters a sense of belonging among members (Peterson 2019:287–288). This is confirmed by the absence of respondents expressing a contrary belief. The respondents, all of whom are from the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda, appreciate what their church is doing for gender diversity and inclusion. However, although the church has made progress in respecting gender equality, there is no shortage of challenges, as the following table indicates.

Main Challenges Women Leaders Encounter Regarding Church Governance

Main challenges encountered by women	Frequency	Percentage
Low number of women with theological degrees	10	40%
Cultural context	6	24%
Patriarchal traditions	5	20%
Structure of the church	4	16%
Total	25	100%

As it is shown on this table, the main challenge women leaders encounter regarding church governance within the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda is the low number of women with theological degrees. Forty percent of respondents affirmed that the low number of women with theological degrees is the persistent barrier to women in church leadership. This lack of education limits their access to leadership roles and to opportunities for advancement (Peterson 2019:287).

Patriarchal traditions and cultural challenges were identified by 20% and 24% of respondents respectively. These may relate to the Rwandan culture which perpetuates gender inequalities and influences the distribution of power within the church and within local government. The structure of the church was also cited as a challenge by 16% of respondents, who argued that institutional structure may contribute to the marginalisation of women in leadership positions. Some churches limit women's participation in the leadership process. Fortunately, Presbyterian women have a big number of opportunities that help them access various leadership positions as is shown on the following table.

Opportunities Available to Women Leaders

Opportunities for women leaders	Frequency	Percentage
Access to theological training	17	68%
Eldership and deaconship	6	24%
Others (not specified)	2	8%
Total	25	100%

This table on opportunities available for women leaders within the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda shows that the church has several avenues through which women can engage in leadership roles. The first one is access to theological training. A total of 68% of respondents argued that Presbyterian women have enough space within the theological institutions. Educational empowerment and equipping women with knowledge and skills is very important for effective leadership within religious contexts. Secondly, women in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda may become elders and deacons. Twenty-four percent of respondents affirmed that women have the opportunity to serve in formal leadership positions within the church hierarchy. Despite a long list of challenges, Presbyterian women are trained

and are playing their role within the church without any discrimination because the church believes that men and women are created equal before God. Therefore, they must play their role in the communities.

As Nkeshimana (2019) argues, Presbyterian women in Rwanda have the opportunity to serve as ordained pastors, providing pastoral care, preaching, teaching, and offering spiritual leadership within a congregation. They can participate in governance structures and decision-making processes within local congregations and presbyteries. Women can lead various initiatives of the church that engage with the wider community, promoting reconciliation, peace-building, and social justice. A subset of respondents (8%) specified other opportunities without providing further details. Further research is needed to explore these unspecified opportunities and their implications for women’s leadership development within the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda. Having identified challenges and opportunities, respondents were asked to offer suggestions to further promote women’s leadership within the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda.

Suggestions to Further Promote Women’s Leadership

Suggestions to further promote women's leadership	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	22	88%
No	3	12%
Total	25	100%

The table above shows that 88% of respondents were willing to give their suggestions while 12% refused. Further research is required to identify the reasons why respondents were unwilling to give their suggestions. One possible reason is that the following question was open-ended, requiring that the respondents express their own ideas. This may have intimidated some respondents.

Specific suggestions to promote women's leadership

Specific suggestions	Frequency	Percentage
Increase the number of women with theological degrees	10	40%
Mobilise women to participate in leadership	5	20%
Provide equal scholarships for theological training	4	16%
Train women training on church ministry	2	8%
Organise seminars and debates on women's contribution to church development	1	4%
Promote gender equality	1	4%
No answer	2	8%
Total	25	100%

Forty percent of respondents argued that increasing the number of women with theological degrees would promote women's participation in church leadership. Twenty percent proposed to mobilise women to participate in leadership. They highlighted the need for education and empowerment to encourage women's active involvement in leadership roles. Sixteen percent argued that the Presbyterian Church should provide equal scholarships for theological training. Two other respondents, who represent 8% of respondents, suggested training women on church ministry. They asserted that equipping women with the necessary skills and knowledge for ministry

roles is important for promoting their leadership. One respondent, who represents 4% of respondents, suggested that the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda should organise seminars and debates on women's contribution to church development. The church should also promote gender equality by ensuring fairness and equal opportunities for both genders within the church. Two respondents, 8% of respondents, did not provide an answer, which may suggest a lack of opinion, knowledge, or interest in the topic.

The study indicates that the best way to promote women's leadership in the church is to increase the number of women with theological degrees. An important way to promote women in leadership is to provide equal scholarships, include women in decision making, and train women on church ministry. In so doing, the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda will have lessons to teach other denominations about women's inclusion in church leadership.

Conclusion

This assessment of women's leadership in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda discussed two views on the proper role of females in church ministry and leadership. It rejected the complementarian position, which believes that women should not be allowed to participate in leadership positions initially reserved for males. In so doing, this study affirmed the egalitarian position, which asserts that men and women should share equally the church leadership. The study explored the biblical perspective on and historical development of the inclusion of women in church leadership. It focused on the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda, highlighting the challenges and opportunities for women in church leadership.

Though traditional patriarchal structures, cultural norms, and the low representation of women in leadership positions have historically limited women's participation in leadership, there are clear evidence of progress and a growing recognition of the valuable contributions that women can make to church governance. The church's efforts to increase access to theological education for women and to promote their inclusion in decision-making roles are positive steps toward achieving gender equity. The church should provide equal scholarships and include women in decision making. The study showed that empowering women within the church not only benefits the individual

women themselves but also enriches the entire faith community and contributes to the church's mission of serving the broader society. It is reasonable for the church to promote gender equity at all levels of governance.

Recommendations

Based on this assessment of women's leadership in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda and the challenges and opportunities for women in church governance, the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda should, first, continue to expand access to theological education for women by offering scholarship support for their studies. Second, the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda should implement policies and practices that promote gender equality within its governance. Third, the church should organise seminars and workshops that focus on the importance of women's leadership and the benefits it brings to the church and the society. Fourth, the church should create opportunities for women leaders to collaborate and network with one another, as well as with women leaders from other denominations and organisations. This will help the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda to create a more inclusive and equitable environment for women's leadership.

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