

Ghana Methodism in Rural Communities: Challenges, Strategies, and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

Rural communities can vary widely in terms of their economic, social, and cultural characteristics. Churches in rural communities including the Methodist Church Ghana have played various essential roles in the growth and development of rural communities over the years. The commitment, faithfulness, resilience, and dedication of Methodist Churches in rural communities have also aided in the spread of the Gospel and the expansion of the Methodist Church. Despite the remarkable commitments that the Methodist Churches in rural communities have demonstrated to their faith and community, they confront various challenges that impede their growth and development. Awareness of the issues facing Methodism in rural communities has increased over the past few years. This article highlights the state of Methodism in rural Churches specifically on the challenges that they are facing and efforts that the Church has made so far in addressing these challenges. The author believes these efforts demonstrate a significant potential for the growth and development of Methodist Churches in rural communities. Data in this paper were gathered from the interview sessions with some rural Church leaders, personal observations, survey questionnaires administered to leaders and members of some rural Methodist Churches in Sekondi Diocese, and data received from; books, articles, dissertations/theses on the subject. While the issues outlined are general and do not apply to all Methodist rural congregations, the author's intent is to provide insights into some of the challenges they face in general. The paper further provides strategies and specific recommendations on how the stated challenges of rural Methodist Churches can be addressed.

Keywords: Rural, Communities, Methodist, Church, Challenge.

INTRODUCTION

The Methodist Church Ghana is one of the largest and oldest mainline Protestant denominations in Ghana. The Church has its roots in the arrival of Rev Joseph Rhodes Dunwell (a missionary from the Wesleyan Methodist Society in London) on January 1, 1835, in Gold Coast which now Ghana (Boaheng, 2021). In 1961, the Church became autonomous through the hard work and selfless services of the forefathers. Methodism in Ghana is currently 189 years old. The Methodist Church Ghana operates presently at four major levels namely; Connexion, Diocese, Circuit, and Society. The society refers to the local Methodist Church in a particular community with its highest decision-making body being the leaders meeting. At the society level, members of the Methodist Church at a specific community gather as one congregation for public worship and fellowship. Notably, the Church has experienced different developmental growth phases over the years, one area that seems to have been ignored and has not seen significant growth has been Methodist Churches in rural communities.

The poor state of Methodism in some rural communities has led to various criticisms of the leadership of the Church. A careful exploration of the historical events of some of these rural Methodist Churches has brought to light the reality that some of these Churches are far older than most of the thriving Methodist congregations, especially the ones in urban areas. This historical reality underscores the need for the stakeholders of the Methodist Church Ghana to pay attention to the concerns of Methodism in the rural communities. The significant contribution of these Methodist Churches in rural areas towards the growth of the Methodist Church Ghana must not be overlooked. These Churches have played significant roles in the growth and development of the Methodist Church Ghana through their commitment, faithfulness, resilience, and dedication. Notwithstanding the vital role the Methodist Church in rural communities plays in the spreading of the Gospel and the expansion of the Church,

the challenges and struggles of Methodism in a lot of rural communities are very real. Accordingly, this article seeks to explore the challenges that some Methodist Churches in rural communities face. Understanding this reality will inform effective measures needed to address these challenges and promote the growth of Methodism in rural communities in Ghana. Outlined below are some of these challenges;

Challenges Methodist Churches In Rural Communities

Lack of adequate facilities for worship service.

A critical challenge is the lack of adequate facilities for worship service. A lot of Methodist Churches in rural communities do not have a good place of worship. Some of these Churches conduct their Sunday services in poor conditions, using deteriorated and rented spaces that are unsafe, uncomfortable, and not conducive for meaningful worship. During rainy season leaking roofs and flooded floors disrupt worship services. Some of them are forced to cancel Sunday service due to the deplorable state of their place of worship during such seasons. Moreover, even the few ones who have a place of worship have also lacked maintenance culture on their chapel buildings leading to neglected repairs, and rapid deterioration of buildings and furnishings. Some of these Churches still worship in the old chapels that were built by their forefathers which have not been renovated over the years and are in a state of despair. While this may serve as a reminder of the rich history and heritage of the Church, there is also the need for progress and development. Few of these Churches that have also started their building project for the past years still worship in uncompleted buildings. The other side of their situation is that they do not know when their building project will be completed due to financial challenges. While the Methodist Development Fund (MDF) has done very well in helping some of these Churches to complete their building project there is still more room for improvement.

Inadequate instruments for worship services.

Another challenge that Methodism in rural communities has faced is about inadequate instruments for worship services. A lot of Methodist Churches in rural communities still struggle with accessing and maintaining musical instruments needed for worship services. Most of them lack the financial resources to purchase or maintain such instruments. According to Hagan (2015), repair and maintenance needs mount up because of a lack of funds to make the necessary improvements. Those fortunate enough to have instruments often find them outdated and in bad shape, making them difficult to use and play. Additionally, some congregations have instruments but struggle to find members with the necessary skills to play them. A major factor contributing to this struggle is that most of these rural Methodist Churches have aging congregations and younger members may not be available to play the instruments. Also, due to the limited opportunities available in rural communities, most of the young members end up traveling to other places to seek greener pastures. Today we still have a few Methodist Churches in rural communities that still use the old way of worship where no instruments were used.

Leadership Struggles due to Human Capital Shortage.

The growth and development of Methodist Churches in rural areas to a larger extent is also dependent on the availability of effective leadership. Leadership seems to be a major problem for some Methodist rural Churches. The lack of opportunities in rural communities which has led to a lot of young people travelling to urban areas and the unwillingness of some Church members to take up leadership positions in the Church has led to this struggle. These rural Churches tend to rely on few leaders who are not well motivated to handle them. In my interaction with a steward of a Methodist Church, he shared with me how he had been a steward for the past six years although he desires to hand over for others to continue but unfortunately, the young members are unwilling to take up leadership positions. This sad reality has caused the current leadership to be in charge for many years. He further indicated that the reason for the unwillingness of the people has been; personal reasons, disbelieving in their own ability, education/schooling (Interview with steward of Atwerboanda Methodist Church on 28th December, 2023). This affirmed Nel and Schoeman's (2015) conclusion on leadership in rural congregations. According to Nel and Schoeman, the challenge in terms of leadership in rural congregations does not mean the absence of leaders. There are potential leaders in the congregations, but for various reasons, these leaders do not come forward to take on leadership. In urban communities, professionals like educators, medical personnel, business owners and workers, lawyers, and other civil and government workers have the capability and human

capital to work on community and economic development. Apart from their contribution to their community some of them also serve as Church leaders in their denominations. Unfortunately, the story is different for rural communities as they often suffer from a lack of appropriate human capital (Sherin, 2012). According to Opoku (2015), some rural Churches are sometimes lucky enough to have government workers like nurses, teachers, and national service personnel in their midst, and in that case, the Churches benefit from their services. Although some of them make themselves available for leadership opportunities in the rural Churches, they stay in such rural communities for a limited number of years as they go back after their service ends leaving the work to a few committed members after their departure with limited capacities for the work. Hagan highlighted the effect of leaving leadership positions to a few faithful members. According to him, this can lead to burnout and frustration.

Poor attitude of some of the leaders.

Another significant obstacle hindering the growth of Methodism in some rural areas is the poor attitude of some of the leaders in charge of the Methodist Churches in some rural areas. The reason for the decline of any Church is that the Church no longer meets the needs of its members. That might be because some Churches have not provided services as required of their leaders. Ameyaw (2017) points out that, everything rises and falls on leadership. Bill (2012) holds a similar point of view in his assertion that, “I am convinced that the Church will never reach its full redemptive potential until men and women with the leadership gift step up and lead.” Ameyaw further emphasizes the importance of leadership in a direct relationship to Church growth. He argues, “Churches do not grow without godly and gifted pastoral and lay leadership.” Clearly, effective leadership cannot be overlooked as the key to Church growth.

The future of some of the Methodist Churches in rural communities is uncertain due to the prevailing attitudes of some Church leaders. Some leaders are hesitant to welcome new ideas of Church growth from members as they are still fixated on their old ways of leadership which may be outmoded and not enhance Church growth in this contemporary setting. A sad reality is that some leaders in charge of Methodist Churches in rural communities often prioritize their interests and egos over the well-being and welfare of their Church members, leading to the exodus of disheartened members. Just to mention but a few of these bad attitudes; lack of empathy by some leaders towards members’ struggles, pains, and concerns and a lack compassion for the needs of members has led to a lot of members leaving the Church. Also, looking down on members, acting superior, and only valuing the opinions of a selected few have hindered the growth of some of the rural Churches. Another bad attitude on the part of some leaders is the lack of transparency. Some leaders are secretive and withhold relevant information about the state of the Church from the higher leadership of the Church. This, to some extent, makes it very difficult for the leadership of the Church to know about their needs so that measures can be put in place for them to be helped. Opoku commented on some bad attitudes and character of some rural Church leaders. According to him, it is not surprising to find leaders in rural Churches who are polygamous, drunkards, lotto agents, and traders in alcoholic beverages. In such cases, they become bad examples for the Church members.

Inadequate or No supervision.

Inadequate or no supervision of the state of some Methodist Churches in rural communities is another challenge. The absence of effective supervision and oversight over rural Methodist Churches has left some of the rural Churches vulnerable to decline, inefficient, and mismanaged. The dangers of this neglect of the rural Churches must not be underestimated. In my interaction with a member of one Methodist Church in a rural community, he expressed his displeasure about how a newly planted Methodist Church in another rural community was left into the hands of some community members to manage with no supervision, regular visitation, and encouragement from higher leadership. Gradually the Church ceased to exist as attendance to Church services started declining (Interview with Egya Essoun, steward of Atwerboanda Methodist Church on 28th December, 2023). Without effective supervision, leaders in charge of the Methodist Churches in rural communities may not be held accountable for their actions leading to possible mismanagement of the Church. Inadequate supervision can result in the higher leadership not knowing about the needs of the rural Churches so that the relevant measures can be put in place for support to be provided. Inadequate or no supervision can also lead to a sense of disconnection of the rural Churches from the Methodist Church Ghana at large, potentially isolating them from

resources and support. While factors like poor road and telecommunication networks may impede effective supervision and oversight of the Methodist Churches in rural communities, higher leadership of the Methodist Church Ghana must deliberately employ alternative ways to effectively supervise the Methodist Churches in the rural communities.

Financial Constraints.

The financial struggles of Methodist Churches in rural communities are very real. Rural Methodist Churches often face financial problems, with dwindling resources and increased expenses threatening their growth and development. The economic realities of rural life including poverty, and limited job opportunities can all be attributed to this challenge. Most of the members of the Methodist Churches in rural areas rely on their engagement in farming activities (a major economic activity in rural areas) as the major source of their income. The financial struggle makes it very difficult to embark on various evangelistic activities, continue their Church projects, perform other Church responsibilities, and also support members in times of need. The financial struggle has also limited their ability to engage in community outreach and mission programs which are imperative to their existence as a Christian community. The low attendance due to various reasons during worship services also affects the income received from offering and fundraising during their Sunday services.

Unwillingness and reluctance of some Lay Preachers to go to rural preaching post.

The unwillingness and reluctance of some lay preachers to go to rural preaching posts despite the need for spiritual growth and guidance is another significant challenge facing the Methodist Churches in rural communities. Lay Preachers constitute lay persons of the Methodist Church Ghana who have been trained and authorized to preach in Methodist Churches. The Lay Preachers augment the clergy in terms of preaching. However, Lay Preachers cannot administer the sacrament of Baptism and Eucharist (Boaheng & Arkoh, 2023). According to Essamuah (2010), Local Preachers are laymen and laywomen who have passed oral and written examinations and are thus licensed to preach in Methodist Churches. In the Methodist Church Ghana, lay preachers are usually sent to preach at various preaching posts which are the Methodist Churches at various communities on Sundays. A sad reality is that some lay preachers have been reluctant to go to rural preaching posts to share the Gospel with the Methodist Churches there. Some of these rural Churches find it very difficult to get preachers for their Sunday services. I remember very well how a caretaker shared this challenge with me on how they struggle to get preachers for their Sunday services. Due to that, they are always being forced to use the same preachers for subsequent services. An issue that members have registered their displeasure (Interview with Nesta, Caretaker of Wassa Mampong Methodist Church on 6th June, 2024). Some of the major causes of this challenge include; transportation costs, poor road networks to rural communities, and inadequate resources for worship services.

Fewer opportunities available in rural communities.

One of the leaders in a Methodist Church expressed this as a major challenge in an interview session I had with him. He indicated how the limited opportunities such as job opportunities, healthcare and educational opportunities available in his community have affected the membership of the Church (Interview with Nesta, Caretaker of Wassa Mampong Methodist Church on 6th June, 2024). The scarcity of opportunities in rural areas poses a struggle to the Methodist Churches. This has led to a lot of young people traveling to other places in search of greener pastures and better opportunities. Hagan in his research paper, identified lack of opportunities for young people as a factor affecting rural communities. According to him, students who excel academically are faced with the dilemma of limited options in rural settings and often migrate to larger suburban and urban environments for better options in urban settings. Opoku also opined rural communities lack educational facilities, and as such the children have no access to quality education. He further indicated that they have poor access to infrastructure and communication networks such as telephone and the Internet. Because of this most of the youth are migrating to the urban centers for greener pastures thus reducing membership in the Churches. The exodus of young adults can result in a reduction of membership and decreased financial resources for the Church. Some of these opportunities may include; fewer or no educational career opportunities, and limited access to health care and social services. However, some rural Churches have over the years benefited from the services and commitments of some Methodist members who are government workers (mostly teachers and

nurses) posted to such communities. Unfortunately, many of these people stay in the community for a limited number of years as they are being posted to other places to render their services due to the living conditions and other limited opportunities in rural communities.

Vast distance covered to worship services.

Methodist Churches in rural communities also face the struggle of vast distances that members must travel to attend worship services. Methodism in both urban and rural settings may face a similar challenge. Whereas people living in urban settings may rely completely on private or public transportation to Church service, those in the rural communities mostly have no other option than to walk to Church service. Although there are primary transport services like *okada*, *pragia*, and *aboboya* available in some rural communities most people are not able to bear the cost involved in going in for such options. *Okada* is a motorbike used for public transportation, offering a quick and affordable way to navigate congested roads. *Pragia* is a three-wheeled vehicle providing affordable transportation services. *Aboboya* is a cargo tricycle for transporting goods and commodities. In some rural communities, *Aboboya* is used to transport individuals. *Okada*, *Pragia* and *Aboboya* are often the most accessible and affordable ways for people in rural communities to get around, especially in areas where roads may be poor or scarce.

At rural communities, some Church members walk long distances before they get to their Church premises. This particular challenge is often being faced by members of the Church who are living in villages where there are no Methodist Churches. For such members, they have to cover a long distance to other communities where there are Methodist Churches. During one of my attachment days as a seminarian, I encountered members of the Church who stayed in the forest yet walked for more than an hour from their place to the Church premises. In my opinion, this showed their dedication and commitment to their faith, despite the challenges they may face. Apart from those who lived in communities with no Methodist Church, this can also be difficult for the elderly or people who may have mobility health issues and those without access to reliable transportation. This challenge can be a threat to the growth and development of Methodist Churches in rural areas as it can lead to reduced attendance to worship services. It can also be a barrier to members' ability to fully participate in Church activities.

Strategies And Prospect

In the face of the above-identified challenges of Methodist Churches in rural communities, the Methodist Church Ghana through her leadership, organizations, and some individual members has demonstrated remarkable commitment, resilience, and dedication in addressing these challenges and their efforts are worth acknowledging. These proactive efforts by the Church do not only help to address the existing challenges but also present significant opportunities for the growth and development of Methodist rural Churches.

Support from the Methodist Development Fund.

This is a special fund that has been designated by the authorities of the Church to support various Methodist Churches with their building project. The MDF which was established over a decade ago is aimed at mobilising resources for Church growth as well as providing support for underprivileged Societies and Methodist institutions in the Connexion. The Methodist Church through the Methodist Development Fund (MDF) has supported a lot of these rural Churches in various ways. MDF, over the years, has supported the construction of manses, places of worship, rehabilitation of Methodist educational institutions, maintenance of health facilities, and Church planting activities (Ashong, 2023). According to the steward of the Methodist Church at Old Daboase Junction community in the Shama circuit of the Methodist Church Ghana, in 2021, the Methodist Development fund played a significant role in the Church's building project by providing funding for the roofing. He also mentioned how the Methodist Development fund supported the Methodist Church at Atwerboanda community with their building project (Interview with Mr. Joseph, Steward of Old Daboase Junction Methodist Church on 25th September, 2024).

Support received from Methodist Development Fund presents a significant prospect for the growth and development of Methodist Churches at rural communities helping them to address the challenges that impede their growth. The empirical evidence as indicated above demonstrates that the Methodist Development Fund has

yielded tangible outcomes in enhancing the infrastructure of rural Methodist Churches. Today, many Methodist Churches that have benefited from the fund can boast of improved facilities thereby fostering a conducive environment for worship. A major challenge hindering the effectiveness of the Methodist Development Fund (MDF) is the prevalent non-compliance with contribution commitments among members of the Church. An empirical observation made from comments from some members suggests perceived mismanagement and lack of transparency in fund utilization underlines this challenge. Some members have the perception that the funds are not being used for their intended purposes, fostering distrust and diminishing motivation to contribute. To address this challenge, empirical evidence of the Methodist Development Fund's tangible impact through completed infrastructure projects must be shown to members for them to appreciate how helpful the fund has been. This will foster transparency and credibility, thereby encouraging members to fulfill their contribution commitments. Comprehensive education and awareness programs should be implemented to enlighten members on the fund's purpose, goals, and benefits. This will help address misconceptions and information gaps. While all Methodist Churches can benefit from the Methodist Development Fund, special consideration and attention should be given to Methodist rural Churches due to their situation.

Support from The Methodist Lay Movement Council.

The Methodist Church Ghana has a strong Lay Movement Council that plays a significant role in the decision-making and growth of the Church. The Church is made up of the clergy and the laity (Kpobi, 2023). The term laity as used in the Methodist Church Ghana refers to all members who are not commissioned or ordained as ministers. According to Kpobi, the laity in the Church circle is used to distinguish between the ordained and non-ordained members of the Church. In the Methodist Church, the lay movement council operates at the Connexional, Diocesan, Circuit, and Societal levels. The Methodist Lay Movement Council is recognized by the Conference as a body made up of all Lay members of the Church (The Constitution of The Methodist Church Ghana 2023). The Methodist Lay Movement Council has over the years contributed in several ways towards the growth and development of Methodist Churches in rural communities. They have built chapels to some less-endowed rural Churches. In 2019, the Lay Movement from its resources purchased a parcel of land and commenced the building of a 350-capacity chapel at Dambai in the Oti region. This project was completed within a year and dedicated to the glory of God (Lay President of Conference Message, 2022). In 2021, the Connexional Lay Movement Council tasked itself to move to the Savannah region and put up another Chapel for the Lord. This was a 450-capacity Damogo Chapel which was completed and dedicated to the glory of God (Lay President of Conference Message). In 2023, the Lay Movement Council at the 4th quarterly Connexional Lay Movement Council meeting decided to build 350 capacity chapel in Nalerigu in the North East region (Lay President of Conference Message). Some Church organisations through their evangelistic activities and financial support have also helped to revive some less endowed Churches and even supported them with their building projects. For example, in 2023, the Methodist Girl's Fellowship dedicated a Chapel at Kedjebi in the Ho Diocese. Organizational programs such as Students in Church Evangelism and Youth in Church Evangelism organized by Ghana Methodist Students' Union and Methodist Youth Fellowship have helped to revive some of the Methodist Churches in several rural communities. Recognizing the challenges confronting rural Methodist Churches, some organisations have implemented the supportive initiative of delegating some of their members to visit some rural Churches on Sundays. This strategic initiative provides an opportunity for encouragement and fellowship. Fellowshiping and sharing words of encouragement with the members of rural Methodist Churches helps to alleviate feelings of isolation and marginalization often experienced by rural Churches. It has also helped to reinforce their connection to the broader Methodist family.

The Methodist Lay Movement Council's rural Church development initiatives demonstrate a promising paradigm for the growth and development of rural Methodist Churches. Providing infrastructural support helps to address specific challenges like inappropriate places of worship and others. To optimize the impact of the Methodist Lay Movement Council in supporting rural Churches, the following suggested strategies can be adopted;

The council should organize leadership training for rural Church leaders. The importance of leadership training in Church growth must not be taken for granted. According to Magezi, Moyo, and Nanthambwe (2024), studies have indicated that a significant number of organisations, such as Churches, lack effective leadership development strategies, which can contribute to their inability to fulfill their responsibilities. They concluded in

their work that, the efficacy of an organisation is contingent upon the quality of its leadership. The provision of adequate training and development opportunities for Church leaders is crucial in ensuring the prosperity and longevity of the Church (Magezi, Moyo, & Nanthambwe). Effective leadership training would equip leaders with essential leadership skills, knowledge, and best practices to effectively navigate the challenges facing rural Church leaders. This training when organised will also provide a platform for rural Church leaders to share experiences, challenges, and **successes**, ensuring a strong and collaborative relationship among the leaders at rural Churches.

The lay movement council, which encompasses all lay members of the Church should organize vocational and career skills training for members. Through this initiative members can be empowered to acquire marketable skills, to secure employment opportunities, improve their economic stability, and enhance their overall well-being. This in turn will enable the members to increase their giving and generosity to the Church. It will also help rural Churches to address some pressing community needs such as poverty, unemployment, and others.

The leadership of the Church should recognize and appreciate organizations that have supported rural Methodist Churches in various ways. By recognizing and celebrating the invaluable contributions of these organizations, the Church will strengthen partnerships and foster continued support from these organizations to rural Methodist Churches.

Support from Individuals and family members.

There have also been some individuals and family members who have supported some less-endowed rural Churches in various ways as members of the Methodist Church Ghana. While some have purchased Church instruments and pews for them to be used for worship services, others have also supported them financially and with their building projects. One of the observations at some rural Methodist Churches is about Church instruments and other items donated by individuals and families. Some bereaved family members in some rural Churches donate items to the Church as a way to honour their deceased family members. Mostly, such donations are often made in recognition of the deceased family member who was once a Church member. This practice is often called “*donation in memory of the deceased*”. It is a way to pay tribute and show respect to the departed family member. The donated items help the Church, ensuring the deceased’s memory lives. Apart from funerals, during occasions like birthday celebrations, wedding anniversary celebrations, thanksgiving, and harvest services individuals often donate to the Church. They do this to express their faith and appreciation to God and the Church community.

This phenomenon does not only foster a sense of ownership and belonging among congregants but also presents a significant potential for the growth and development of Methodist rural Churches. The commitment of individuals and families has helped rural Churches overcome significant challenges that they face. Through the generous donations of items and infrastructure support, many rural Churches have enhanced their worship experiences and enabled Churches to acquire vital infrastructure for their worship services. The practice of dedicating gifts in memory of loved ones has created a lasting tribute to loved ones fostering a sense of community and shared purpose.

To encourage such commitments among individuals and family members, the Church must prioritize recognition and heartfelt honor to individuals and family members who generously support rural Churches. This may entail: personalized thank-you messages and citations of honor, special recognition during Church events or ceremonies, named donations, annual appreciation ceremonies, or banquets. Recognizing and honoring these individuals and family contributions can encourage continued support from individuals and family members, inspire others to emulate these efforts as well as foster a sense of shared responsibility for Church growth and development. A clear communication strategy of sharing stories of impact and testimonies from supported Churches can also help to inspire others.

While the Methodist Church in Ghana has made notable strides in addressing these challenges, there is still much work to be done. The reality that these challenges still exist in some rural Methodist Churches must not be overlooked.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having identified the challenges hindering the growth and effectiveness of the Methodist Church in rural communities, it is crucial to develop strategic responses to help address these challenges. The following recommendations propose solutions to overcome the identified challenges.

The leaders of the Methodist Churches in rural areas should be effectively supervised, motivated, and equipped to enable them to work effectively. Motivated leaders are more productive, faithful, and effective in their roles. Senior Ministers must appreciate and celebrate their hard work, achievements, and commitment. Effective supervision also helps to ensure that leaders are accountable for their actions and decisions. Existing rural Church leaders need to be exposed thoughtfully to new ideas and materials. Training sessions and conferences can be organized for them so that they will be educated on new ideas and initiatives. Rural Church leaders are critical for bringing change. They will lead the Church far more successfully if they are well-supervised and equipped for their work (John Mark Ministries, 2024).

Support in the form of financial resources, leadership, and worship instruments should be given to Methodist Churches at rural communities to help them overcome their resource limitations and also amplify their impact in rural communities. Thriving Methodist Churches have a vital role to play in supporting their counterparts. Such Churches should be encouraged to support struggling Methodist rural Churches by offering financial and leadership assistance as well as sharing their resources. This will help the rural Churches overcome their challenges and become more effective and vibrant in their existence, ultimately strengthening the broader Methodist community. As indicated earlier some rural Methodist Churches are often beset by financial hardships hindering their ability to fulfill their mission.

Apart from the support in the form of finances offered to them, the leadership of the Church should consider financial relief measures. They should consider exempting or reducing their financial commitment. This will help ease the pressure on such Churches that are struggling to meet their financial obligations, redirecting their resources and also enhancing ministry effectiveness. Such Churches should rather be supported and empowered to grow and fulfill their mission. Implementing these measures will empower Methodist Churches in rural to become more effective agents of transformations and community development. This, in turn, will contribute to the Methodist Church's broader mission of making disciples and transforming lives.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section presents a comprehensive analysis and discussion of the data collected from the survey, which was designed to gather insights into the challenges faced by Methodist Churches in rural communities and to explore the effectiveness of current strategies and proposed recommendations. The survey questionnaire was administered using Google Drive Forms, which also facilitated the retrieval of statistical output from the response. A total of 27 respondents participated in the survey. These respondents who comprised Church leaders (e.g., Steward, Society Secretary, Lay Leader), lay preachers, Church members, and Sunday School teachers were selected exclusively from rural Methodist Churches, specifically within the Sekondi Diocese of the Methodist Church Ghana. This specific geographical limitation for respondent selection was adopted by the researcher due to practical constraints such as time and resource limitations. The subsequent subsections detail the statistical outcomes of these responses, providing an in-depth discussion and analysis of the findings.

Section A: Demographics and Background (Total Responses: 27)

Table 1: Primary Role within the Methodist Church in a Rural Community

Role	Percentage of Respondents
Church Leader (e.g., Steward, Society Secretary, Lay Leader)	40.7%
Lay Preacher	22.2%
Church Member	14.8%
Other (Minister, Ministerial students, Sunday School Teachers)	22.2%

Comment: This table indicates that the majority of respondents hold formal leadership positions within the Methodist Church in rural communities, with "Church Leader" and "Lay Preacher" collectively accounting for 62.9% of responses. The "Other" category further includes roles such as "Minister, Ministerial students, Sunday School Teachers, signifying that a significant portion of the survey participants are actively involved in the operational and spiritual leadership or teaching aspects of the Church. This strong representation from leadership roles suggests that the insights gathered reflect the perspectives of individuals directly engaged with the challenges and operations of rural Methodist Churches, as the study itself gathered data from "rural Church leaders".

Table 2: Years Involved with a Methodist Church in a Rural Community

Years Involved	Percentage of Respondents
Less than 1 year	22.2%
1-10 years	25.9%
11-20 years	51.9%
21 years and above	0.0%

Comment: The data reveals a strong concentration of respondents with 11-20 years of involvement (51.9%), suggesting that a substantial portion of the participants possess considerable experience and historical knowledge regarding the rural Methodist Churches. The fact that 0.0% of respondents fall into the "21 years and above" category is notable, indicating either a specific demographic of respondents was targeted or a limited number of individuals with very long-term involvement participated in this particular survey.

Section B: Challenges Facing Methodist Churches in Rural Communities (Total Responses: 27 per question)

Table 3: Perceived Extent of Challenges Facing Rural Methodist Churches

Challenge	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
B1. Facilities and Instruments for Worship (lack adequate facilities, deteriorated, rented, unsafe, uncompleted buildings)	37.0%	63.0%	0.0%	0.0%
B2. Leadership Struggles due to Human Capital Shortage	29.6%	66.7%	0.0%	0.0%
B3. Poor attitude of some of the leaders	63.0%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%
B4. Inadequate or no supervision from higher leadership	55.6%	33.3%	11.1%	0.0%
B5. Financial constraints	74.1%	25.9%	0.0%	0.0%
B6. Unwillingness and reluctance of some Lay Preachers to go to rural preaching post	48.1%	37.0%	7.4%	0.0%
B7. Fewer opportunities available in rural communities (limited job, healthcare, educational opportunities)	74.1%	22.2%	0.0%	0.0%
B8. Vast distance covered to worship services	51.9%	33.3%	7.4%	0.0%

Comment: This section highlights a widespread acknowledgment of significant challenges facing rural Methodist Churches. For most challenges, 85% or more of respondents either "Strongly Agree" or "Agree," indicating these are deeply felt issues.

B1. Facilities and Instruments for Worship: A unanimous 100% of respondents agree or strongly agree that

this is a challenge. The paper elaborates that many rural Churches lack adequate or well-maintained worship spaces, with some holding services in deteriorated, rented, unsafe, or uncompleted buildings, leading to service disruptions or cancellations during the rainy season. There is also a significant struggle with accessing and maintaining musical instruments, often due to financial constraints or a shortage of skilled members to play them.

B2. Leadership Struggles due to Human Capital Shortage: Nearly all respondents (96.3%) agree or strongly agree with this challenge. This aligns with the discussion about young people migrating to urban areas due to lack of opportunities, leading to an unwillingness of Church members to take up leadership positions and burdening a few unmotivated leaders, often resulting in burnout.

B3. Poor attitude of some of the leaders: A very high 96.3% of respondents agree or strongly agree, with 63.0% "Strongly Agreeing". The source details this as a critical obstacle, including leaders' hesitation to adopt new ideas, prioritizing self-interest over members' well-being, lack of empathy, disrespect towards members, and a lack of transparency with higher leadership. Some leaders are even noted for negative personal behaviors like polygamy or drunkenness, setting a bad example.

B4. Inadequate or no supervision from higher leadership: 88.9% of respondents agree or strongly agree with this challenge. The text emphasizes that a lack of effective supervision leaves rural Churches vulnerable to decline, inefficiency, and mismanagement, potentially isolating them from essential resources and support from the broader Methodist Church Ghana.

B5. Financial constraints: A staggering 100% of respondents agree or strongly agree with this, with 74.1% "Strongly Agreeing," making it the most intensely felt challenge. The source attributes this to the economic realities of rural life, such as poverty and limited job opportunities (primarily farming), which hinder Churches from engaging in evangelistic activities, continuing projects, fulfilling responsibilities, and supporting members. Low attendance also impacts offering income.

B6. Unwillingness and reluctance of some Lay Preachers to go to rural preaching post: 85.1% of respondents agree or strongly agree with this. The source explains that despite their vital role in augmenting the clergy, lay preachers are reluctant due to factors like transportation costs, poor road networks to rural communities, and inadequate resources at the preaching posts, leading to a struggle for Churches to secure preachers for Sunday services.

B7. Fewer opportunities available in rural communities: 96.3% of respondents agree or strongly agree, with 74.1% "Strongly Agreeing". This challenge is linked to limited job, healthcare, and educational opportunities, causing young people to migrate to urban areas for "greener pastures," which in turn reduces Church membership and financial resources.

B8. Vast distance covered to worship services: 85.2% of respondents agree or strongly agree with this issue. The source describes members, particularly those in villages without a Methodist Church, having to walk long distances to attend services, which can be particularly difficult for the elderly or those with mobility issues, ultimately threatening attendance and participation.

Section C: Strategies (Total Responses: 27 per question)

Table 4: Awareness of Contributions from Various Methodist Entities and Individuals

Contribution Source	Aware (Yes)	Not Aware (No)
Methodist Development Fund (MDF)	88.9% ¹	11.1% ¹
Methodist Lay Movement Council	81.5% ²	18.5% ²
Some Church Organizations	77.8% ²	22.2% ²
Some Individuals and Family Members	88.9% ³	11.1% ³

Comment: This section reveals a significant level of awareness among respondents regarding existing contributions and strategies aimed at supporting rural Methodist Churches, with "Yes" responses consistently above 75% for all categories.

C1. Methodist Development Fund (MDF): A high percentage of respondents, 88.9%, are aware of MDF's contributions, while 11.1% are not.

C2. Methodist Lay Movement Council: A majority of respondents, 81.5%, are aware of the Methodist Lay Movement Council's contributions, with 18.5% unaware.

C3. Some Church Organizations: Similarly, 77.8% of respondents are aware of contributions from other Church organizations, while 22.2% are not.

C4. Some Individuals and Family Members: The highest awareness is recorded for contributions from individuals and family members, with 88.9% of respondents aware and only 11.1% unaware.

Section D: Proposed Recommendations (Total Responses: 27 per question)

Table 5: Perceived Effectiveness of Proposed Recommendations

Recommendation	Very Effective	Effective	Slightly Effective	Not Effective
D1. Organizing leadership training for rural rain leaders to equip them with essential skills	63.0%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%
D2. Organizing vocational and career skills training for Church members to improve economic stability	63.0%	37.0%	0.0%	0.0%
D3. Recognizing and honoring organizations and individuals who support rural Methodist Churches	55.6%	44.4%	0.0%	0.0%
D4. Ensuring effective supervision, motivation, and equipping of rural Church leaders	77.8%	22.2%	0.0%	0.0%
D5. Encouraging thriving Methodist Churches to provide financial, leadership, and worship instrument support to struggling rural Churches	55.6%	44.4%	0.0%	0.0%
D6. Implementing financial relief measures for rural Churches (e.g., exempting or reducing their financial commitment)	74.1%	22.2%	0.0%	0.0%

Comment: The responses to this section demonstrate overwhelming support for the proposed recommendations, with all options receiving 96% or more combined "Very Effective" and "Effective" ratings. This indicates a strong consensus among respondents on the potential impact of these strategies.

D1. Organizing leadership training for rural Church leaders: A high 96.3% of respondents perceive this as effective or very effective. This aligns with the source's argument that effective leadership training is "crucial in ensuring the prosperity and longevity of the Church" by equipping leaders with essential skills, knowledge, and best practices, and fostering collaboration.

D2. Organizing vocational and career skills training for Church members: A unanimous 100% of respondents consider this effective or very effective. This strong endorsement supports the idea that such training can empower members to acquire marketable skills, improve economic stability, increase their contributions to the Church, and address community issues like poverty and unemployment.

D3. Recognizing and honoring organizations and individuals who support rural Methodist Churches: Also, a unanimous 100% agree on its effectiveness. The paper emphasizes that recognizing and celebrating these

contributions through methods like personalized thank-you messages, special recognition, and sharing impact stories can "strengthen partnerships" and "foster continued support," inspiring others to contribute.

D4. Ensuring effective supervision, motivation, and equipping of rural Church leaders: This recommendation received the highest "Very Effective" rating at 77.8%, with 100% overall agreement on its effectiveness. This directly addresses the "Inadequate or no supervision" challenge identified earlier and is seen as critical for ensuring accountability, productivity, and the ability of rural Church leaders to "bring change" by being exposed to new ideas and materials.

D5. Encouraging thriving Methodist Churches to provide financial, leadership, and worship instrument support to struggling rural Churches: Unanimous agreement (100%) on its effectiveness. This reflects the proposed solution for overcoming resource limitations, as thriving Churches can help their struggling counterparts become "more effective and vibrant" by sharing financial, leadership, and worship instrument resources, thereby strengthening the broader Methodist community.

D6. Implementing financial relief measures for rural Churches: A high 96.3% of respondents consider this effective or very effective. This recommendation directly tackles the "Financial constraints" challenge, suggesting that exempting or reducing rural Churches' financial commitments can "ease the pressure," allow them to redirect resources, and enhance their ministry effectiveness, ultimately empowering them for growth and community development.

CONCLUSION

Methodism in rural communities faces various challenges that threaten its effectiveness. These challenges include: lack of adequate facilities for worship service, inadequate instruments for their worship services, poor attitude of some of the leaders, inadequate or no supervision, lack of support, and unwillingness of some lay preachers to go to rural preaching posts. The sad effect of the above-stated challenges on the Methodist Church Ghana at large is that, they do not only drive members away from the Church but also harms the Church's reputation as well as its potential for impact. While the Methodist Church in Ghana has made various efforts in addressing these challenges, there is still much work to be done. By acknowledging and addressing these challenges, The Methodist Church Ghana can empower rural Churches to continue their vital ministry, foster spiritual growth, and make a great impact in various rural communities.

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