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Followership in British Christian churches: A comparative study

Krystin Zigan[1] | **YingFei G. Héliot**[2] | **Alan Le Grys**[3]

[1]Faculty of Business and Economics, University of Applied Sciences, Zwickau, Germany

[2]Surrey Business School, University of Surrey, Guildford, UK

[3]University of Kent, Canterbury, UK

Correspondence
Krystin Zigan, Faculty of Business and Economics, University of Applied Sciences, Zwickau, Germany.
Email: krystin.zigan@fh-zwickau.de

Abstract

Emerging research on followership has overwhelmingly been focused on for-profit organizations. This research investigates four British congregations from different Christian denominations to explore how differing contexts shape the understanding of followership in nonprofit organizations. Using implicit followership theory, we analyze the value sets deriving from theological-ideological, institutional, and local contexts and explore informants' perceptions of ideal followership attributes. By conducting 26 semi-structured interviews with three different types of actors, we found that church members found themselves in a dialectic relationship between institutional norms and local settings, which shape the way followership is perceived. In terms of follower attributes, we identified faith-related and ethical as well as relational attributes to be prevalent. With this research, we advance current understandings of how effective leader-follower relationships in nonprofit organizations can be formed highlighting the importance of differing contexts for perceiving the role of followers.

KEYWORDS

Church organizations, contextual analysis, followership, implicit followership theory, volunteers

1 | INTRODUCTION

Nonprofit organizations offer a rich space for investigating followership as they rely predominantly on volunteers and members to achieve organizational objectives (Ashcraft & Kedrowicz, 2002). Faith-based organizations, for example, "are created by faith communities or their members to address community needs in the context of the theology of justice and charity of that particular faith" (Schneider, 2012, p. 518). They can encompass schools, hospitals, and orphanages (Bielefeld & Cleveland, 2013) and incorporate worship and other faith-related activities. This is particularly true for organizations such as churches, which are the focus of this research. Church organizations depend heavily on volunteers whom Adams (1985) describes as those who work in some way to help others for no monetary reward. The National Church and Social Action Survey (Knott, 2014) found that between 1.1 and 1.4 million volunteers contributed to church-based social action in the UK. Despite this essential support, the report also revealed the lack of volunteers and adequate leaders as major barriers to growth. The situation has clearly worsened since the pandemic with about a quarter of church leaders perceiving a significant decrease in volunteers (Evangelical Alliance, 2021).

Studying the role of volunteers in church organizations is of paramount importance for those interested in understanding voluntary nonprofit organizations simply because "congregations are the archetypal voluntary association" (Jeavons, 2000, p. 457). Jeavons bases his argument on Ammerman's (1997, p. 2) observation that "voluntary religious system came the impetus for other voluntary charitable activities" and have directly or indirectly informed many other organizations.

Schneider (2012) found that the emphasis on volunteering in church congregations stemmed from a practical theology which calls on volunteers to express a personal call to service. Congregation members are usually mindful that they will be expected to contribute to church activities (Cnaan et al., 2002) but in return look for inspiration from their leaders to grow in faith and spirituality (Rowold & Rohmann, 2009; Zigan et al., 2019).

Within the church context, Cameron (1999) draws out the distinction between church members and volunteers and, based on Dhooghe (1968), argues that volunteering is always an optional "extra" alongside general membership. Harris (1996) claims that members are more committed to organizational values than volunteers while Torry (2014) suggests that a church member prioritizes worship as their main commitment, whereas a volunteer may focus on other aspects of organizational life, such as fundraising. Members increasingly expect their views to carry more weight than those of (non-member) volunteers. In addition, they expect clergy to embody and reflect the organization's religious values, whereas volunteers might not have such expectations. Torry (2014) argues that in some church settings, particularly in the post-Reformation tradition, members may not expect any form of management, considering themselves collectively as the primary decision-making unit within the church, subject only to the same external authority structures as other members. Given all this, Varela (2013) argues that there is an urgency to better understand the expectations of volunteers and the resulting leader-follower relationship, if only because of the direct implications for the retention of valuable resources. So far, limited research has focused on congregations as followers for understanding nonprofit organizational relationships (Solansky et al., 2008).

Leadership theory flourishes, including important research into volunteer and religious organizations, with a recent focus on servant, ethical, and authentic leadership (for example, Grandy & Sliwa, 2017; Løvaas et al., 2020). By contrast, however, there has been limited research on how volunteers relate to leaders and their role as followers within the overall authority structures of a church organization. Followers are an essential component within the

dynamics of leadership systems as both leaders and followers work together to achieve a "common purpose" (Chaleff, 2003, p. 17).

While previous research predominantly focused on the role of leaders in influencing volunteers' behavior (Løvaas et al., 2020), this study focuses on the role of volunteers as followers and expectations of ideal followership. We distinguish between followers as lay leaders (followers with leadership responsibility) and ordinary congregation members. We argue that followership is a suitable concept to be explored in this context as congregation members follow both Jesus Christ and the Minister's guidance and may find themselves in an area of tension because of the interplay between theological, institutional, and local contexts. Carsten et al. (2010) argue that the context may influence social constructions of followership and how individual actors interpret their followership roles.

In detail, we address the following research question: How do the theological-ideological, institutional, and local contexts shape the understanding of ideal followership?

To answer this question, we developed the following objectives:

1. Identify relevant theological-ideological, institutional, and local contexts of four different Christian UK churches
2. Identify the resulting understanding of followership and ideal followership attributes as perceived by clergy, lay leaders, and congregation members and understand the level of congruence

Through this research, we make the following contributions:

First, we aim to identify relevant followership attributes within a church setting using Implicit Followership Theory (IFT). Understanding IFTs is crucial for comprehending leadership processes (Sy, 2010) as a higher congruence in IFTs between leaders and followers is associated with better LMX ratings (Junker & van Dick, 2014). We advance the single source approach (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004) by investigating ideal followership attributes as perceived by the different groups of leaders, lay leaders, and followers. This multi-level approach helps uncover variations in perceptions because of the leaders' differing proximity to these follower groups offering a more nuanced perspective and identifying inter-group variations in followership attributes, as suggested by Foti et al. (2012). This knowledge is vital for understanding the interplay between expectations and the leader-follower relationship (Foti & Coyle, 2015).

Second, by focusing on nonprofit organizations, we chose a unique context in which leadership and followership take place as volunteers and members have no formal contractual obligation to work. Lewis et al. (2001) argue that followership is the central driving force in nonprofit organizations. So, leaders in these organizations are required to possess effective leadership skills (Cameron & Quinn, 2006) to motivate members and volunteers and secure retention (Jaeger et al., 2009). With this study, we increase leaders' understanding about followership, and more specifically about the expectations on ideal follower behavior thereby, complementing early nonprofit research that has examined followers' perception of volunteer leaders (Schreiner et al., 2018) and followership from the perspective of organizational leaders (Gilstrap & Morris, 2015).

Third, we explore how members of four Christian denominations perceive the role of followers assuming that distinct religious contexts influence followers' expectations differently, but considering also whether societal developments produce isomorphic values. Danielsson (2013) explains how contextual factors shape role expectations, an aspect that has received limited attention in followership research. Previous research suggests that organizational structure, whether hierarchical or co-constructed, affects followership understanding (Uhl-Bien

et al., 2014) as does the spiritual context (Tourish & Tourish, 2010). Gümüsay (2017) argues that the role of religion has been relatively under-researched in organization studies.

By comparing Anglican, Roman Catholic, Baptist, and Pentecostal congregations, we investigate the extent to which institutional governance and organizational settings influence understandings of followership. Church organizations are challenged at three levels: to maintain their religious ideology, to function as organizations that provide welfare services, and to increase their membership in a changing society. Comparing these different denominations, we further contribute to the discussion of the transferability and variability of IFTs across different organizational settings, including sectors which have not previously been researched in detail (Junker & van Dick, 2014).

This paper begins with an overview of recent followership literature before describing the institutional contexts and the practical theology of four British Christian denominations. We then outline the methodology for this research, present the findings, and discuss their significance. Finally, the paper concludes with a summary of theoretical and practice-focused implications.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

The follower-centered approach has only recently attracted much needed attention and highlights the importance of followers for the achievement of organizational success (Carsten et al., 2010; Sy, 2010). We follow Uhl-Bien et al.'s (2014), p. 84) definition of followership theory as "the study of the nature and impact of followers and following in the leadership process." Followership theory thus analyses how followers understand and construct following behavior around such issues as hierarchy, power, personal expectations, and characteristics.

One avenue of investigation in follower-centered leadership perception is research into implicit followership theory (IFT), which focuses on leaders and followers' perceptions of ideal or typical followership behavior. IFTs are cognitive categories of individuals about the traits and behaviors of followers (Sy, 2010). Therefore, each member of the dyad carries and develops prototypes of what they assume a follower should look like Coyle & Foti, 2015. These expectations are shaped by socialization processes and previous experiences of individuals in relation to leaders and followers and are likely to vary (Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

Despite being limited, recent studies have provided useful insights into prevalent attributes of ideal followers. The seminal work of Kelley (1992) has provided formative insight into the concept of exemplary followers, who he described as active, independent, and critical thinkers with strong values and a courageous outlook. Studies by Sy (2010) and Lord et al. (2020) found that IFTs are related to industry, enthusiasm, good citizen, and conformity. Agho (2009) identified other attributes such as honesty, competence, dependability, loyalty, and cooperation as desirable qualities, and others have added willingness to participate, attention to detail and ability to do the job, being supportive, and showing consideration (for example, Berg, 1998). Effective followers have further been described as possessing the ability to give and receive constructive criticism, as well as the capability to be innovative and creative (Hertig, 2010; Kelley, 1988). Negative connotations to followership have been identified by Bligh (2011) and Oreg (2003) who argue that followers can be passive, resist change, lack resilience, and are characterized by short-term thinking and cognitive rigidity. Such lists as these, however, have been criticized for being too broad and stereotypical as they fail to consider differences between different follower roles (Danielsson, 2013).

To the best of our knowledge, there is very limited research specifically investigating IFTs in nonprofit organizations even though their functionality and longevity are dependent on functioning leader-follower relationships that exist with a wide range of stakeholders. Further, there is a dearth of empirical evidence on followership within this sector (Gilstrap & Morris, 2015). As a notable exemption, Baker et al. (2011) explore (paid) followers' self-identification in US hospitals and found that good followers in this context show leader-like abilities- that is, they are able to challenge existing processes and encourage others to act. Gilstrap and Morris' (2015) explored nonprofit leaders' understanding of good followers and found attributes such as collaboration, passion, and vision valuable.

Carsten et al. (2010) provided some pionieering insights into followers' view of followership and suggested three socially constructed meanings of followership: followers saw themselves as either passive (being obedient and deferent), active, or proactive (partners). Applying this to the nonprofit context, Gilstrap and Morris (2015) loosely agree and suggest the categories of uninvested followers, invested followers, and leader preparation followers. Varela (2013) explored the motivation of followers in the voluntary context and argued that an (implicit) operational model of followership effectively determines their actual role.

Danielsson (2013) argues that understanding of roles and expectations is shaped by contextual influences, which so far have received limited attention in followership research (Bligh, 2011). Carsten et al. (2010) were among the first to focus explicitly on contextual factors, exploring how various industries shapes follower perceptions and behavior. They found that context influences the social construction of followership behavior, as followers carry out their roles. For the profit sector, previous research has also shown that factors such as hierarchical systems, status inequalities, and power differences have an impact on followers perceptions (Ravlin & Thomas, 2005). Structural characteristics such as the level of hierarchy have also been found to be relevant in the nonprofit sector as they influence decisions regarding volunteer roles (Rochester et al., 2010) and affect how volunteers experience the organization (Nesbit et al., 2018).

Bjugstad et al. (2006) claim that social constructions of followership depend on the style of the particular leader, but little research has gone into the role of institutions (in Church terms, the ecclesiology of each particular congregation) in shaping the perceptions of followers. Danielsson (2013) argues that follower roles are framed by institutional structures and norms and further research into the dialectal nature of this relationship between institutions and volunteers seems required (Lounsbury, 2008).

3 | PRACTICAL THEOLOGY OF THE FOUR CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS

The four denominations selected for this study are the Roman Catholic Church, Church of England, Baptist Church, and Pentecostal Church, chosen to represent a broad spectrum of different ecclesiologies. Followership in all four churches is based fundamentally on a shared understanding of God's action in Jesus Christ, as understood through scripture (as each denomination has received it) and the classical formulations of the Christian creeds. While all these denominations agree on basic Trinitarian principles, they have developed distinctive approaches to theological interpretations of the Bible, theology, institutional set-ups, and organizational structures.

Based on Schneider's (2012) categorization of church organizations, we consider the Roman Catholic Church as an institutionalized system based on centralized structures which provide planning, evaluation, and leadership development programs. The two authoritative documents Catechism of the Catholic Church (2011) and *Lumen Gentium* Second Vatican Council (1964) speak clearly about key aspects of the institutional structures: the hierarchical nature of the Church, and the *magisterium* or authoritative teaching office distributed through the ministry of the Pope, bishops, and priests. Both documents also draw on all three sources of authority: scripture, tradition, and reason to support their position structures. Catholics also place a characteristic emphasis on the sacraments, especially the Mass or Eucharist. The Catholic Church formally went through a period of reform during the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s but tends to remain broadly conservative theologically.

Since the Reformation, the Church of England (C of E) has blended elements of both Catholic and Protestant ecclesiology. It has a much more distributed organizational model: power is shared unevenly between diocesan bishops, who have a substantial degree of control within their own diocese, local clergy, who also have a fair degree of power in local parishes, and the laity, who have increasing levels of influence over matters such as finance and local church management (Church of England, 2021). Hence, the C of E combines an institutionalized structure at national and regional levels and congregational ecclesiology at local parish level. Power balance fluctuates, driven partly by secularization and social changes, leading to greater lay member involvement in holding leaders accountable. This shift has reduced the influence of local parish priests, who now share power with formally constituted Councils and Synods.

The Baptist Church places a strong emphasis on scripture as the foundational theological principle, though in practice, scripture is interpreted through "common sense" readings of "plain meaning" which also incorporate contemporary cultural understandings of language. The Church nationally consists of a loose federation of affiliated congregations who elect to belong. Each congregation retains a high degree of autonomy, while legally adopting a clear constitution as registered charities (Leonard, 2010). Distinctive features of the Baptists include a strong belief in the "priesthood of all believers," a doctrine which tends to relativize the Minister's position and empowers local congregation members. Local Ministers primarily advise, guide, and provide a degree of expertise, particularly in relation to worship. They are accountable to the congregation. Baptist churches follow a congregational system, emphasizing the local congregation as the primary basis for ministry.

Pentecostal churches tend to be either independent congregations or congregations affiliated to a wide range of different church groupings, which makes generalization difficult. There is no common structure binding these churches together, apart from a shared appeal to the presence of the Holy Spirit as the one who guides and informs decision-making (Patte, 2010). Nevertheless, distinctive features tend to include: a rich cultural and ethnic diversity, a strong emphasis on the Bible which tends towards fundamentalism(s), and a leadership style centered around a charismatic figure (in the sociological sense). Pentecostal churches typically—like Baptists—tend to prioritize scripture as the main source of inspiration with a corresponding absence of authority invested in tradition and/or reason. This diversity means the organization and management of Pentecostal groups varies enormously, with the sole unifying factor, perhaps, being a grounding in strong local leadership.

We acknowledge the difficulty of comparing congregations of different denominations as none of them imagine ministry in the same way. Table 1 provides an overview of the key institutional and organizational differences between the denominations relevant for this research.

TABLE 1 Overview of institutional, organizational differences between denominations.

Denomination	Catholic Church	Baptist Church	Pentecostal Church	Church of England
Key theological approach	• Framework built on scripture *and* Christian tradition • Strong emphasis on the *magisterium* or teaching office of the Church—"*the* faith" • Can be seen as authoritarian and "top down"	• Framework built on scripture alone • Concept of priesthood of all believers (baptized individuals have a direct relationship with God) • Significantly influenced by recent evangelical revival • Emphasis on individual before God	• Framework built on scripture *and* personal experience of spiritual renewal (Holy Spirit) • Emphasis on individual before God • Often led by strong charismatic leaders • Significantly influenced by recent evangelical revival	• Via media: Catholic orders of bishops, priests, and deacons; catholic emphasis on sacraments framed by Protestant emphasis on the Bible and preaching (the "Word") • Looser doctrinal framework, ranging from evangelical to Catholic views • Some emphasis on the individual, particularly in present evangelical revival
Organizational structure at local level	• Centralized hierarchy with strong sense of authority structure centered on the Pope and Vatican, the ordained ministry of bishops and priests • But also principle of subsidiarity	• Congregation as main unit within a loose national network ("fellowship") • Based on mutual relationships and negotiation • Strong blend of individualism and congregational authority	• Congregation as the central unit • But can also be part of a wider network of churches	• Blend of Catholic and reformed polities • Parishes embedded in diocesan and national institutional structures • "Episcopally led and synodically governed" through local councils at parish & diocesan levels • Lay involvement in decision-making
Role of minister	• "Priest": leader with clearly delegated authority within the hierarchy	• "Minister": seen as pastor and teacher • Minister called by and accountable to	• Charismatic "Pastor" in both spiritual and sociological senses	• Minister possesses "discursive authority" which is constrained by institutional structures, for

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Denomination	Catholic Church	Baptist Church	Pentecostal Church	Church of England
	• Priest sent by and accountable to the bishop • Final local decision-maker	the congregation • Shared leadership and decision-making • Emphasis on individual access to God can lead to division	• Pastors can be quite authoritarian • Thus, emphasis on individual access to God can also lead to division	example, Parochial Church Councils and local Church wardens

Sources: Burgess (2010); Cross & Livingstone (2005); Leonard (2010); O'Collins (2017).

4 | METHODOLOGY

Because of the limited research on followership in church settings and the complexity of the topic, we conducted an exploratory qualitative study. This approach enabled an in-depth exploration of the different congregational contexts. We employed semi-structured interviews and document analysis to provide a rich account of two specific groups of followers (congregation members and lay leaders) in their interaction with leaders (clergy). Thus, we interviewed the Minister as leader, lay leaders, and ordinary members in each congregation.

The term "lay leader" can apply to various roles in a congregation, but often denotes a non-ordained individual involved in subsidiary leadership tasks like leading music, administration, maintenance, and local decision-making, usually on a voluntary basis (Callahan, 2013). In some cases, it may include unordained individuals engaged in some level of authorized ministry, paid or voluntary, such as worship leading, preaching, and pastoral care, often after formal training. In this paper, "lay leader" refers to individuals in a congregation with recognized delegated responsibilities within a broader leadership team or equivalent structure.

For each denomination, we reviewed the governance documents (for example, annual reports, internal communication documents, church websites) to allow for the triangulation of data - that is, to compare the understanding of ideal followership as shaped by different contexts. We employed the term "Minister" across denominations for clergy leaders, using specific terms like "pastor" as needed to reflect their faith tradition or affiliation in specific contexts.

4.1 | Research setting

This research uses a comparative design to investigate followership within the congregations of four British Christian churches in order to capture variety within the topic researched. Three churches were located in the same city, and the fourth church was from a different location in the UK.

The Roman Catholic congregation is highly diverse and one of the largest and most dynamic congregations in its region. Its 600 members mainly consists of English locals from various backgrounds and occupations as well as a diverse international population.

The Church of England parish is an established congregation within the evangelical tradition with strong links to the local community. It has 353 members, and the congregation consists of people of all ages and backgrounds. The church is socially located in a predominantly white middle-class community adjacent to an area of social deprivation.

The Baptist congregation is a member of the Baptist Union of Great Britain. The Minister is elected by the congregation. The church members are mostly English locals from the middle class. It has 46 members and a leadership team, which consists of a group of academics, teachers, social workers, and lawyers. The congregation has a specific focus on reaching out to the community.

The Pentecostal church is a multicultural self-formed church and a registered charity. Its charitable objectives are the advancement of the Christian Faith, the relief of poverty, and the advancement of education. The Pastor is self-nominated. It has 50 members, mainly with African heritage.

4.2 | Data collection

One author, as a practicing Christian, had relatively easy access to all four church communities and "the obvious advantage of opportunistic sampling" (Knights & Clarke, 2014, p. 339) to recruit informants. The church leaders (Ministers) were contacted first to gain permission to conduct research and to approach church members who were then contacted via email or in person. All interviews were conducted at the church premises. Using a convenience sampling approach through personal contact helped create an open and trusting atmosphere (Webster et al., 2014) that enabled interviewees to share personal experiences.

The researchers employed ethical reflexivity to consider ethical concerns around data collection and analysis. As a result, the researchers applied ethical practice throughout this research by, for example, advising informants about the purpose of the research and anonymizing their data without reducing its hermeneutical value (Roth & von Unger, 2018). The research context enabled two of the authors to contribute a "reflective insider perspective" in relation to existing theoretical models (Iszatt-White et al., 2006). We are aware that these insider perspectives could distort the interpretation of findings and hence the conclusions drawn. To enhance the reliability of this research, therefore, we employed objective coding mechanisms as well as a rigorous comparison of findings. Further, we aimed to achieve intersubjective consensus between the researchers during data analysis to triangulate the emerging themes and increase reliability (Franklin et al., 2001).

We conducted 26 semi-structured interviews, which ranged from 60 to 110 min, averaging 75 min. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Interview questions contained general questions about how and why informants were involved in the church before asking about their perceptions of followership, ideal follower attributes, and their understanding of the institution. Table 2 provides an overview of the research informants. A summary of the interview guide can be found in Appendix 1.

4.3 | Data analysis

We employed thematic analysis to uncover key themes within each church. These provided detailed insights into the development of understanding and behavior. We followed Braun and

Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis. After organizing and anonymizing the data, we immersed ourselves in the interview transcripts and notes to become familiar with the data. Initial codes were generated through open coding, with one author using a manual approach and others using NVIVO. Each researcher created a table of potential codes to summarize key points and uncover important information for later interpretation (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021).

We then we created a set of provisional categories and grouped them with appropriate labelling themes (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Recurrent themes pertaining to informants' experiences and perceptions (as shown in similar quotes and codes) were grouped meaningfully together to form themes, which we then compared to reach consensus (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This data reduction process enabled us to move to a higher level of inference, identifying connections to the research question and objectives. Overarching themes were developed by all authors individually and then discussed and agreed upon collectively. We reviewed and refined the themes, adding new ones and eliminating those lacking subthemes or supporting codes. In particular, categorizing ideal followership attributes required deep reflection. Then, we compared findings within and across congregations, as well as with findings of other studies. We applied Glaser and Strauss' (1967) technique to compare intra- and inter-case differences and similarities. This process ended in determining and revising the following main themes for each congregation which will be presented next:

1. General understanding of followership by leaders and followers, shaped by theological-ideological, institutional, and local contexts.
2. Perception of ideal followership attributes influenced by these contexts.

5 | FINDINGS

5.1 | General understanding of followership as shaped by various contexts

The different contexts clearly influenced perceptions of followership among the three groups of informants, that is Ministers, lay leaders, and regular congregation members. We found that in congregations operating within strong theological and institutional influences, followership was mainly understood as being obedient and loyal. However, the influence of the local context, that is, for example, the Minister's personality and leadership style was also evident. In all congregations, Ministers' perceptions of ideal followership differed from those of the other two groups.

TABLE 2 Number of research interviews.

	Roman Catholic Church	Church of England	Baptist Church	Pentecostal Church
Clergy	2	2	1	1
Lay Leaders	4	3	2	2
Ordinary congregation members	3	2	2	2
Total number of interviews per denomination	9	7	5	5
Total number of interviews				26

5.1.1 | Roman Catholic Church

The Minister's way of leading significantly affected the congregation's understanding of followership. This Minister displayed a liberal and egalitarian leadership style despite the formal hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church and viewed his followers as co-workers. He realized that leadership had to be shared and was therefore willing to delegate tasks. However, his personal style was described as distant, not very communicative or approachable.

Lay leaders felt that being too independent from the "organizational scheme" was inappropriate and following the institutional ethos was highly important. They expected the church to be run in a consistent way, not deviating from traditional hierarchical and authoritarian models. One congregation member argued: "One of the reasons why I am a Catholic is because I've always known it to be consistent. Leadership and consistency go together. [However], what I am seeing in Rome isn't currently translating to my local congregation."

To regular church members followership meant looking to the Minister for guidance on teaching, moral and spirituality, learning obedience to the Lord, and setting a good example. Both groups of followers placed high premium on loyalty and a degree of structural conformity.

In general, we found a mismatch between perceived theological-institutional values around authority and obedience and the Ministers' personal leadership style which seemed to confuse some congregation members, who expected consistency within a hierarchical setting. This caused wide variance in understandings of followership. As a result, some lay leaders seemed very disappointed and frustrated with the Minister-congregation relationship. Although the Minister's leadership style encouraged participation, his approach actually caused alienation. Some lay leaders expected more encouragement and active leadership while others missed the guidance and direction from the Minister. Apparently, the Minister could not adjust his style to meet parochial expectations.

5.1.2 | Anglican Church

In the Anglican congregation, the dispersed power model seemed to shape informants' understanding of followership. Further, Protestant beliefs emphasizing individualism were evident in this congregation. The different influences result in a mixed understanding of followership ranging from active involvement and shared leadership to obedience and loyalty.

In line with the broader Anglican setting, the Ministers expected the congregation members to be involved in leadership. Building strong relationships, developing and encouraging church members was vital. This was also reflected in their leadership styles. One Minister argued: "we have a role of supporting each other."

Lay leaders reflected a similar attitude and felt uncomfortable with too much language of obedience. One lay leader (Paul) explained: "I think you could always be a follower and never actually realize your potential, by taking that risk and making that change." However, he also felt that they had to be loyal and obedient to the institution and the Minister whom he referred to as shepherd. Another lay leader's comments illustrated the independence of followers from the leader arguing that as a follower, it would be difficult to be yourself and that it could be dangerous to start treating the Minister as he would be the ultimate person to follow.

The general congregation welcomed the sensitive approach by the Minister. The leadership style was characterized as encouraging and trustful. Within the institutional framework, the democratic way of decision-making seemed to suit many church members and created a

conducive Minister-congregation relationship. The relationship between leaders and followers was seen as less formal but with explicit boundaries as indicated by Amy (Lay leader): "the Minister would delegate tasks but not authority."

5.1.3 | Baptist Church

In the Baptist Church, the understanding of followership in the congregation very much mirrored the institutional ecclesiology which emphasizes the belief in the "priesthood of all believers" but is also influenced by the individual contexts of the priest and the followers.

The Minister described the inherent challenges encountered by active members in balancing their professional commitments, familial obligations, and church engagement. He sought to balance workloads by providing clear job descriptions to the lay leaders.

Lay leaders explained that the Minister's role was to give guidance, pastoral care, biblical teaching, and to question and challenge when necessary. Drawbacks of following were linked to concerns about following the Minister too much, as one lay leader put it: "If you are following, you are copying, you can make yourself into a mini-person of the other person, which might not be who you are." (Louise, Lay leader) Lay leaders felt that a mutual working relationship was missing. Several informants felt that the Minister was struggling with leadership responsibilities and did not understand where his authority started and ended. As a result, several members reported a degree of frustration and confusion around their relationship with the Minister.

The leadership style of the Minister again impacted Church members' understanding of followership. Like the lay leaders, they showed some reserve emphasizing that the Minister should not expect blind obedience, as each member was called to follow their own conscience before God, perhaps reflecting again societal tendencies of increased independence.

5.1.4 | Pentecostal Church

We found a strong influence of individual and local contexts in the Pentecostal congregation, potentially due to the missing strong institutional environment leading to an ambivalent relationship between leader and followers.

The charismatic Minister displayed strong leadership characteristics and determined the local context. He established his own followership model. The Minister was clearly experienced in using his position power to encourage obedient and submissive behavior. He explicitly used the term "follower" and made a clear distinction between himself, lay leaders, and ordinary congregation members. His perception of power was evident in that he would only allow congregation members to take on leadership roles once they had successfully completed a training program. Once authorized to lead, he would allow them freedom only to lead in his way: "it gives me special joy as a leader to see other leaders who are leading independent of me but in the way, I would love to see them lead." (Carl, Minister).

Lay leaders and congregation members were well-aware of their Minister's expectations and his understanding of following, as indicated by Jenny (Congregation Member): "I believe we all understand the power he has, which is not from him but from God. So, we submit to that power, not him, and because of that we know exactly our limits." Followers constructed and behaved in a more traditional "subordinate sense." In all interviews, we found a clear

understanding of the framework for followership: there is only one leader, and congregation members had to follow the Minister. Occasionally, however, lay leaders described resistance and seemed to question the Minister's leadership style. This suggests that followers sometimes seemed to be in two minds: following the Minister's lead and adhering to acceptable behavior, while also feeling the need to question or challenge him when necessary, indicating an ambivalent relationship with the Minister.

5.2 | Perception of ideal followership attributes across the denominations

Perceptions of ideal followership appeared to be the result of a blend between the theological-ideological and institutional contexts and the local environment.

5.2.1 | Roman Catholic Church

Because of the different understandings of followership, we found a great variation in ideal followership attributes in this congregation.

One Minister suggested that a good follower should have social skills, experience, sensitivity, and a sound faith.

For lay leaders, being a good follower meant reaching out, building relationships, showing love through action, care, and empathy—what they saw as Christ-like qualities. Anna (Lay leader) said: "a follower to me means serving, not just being bystanders or observers." Lay leaders understood their role in actively engaging in church activities and staying in contact with other church members. Other attributes mentioned were being friendly and loving, part of the community, feeling connected, and possessing social skills. Another lay leader felt personal constraint was crucial: there could be no room for personal opinion because otherwise followers would not be followers.

Congregation members argued that being a good person meant leading a faithful life in accordance with the teachings of the Bible. Some followers happily adopted an obedient pattern of behavior and accepted their role as subordinates; they valued this denomination for its consistency in a strong Catholic ethos and structure. However, some clearly recognized the Minister's limitations and felt a strong need to assert greater leadership.

5.2.2 | Anglican Church

The Anglican Ministers' democratic understanding of followership was also reflected in their perception of good followership. They emphasized a shared corporate vision and expected followers to be co-constructors of a relationship with God and with each other.

Lay leaders echoed this and saw themselves as colleagues or team members. Lauren (Lay leader) argued that: "A good follower is to be involved, to serve, get it actioned, to really have time spent with God, pray every day, listen, encourage others, support them."

Ordinary church members felt that good followers should be loyal, faithful, supportive, open, and honest.

5.2.3 | Baptist Church

The Baptist Minister described good followers as meeting with other Christians to pray, serve God in the community, and challenge each other. He expected the congregation to be actively involved, ready to serve, and "hungry and thirsty for God."

Lay leaders argued that a good follower needed to have good interpersonal skills, humility, and being willing to invest oneself.

Congregation members felt that good followers should be actively participating in Church life, be open, listen, and ready to discern. One congregation member suggested that qualities in a good follower included: "being genuine, being authentic, being true to yourself, and being true before God and others."

5.2.4 | Pentecostal Church

The Minister of this Church defined good followers as being willing to learn, possessing an attitude of humility and obedience, consistently participating in church activities, attending meetings, and be financially committed. He showed clear expectations on followers to grow in faith and spirituality. He suggested that potentially unhelpful or difficult aspects of followership could be traced back to personality factors, preconceived ideas on the part of the follower, a lack of humility, and an unwillingness to learn.

Lay Leaders emphasized the importance of accepting leadership. One argued: "A good follower is to buy into the vision of who you are following; accepting, you have to be humble, to be teachable."

Congregation members described good followers as listening, patient and obedient.

Table 3 aggregates the key findings of this research.

5.3 | Summary of similarities and differences across the four denominations

5.3.1 | In relation to context

In all but one church, we found a mismatch in expectations around the involvement of followers due to contextual differences. The theological-institutional context seemed to be strongly influenced by local factors, such as the leadership style of the Ministers. Notably, the Anglican, Pentecostal, and Roman Catholic leaders held significant decision-making authority, but in large congregations, such as the Roman Catholic and the Church of England churches, Ministers faced challenges in managing their workload alone. Consequently, discussions within these churches emphasized the need for ordained ministers to develop better leadership and team-building skills. By contrast, the Baptist and Pentecostal churches exhibited varying patterns of lay leadership involvement reflecting differences in ecclesiology and congregation size.

The misalignment between institutional and local contexts seemed to cause confusion among some congregation members: either because the leader expected obedience and hesitated to share too much of the leadership role (Pentecostal and Baptist Church), or followers expected guidance and authoritative behavior from the leaders (Roman Catholic Church), who, however, sought greater lay participation. This resulted in some proactive behaviors in

TABLE 3 Summary of key findings.

Christian Denomination	Clergy	Lay leaders	Ordinary congregation members
Theme 1 General understanding of followership as shaped by various contexts			
Local Roman Catholic Church, UK	Seem to apply a liberal and egalitarian approach within the theological-institutional framework	Acknowledge the authority of the leader given by the institution and understand followership as contributing to Church life	Strong expectations on consistent theological-institutional framework with clerical authority and leadership
Local Church of England Church, UK	Dispersed institutional structure with shared power, less formal relationship, Ministers expect congregation to be involved	Expect to be involved in decision-making through dispersed institutional structure, but acknowledge authority of Minister and the need to be supportive and loyal	Expect the Minister to lead and acknowledge their human weaknesses, are ready to follow
Local Baptist Church, UK	Less centralized institutional structure shifts power from institution to Minister yet, Minister's human weaknesses put pressure on them and the congregation	Realized limitations in leadership skills of the Minister encourage lay leaders to get involved and lead	Limitations of leadership skills affect the congregations' understanding of followership to not follow blindly
Local Pentecostal Church, UK	Weak institutional structure encourages dominance of the individual Minister, who sets the rules and have a clear understanding of followership	Strong influence of the local context	Clear acceptance of followership and leadership roles
Theme 2 Perception of ideal followership attributes within different contexts			
Local Roman Catholic Church, UK	Attributes relate to personal skills, experience, faith, and knowledge	Attributes relate to being supportive, helpful, active involvement, having Christ-like qualities, being open-minded and friendly	Attributes relate to taking part in Church life, regular attendance, being friendly, leading a faithful life, being obedient
Local Church of England Church, UK	Active involvement of congregation, sharing of opinions, supporting the Minister	Being involved in decision-making and supportive, but also obedient and loyal	Support local church, help each other in the congregation, be faithful, obedient, and loyal to Minister
Local Baptist Church, UK	Active engagement with faith and in church	Listening, discerning, learning from leader, being involved	Active participation in church life

(Continues)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

Theme 2 Perception of ideal followership attributes within different contexts			
Local Pentecostal Church, UK	Obedience, humility, willingness to grow in faith, and spirituality expected	Critical thinking	Critical thinking, own relationship with God, obedience, patience
Theme 3 Relationship between leaders, lay leaders, and followers			
Local Roman Catholic Church, UK	Followership as co-constructed relationship, Ministers welcome shared leadership and encourage collaboration	Lay leaders expect guidance but delegation of tasks and active involvement due to unhappiness with the Minister's leadership style	Congregation members expect guidance, encouragement, support, and a trustworthy relationship
Local Church of England Church, UK	Ministers seek a trusting and respectful relationship with the congregation, team-oriented within boundaries	Listening to congregation, amicable relationship, freedom within boundaries	Encouraging, supportive, and respectful relationship, servant leadership
Local Baptist Church, UK	Provides high degree of autonomy, impersonal relationship	Difficult relationship due to limited leadership skills, no personal/collegial relationship	Dysfunctional relationship, resistance among congregation
Local Pentecostal Church, UK	Clear hierarchical relationship with Minister leading	Experience strong leadership, which is not necessarily what lay leaders want	Value Minister's advice and support but accept his powerful position, clear difference felt to relationship to lay leaders

followers but also inner tensions between obedience and independence. In the Baptist Church, we saw a much stronger tendency to individualism as, for example, in the Roman Catholic Church.

5.3.2 | In relation to follower attributes

The comparison of understandings of followership and ideal follower attributes across the different church groups showed that all clergy prioritized faith-related attributes such as sound faith, praying, serving, and worshipping God. In the Pentecostal and Baptist Churches, the leaders expected a level of obedience and did not want to share their leadership role without a clear readiness in place.

By contrast, lay leaders from the four denominations prioritized pastoral care emphasizing relational and ethical attributes such as supportiveness and empathy. Pentecostal and Baptist lay leaders stressed the importance of followers trusting the leader and displaying humility. In Roman Catholic and Pentecostal settings, lay leaders expected followers to be obedient, putting

aside personal opinions and showing unconditional commitment to following the leader. Active engagement in church life was evident across all denominations with leaders and followers alike prioritizing support for church activities. Despite the expectation of authoritative behavior from leaders in the Roman Catholic tradition, there was still a desire for greater lay involvement.

Regular church members seemed far less concerned with active participation but mentioned faith-related attributes like leading a faithful life, being true to God, and relational attributes such as loving others. The Pentecostal church members stressed listening, obedience, patience, and humility. Catholic church members especially mentioned institution-related attributes like reliability and commitment in terms of time and support.

In summary, there was an alignment regarding faith-based, ethical, and relational attributes across denominations and between lay leaders and regular followers. Active church involvement was mentioned in all denominations with attributes such as self-determination, participation, and empowerment deemed important, albeit with varying expectations between the two groups. Regular followers were expected to engage to some extent, such as attending church services, while lay leaders were expected to be more actively involved which is understandable considering their particular roles. This tendency among followers to choose levels of engagement perhaps reflects wider societal trends towards individualism. Appendix 2 provides additional quotes and a brief summary of the main findings.

6 | DISCUSSION

Previous studies in the nonprofit context tended to focus on the role of leaders and their impact on volunteers' motivation and capacity (De Clerck et al., 2020), and the significance of value congruence among volunteers and the organization for volunteer retention (Ihm & Baek, 2021).

This paper has extended previous research by exploring the perception of followership in church organizations. More specifically, we explored the influence of the challenging volunteer context on informants' perceptions of ideal followership attributes. While previous nonprofit research has often assumed volunteers to be a homogenous group whose needs and wants are aligned with the organizations' needs (Rehnborg, 2015), we showed that expectations clearly differed due to the varying proximity of some followers to their leaders, and the unique mix of local context, institutional setting and the underlying ecclesiology, which affect the relationship between actors.

Understanding contextual factors which influence volunteers' behavior has attracted some initial research attention (see e.g., Olivola et al., 2019). For the specific context of this research, we show that institutional structures shape perceptions of followership. In denominations with a centralized institution (such as the Roman Catholic Church), understanding of stewardship has evolved from a theology that views responsibility for the church as a whole (Carp, 2002). Respectively, in our study, leaders and followers seemed to rely heavily on the institution for structure and guidance.

In congregation-based churches, local congregations are the main vehicle for carrying out the mandates of faith and hence local church members form a main source of support and are involved in the stewardship of the local church. Involving volunteers in leadership is common in congregation-based churches (Schneider, 2012) and responsibility for conveying a shared understanding of roles is with the local Minister rather than the institution (although there are centralized denominational structures to support). Accordingly, in the Anglican church, we found a higher alignment in understanding of the role of followers.

Paying attention to the hierarchical setting provided useful insights for the effective management of nonprofit organizations. Using Uhl-Bien et al.'s (2014) distinction between subordination and co-construction, we were able to explore a little of this variation in practice between the hierarchical structure and local realities. Across the denominations followership was mostly associated with subordinate roles, partly because followers felt this to be appropriate behavior given the wider institutional frames and partly because the leader seemed to expect it. When a co-constructionist leadership approach meets a hierarchical institutional context, volunteers and church members might feel confused because of the mismatch of expectations. Timm (2016) argues that volunteers are usually less rigid about responsibilities and more flexible when adapting to various situations. However, our research found that in a highly structured institutional setting, volunteers expected corresponding behavior.

Our finding that empowering contexts do not necessarily promote proactive schema if the institutional framework is felt to be dominant adds new insights to previous research which has explored the impact of institutional structures on followers' behavior (Carsten et al., 2010). In Figure 1, we show how contextual factors such as theological-ideological stance and institutional structures are blended with local realities and the personalities of those involved and how these subsequently impact the understanding of followership of three different types of actors investigated in this research, that is leaders, lay leaders, and regular followers. We assume this to be the case in other nonprofit organizations as well given the existence of similar contextual factors.

Next to the theological-ideological and institutional frameworks, these findings need to be positioned within the volunteer context as church organizations are hugely dependent on volunteer contributions. In contemporary western society, where membership of a church organization is an entirely free choice (De Roest, 2008), all followers, lay leaders, and congregation members have actively chosen to place themselves in this framework and retain the right to opt-out at any stage. This means that all Ministers, even in the most structurally authoritarian contexts, necessarily have to negotiate a way through the tensions created by freedom of choice. Historically, this has been especially true in the case of Pentecostal churches, where lay leaders and congregation members have demonstrated a clear tendency to break away and form alternative communities in case of mismatch of expectations. In fact, this research revealed that in most churches, some mismatch in expectations existed between leaders and followers (often caused by differences in personality) which sometimes resulted in an unhappy and ineffective relationship.

Engagement in the voluntary sector implies some sort of activism, and we observed cases where a mismatch existed between volunteering and activist commitment to a particular understanding of the Church. In these cases, many followers actively wanted to be more involved in decision-making, as way of promoting what they saw as the well-being of the local congregation. Such behavior is consistent with previous findings (for example, Carsten et al., 2010) that more proactive followers come to see themselves increasingly as co-producers of leadership. However, despite the high level of potential friction, volunteer followers felt strong loyalty towards the institution which seemed to outweigh dissatisfaction with local leadership. Hence, we confirm that the alignment of local and institutional values is indeed a highly significant factor in volunteer retention (Ihm & Baek, 2021).

In terms of the ideal followership attributes, our research supports previous studies which suggest that ideal followers share a number of common attributes, for example, being loyal and social and self-motivated (Carsten et al., 2010). Building on Danielsson (2013), who distinguished between organization-related attributes and individual-related attributes, we categorize the attributes identified in this study into faith-related (for example, humility, praying, and growing in faith), relational (for example, being teachable, obedient and listening, supportive, friendly, loving, and trusting), and institution-related (for example, loyal, reliable).

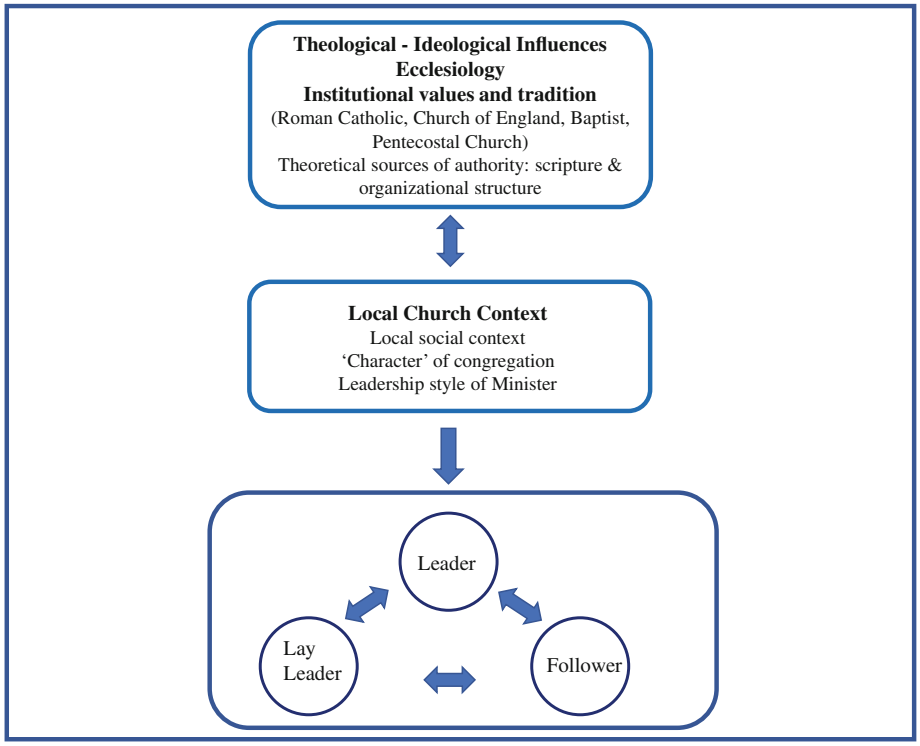

FIGURE 1 Interplay between varying contexts and perceptions of followership.

Several attributes, such as humility and obedience, but also relational attributes, took on a particular significance for followers and leaders as key theological values associated with Christ-like behavior (Caputo, 2009). The local church context also impacted followers' understanding of critical and independent thinking and the need to provide helpful and honest feedback (as identified, for example, by Hertig, 2010). Ecclesiological-ideological factors clearly shaped outcomes: for example, followers in the Roman Catholic and Pentecostal churches seemed to be particularly uneasy about critical comments directed at Ministers. Many individual church members had a clear sense that they should use their own minds and not follow blindly, but only in relation to interactions with the local leader, never towards the overall institutional and theological structure. Based on these findings, there is a need to refine some of the lists of follower attributes as identified in previous research, for example, by Agho (2009) and Sy (2010). With these insights into ideal followership attributes in a church setting, we make an important contribution to the understudied area of research in the nonprofit sector.

We advance Gilstrap and Morris' (2015) study which explored nonprofit leaders' perception of good followers. Attributes such as collaboration, passion, and vision were partly confirmed in our study.

7 | CONCLUSIONS

Given the noticeable scarcity of nonprofit followership research (Gilstrap & Morris, 2015), this study contributes with empirical insights into the understanding of followership by qualitatively exploring four Christian church organizations.

To be able to identify the array of perceptions of followership across the different congregations, analyzing the theological-ideological, institutional, and local contexts has proven insightful. In line with Carsten et al. (2010), we found that certain contextual factors have more influence than others on how followership is socially constructed. For example, we found the Ministers' leadership style to be highly prevalent. We also found that a lack of alignment of these contexts creates a wide-ranged understanding of followership which impedes congruence and the establishment of fruitful relationships. The local context seemed to outweigh the role and power of the institution and emphasized the immense responsibility of religious leaders in building effective relationships with followers. Developing a shared understanding seemed challenging in some cases due to a mix of expectations, which, however, has been identified as vital for achieving better task performance and more positive attitudes (Cannon-Bowers & Salas, 2002).

We used implicit followership theory to identify ideal follower attributes such as humility, support, and active involvement. We categorized these attributes into faith-related, relational, and institutional-focused attributes, although with a degree of caution: despite the significant degree of overlap between the IFTs, the differing contexts clearly influenced the way leaders and followers construct followership and evaluate the resulting relationship.

Since these were found across the four denominations, we assume a certain level of transferability, provided there is close attention to the specific local context. This is in line with previous research on how followership is socially constructed (Meindl, 1995). Relational and institutional-focused attributes may be relevant in other nonprofit organizations, too, yet more research is needed to explore relevant attributes in these settings.

The findings on the importance of contexts have important practical implications for other nonprofit organizations. With the aim of creating effective relationships between leaders and followers, expectations of all actors involved need to be aligned with the existing frameworks. In our case, we demonstrated that the theological and institutional frameworks did not always match the strong personality of leaders and followers. Hence, expectations need to be analyzed and managed carefully by, for example, communicating about the ever-increasing workload of leaders, which seems to make it inevitable to involve volunteers in leadership. Aligned with Gilstrap and Morris (2015), when the institutional setting allows for co-constructed leadership, shared responsibility and dispersed authority tend to encourage a sense of shared enterprise, despite associated problems of reaching consensus in diverse groups. Recognizing each other's strengths and weaknesses, including leadership and followership attributes, and purposefully using experience and expertise can guide and support each other in building high-quality relationships. Collaborative leadership, acknowledging the authority of the leaders and the supportive and administrative roles of lay leaders, might be a way forward in nonprofit settings.

Limited congruence in the expectations of followers can have major implications for the engagement of volunteers, and all the actors involved need to be aware of the potential consequences.

Future research could address some of the limitations of this study which mainly derive from its methodology. The small sample size and the wide range of congregational sizes meant that our interpretations and conclusions had to be drawn with due caution. We are aware that they do not enable us to provide any generalizable conclusions, and hence, we invite future research to expand the scale to test the results. The qualitative interviews and the self-reported perceptual measures of informants could be complemented with quantitative methods, for example, research to identify the most relevant follower attributes in each specific institutional setting. Even though we have explored followership across various Christian denominations,

and hence achieved some transferable insights, we propose to extend research into different denominations as this is clearly an under-researched area. Further, we encourage studies into the understanding of followership in other nonprofit organizations as we realize that our findings are very context-specific and colored by the unique theological setting. The conclusion, however, is clear: the needs and expectations of followers need to be taken far more seriously to form a fruitful leader-follower relationship.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Krystin Zigan is an Interim Professor of Strategic Management at the University of Applied Sciences in Zwickau, Germany. Her current research interests focus on social management and leadership issues in church organizations. She has published recent work in the *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Work, Employment and Society and Tourism Management*.

YingFei Gao Héliot is a Senior Lecturer in Organizational Behaviour at University of Surrey. Her research focuses on identity and its impact on well-being in people's working lives, social identity dynamics in leadership, and evidence-based management. Her research findings have been published in international journals such as *Human Resource Management*, *International Journal of Management Reviews*, *Work, Employment and Society*, *and Journal of Business Ethics*.

Alan Le Grys is a retired Anglican priest who spent some time in parish ministry before moving into theological education, both for the Church of England and the University of Kent. He has a doctorate in Theology and Ministry. In addition to his continued research into the New Testament Studies, he has an interest in practical theology—the empirical study and analysis of contemporary ministerial practice within Christian denominations.

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APPENDIX 1: Interview Schedule

1. Minister

Focus of the interview	Summary of topics explored
Introduction	Job role, experience, challenges, changes in society, changes in the job, changes in expectations, leadership style (over time)
Contextual factors	Factors influencing the way of leading, for example, nature of local church, organizational structure, level of autonomy, perception of the institution, collaboration with other institutional bodies
Relationship Minister-lay leaders	Description of leadership style Description of relationship Expectations on lay leaders Perceived expectations on Minister Challenges of leading lay leaders Decision-making process Involvement and empowerment, shared leadership Lay leaders' influence on Minister's way of leading Issues of leading volunteers Power relations
Relationship Minister-regular congregation	Characteristics and role of congregation Relationship and collaboration with the congregation Decision-making process, involvement and empowerment, shared leadership Match between congregation and Minister Comparison of objectives of Minister, lay leader, and congregation Expectations of Minister on congregation Expectations of congregation on Minister
Followership	Understanding of followership Terminology, e.g., partners, collaborators, subordinates, participants, followers Expectations on followers, ideal behavior, effective followers (personal qualities, actual behavior), development of trust Impact of followers on leader Impact of organizational factors on the role/success of followers God as leader

2. Lay leader

Focus of the interview	Summary of topics explored
Introduction	Job role, experience (within and outside church), involvement in church, challenges, Reasons for attending this particular church
Contextual factors	Factors influencing the way of leading, for example, nature of local church, organizational structure, level of autonomy, perception of the institution Changes in society, changes in the job, changes in expectations, being volunteers, changes in society, and local church
Involvement in Church	Why engagement in church, appreciation, reward, characteristics of lay leaders
Relationship lay leaders-Minister	Relationship and expectations on Minister Perception of Minister's leadership style with examples Impact of Minister on personal variables, job role, and outcome Involvement in leadership, empowerment, decision-making process Minister as follower Objectives, values, and attitudes of those involved Power relations
Relationship to other lay leaders	Nature of collaboration, influence on Minister
Relationship Minister-regular congregation	Characteristics and role of congregation, personality, changes, engagement Perceived relationship and expectations of each other Decision-making process, involvement and empowerment, shared leadership Perceived match between congregation and Minister Comparison of objectives of Minister, lay leaders, and congregation Impact of current Minister on church life Minister's way of leading
Followership	Understanding of Followership Terminology Perception of role as follower Characteristics of ideal/good followers (personal qualities and behaviors) Power relations Benefits and drawbacks of following God as leader

3. Regular members of congregation

Focus of the interview	Summary of topics explored
Introduction	Involvement, experience (within and outside church) Reasons for attending this church
Contextual factors	Changes in society, changes in the church Characteristics of the local church
Relationship congregation-Minister	Characteristics and role of congregation Relationship among people Role of the Minister, expectations on Minister Description of their leadership style with examples Description of relationship to Minister Match between congregation and Minister Impact of Minister on congregation, on personal variables, and outcome Development of relationship over time
Relationship lay leaders-congregation	Description of relationship Role of lay leaders, leadership style
followership	Understanding of followership Terminology Expectations on followers Perception of role of follower Characteristics of ideal/good followers (personal qualities and behaviors) Congregation as follower Minister as follower Power relations Benefits and drawbacks of following God as leader

APPENDIX 2: TABLE 4: Excerpts from key findings with selected quotes

Theme 1: General understanding of followership as shaped by various contexts.

	Clergy	Lay leaders	Ordinary congregation members
Roman Catholic Church	*"I am free to run this parish as I choose according to my own style, but obviously I'm part of the Roman Catholic church so there's certain givens you know, that liturgy is set, the mass has a certain structure which I cannot alter, teaching and ceremonies prescribed." (Harry)*	*"Following is very much fellowship, discipleship, listening to your heart. We do have a definitive leader, but we all have contributions to make, there is genuine discussion. We know who is in charge and we are contributing." (Anna)*	*"Because we are all supposed to be one church and one of the reasons why I am a Catholic is because I've always known it to be consistent." (Katie)*
Summary core message: Theological-institutional framework tends to shape expectations of followers but generally leaders seem to have a more liberal and egalitarian approach			
Church of England	*"In evangelicalism we are all our own boss, the relationship is much easier, more friendly, and less formal, and less respectful very often." (Matthew)* *"It comes back to the control which an Anglican priest has, or the authority and power he has in this parish." (Matthew)* *"I would say we are partners together in the works. And everybody in the church, we are all partners together in what we do. I'd hate to call them followers, we are more partners than followers." (Henry)*	*"Church makes decision by committee (no sole authority, like in Catholic church), but ultimately the responsibility and the power sits with the Minister." (Lauren)* *"Church of England still feels like a pyramid, there are people at the top, so there is still that hierarchy in the church, so I think for people like my generation who perhaps are used to a lot more collaboration, consultation." (Amy)* *"Because sort of organisationally within the Church of England it is the churchwardens who have the responsibility over the church, isn't it and I think we feel that very strongly, especially as we are losing our incumbent. That's where the responsibility falls and we feel that and I think we look upon [the vicar] as our spiritual leader if you will." (Sophie)*	*"One thing I have learnt from other churches is that because they are human as well and they won't, their strengths won't be with everything. So, quite often the vicar doesn't do this well or that well, you know, but actually, that is human... Because I really never see it [followership] as that, I never see it as my commitment to the vicar. I see it as more the commitment to the Christ." (April)* *"My role is the servant, as a follower it is always to follow the example of Christ in the first instance. And as I follow the example of Christ in the first instance that may will lead me to be a member of the congregation." (Grace)*
Summary core message: The theological stance and the dispersed institutional structure of the C of E has generated a mixed understanding of involvement and followership. While authority is formally distributed, Ministers still hold significant power, though this can be moderated through the expectations of the congregation and/or lay members behaviors.			

	Clergy	Lay leaders	Ordinary congregation members
Baptist Church	*"Traditionally, ministers have been selected for ministry because of strong pastoral motives, and I don't think pastoral care is my strong gifting. I can do it, but it's not my strongest. And secondly, or at least as I understand it, most ordained ministers tend to be of an introvert side on Myers-Briggs, whereas I'm quite more extrovert; and I'm also very, sort of, perceiving rather than thinking." (Adam)* *"I'm struggling with my character—with my personality. I cannot be myself, because I'm having if he falls to try and do things which are really going against my... Because my real self is not that people-orientated in actual fact, I'm a more project-orientated person." (Adam)*	*"Sometimes he (the Minister) struggles with collectively joining other leaders and knowing how to follow God's lead, because he sees leadership as quite high hierarchical. So, I think from his point of view, he would say that he should be leading the church. And he gets very worried when other people are doing things might be perceived as stepping on that sort of area." (Kevin)* *"There's never this organic understanding of where his responsibility stops and ends and where mine would pick up. So, sometimes you feel slowed down or held back, because you don't really know where you stand in terms of making decisions and plan things." (Kevin)*	*"I think in the beginning I felt like I would try and encourage Steve a lot, and try and be very positive, and affirming of what he does, but I think what I struggle with is when I start to see things that really frustrate me like, bad communication, let's say, for instance. Then when I try and talk about that, if it doesn't go well, then there's almost no, no, it's very difficult to move forward from that. I wouldn't want to just follow blindly." (Steve)* *"He's not someone who people will naturally just follow because, you know, some people are so charismatic they almost just encourage, people and inspire people by the way they behave, by what they say. I don't think that's his leadership style." (Amelia)*
Summary core message: The personality of the Minister has a strong impact on the perception of lay leaders and followers within the less centralized institutional structure. Church members can modify their attitude towards following in the light of experience of the Minister's way of leading.			
Pentecostal Church	*"We do not permit anyone to become a worker in the church without going through the discipleship course. "You must have a filter that will discourage the wrong type of people." (Carl)* *"When we have someone who could not follow, then we will not let that person progress; people cannot follow if they don't see the leader in you, have to understand the vision." (Carl)*	*"You can only have one leader, one person has to follow, he is the pastor, so has got the lead, I have got to follow; leaders have to make the decisions but can collaborate with the followers in making that decision, having trust in that one leader." (Lea)*	*"Here is hierarchy in church, there will always be, because the leader must be the leader." (Jenny)*
Summary core message: These findings clearly show the dominance of the individual Minister as leader in a relatively weak institutional structure.			

Theme 2: Perception of ideal followership attributes within different contexts.

	Clergy	Lay leaders	Ordinary congregation members
Roman Catholic Church	*"We are part of this body (Church), each one has its own task to do, just not all the parts are fingers* etc.*, need to recognize own ability and also our place within the church." (Oliver)* *Personal skills, experience, sensitivity, sound faith, knowledge, and wisdom (Oliver)*	*"I am happy to do what I am asked to do, you are there to help, facilitate, support." (Max)* *"People who have got Christ-like qualities, people skills, to be open and sensitive to people, welcoming." (Max)* *"We should put our task in good use* *Being open-hearted, open-minded, no room for personal opinions, it's got to be unconditional. If you are gonna follow, you have to be willing, able and just open-hearted, even the most opiniated person has to put this aside because that's not gonna help you to truly follow and facilitate." (Anna)*	*"I see that role as sort of taking part, making sure I regularly attend, have regular contact with the parishioners, just communicating with people, being friendly and loving to people, being able to be a good, friendly, happy, loving Christian." (Emily)* *"Being a good person, to lead a faithful life, to do things out of the goodness of my heart because of my faith and my teaching." (Lily)* *"Follow the priest, teachings and recommendations of how we should live our lives, learning how to be obedient to the Lord, they set a good example and then you can follow." (Arthur)*
Summary core message: The perceptions of ideal followership vary: while Ministers and Lay Leaders expect active involvement, some members of congregation see themselves as required to unconditionally follow the Minister.			
Church of England	*"We have a role of supporting each other, everybody's opinion is vital and valid." (Henry)* *"I think effective followership comes from catching a corporate vision, I think if people in the congregation know that the leader is on a course that he has explained, or she has explained, and has warmed them into, they will follow gladly. I think if they're pushed in directions which they're not convinced about, they will kick." (Matthew)*	*"Be a servant of Christ, obedience, we need to be obedient, we need to be a follower." As a follower, my role is to follow God and listen to [the Minister] as kind of head of fellowship in his area." (Grace)* *"I feel I would want to very much be a follower, be a supporter, be loyal." (Paul)*	*"To be of use on earth, forgiving and loving others." (April)* *"I never see it as my commitment to the vicar, but to Christ. Sharing and loving the congregation, to be able to help each other." (April)* *"My desire should be to be a servant of Christ. We need to obedient, and therefore, we need to be a follower.* *So being a follower is the sound ground work of establishing one's own faith." (Grace)*
Summary core message: Ministers hoped followers would share opinions and support them. Also, lay leaders saw ideal followership in being involved in decision-making and being obedient. Congregation members expected ideal followers to support the local church but also to be loyal to the Minister.			
Baptist Church	*"Meeting with other Christians to pray, challenging each other,*	*"Be open to listening to God, spend time listening and discerning." (Kevin)*	*"Following should be active." (Amelia)*

	Clergy	Lay leaders	Ordinary congregation members
	desire to worship God, how you are serving God in the community, discipleship." (Adam) *"We obviously don't judge people, and it's not our or my place to go around and say "you're not pulling your weight," or "you've got your priorities wrong." It's not my job to do that, but sometimes I might sort of challenge in a gentle way." (Adam)* *"Effective followers are those who are meeting with other Christians to pray, to be challenging each other about things God's doing in their life, or where God's wanting to develop them further. I see effective followers in a desire to worship God." (Adam)*	*"You will have to watch and copy and learn from the person you are following." (Louise)* *"Good interpersonal skills, good eyes and ears to listen, good communication." (Louise)* *"Equal, working alongside, growing together in something rather than following from behind." (Louise)*	*"Actively participating, really being part of the community, being open." (Steve)* *"Being a follower, I think it's being inspired by the vision and direction and feeling personally engaged and brought into it and actively pursuing it and encouraging others to pursue it. Being willing to invest of oneself." (Amelia)* *"I think to be a follower you need to really be part of your church, you need to really be invested in each other, invested in the community, invested in your relationship with God, like not just reading your bible and praying, because again those are important, but I feel like those are outward things that, about being actually repentant, and actually seeking God, seeking the holy spirit, like trusting in him, in his relationship with you and seeking to actually walk with him and live with him." (Steve)*
Summary core message: All three groups had similar expectations on followership, that is, to be active and involved in decision-making.			
Pentecostal Church	*"Willingness to learn, humility, an attitude of humility and obedience which is the attitude we see in Christ, to be a true follower, you have to be consistent in participation in church activities, attending meetings, committed financially, to be able to grow spiritually, practicalise what they are learning." (Carl)*	*"I still ask questions, don't take things for granted, you still have to have a personal responsibility to your own Christian life, to your own soul." (Gloria)* *"Listen, be patient, not necessarily do as you are told, it doesn't mean you can't challenge it, trust, as long as you trust your leader, you'll be a good follower." (Lea)*	*"Listen to instructions, have own personal relationship with God, and balancing that with following whoever is leading me, also being obedient, obedient does not mean, not being able to question if something wasn't right or just being humble with yourself." (Paula)*
Summary core message: Obedience is seen by all three groups as one of the key features of an ideal follower. However, lay leaders and members of congregation also emphasize the need to be critical in their thinking and seek their own relationship with God.			

Theme 3: Relationship between leaders, lay leaders, and followers.

	Clergy	Lay leaders	Ordinary congregation members
Roman Catholic Church	*"Depending on your age range, if you're sort of elderly you'd remember priests from your childhood who were very much almost dictatorial. If you're now a younger person, particularly the youth, you'd have a much healthier relationship with the priest because you'll see them as people." (Harry)* *"I like to have equality. We can have an equal discussion without my words being heavily weighted." You need people with confidence and knowledge to be able to lead those programmes. It can't all be down to the priest anymore." (Harry)* *"I try to call them friends because we need to rely on one another we need to trust one another. I am more cooperate with them rather than instruct them, lead them as well." (Oliver)*	*"It's imperative that they actually delegate their things." (Anna)* *"I think it's better to have other people to share it with. I don't think a dictatorship is very Christian." (Max)* *"I think the task leaders themselves have to be much more on the ball and get on with it and you know, lead themselves you know. And perhaps so much wouldn't have to happen if he was more of a leader." (Hannah)*	*"I'd expect him to support and lead and guide and offer encouragement and offer advice and love, bringing the community together by offering support for people in need." (Lily)* *"It's good to have that relationship with the priest but I don't see it as a precursor to my relationship with God." (Lily)* *"What he gives me personally, it's nothing material to be fair. It's kind of just sort of peace of mind you know, and trust and comfort." (Arthur)*
Summary core message: Ministers welcome shared leadership and encourage collaboration and lay leaders expect active involvement in leadership due to disappointment and frustration about a perceived lack of leadership. Congregation members have different expectations on the Ministers as they expect guidance, support, and a trustworthy relationship.			
Church of England	*"I've always found it helpful to build a strong team, so that we have a full-time team. And we have a role of supporting each other." "What I am trying to do with my staff is build a good relationship between them." (Matthew)* *"You can't do big changes until people trust you." (Matthew)*	*"There's stability there's not a lot of chopping and changing so he'll listen to new ideas and he'll slowly, you know, kind of encourage." (Paul)* *"The relationship is amicable, and positive, and open." (Paul)* *"He is such a people person, not a people pleaser." (Paul)*	*"He doesn't make me feel under pressure. He is very encouraging* *He is very supportive." (April)* *"He will be serving others even though he is a leader." (April)* *The relationship is "amicable, and positive and open." (Grace)* *"The vicar allows people to be who they are. So, he*

	Clergy	Lay leaders	Ordinary congregation members
			doesn't put strong expectation on people, he allows people to grow in their own right and he's there for them when they need direction." (Grace)
Summary core message: Ministers and lay leaders tend to be aligned in their understanding of leadership and followership, which is based on freedom within boundaries. Ministers have a considerate and respectful relationship with the congregation.			
Baptist Church	*"I don't need to lead it very much, because, I've written their job descriptions for them all, and all members of staff have signed their job descriptions They have plenty of autonomy." (Adam)* *"They influence you if you take things out of perspective, or you get too hung up on an issue." (Adam)* *"My leaders would pick up stuff that people were frightened to say to my face." (Adam)*	*"There isn't that sort of mutual working relationship." "No cups of tea, to discuss the things in a more human way. It isn't a very functional relationship." (Kevin)* *"I think there's probably frustration, because of the disorganisation. So, the task leaders want to get on with what they have been asked to do, but perhaps they need from the Minister some information or some skills or some knowledge."* (Louise)	*"There's also a little bit of resistance to it, in terms of people just being very busy and not feeling that they've they can give much more of their time and energy." (Amelia)* *"I probably feel I don't have that relationship with him. I don't feel that, that I could be completely open or completely honest. He's not very good at delegating." (Amelia)* *"His actual people skills and his communication style is just awkward. I don't feel like I personally, get much from that particular relationship." (Steve)*
Summary core message: Difficult relationship as Minister has a degree of autonomy but does not lead in a clear way. Lay leaders and members of congregation feel frustrated and disappointed as there does not seem to be a functional relationship.			
Pentecostal Church	*"Myself and my wife are playing most of the leadership role so there's no need for an extra meeting." (Carl)* *"Because all leaders in the church have to operate under the lead pastor and if they cannot take instruction then they cannot operate." (Carl)* *"They would have to first go through the tier of being a follower, being mentored and discipled."*	*"He keeps encouraging me and he keeps pushing me after I said, yes."* *"Sometimes he has had to be really firm with me which I don't like." (Lea)* *When people don't have the same value, the core values, they struggle, and they feel like they can't, and it is just conflict." (Lea)*	*"I believe we all understand the power he has, which is not from him but from God. So, we submit to that power, not him, if you know what I mean and because of that we know exactly our limits." (Jenny)* *"We can actually chat one-to-one anytime, anywhere. He is almost like a big brother to me, trust through spiritual connection." (Jenny)* *"I think he is very open to take as long as it is not*

(Continues)

Clergy	Lay leaders	Ordinary congregation members
"People must be able to have that impression that you genuinely care about them." (Carl)		*causing any harm, but the main power always lies with him." (Paula)* *"Whatever he says, we do it, we don't hesitate." (Jenny)*
Summary core message: Clear hierarchical relationship. While lay leaders feel the strong leadership, members of congregation value the Minister's advice and guidance. There is clear evidence of obedience among the congregation. However, they also feel engaged and welcome his strong interest in their spiritual growth.		