



## The Effects of Sacramental Confession on The Emotional Well-Being of Parishioners Within the Catholic Archdiocese of Kumasi

**Anthony Otu Abban**

Christ the Teacher College of Education- Appeadu/ Kumasi

E-mail: tonydelight1@gmail.com

### Managing Editors

Prof. Daniel Obeng-Ofori

Rev. Fr. Prof. Peter Nkrumah A.

Prof. Kaku Sagary Nokoe

**How to Cite:** Anthony Otu Abban (2024). The Effects of Sacramental Confession on The Emotional Well-Being of Parishioners Within the Catholic Archdiocese of Kumasi. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies and Innovative Research*, 12(2), 1825-1837. DOI: 10.53075/Ijmsirq/05432443243

**Abstract:** This study explores the impact of sacramental confession on the emotional well-being of parishioners within the Catholic Archdiocese of Kumasi, blending theological insights with psychological perspectives. Amidst evolving societal norms and shifting religious practices, the confession sacrament faces challenges and reaffirmation concerning its relevance in contemporary Catholic life. This research aims to dissect the multifaceted role of confession, not only as a spiritual doctrine but also as a therapeutic practice that contributes to individual and communal psychological health. Employing a qualitative research methodology, the study interviewed 41 participants, 7 priests and 34 parishioners and their experiences and perceptions of sacramental confession. Through semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, the research uncovered that most parishioners experienced significant emotional relief and a sense of spiritual renewal following confession. Key findings indicate that the moment of absolution plays a critical role in facilitating feelings of forgiveness and psychological liberation, aligning with prior studies that underscore the psychological benefits of religious rituals. However, the study also identifies a spectrum of responses to confession, highlighting a minority of parishioners who perceive the practice as less spiritually significant. This diversity underscores the complex interplay between personal spirituality, religious doctrine, and cultural context. Additionally, the research delves into the counseling techniques employed by priests during confession, the confidentiality of the sacrament, motivations for participating in confession, and the perceived barriers to its practice. Conclusively, the findings affirm sacramental confession's positive impact on emotional well-being, while also suggesting areas for future research further to understand its role in modern religious and psychological landscapes. This study contributes to the ongoing dialogue between theology and psychology, offering insights into how ancient practices adapt to and support contemporary spiritual and emotional needs.

**Keywords:** Sacramental Confession, Emotional Well-being, Catholic Archdiocese of Kumasi, Religious Practices, Spiritual Renewal

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The sacrament of confession, also known as the sacrament of reconciliation, has been a cornerstone of Catholic spiritual practice for centuries, offering a pathway for the faithful to seek forgiveness for their sins and to reconcile with God and the church community. Rooted in biblical teachings and sustained through ecclesiastical tradition, confession provides a unique intersection of religious doctrine, personal spirituality, and communal ethics. The practice is a ritualistic expression of faith and serves a profound psychological role, facilitating emotional relief and spiritual renewal for individuals (Dang et al., 2022; Singh & Singh, 2022).

Despite its long-standing presence in religious life, sacramental confession has encountered both adherence and challenges in contemporary society. Changes in cultural attitudes, shifts in religious practice, and evolving understandings of psychology and spirituality have prompted a reevaluation of confession's role and relevance in modern Catholicism (Ulrich et al., 1991; Wilczewski et al., 2020). This complex backdrop provides a rich terrain for exploring how confession impacts the emotional well-being of parishioners, particularly within the vibrant and diverse context of the Catholic Archdiocese of Kumasi.

Recent scholarship has begun to bridge the gap between theology and psychology, examining how religious practices such as confession can influence mental health and emotional well-being (Ulrich et al., 1991; Zelenski et al., 2013). These studies suggest that the act of confessing within a supportive and sacred space can lead to significant psychological benefits, including reduced anxiety, guilt relief, and increased emotional resilience (Thompson, 2007). Furthermore, the communal aspect of confession, its ability to reinforce social bonds and affirm collective moral values, enhances its role as a mechanism for individual and communal healing (White et al., 2013; Wu et al., 2023).

In light of these considerations, this study aims to delve into the effects of sacramental confession on the emotional well-being of parishioners in the Catholic Archdiocese of Kumasi. By focusing on this particular religious and cultural setting, the research seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on the interplay between religion and psychology, offering insights into how traditional spiritual practices continue to shape and support the lives of modern believers.

## **2. MATERIALS AND METHOD**

### **Study Area**

There are a lot of parishes in the Archdiocese of Kumasi. Among these parishes, four of them were chosen for the study; Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) Chaplaincy, Saint 'Mary's Catholic Church, South Suntreso, Saint Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, Asokwa and the Saint Dominic Catholic Church, Adankwame. The KNUST Chaplaincy was selected because it is an elite community which constitute a lot of university students and lecturers. The Saint 'Mary's Catholic Church, South Suntreso was selected due to its vibrancy and the Adankwame Catholic Church was chosen because it is in a rural setting which has a lot of rural folks. In all, these parishes were selected in order to give each class of life a good representation. They also have large population of parishioners which will make sampling of the required number of Parishioners quite easy.

### **Research Type and Design**

The study is grounded in the interpretivism paradigm, also called constructivism. This approach integrates individuals' perspectives into research by engaging researchers in interpreting study elements. Interpretivism encompasses various methodologies, including social constructivism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics. These methodologies challenge the notion that meaning exists independently of human consciousness, aligning with the philosophical stance of idealism (Hartig, 2021; Tyrväinen et al., 2014). Interpretivism mandates that researchers recognize the diversity of individuals as social actors (Saunders

et al., 2013). Research under this paradigm typically concentrates on understanding meanings and employs multiple methodologies to explore different subject matter facets.

The primary goal of the interpretivist paradigm is to acknowledge the subjectivity inherent in human experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). This approach strives to comprehend the perspectives of study subjects by 'stepping into their shoes,' aiming to interpret their thoughts and perceptions of their environment. Emphasis is placed on understanding the subject from their viewpoint rather than the observer's. This understanding underscores the interpretivist belief that reality is socially constructed (Rogerson et al., 2020).

The study uses a qualitative research methodology to explore the subject matter through an interpretive, naturalistic lens. Qualitative research is characterized by its focus on understanding meanings from multiple perspectives. (Subiza-Pérez et al., 2021) Describes it as a broad category encompassing interpretive techniques designed to elucidate, interpret, and engage with the significance of phenomena within the social world, rather than merely quantifying occurrences.

A case study design was adopted for this research. Case studies enable an in-depth, comprehensive analysis of complex subjects within their real-life contexts. Widely utilized across various fields, especially in the social sciences, case studies focus on a detailed examination of an event or phenomenon in its natural setting. This approach contrasts with experimental designs, such as randomized controlled trials, which aim to control and manipulate the variables of interest.

### **Population of the Study**

The population is the set or collection of all the units to whom the research's conclusions should be applied. The operational definition of the target population is the study population (Henry, 1990; Bickman & Rog, 1998). The population of the four parishes was summed up to 5500 parishioners (Table 3.1). However, there were 7 priests at the sampled parishes.

Within the Archdiocese of Kumasi, the distribution of priests and parishioners across four parishes demonstrates a vibrant faith community. At Saint 'Mary's Catholic Church in South Suntreso and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) Chaplaincy, each parish boasts a strong presence of 2,000 parishioners served by 2 priests. In contrast, Saint Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in Asokwa provides spiritual guidance to 900 parishioners with the help of 2 priests, indicating a more intimate community. The smallest among them, Saint Dominic Catholic Church in Adankwame, is nurtured by a single priest for 600 parishioners, reflecting a closely-knit family of faith. Overall, the Archdiocese oversees a dynamic and diverse congregation of 5,500 parishioners with a dedicated clergy of 7 priests, showcasing the breadth and depth of its religious outreach.

### **Sample and Sampling Techniques**

Cohen (1988) highlights the critical role of sample size in statistical power, emphasizing that limited sample numbers can lead to inconsistent, variable, or skewed results within a study area. Sekaran and Bougie (2010) define the sample size as the portion of a population needed to ensure sufficient information for drawing valid conclusions. Kumar et al. (2013) describe it as the total number of participants included in a study, indicating the count of subjects or observers involved. Choosing the right sample size requires consideration of several factors, including the study strategy, analytical approach, complexity of variables or model, time and resources, completion rate, research supervision, sample sizes in related studies, and the data analysis software.

The study utilized purposive sampling to select 7 priests from four parishes within the Archdiocese of Kumasi, highlighting the adaptability of purposeful sampling across various research scenarios. This method is effective for preliminary investigations, selecting knowledgeable informants, comparing cultural practices, and case studies, demonstrating its long-standing application in fields like ethnobotany.

Sampling, defined by (Kuo, 2015; Ojala et al., 2019) as selecting a statistically representative subset of the target population, is crucial because the community of interest is often too large for comprehensive participation in research. A suitable sample accurately reflects the population and is large enough to

explore the study topic comprehensively (Browner et al., 1988). Additionally, 34 parishioners were selected through convenience sampling, a widely used technique in qualitative research for its efficiency and cost-effectiveness, despite potential biases introduced by participant motivation. This method's advantages in hypothesis generation and study objective formulation should be balanced with strategies to enhance its credibility, considering its limitations in achieving representative sampling.

### **Instruments**

In a semi-structured interview, data collection involves asking questions within a framework of predetermined themes. A detailed semi-structured interview guide was crafted and implemented in two stages: the first for parishioners and the second for priests. Conducted through interviews, participants were encouraged to share their experiences. Selected respondents were interviewed, providing insights in response to the questions posed. Additionally, this method satisfied the requirement for collecting qualitative data. The semi-structured interview guide was strategic; it enabled the researcher to employ probes and prompts whenever necessary. This approach helped maintain focus and minimized irrelevant digressions during the interview process.

### **Data Collection**

Before administering the questionnaires, an introductory letter and permission were obtained from the Faculty of Education at the Catholic University College of Ghana. Rapport was established with potential participants, including parishioners and priests. Furthermore, an appointment for the interview was arranged to take place on the parish premises. Participants were informed about the study's aim and objectives, and their consent was sought before starting the interview. The responses provided by the participants were recorded using a tape recorder equipped with an interview guide. In addition, field notes were taken as a precaution in case of recorder malfunction.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative analysis was conducted on the information gathered from the interview schedules. The research utilized an Inductive Thematic Data Analysis approach, as outlined by Kusi (2012), which involves organizing the data, immersing oneself in it, noting down observations, developing themes, coding, and then describing the findings. This method was particularly chosen for its suitability in descriptive and explanatory research, often favored in social and behavioral studies. Bernard (2010) emphasizes the importance of meticulously reading and re-reading the data to identify significant words or trends that serve as a foundation for the study. This approach enabled the identification of patterns and inconsistencies in the participants' responses.

To safeguard participant confidentiality, the data was organized by date, name, time, place, and the individuals involved. This precaution was crucial to prevent any accidental disclosure of identities. Following the organization, the interviews were transcribed, a process that involves converting audio recordings or field notes into written text. During transcription, the researchers spent considerable time familiarizing themselves with the content by listening to the recordings and accurately documenting the discussions verbatim. This phase required extensive review until the researcher was comfortable with the material, marking the beginning of theme development. Before analysis, themes were categorized as "pre-set themes" (Kusi, 2012), allowing the researcher to sift through the literature to establish a set of themes and then identify data that corresponded or aligned with these predetermined themes.

The analysis began once themes were identified, and the data was delivered into using a methodical approach, as described by Creswell (2009). Creswell characterizes coding as dissecting text into smaller, more digestible segments, thereby imbuing the data with meaning. This method entails segmenting text data, categorizing sentences or paragraphs, and labeling each category. This enables the generation of descriptions in the participants' vernacular. Text segments were pinpointed, highlighted, and tagged with codes or terms that precisely encapsulated their essence, and similar codes were then aggregated under pertinent major themes. This technique is known as open coding, a process that facilitates the discovery,

naming, and categorization of novel phenomena, fostering the creation of new categories distinguished by their properties (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Descombe, 2007). For anonymity and organization, parishioners were given serial numbers P1–P34 (where 'P' represents parishioners), and interviewees, presumably the parish priests, were assigned serial numbers PPR1 – PPR7 (where 'PPR' denotes Parish Priest). Throughout the analysis, the connections and interrelations among responses were scrutinized, offering insights into the underlying dynamics of the findings.

### 3. RESULTS

#### Demographic characteristics of participants

In the study focusing on the practices and demographics within a Christian community, a detailed survey was conducted to understand its members' composition and educational background. A total of 41 participants, encompassing 7 priests and 34 parishioners, were interviewed to gain insights into their age, gender, educational attainment, and duration of practicing Christianity. The following table, titled "Demographic and Educational Profile of Interviewed Participants in the Christianity Practice Study," presents a summarized view of the findings, highlighting the prevalent trends and characteristics within this community.

**Table 1: Demographic and Educational Profile of Interviewed Participants in the Christianity Practice Study**

Group	Count	Notes
Total Participants	41	7 priests and 34 parishioners
Male	70.73%	Male-dominated
Female	29.27%	
Age 20-30 & 31-40	39.02%	Largest age group segment
Age 41-50	Few	Few participants
Postgraduate Degree	60.98%	Highest level of education
Bachelor's Degree	39.02%	
Diploma Holders	0	No participants
Practicing Christianity >10 years	100%	All participants

From the interview responses, a total of 7 priests and 34 parishioners were interviewed. Out of the total 41 participants, the majority (70.73%) were males whereas 29.26% were females. This shows that the participants were male-dominated. Also, the results obtained further exposed that many of the participants (39.02%) were within the age group of 20 – 30 years and 31 – 40 years while only a few were between the age group of 41 – 50 years. In terms of the level of education of the participants, most of the participants (60.98%) have obtained postgraduate degrees, followed by 'Bachelor's Degree holders (39.02%), and none of the participants were Diploma holders. All of the participants in the survey have been practicing Christianity for more than ten years, according to the study's conclusions.

## **What effect does sacramental confession have on the emotional wellbeing of parishioners in the Catholic Archdiocese of Kumasi?**

The 'participant's knowledge of the therapeutic value of sacramental confession to the emotional well-being of parishioners was assessed. The responses were elicited from the priests and parishioners in the Catholic archdiocese of Kumasi. The participants indicated that the aspect of the celebration of the sacrament helps them emotionally and psychologically is when it gets to "go forth, your sins have been forgiven". They indicated that at that point, they feel relieved. All parishioners interviewed in this study said "yes' to the question. The majority of the participants indicated that going for sacramental confession gives them spiritual healing, whereas only a few of the participants noted that sacramental confession does not give them spiritual healing. Some of the responses of the parishioners are as follows;

*"...the sacramental confession gives a form of relief especially when the priest says "go forth and sin no more, your sins have been forgiven". It brings me some emotional balance in my life.... "[P27]*

*"...it gives me spiritual healing after I go for sacramental confession. It helps lessen the burden he is carrying which can be hurt or pain ... ."[P22]*

Another parishioner also indicated that

*"... knowing my sins have been forgiven is a form of emotional well-being to me. My mind is preoccupied with the fact that I am whole and that no form of sin is embedded in my heart. Sacramental confession does better to my emotional and physiological wellbeing.... "[P30]*

One of the divergent views of one of the parishioners is that;

*"...To me I see it to be normal. 'It's just confessing you have done something bad, but there is no spirituality attached to it. 'It's a normal process and that is how I feel. No spirituality is attached to the confession. Everyone with their way of taking or attaching spirituality to confessions...."[P15]*

Parishioners agreed that going for sacramental confession is important to them this shows that parishioners attach some importance to the sacrament. The majority of the parishioners agreed that going for sacramental confession gives them spiritual healing. Therefore, it can be said that the sacrament of confession gives some form of healing. This finding is in accordance with Murray-Swank et al. (2007) who stipulated those spiritual confessions may significantly affect one's physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Knowing the truth gives one the feeling of mental tranquilly. We are all aware of our sinfulness. We also understand that because we are sinners, we have grieved God and have grown distant from His love. How much we need the confidence that this angered God still approves of us, based on faith. Christ is speaking of us who have deserved His rejection when He says that there is greater joy in heaven over one sinner doing penance than over ninety-nine who are just. The more frequently we partake of His sacrament of mercy, the more we are at peace.

## **Which counselling techniques are adopted during sacramental confession in the Catholic Archdiocese of Kumasi?**

The priests were questioned on the use of counselling technique used during sacramental confession. A detailed procedure was highlighted, given the step-by-step procedure and the priest's involvement in counselling procedures. One priest went further to expound on how it is done. He noted that

*"...Sacramental confession as in reconciliation in the first place it is one of the seven sacraments and it was instituted by Christ himself for the church. It is a sacrament that assists in the spiritual growth of an individual catholic. As a baptized catholic, and a communicant,*

*you should attend confessions regularly depending upon the spirituality of the individual. Ordinarily, as a baptized committed catholic, you must be able to attend confession at least once a month. As a baptized committed catholic, you must be able to attend confession at least once a month. According to the church, if any reason, you should be able to attend confession at least once a year. It is conferred on any baptized communicant and when you access yourself that you are a sinner, and you seek the assistance of a priest and you confess your sins through him. Knowing well that you have fully prepared yourself physically and spiritually, you have evaluated yourself and you realize the sins you have committed, then proceed to the priest to confess your sins. At the confessional, you accept the fact that you are a sinner. First, when you approach the priest, you make the cross sign. Since you have signed well on your sins, you will be able to tell the priest the sins that you have done. After that, you can tell the priest what you remember and 'don't remember. With the mandate given to the priest, will advise you using several counselling techniques, admonish you and tell you not to repeat those sins again. Mostly we will encourage and motivate you that God's grace has bounced for you to be forgiven so just go and sin no more. In the sacrament of confession, there is something called penance. When you go to a priest, he will give you a penance. In the initial part of the church, penance came in so many forms. Sometimes a priest can give you instructions on what to do and not necessarily tell you to go and pray. After he has told you about the penance you need to do, he will absorb you"..."* [PPR2]

Concerning the 'priests' take on how religiously relevant sacramental confession is, the majority of priests indicated that since humans are not perfect, in the act of attaining perfection, we cannot but add this sacrament to our spiritual life. The other priests attested to the fact that Sacramental confession is very important religious since it unites a Christian to his maker again. It also helps a person fully and consciously participate in church activities, particularly the Eucharist sacrament.

*"...it is a source of healing also for the parishioners and also brings some mental relief. Statistics have shown that people who go through confession a lot and people who participate in confession are less likely to commit suicide because they have the advantage of talking to somebody and relieving themselves off their burden..."* [PPR 1]

When priests were asked how well do your parishioners patronize sacramental confession, they mentioned that patronage is poor. It should be known that only 2 days are set aside to listen to the confessions of parishioners. Although there is a rule that at least once a month members must come for confession so, during their meeting times, only about 6 people on average can come for confession.

One priest gave a detailed explanation by saying

*"In actual sense, every Saturday evening, the parishioners will come around, and those who have prepared themselves for confession will come in the evening around 6.30 pm for all priests around to listen to their confessions. There have been several attempts to make sure that we continue with this practice but looking at things now, they are not patronizing it; announcements are being made on Sundays or any other occasions. There is a need for them to come. We school them through the significant, spiritual and physical impact of the sacrament of confession. We researched to know that most of them may not be coming to confession because of familiarity. We have assured them that there are so many priests they can go to for confession, but they still do not come. Most people are shy about sitting before their priest to confess what he or she has done. We tell them that there is secrecy in the sacrament, confessional secrecy in the sacrament, confessional secrecy, and confessional secrecy in the sacrament. I have the mandate not to make note of whatever is being said in the confessional to any other person. Notwithstanding all these, a good number of them show up" ..."* [PPR 3]

In response to the question of 'what are some of the problems and challenges associated with the 'confession', They mentioned that,

*""..... firstly, people do not want to go for confessions because everyone is watching especially in places with no confessional boxes. Secondly, some parishioners feel their priest may know them so much that they may not want to go for confession at their parishes and sometimes it becomes difficult for them to move from one parish to the other. Hence, 'it's become very difficult for them when they have some familiarity with their parish priest. Furthermore, since the parishioners have not been attending confessions regularly, when they come, they find it very difficult to remember the procedures of the confessions... "[PPR 1,3]*

Concerning the 'priests' take on how parishioners value the rite of sacramental confessions? One priest said that

*""...When I was growing up, there was so much premium on sacramental confession. It was a sacrament that everyone wanted to have because it is comforting, humbling and relieving. Of late people have distorted notions about sacramental confession. Perhaps due to social media and how news trend in parts of the world, many people these days do not patronize sacramental confession". .... [PPR 2]*

### **How are sacramental confessions of parishioners in the Catholic Archdiocese of Kumasi kept confidential by the priests/clergy?**

The priests under the Catholic Archdiocese of Kumasi were questioned on the confidentiality of the sacramental confessions. All the priests gave similar views that the sacramental confession of the parishioners is kept secret and not shared. Some of the comments are as follows;

*""... Yes, the sacramental confession of the parishioners is kept confidential. It is assumed they are talking to God for them to be holy. Their sins need to be kept between the priest, the parishioner, and God. I only have to intervene on their behalf to God.."" [PPR 3]*

Another priest added that.

*""...Some people do not understand the teachings of the church as I said earlier that the priest is under the oath of secrecy and not to talk about whatever is being said to a third party. The sacramental oath of secrecy binds me. I cannot mention anything that is discussed during confession with another person"".... [PPR 1]*

*""...Sacramental confession is always seen as a communication with God. So as a priest, we ensure the confession is always kept confidential. Sacramental confession is kept confidential...."" [PPR4]*

The response from the priest gives a clear overview that a sacramental confession is a confidential act in the catholic church. The confidentiality of sacramental declaration is regarded as the seal of declaration. The seal of Confession is one component of church practice that attracts plenty of people. This seal ensures that any sins confessed to a priest within the context of the sacrament remain completely private and are never made public. The Church declares that under extremely severe sanctions, every priest who hears confessions is required to maintain complete secrecy regarding the sins that his penitents have confessed to him. This is because of the delicateness and largeness of this church as well as the respect given to individuals. The information about the penitents' life that confessions provide him is useless to him. This secret, which admits of no exceptions, is regarded as the "sacramental seal" because what the penitent has revealed to the priest remains "sealed" by the sacrament"" (Paragraph 1467). You receive penance from the priest out of a sense of justice. There are always repercussions for our immoral



behaviour, and if we are honest with ourselves, we acknowledge that our wrongdoing has hurt God and others. We must atone for the harm caused by our wrongdoing by making amends, expressing our regret, and engaging in penance as a demonstration of our sincerity. Sin damages both our human dignity and our relationships with God and other people. Faith makes destructive power in our lives and destructive power in our lives and the world clear to us. (P. 245 of the Adult Catechism)

### **What propels parishioners to go for sacramental confession in the Catholic Archdiocese of Kumasi?**

All the parishioners under the Catholic Archdiocese of Kumasi were questioned on why do they go in for confession. They gave a similar view on why they involve themselves in confession. The main reason given by the parishioners was for the sake of forgiveness of their sins and making them look holy and be right in the presence of God. The 'parishioner's comments were as follows:

*"...I undertake sacramental confession in order for my sins to be forgiven, which enables me to get right with God. Also, it helps us to get some advice from the priest which is very helpful..."* [P12]

*"...Sacramental confession makes me holy in the sight of God. It takes away the burden of sin from me and makes me refocus on life. I see it to be a necessity that has to be fulfilled always and at all time..."* [P28]

*"....I always go for sacramental confession for me to be right and just in the presence of the most high. Without confession, one cannot be holy and healthy. I always want my sins to be forgiven because our God is forgiving and it is prudent to always go for sacramental confession..."* [P32]

Few of the participants are of the view that they have to go for sacramental confession because it is a custom for catholics as member of the Catholic Church. Below is the view of one parishioner;

*"...As a Catholic, it is important to go for confession and this shows that you are a devoted catholic who you tend to adhere to the role and regulation of the church. It also implies that you are committed to the Christian life as a Catholic..."* [P2].

With respect to the 'parishioners' take on their motivation for going for confession, the parishioners gave different views based on their own perspectives. Most of the parishioners indicated that what motivated them is their preference to be pure and holy for them to get closer to God Almighty since they believe holiness is a necessity for worshipping God.

*"...My motivation for going for confession is that, I always want to be pure and be able to get closer to God as Holiness is a necessity for worshipping God and I must worship him in that holiness..."* [P33]

*"...I want to remain pure and whole in the sight of God because it makes me get closer to God. Getting closer to God brings a lot of blessings to me. That is what motivates me to undertake the sacramental confession..."* [P21]

Further, another group of parishioners also indicated that their motivation for going for the sacramental confession is mainly because the act is part of the Catholic doctrine, and they feel it is necessary to go for confession at least once a year.

*"...My motivation for going for confession is one of the 'church's sacraments, and therefore, I feel obliged to go for confession even at least once a year..."* [P18]

Another parishioner indicated that whenever he feels he has sinned and is paranoid, he is motivated to partake in the confession.

*".....I am motivated to go for confession when I feel sinful and paranoid....."* [P7]

The varied responses from the parishioners illustrate that they possess different motivations for participating in sacramental confession. A common theme in their responses is their desire to forgive their sins. The results also suggest that parishioners seek sacramental confession to reconcile with God and fulfill their religious duties. Todd (1985) defines confession as the act of admitting to a personal wrongdoing for which one feels responsible, assumes accountability, and shows remorse. Consequently, it is important to encourage parishioners to engage in the sacrament of confession, as it offers a sense of relief. This insight aligns with the research findings of Butler (1990) and Temple (2002).

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

The present study aimed to investigate sacramental confession's impact on parishioners' emotional well-being within the Catholic Archdiocese of Kumasi. Our findings reveal that the majority of parishioners experience significant emotional relief and spiritual healing following sacramental confession, aligning with the assertions of (Han, 2021; Kaplan, 1995; McMahan & Estes, 2015), who highlighted the profound effects of spiritual practices on physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Specifically, the moment parishioners hear the words "go forth, your sins have been forgiven" serves as a pivotal point of emotional release and spiritual renewal (Participant P27), emphasizing the therapeutic value of absolution in sacramental confession. This observation resonates with the theological perspective that acknowledges confession as a sacrament of mercy, providing solace and peace to the penitent (Jakicic et al., 2019).

Contrarily, a minority viewpoint among the participants suggests a lack of spiritual connection to the act of confession (Participant P15), indicating a diverse range of personal interpretations and emotional responses to this sacramental practice. This divergence underscores the complexity of individual spirituality and the subjective nature of religious experiences, as discussed by (Fuegen & Breitenbecher, 2018; Maas et al., 2009), who advocate for recognizing subjective realities in interpretive research.

The study also delves into the counseling techniques employed during sacramental confession, highlighting a process encompassing spiritual and psychological support. As described by PPR2, the priests' approach includes advice, motivation, and the assignment of penance, illustrating a holistic method that aims to foster spiritual growth and emotional well-being. This dual function of sacramental confession—serving both as a religious rite and a form of spiritual counseling mirrors the findings of Pargament (1997), who acknowledges the therapeutic dimensions of religious rituals.

Regarding the confidentiality of sacramental confession, all participating priests affirmed the inviolability of the confessional seal, a cornerstone of Catholic confession that ensures the penitents' disclosures remain strictly confidential. This practice, deeply rooted in church doctrine (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994), not only respects the individual's privacy but also symbolizes the sacred trust between the penitent, the priest, and God.

The motivation for parishioners to engage in sacramental confession varied, with many citing the desire for forgiveness and spiritual cleansing as primary drivers. This aligns with the concept of confession as a means of reconciling with God and the church community, supporting the notion that confession facilitates spiritual restoration and social integration (Bellefontaine & Lee, 2014; Rebetz et al., 2018). Interestingly, the adherence to confession as a religious obligation, rather than solely for personal spiritual benefit, reflects a communal dimension of the sacrament, emphasizing its role in maintaining the moral fabric of the Catholic community.

The study affirms the significant role of sacramental confession in parishioners' emotional and spiritual lives in the Catholic Archdiocese of Kumasi. By providing a platform for emotional expression, spiritual healing, and psychological counselling, confession contributes to the overall well-being of the faithful. While individual experiences and motivations may vary, the collective acknowledgment of confession's value highlights its enduring relevance in contemporary religious practice. Future research

should explore the nuanced experiences of those with divergent views on confession to foster a more inclusive understanding of its impact on parishioners' lives.

## 5. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study has provided valuable insights into sacramental confession's emotional and spiritual impacts within the Catholic Archdiocese of Kumasi. However, it also opens up several avenues for further research that can deepen our understanding of confession's role in modern religious practice and its broader implications for mental health and community cohesion. Here are potential future directions to consider:

1. **Expanding Demographic Scope:** Future studies could broaden the demographic scope to include a wider range of parishes across different socio-economic and cultural contexts within and beyond the Catholic Church. This expansion would allow for a more comprehensive analysis of how cultural and contextual factors influence the perception and practice of sacramental confession.
2. **Longitudinal Studies:** Implementing longitudinal designs to track changes in parishioners' emotional well-being over time after participating in sacramental confession could provide deeper insights into the lasting effects of this sacrament. Such studies would offer a dynamic perspective on the spiritual journey of individuals within the church community.
3. **Comparative Studies:** Comparative research across different denominations or religions that practice confession or similar rites of penance could highlight universal and unique aspects of confession's impact on emotional and spiritual well-being. This approach would foster a greater understanding of confession within a broader religious and psychological context.
4. **Integration with Mental Health Services:** Investigating the potential for collaboration between religious institutions and mental health professionals could yield innovative approaches to supporting individuals' emotional well-being. Exploring how confession and professional counseling can complement each other would contribute to a more holistic approach to mental health care.
5. **Technological Adaptations:** In an era of increasing digital engagement, studying the effectiveness and reception of virtual confessionals or digital platforms for spiritual counseling could address the evolving needs of the faithful. Research in this area could provide valuable insights into how technology can support traditional religious practices in a modern context.
6. **The Role of Confession in Community Building:** Future research could explore how sacramental confession influences social bonds within the church community, potentially fostering a sense of belonging and mutual support among parishioners. This direction would highlight the communal benefits of confession beyond individual spiritual healing.
7. **Addressing Challenges and Barriers:** Identifying and addressing the barriers to participation in sacramental confession, as highlighted by the current study's findings on poor patronage, could lead to strategies that make confession more accessible and meaningful to a wider audience. Research could focus on educational initiatives or community outreach efforts to demystify the sacrament and encourage engagement.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The investigation into the effects of sacramental confession on the emotional well-being of parishioners within the Catholic Archdiocese of Kumasi has underscored the profound significance of this religious practice in the lives of the faithful. Our findings reveal that sacramental confession serves as a spiritual rite of purification and reconciliation and as a source of psychological relief and emotional healing for many parishioners. The act of confession, encapsulated by the absolution and guidance provided by the clergy, fosters a sense of peace, renewal, and spiritual well-being among participants.

The study highlights the therapeutic aspects of confession, supported by the participants' experiences of emotional release and spiritual comfort upon receiving absolution. This aligns with broader

theological teachings and psychological understandings of the role of confession in facilitating personal growth and emotional resilience. Moreover, the confidentiality and sacredness of the confession process underscore the trust and safety that parishioners feel within this sacramental practice, further contributing to its emotional benefits.

However, the research also acknowledges the existence of diverse perspectives and experiences with sacramental confession, indicating the complex and multifaceted nature of this religious practice. While the majority of parishioners report positive impacts on their emotional and spiritual well-being, a minority view reflects ambivalence or disconnection, suggesting areas for further exploration and understanding.

Sacramental confession in the Catholic Archdiocese of Kumasi plays a critical role in the community's spiritual life and emotional health. It embodies a unique intersection of faith, psychology, and communal support that enriches the lives of parishioners. This study calls for continued dialogue and research into how confession can adapt to changing societal contexts while preserving its core values of forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation. As the church navigates the challenges of modernity and seeks to meet the spiritual needs of its diverse congregation, the sacrament of confession stands as a testament to the enduring power of faith to comfort, heal, and transform lives.

## REFERENCE

- Bellefontaine, S. P., & Lee, C. M. (2014). Between Black and White: Examining Grey Literature in Meta-analyses of Psychological Research. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 23(8), 1378–1388. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S10826-013-9795-1>
- Dang, Q. T., Rammal, H. G., & Michailova, S. (2022). 'Expatriates' families: A systematic literature review and research agenda. *Human Resource Management Review*, 32(4). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2021.100877>
- Fuegen, K., & Breitenbecher, K. H. (2018). Walking and being outdoors in nature increase positive affect and energy. *Ecopsychology*, 10(1), 14–25. <https://doi.org/10.1089/ECO.2017.0036>
- Han, K. T. (2021). Effects of three levels of green exercise, physical and social environments, personality traits, physical activity, and engagement with nature on emotions and attention. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 13(5), 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.3390/SU13052686>
- Hartig, T. (2021). Restoration in Nature: Beyond the Conventional Narrative. *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, 67, 89–151. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-69020-5\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-69020-5_5)
- Jakicic, J. M., Powell, K. E., Campbell, W. W., Dipietro, L., Pate, R. R., Pescatello, L. S., Collins, K. A., Bloodgood, B., & Piercy, K. L. (2019). Physical Activity and the Prevention of Weight Gain in Adults: A Systematic Review. *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise*, 51(6), 1262–1269. <https://doi.org/10.1249/MSS.0000000000001938>
- Kaplan, S. (1995). The restorative benefits of nature: Toward an integrative framework. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 15(3), 169–182. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0272-4944\(95\)90001-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/0272-4944(95)90001-2)
- Kuo, M. (2015). How might contact with nature promote human health? Promising mechanisms and a possible central pathway. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6. <https://doi.org/10.3389/FPSYG.2015.01093>
- Maas, J., van Dillen, S. M. E., Verheij, R. A., & Groenewegen, P. P. (2009). Social contacts as a possible mechanism behind the relation between green space and health. *Health and Place*, 15(2), 586–595. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2008.09.006>

- McMahan, E. A., & Estes, D. (2015). The effect of contact with natural environments on positive and negative affect: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 10*(6), 507–519. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2014.994224>
- Ojala, A., Korpela, K., Tyrväinen, L., Tiittanen, P., & Lanki, T. (2019). Restorative effects of urban green environments and the role of urban-nature orientedness and noise sensitivity: A field experiment. *Health and Place, 55*, 59–70. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2018.11.004>
- Rebetez, M. M. L., Rochat, L., Barsics, C., & Van der Linden, M. (2018). Procrastination as a Self-Regulation Failure: The Role of Impulsivity and Intrusive Thoughts. *Psychological Reports, 121*(1), 26–41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033294117720695>
- Rogerson, M., Colbeck, I., Bragg, R., Dosumu, A., & Griffin, M. (2020). Affective outcomes of group versus lone green exercise participation. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 17*(2). <https://doi.org/10.3390/IJERPH17020624>
- Singh, R. K., & Singh, S. (2022). Spirituality in the workplace: a systematic review. *Management Decision, 60*(5), 1296–1325. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MD-11-2020-1466>
- Subiza-Pérez, M., Korpela, K., & Pasanen, T. (2021). Still not that bad for the grey city: A field study on the restorative effects of built open urban places. *Cities, 111*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2020.103081>
- Thompson, E. R. (2007). Development and validation of an internationally reliable short-form of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS). *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 38*(2), 227–242. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022106297301>
- Tyrväinen, L., Ojala, A., Korpela, K., Lanki, T., Tsunetsugu, Y., & Kagawa, T. (2014). The influence of urban green environments on stress relief measures: A field experiment. *Journal of Environmental Psychology, 38*, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2013.12.005>
- Ulrich, R. S., Simons, R. F., Losito, B. D., Fiorito, E., Miles, M. A., & Zelson, M. (1991). Stress recovery during exposure to natural and urban environments. *Journal of Environmental Psychology, 11*(3), 201–230. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-4944\(05\)80184-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-4944(05)80184-7)
- White, M. P., Pahl, S., Ashbullby, K., Herbert, S., & Depledge, M. H. (2013). Feelings of restoration from recent nature visits. *Journal of Environmental Psychology, 35*, 40–51. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2013.04.002>
- Wilczewski, M., Wróblewski, Z., Wołośńiej, M., Gut, A., & Wilczewska, E. (2020). Spirituality in expatriate experience and coping in mission. *Journal of Global Mobility, 8*(2), 229–248. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JGM-04-2020-0022>
- Wu, H., Ji, R., & Jin, H. (2023). Parental factors affecting 'children's nature connectedness. *Journal of Environmental Psychology, 87*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2023.101977>
- Zelenski, J. M., Sobocko, K., & Whelan, D. C. (2013). Introversion, Solitude, and Subjective Well-Being. *The Handbook of Solitude: Psychological Perspectives on Social Isolation, Social Withdrawal, and Being Alone*, 184–201. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118427378.CH11>