

**‘REMEMBER THOSE IN PRISON’ (HEBREWS 13:3): AN EVALUATION OF
THE IMPACT OF SDA’S CORNERSTONE PRISON MINISTRY IN MALAWI**

MASTER OF ARTS (THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES) THESIS

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THE IMPACT OF SDA’S CORNERSTONE PRISON MINISTRY IN MALAWI**

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Religious Studies)

University of Malawi

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and that it has not been submitted anywhere for any award. Where other sources of information have been used, they have been acknowledged.

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my Mother, Verina Alick Solomon who never lived to see the fruits of her investment on my education. I further dedicate this thesis to the Solomon family in general, my wife Alice, and my children; Louis, Lonel and Loeman for their encouragement and contributions to my success.

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the impact of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Cornerstone Prison Ministry in Malawi. It examined the intersection between Hebrews 13:1-3 and Matthew 25:36, as biblical foundations of prison ministry emphasizing on compassion, solidarity, and spiritual care for prisoners. The research also explored prisoners' motives for participating in religious activities, assessing whether their involvement was driven by genuine spiritual conviction or external factors. Using Religious Coping Theory, the study also assessed how religious engagement supports inmates' mental health recovery, addressing issues like stress, depression, and anxiety linked to harsh prison conditions that characterize Malawian Prisons. Through an ethnographic qualitative approach, including observations and interviews with inmates and officers, the study found that religious activities provided inmates with spiritual growth, emotional coping mechanisms, and a sense of identity renewal. While some inmates participate in religious activities for manipulative purposes, the study established that Cornerstone SDA Prison ministry plays a crucial role in offering psycho-social support, fostering hope, community, and personal transformation. The study highlights how faith-based interventions can promote both spiritual and mental health recovery within the Malawian prison system.

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ABBREVIATIONS

SDA	Seventh-day Adventists
MPS	Malawi Prisons Service
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
MHRC	Malawi Human Rights Commission

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

At the onset of his Ministry, Jesus Christ clearly outlined his mission; “to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind and to set the oppressed free (Luke 4:18-19).” Later in his ministry, he identified himself with prisoners by saying “I was in prison and you came to visit me” (Matthew 25:36). The Writer of the book of Hebrews tells readers: “remember those in Prison as if you were bound with them” (Hebrews 13:3). Ultimately; this suggests that the church, which is basically a group of followers of Jesus Christ, has a role to play on Prisoners.

Interestingly, there is a visible relationship between Christianity and imprisonment in the New Testament. It is evident in the New Testament that early Church members were victims of imprisonment to the extent that it was nearly one of the characteristics of being a Christian. As a result, ministry to prisoners may be traced back to the first Century Church. For instance, an Angel of the Lord ministered to Peter while in Prison (Acts 12:7-11); Paul and Silas, though imprisoned themselves, ministered to fellow prisoners (Acts 16:25); and the book of Philemon is all about the fruit of Paul’s Prison Ministry while he, himself, was imprisoned.

Surprisingly, as the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church observed, “the Church has not been in sync with the significance and the relevancy of ministering behind the walls.”¹ In Malawi, Prison Ministry has largely been ignored by many people, churches and organizations with a handful churches extending their ministry beyond the

¹ General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2010 pg. 6. “Keys to Prison Ministries”. United States of America. ISBN: 978-1-57756-689-2. Retrieved from <https://www.sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org/assets/sspm/pmleaflets/prison%20ministries.pdf> on 29th June 2023.

gates of prisons. One of few churches that put prison ministry at heart is Seventh-day Adventist Church through Cornerstone Ministries (Australia) among other evangelistic ministries.

With agency of Cornerstone Ministries, the SDA church in Malawi conducts a series of public prison revival and evangelistic meetings in prisons across the country. These public revival meetings are characterised by overwhelming prisoners' attendance and conversion. For example, during the period between December 2023 and March 2024, over nine hundred sixty-eight (968) inmates got baptised into the SDA Church across Malawian prisons; namely, Zomba Central, Mpsyupsyu, Mangochi, Maula, and Chichiri prison among others. Nevertheless, an evaluation of the motivation of prisoners' overwhelming participation and conversion and the impact of Cornerstone SDA's prison ministry on rehabilitation of prisoners had not been done. Therefore, the study intended to evaluate the influence of Adventists revival meetings on mental health of prisoners in Malawian Prisons from biblical perspective.

1.2 Aim

The main objective of the study was to evaluate the biblical foundation and the impact of SDA's Cornerstone Prison Ministry programs on Prisoners in Malawi.

1.3 Specific Objectives

In line with the aim of the study, there were three specific objectives to be achieved. These are:

1. To examine the intersection between Hebrews 13:1-3 and Matthew 25:36 as biblical foundations for the development of Prison ministry in Seventh-day Adventist Church in Malawi.
2. To evaluate motives of prisoners' participation and conversion during Seventh-day Adventist Church's evangelism activities in prisons.
3. To evaluate the impact of Cornerstone SDA's ministries' prison program on mental health of inmates.

1.4 Problem Statement

There are conflicting views regarding biblical foundations for Prison Ministry. Traditionally, when discussing prison ministry, it is common among Christians, Pastors and Chaplains to refer to Jesus Christ's statement "I was in prison and you visited me" (Matthew 25:36) as a biblical foundation of prison ministry. A number of scholars agree with the traditional use of Matthew 25:36 as a biblical basis of Prison Ministry. Paunder Sadie, for example, cites Matthew 25:36 as a biblical foundation of Prison Ministry.² More recently, Dwight Anderson referred to Matthew 25:36 as a key verse amplifying prison Ministry.³ The General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist church also quotes Mathew 25:35-40 as one of the biblical foundations for ministering to prisoners.⁴

However, contemporary scholar Linda Barkman challenges the traditional perspective, asserting that "the basis for the church's involvement with prison and re-entry ministries must be found outside Matthew 25."⁵ In cognizant of the existing debate, this study aims to critically examine Hebrews 13:1-3 as the specific biblical foundation for the SDA's Cornerstone Prison Ministry in Malawi. Hebrews 13:1-3, emphasizes themes of love, hospitality, and empathy, making it a potential foundation for a ministry focused on the incarcerated. Therefore, as the study examines this biblical passage, it seeks to assess the alignment of Cornerstone Ministries' Prison Evangelism Programs in Malawi with the principles outlined in Hebrews 13:1-3. Through this examination, the study aims to contribute insights into the biblical underpinnings of the SDA's Cornerstone Prison Ministry and evaluate its theological grounding in the selected scripture.

In addition, despite overwhelming number of inmates converting to the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church through Cornerstone prison ministry programs, there is a notable

² Sadie Cantone, Pounder. 2008. "Prison Theology: a Theology of Liberation, Hope and Justice." *Dialog* 47, no. 3: 278-291.

³ Anderson, Dwight, 2020. "Running head: Best Practices for Prison Ministry in a Post Covid-19 World." Grace Christian University. <https://www.prisonmission.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Dwights-Thesis-project-paper-post-covid-19-prison-ministry.pdf>

⁴ General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2010 pg. 6. "Keys to Prison Ministries". United States of America. ISBN: 978-1-57756-689-2.

⁵ Linda, Barkman. *Towards a Missional Theology of Prison Ministry*. *International Journal of Pentecostal Missiology* 5 (2017) pg. 5. <https://www.evangel.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/38-53-Barkman-theology-of-prison-ministry.pdf>

lack of evaluation regarding the underlying motivations for these conversions and the consequent impact of the SDA's prison ministry on the well-being of prisoners. This gap in research is critical because understanding the factors driving such significant religious shifts can provide insights into the personal and psychological needs of inmates, and how effectively these are being addressed by religious interventions. Moreover, assessing the ministry's impact on prisoners' well-being is essential to determine whether the conversions and associated religious activities contribute positively to their mental health, rehabilitation, and reintegration into society.

1.5 Hypothesis

In view of the apparent scholarly debate regarding the use of Matthew 25:36 as a biblical foundation of prison Ministry as discussed above, the hypothesis of this study was that Jesus Christ in Matthew 25 identified himself with suffering people and, therefore, encourages his followers to love one another and show hospitality to suffering people including prisoners. In that view, the researcher presumes that the writer of the book of Hebrews summarizes the concept of “love” found in Jesus Christ’ teachings on Matthew 25:35-40. Hence, in the broader spectrum of “love” Hebrews 13:1-3 provides a strong biblical foundation of prison Ministry by saying “remember those in prison as if you were bound with them, and those who are mistreated as if you were suffering with them” (Hebrew 13:3).

The study also hypothesized that a significant portion of prisoners profess faith in Adventism primarily due to their acute need for material support. In the harsh and resource-scarce environment of prisons, basic necessities such as food, clothing, and hygiene products like soap are often in short supply. Furthermore, financial assistance to cover transportation costs upon release is a critical need for many inmates, who often lack the means to reintegrate into society. Therefore, the researcher presumed that conversion to Adventism may be driven more by the evident material benefits provided by the SDA Church's prison ministry rather than purely spiritual motivations.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

The study was done in the conceptual framework of Liberation Theology. Championed by Gustavo Gutiérrez, among many others, Liberation Theology emphasizes that the Church must fight for freedom from spiritual, psychological, social, political, and economic oppression as an anticipation of ultimate salvation.⁶ As an expansion of Liberation Theology, Sadie Pounder, recently proposed “Prison Theology” to be part of Liberation Theology.⁷ In agreement with Pounder, this study revolved around the concept of Prison liberation theology focusing on the notion that true followers of Jesus Christ must work towards freeing people out of the bondage of sin and psychological distress, bringing hope to the hopeless, showing love and acting as agents of social and behaviour change among prisoners.

Additionally, the study revolved around Religious Coping Theory. Religious coping theory was developed by Kenneth Pargament; thus, it is commonly known as Pargament’s Theory of Religious Coping among contemporary scholars.⁸ In his 1997 publication titled “*The psychology of religion and coping: Theory, research and practice*”, Kenneth Pargament wonders: why some people turn to religion to help them cope, while others turn away? Is religious belief merely a defence or a form of denial? Is religion a help or a hindrance in times of stress? As he probed into these questions, Pargament built a bridge between two disciplines, religion and psychology. He, therefore, came up with a theoretical framework called Religious Coping Theory which binds the interface of religion, psychology, and mental health.

Supported by Ano and Vasconcelles, Religious Coping Theory suggests that “individuals utilize religious beliefs, practices, and rituals as coping mechanisms to navigate psycho-

⁶ Leonardo Boff, “Introducing Liberation Theology”, Orbis Books, 1987.

⁷ Sadie, Cantone Pounder. 2008. “Prison Theology: A Theology of Liberation, Hope and Justice.” *Dialog* 47, no. 3: 278-291.

⁸Jianbin, Xu. *Pargament's Theory of Religious Coping: Implications for Spiritually Sensitive Social Work*. The British Journal of Social Work, Vol. 46, No. 5 (July, 2016), pp. 1394-1410. Oxford University Press. 2016. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43905535>.

social problems such as stress, adversity, and life challenges.”⁹ Pargament and Ano argued that studying religion from a coping perspective can shed light on “how particular people use religion concretely in specific life situations and contexts.”¹⁰ Pargament defined religion as “a process, a search for significance in ways related to the sacred”; and spirituality as ‘a search for the sacred’.¹¹ Whereas “Coping” is defined as ‘a search for significance in times of stress’¹² Thus, religious coping entails ways in which individuals draw upon their religious beliefs, practices, and experiences to deal with stressors and challenges in life.

In 1991, Christopher Ellison made a similar conceptual framework to help understand the mechanisms through which religious involvement and spirituality may influence mental health.¹³ He suggested that religiosity and spirituality may (a) reduce the risk of a number of stressors such as antisocial behaviour; (b) provide a sense of meaning that thwarts stress and assists with coping; and (c) provide a network of like-minded persons who can serve as social resources and promote the development of psychological resources, including self-esteem and a sense of personal worth.¹⁴ Therefore, through a conceptual framework of Religious Coping, the central thesis posited in this paper is that most prisoners keenly participate in religious activities as a coping mechanism leading to enhanced psychological well-being.

⁹ Gene, G. Ano, G. G., & Erin, B. Vasconcelles, Religious Coping and Psychological Adjustment to Stress: A Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 61(4), 461–480. 2005, p. 464.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.20049>

¹⁰ Kenneth, Pargament & Gene, Ano. ‘Empirical advances in the psychology of religion and coping’, in Schaie K. W., Krause N., Booth A. (eds), *Religious Influences on Health and Well-Being in the Elderly*, New York, Springer. 2004, p. 119.

¹¹ Kenneth, Pargament. *The psychology of religion and coping: Theory, research, practice*. Guilford Press. 1997, p. 32.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Christopher W. Ellison, Religious involvement and subjective well-being. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*. 1991. 32(1), 80-99.

¹⁴ Christopher Ellison, in R. S. Allen & et al. Religiousness/Spirituality and Mental Health Among Older Male Inmates. *The Gerontologist*, 48(5), 692–699. 2008, p. 693. Retrieved from <https://academic.oup.com/gerontologist/article/48/5/692/625313>

1.7 Justification of the Study

1.7.1 Knowledge Contribution

The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge relating to the influence of religion on prisoners. For decades in Malawi, scholars had imprisoned the power of the gospel to detained criminals due to their lack of interest to pursue knowledge on the matter. Such being the case, knowledge of the significance of religion to prisoners was apparently being hidden and obstructed by the walls of prisons as prisoners themselves. Therefore, this study is very essential because it brings light to the existing literary blackout of the power of the gospel to our brothers and sisters behind bars. In that respect, it will greatly contribute to the scholarly knowledge on prison ministry.

In addition to that, the history and development of the church's involvement in reformation and rehabilitation of prisoners in Malawi had not yet been documented. This study, therefore, would act as a footing step towards a comprehensive history of the church's participation on prisoners' rehabilitation in Malawi. For that reason, it may be observed that this study was not only interesting but also very essential in as far as knowledge contribution in Malawi is concerned.

1.7.2 Theoretical Contribution

The scholarly debate regarding biblical basis of prison ministry is not yet resolved. The study, therefore, finds its position in the debate and brings new insights and contribution to existing scholarly views. In so doing, it adds to the growing theoretical biblical knowledge among scholars not only in Malawi but also Africa and the world at large.

1.7.3 Practical Contribution

Regardless of the growing interest of the Seventh-day Adventists Church to reach out to prisoners with the message of hope, little attention has been given to evaluation and documentation of its work in Malawi. Such being the case, there is a literary vacuum on Adventists prison ministry's historical development and its efficacy to Prisoners in Malawi. Consequently, this study would be helpful to the church as it becomes a basis for future decisions on prison ministry. Moreover, there is no latest study on the effectiveness of

chaplaincy department in Malawian prisons; hence, this study may also be of much value to prison Authorities in policy formulation.

1.8 Delimitations of the Study

The study has two main delimitations. Firstly, it examined the implications and intersections of Matthew 25:35-40 and Hebrews 13:1-3 in its quest for biblical foundation of prison ministry. Secondly, it only focused on six prisons in the eastern region of Malawi; namely, Zomba Central Prison, Mangochi Central Prison, Domasi prison, Mpsupsu Prison as well as Mikuyu 1 and Mikuyu 2 prisons.

1.9 Motivation

The study was motivated by the desire to produce a unique historical and theological account of prison ministry that brings new biblical insights and knowledge regarding the significance of the gospel in Malawi. The underlying motivation was that the Church in Malawi will probably draw lesson from its mistakes or right things they do during prison ministry. The researcher was also motivated by the desire to present a comprehensive theological discussion and correlated history of prison ministry in Malawi which may be helpful to biblical and missiology students and scholars in Malawi.

1.10 Chapter Summary

The chapter is an introductory chapter covering background, objectives, problem statement and Theoretical framework among others. Chapter 2 will present a literature Review on the subject matter while chapter 3 presents a research methodology. Chapter 4 will be dedicated to discussion of research findings and chapter 5 on conclusion.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Prison ministry is a multidimensional effort that encompasses spiritual guidance, mental health support, and rehabilitation for imprisoned people. Therefore, this chapter reviews scholarly literature on biblical foundation and history of the church's involvement in prison ministry, inmates' participation in religion, and documented impact of religious interventions on the mental health of inmates, their behaviour, and reintegration into society.

2.2 Prison Ministry

To begin with, the word "prison" is derived from the Latin term "prensio" signifying a state of being physically confined.¹⁵ As a noun, 'prison' refers to a building in which people are legally held as a punishment for a crime they have committed or while awaiting trial. In contemporary times, Prisons are understood as places where individuals undergo physical confinement and are generally blocked from exercising their various personal freedoms. With reference to Schlanger, imprisonment, also known as incarceration, constitutes a lawful penalty imposed by the state in response to criminal activities.¹⁶ Schalarger rightly noted that various terms, such as penitentiary, correctional facility, detention centre, and jail, are interchangeably used.

Therefore, Prison Ministry is generally concerned with spreading the gospel (good news) to places where people undergo physical confinement and are blocked from exercising their various personal freedoms. Women's Ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

¹⁵ Oxford English Dictionary. 2022. Prison. Retrieved from <https://www.oed.com/>

¹⁶ Margo, Schlanger, The difference between jails and prisons. 2003. Retrieved from http://www.law.umich.edu/facultyhome/margoschlanger/Documents/Resources/The_Difference_Between_Jails_and_Prisons%20.pdf.

defines Prison Ministry as a ministry that “ministers to prisoners and their families, helping them reach their potential in Christ through spiritual, emotional, psychological and physical support.”¹⁷ It involves reaching out to individuals who are imprisoned to provide spiritual and emotional support, share the gospel and help with their rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Prison ministry is a multifaceted approach involving religious, spiritual, and social interventions aimed at meeting the needs of inmates. “The core objective is to promote rehabilitation, transformation, and moral development among incarcerated individuals”.¹⁸

Smith comprehensively defined Prison ministry as a religious outreach programs targeting incarcerated individuals, often conducted by external religious organizations or volunteers.¹⁹ According to him, Prison ministries offer spiritual guidance, counselling, and religious education to inmates. Akih and Dreyer highlighted that prison ministry involves religious or spiritual organizations, often external to the prison system, engaging in activities such as counseling, teaching, worship services, and providing resources like literature and support groups within prison walls.²⁰ They observed that, in Africa, prison ministry initiatives provide crucial support to inmates facing neglect and abuse within correctional facilities. However, critics argue that such ministries may lack institutional backing and fail to address systemic issues within the penal system.²¹ Thus, chaplaincy ministry is regarded to be a solution to the lack of institutional backing that characterises prison ministry.

Chaplaincy ministry, on the other hand, involves the employment of trained religious personnel within correctional institutions to offer pastoral care and counselling services to

¹⁷ Women’s Ministries, Prison Ministry: Touch a heart, tell the world. General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church; p.2. www.women.adventist.org

¹⁸ General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, “Keys to Prison Ministries”. United States of America. 2010 pg. 6.

¹⁹ E.J. Smith. The role of prison ministry in rehabilitation: A case study of Kenya. *Journal of Religion & Society*, 17, 1-19. 2015.

²⁰ A.K. Akih, & Y. Dreyer, (2017). Penal reform in Africa: The case of prison chaplaincy. *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 73(3), a4525.

²¹ C.N. Nwanna, (2019). Religion and prison chaplaincy in Nigeria: Exploring the challenges and prospects. *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies*, 12(1), 136-150.

inmates.²² These chaplains often work closely with prison authorities to facilitate religious activities and promote moral and spiritual development among inmates.²³ In Africa, chaplaincy programs have been recognized for their potential to foster a safer and more rehabilitative prison environment.²⁴ However, limited resources and understaffing pose significant challenges to the effective implementation of chaplaincy services in many African prisons.²⁵ Even so, Prison Chaplaincy ministry is an integral component of prison ministry, providing spiritual guidance and support to incarcerated individuals, fostering rehabilitation, and addressing the holistic needs of inmates.

2.3 Biblical foundation of Prison Ministry

The biblical foundations of Prison Ministry have sparked differing opinions among scholars. Traditionally, many Christians, Pastors, and Chaplains have pointed to Matthew 25:36, where Jesus mentioned visiting prisoners, as a core scriptural support for prison ministry. Several scholars, including Sadie Paunder and Anderson Dwight, have endorsed this view.²⁶ The General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist church also includes Matthew 25:36 in its list of biblical foundations for ministering to inmates.²⁷ Ellen G. White Estate writes: “The psychology of the Seventh-day Adventist prison ministry outreach is based on Matt. 25:36: “I was in prison, and ye came unto me.”²⁸

However, contemporary scholar Linda Barkman challenges this traditional perspective, suggesting that the church's involvement in prison and re-entry ministries should be based

²² Ibid.

²³ A.K., Akih, & Y. Dreyer, (2017). Penal reform in Africa: The case of prison chaplaincy. HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies, 73(3), a4525.

²⁴ S.A. Adeniyi, “*Chaplaincy ministry and rehabilitation of prison inmates in Nigeria.*” Journal of Educational and Social Research, 8(3), 143-149. 2018.

²⁵ C.N. Nwanna, (2019). Religion and prison chaplaincy in Nigeria: Exploring the challenges and prospects. African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies, 12(1), 136-150.

²⁶ Sadie Cantone. Pounder, 2008. “Prison Theology: a Theology of Liberation, Hope and Justice.” Dialog 47, no. 3: 278-291; Anderson., Dwight 2020. “Running head: Best Practices for Prison Ministry in a Post Covid-19 World.” Grace Christian University. <https://www.prisonmission.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Dwights-Thesis-project-paper-post-covid-19-prison-ministry.pdf>

²⁷ General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, “Keys to Prison Ministries”. United States of America. 2010 pg. 6.

²⁸ Ellen G. White Estate, <https://ellenwhite.org/topics/295>

on sources other than Matthew 25.²⁹ Barkman, outlines two reasons why Matthew 25:36 is not sufficient as a foundational basis for prison ministry. Firstly, she argues that the historical context of prisons in biblical times was different from contemporary society, as modern prison systems did not exist until much later. Barkman noted that prisons were mainly for debtors and political prisoners, not modern-day criminals.

Secondly, she highlights that Matthew 25:36 refers primarily to hospitality and meeting basic needs but not complex challenges of dealing with incarcerated individuals and their reintegration into society. She argues: “Jesus is emphasizing the Old Testament themes of caring for the orphan, widow, and stranger by meeting their needs for food, water, clothing, shelter, and medical care. Matthew 25:36 does not address the underlying issues that the church faces today in dealing with imprisoned criminals and their re-entry into society.”³⁰ Barkman concludes that while hospitality is important, it is not sufficient to serve as the foundation for addressing the multifaceted needs of prisoners.

Additionally, other than relying on one verse, Anderson Dwight emphasizes the biblical principles that form the foundation for prison ministry, with references to key biblical sources. He highlighted four primary principles, namely; redemption, service, deliverance, and transformation.³¹ According to Dwight, the principle of redemption underscores the belief that all individuals, including those in prison, are redeemable through the gospel of God's grace, emphasizing the transformative power of Christ's redemption and the importance of sharing the good news with all, regardless of their past actions. He also pinpoints the principle of service which stresses the role of the Church in reaching out to those in need, including prisoners and their families, as a basis for prison Ministry.

²⁹ Linda, Barkman. *Towards a Missional Theology of Prison Ministry*. *International Journal of Pentecostal Missiology* 5 (2017) pg. 39. <https://www.evangel.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/38-53-Barkman-theology-of-prison-ministry.pdf>

³⁰ ³⁰ Linda, Barkman. *Towards a Missional Theology of Prison Ministry*. *International Journal of Pentecostal Missiology* 5 (2017), 39.

³¹ Anderson Dwight, Running head: Best practices for Prison Ministry in a post COVID-19 World. Grace Christian University. Master's Thesis Project. 2020, p. 6-8

Nonetheless, along with Matthew 25:36, this Study proposes Hebrews 13:3 which reads: “remember those in Prison as if you were bound with them” as a strong biblical foundation for prison ministry. As such, it is essential to touch base with the historical context of Hebrews 13:3 because it is difficult to fully appreciate the meaning without understanding the context in which it was produced. This will help ground the debate in a historical context and have a proper understanding of the subject matter.

2.3.1 Hebrews 13:1-3 as a Foundation of Prison Ministry

The biblical appeal found in Hebrews 13:3, "remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering," serves as a profound scriptural basis for the establishment and sustenance of prison ministry initiatives. This verse generally underscores the Christian responsibility to extend compassion, empathy, and support to those experiencing incarceration, emphasizing the significance of remembering and standing in solidarity with the imprisoned. A number of scholars have explored the biblical and theological foundations of prison ministry, with a specific focus on Hebrews 13:3. For Example, David Instone-Brewer in his work "Prison Ministry in the New Testament," examines how Hebrews 13:3 reflects the early Christian community's commitment to visiting and ministering to those imprisoned for their faith.³² He argues that Hebrews 13:3 summarizes the essence of the Christian duty to offer spiritual and practical support to incarcerated individuals. Sullivan also noted that the Christian commitment to remembering those in prison, as articulated in Hebrews 13:3, has been a driving force behind the involvement of religious organizations in advocating for the spiritual and material well-being of prisoners.³³

Furthermore, Christopher Marshall argues that Hebrews 13:3 plays a pivotal role in discussions on Christian ethics and social responsibility. In his work, "Prisoners in the Bible: Exploring the Role of Prison in a Christian Ethics of Punishment," Marshall contends that “this verse challenges Christians to actively engage in prison ministry,

³² Instone-Brewer, D. *“Prison Ministry in the New Testament.”* Paternoster Press. 2000.

³³ Sullivan, W. F. *Prison Religion: Faith-Based Reform and the Constitution.* Princeton University Press. 2009.

advocating for the fair treatment and holistic care of prisoners”.³⁴ Marshall's work highlights the ethical imperative rooted in Hebrews 13:3 to address the needs of the incarcerated and advocate for justice within the penal system. Yet, Spitale emphasizes the transformative potential of prison ministry when rooted in the compassionate ethos embedded in Hebrews 13:3.³⁵

Nevertheless, Kombo suggests that interpretation and application of Hebrews 13:3 may vary across different Christian denominations, leading to diverse approaches in addressing the complex issues within prison systems.³⁶ The Seventh-day Adventist Prison Ministry in Malawi is anchored on Hebrews 13:3 among other verses. Thus, there was a need for research to evaluate the practical application of Hebrews 13:3 in the context of the SDA's Cornerstone Prison Ministry and effectiveness of such programs in a specific cultural and geographical context like Malawi. Investigating the unique challenges and opportunities faced by SDA's Cornerstone Ministries in their prison evangelism initiatives in Malawi will contribute valuable insights to the broader discussion on the intersection of biblical mandates, cultural considerations, and the real-world impact of prison ministry.

2.4 Prison and Imprisonment in the Bible

Imprisonment as a means of punishment has existed from ancient biblical times to modern societies. Bromiley noted that there are 127 references to prison and prisoners in the Bible beginning from Joseph's imprisonment in Genesis 37 to Satan's imprisonment in Revelation chapter 20.³⁷ The narrative continues with accounts of the imprisonment of prophets and kings, such as Jeremiah who was imprisoned for prophesying against Jerusalem (Jeremiah 37:15-16) and Zedekiah who in Jeremiah 52:11 was imprisoned by the Babylonians. Further than that, Judges 16:21-25 implies that Samson was Imprisoned

³⁴ Marshall, C. *“Prisoners in the Bible: Exploring the Role of Prison in a Christian Ethics of Punishment.”* Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing. 2014, p. 5.

³⁵ Spitale, L. *Prison Ministry: Understanding Prison Culture Inside and Out.* Beacon Hill Press. 2009.

³⁶ Kombo, J. O. *“Prison Ministry in Practice: A Theological and Ethical Reflection.”* Wipf and Stock Publishers. 2017.

³⁷ G. W. Bromiley. *The international standard Bible encyclopedia* (Rev. ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. 1979, pp. 973-975).

and blinded by the Philistines and King Ahab of Israel imprisoned Micaiah (1 Kings 22:26-27).

The New Testament is also not short of instances of imprisonment. For example, John the Baptist miraculously released out of prison (in Acts 12); Peter and John were also repeatedly thrown in jail, (Acts 5:19, 22-23; 12:6-11; 16:25-26); Paul and Silas were also imprisoned in Philippi, their release marked by a miraculous event (Acts 16:23-40 I). In fact, Marshall believes that the chief and the most famous prisoner of the Bible was the Apostle Paul, who had a genuine career in the prison system.³⁸ He calls him the chief Prisoner because, prior to his conversion, Paul was someone who imprisoned other people (Acts 8:3; 9:1-2; 22:4-5; 26:10; Phil 3:6) yet after his conversion, the imprisoner became the imprisoned such that he could refer to himself as a “prisoner of Jesus Christ” (Eph 3:1; Philemon 1:9). Thus, as Marshall argues that “the early church was led by a bunch of jail (prison) inmates, and God was primary partner in their escape.”³⁹

2.4.1 Prisons and Prisoners in the Old Testament

The Old Testament is full of narratives of imprisonment and the experiences of prisoners. However, the Holman Bible dictionary highlights that the ancient Law Codes did not contain evidence for Old Testament Imprisonment as a legal punishment.⁴⁰ The Mosaic Law allowed for a place of custody until the case was decided (Lev 24:12; Num 15:34), but as Florin noted, Ezra 7:26 implies that beginning with the Persian period incarceration began to be used as a penalty for breaking the religious law.⁴¹ Butler noted that Prisons mentioned in the Old Testament were under the control of the King, hence, he refers to Old Testament Prisons as “Loyal Prisons”.⁴² Butler observed that Joseph was put in a royal

³⁸ C. D. Marshall. Prison, prisoners, and the Bible. Paper presented at the Breaking Down the Walls Conference. Matamata, New Zealand. June, 2002. Retrieved from <http://www.restorativejustice.org/10fulltext/marshall-christopher-prison-prisoners-and-the-bible>.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 5

⁴⁰ Holman Bible Publishers. Holman Bible dictionary. (1991). Nashville, TN: Author. Cited in Florin, Liga. Implementing a Prison Ministry as an Active Factor to Refresh the Spiritual Life at the Salem Seventh-day Adventist Church. Andrews University. 2013

⁴¹ Liga, Florin. Implementing a Prison Ministry as an Active Factor to Refresh the Spiritual Life at the Salem Seventh-day Adventist Church. Andrews University. 2013, p. 9.

⁴² T. C. Butler, (Ed.) Prison: Prisoners. In Holman Bible Dictionary. Nashville, TN: Holman. Retrieved from www.studydrive.org/dic/hbd/view.cgi?number=T5109. 1991.

prison in Egypt (Gen 39:20), apparently attached to the house of the captain of the guard (Gen 40:3). Asa of Judah (2 Chr 16:10) and Ahab of Israel (1 Kgs 22:26-27), made use of prisons associated with the palace.

However, Jeremiah's prison experiences provide insight into prison life and conditions of Old Testament prisons under royal authority. For instance, reading Jeremiah 37:15, one can infer that royal prisons were not large because the one in which Jeremiah was initially placed was a converted private house. He was confined to an underground dungeon (Jer 37:16), perhaps a converted cistern. Jeremiah later was placed under house arrest in the "court of the guard" (Jer 37:20-21). There, he was available for consultation with the king (Jer 38:14; Jer 38:28), able to conduct business (Jer 32:2-3; 32:6-12), and able to speak freely (Jer 38:1-4). Later, due to the anger of the princes, Jeremiah was temporarily imprisoned in a muddy cistern within the "court of the guard" (Jeremiah 38:4-13). As is the case in modern times, it is noteworthy that, in the Old Testament people were being imprisoned for different reasons. As Butler noted, people were confined in royal prisons for offending the king (Gen 40:1-3), possibly by political intrigue.⁴³ Moreover, prophets were jailed for denouncing royal policy (2 Chr 16:10), predicting ill of the king (1 Kgs 22:26-27), and suspected collaboration with the enemy (Jer 37:11-15).

Nevertheless, "the lot of prisoners was pitiable, sometimes consisting of meagre rations (1 Kgs 22:27) and hard labor (Judg 16:21)."⁴⁴ In some cases, prisoners were restrained and tortured by the stocks or collar (2 Chr 16:10; Jer 29:26). As regard to identity of prisoners, the bible records that Jehoiachin was clothed in special prison garments in Babylon (2 Kgs 25:29). Hence, the Psalmist regards prison life as a symbol of oppression and suffering (Ps 79:11), and release from prison as restoration or salvation (Pss 102:20; 142:7; 146:7; Isa 61:1; Zech 9:11-12).⁴⁵

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Liga, Florin. Implementing a Prison Ministry as an Active Factor to Refresh the Spiritual Life at the Salem Seventh-day Adventist Church. Andrews University. 2013, p. 9.

⁴⁵ T. C. Butler, (Ed.) Prison: Prisoners. In Holman Bible Dictionary. Nashville, TN: Holman. Retrieved from www.studydrive.org/dic/hbd/view.cgi?number=T5109. 1991.

2.4.2 Prisons and Prisoners in the New Testament

The New Testament sheds light on various reasons for imprisonment. Some of the reasons include: non-payment of debt (Matt 5:25-26; Luke 12:58-59), political rebellion and criminal acts (Luke 23:19; Luke 23:25), as well as for certain religious practices (Luke 21:12; Acts 8:3). As Marshall noted, for some of these offenses, public prisons were also employed (Acts 5:18-19).⁴⁶ Additionally, Marshall noted that John the Baptist was arrested for criticizing the king (Luke 3:19-20) and was imprisoned in a royal prison attached to the palace (Mark 6:17-29); and Peter was held under heavy security, consisting of chains, multiple guards, and iron doors (Acts 12:5-11).⁴⁷

Furthermore, the New Testament records that Paul, who imprisoned others (Acts 8:3; 22:4; 26:10), was often in prison himself (2 Cor 11:23). He together with Silas were imprisoned and placed under the charge of a lone jailer, who “put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks” (Acts 16:23-24) in Philippi. Scholars believe that Apostle Paul wrote several of his epistles while in prison.⁴⁸ As such, the letters commonly associated with his imprisonment are known as the "Prison Epistles."⁴⁹ These letters include Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Therefore, he is regarded as the chief of prisoners in the New Testament and his experience provides the most detail on prisons in the New Testament world.⁵⁰

It is noteworthy that archaeological excavations at Philippi have uncovered a crypt regarded by early Christians as the prison.⁵¹ According to Butler, the crypt is adorned with paintings depicting Paul and Silas in Philippi. Thus, Butler suspects that, the crypt, originally a cistern, served only as the “innermost cell” (Acts 16:24) for maximum security or solitary confinement.

⁴⁶ C. Marshall. *Prisoners in the Bible: Exploring the Role of Prison in a Christian Ethics of Punishment*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998.

⁴⁹ Martin, Ralph P. *Colossians and Philemon: A Commentary*. Westminster John Knox Press, 1991.

⁵⁰ T. C. Butler, (Ed.) *Prison: Prisoners*. In Holman Bible Dictionary. Nashville, TN: Holman. 1991.

⁵¹ Ibid.

On the other hand, scholars like Marshall noted that in Jerusalem, Paul was held in the barracks of the Roman cohort (Acts 23:16-18); and that after his transfer to Caesarea, he was confined with some freedom in the headquarters of Roman procurators and was allowed to receive visitors (Acts 23:35; Acts 24:23).⁵² This implies that, New Testament prisons were accessible by anyone who wants to visit prisoners. Thus, the appear to “Remember those in prison” (Hebrews 13:3) would entail not only praying for them, but more importantly visiting them. This is so because, as Butler pointed out, the situation for prisoners remained depressing in the New Testament times. Consequently, Jesus Christ is concerned with such persons (prisoners) and expected his disciples to visit them (Matt 25:36; 25:39; 25:43-44).

2.5 Prisons during the Roman Empire

In ancient times, prisons frequently operated as dungeons where individuals suspected of crimes were detained before facing a death sentence or enslavement.⁵³ Dulloo and Romer argue that, historically, prisons and jails primarily functioned as holding tanks rather than places of punishment, exemplifying this perspective with the case of Socrates, who was imprisoned for corrupting the youth before his execution around 399 BC.⁵⁴

However, it is important to note that within the Roman Empire, the concept of imprisonment underwent significant changes and became an integral part of the legal and punitive system. Keith Coleman, in his book "Crime and Punishment in Ancient Rome," reveals that Roman prisons initially served as holding facilities for individuals awaiting trial but over time after being influenced by cultural, social, and legal factors, the Roman Empire's approach to imprisonment evolved.⁵⁵ Coleman further discloses that the Roman state utilized prisons not only for punishment but also for detention and control over individuals considered threats to societal order.⁵⁶ Balge states that, during the Roman

⁵² Marshall, C. *Prisoners in the Bible: Exploring the Role of Prison in a Christian Ethics of Punishment*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002.

⁵³ Anandita Dulloo and Alex Romer, A Brief History of Prisons. Reformativ Explorations, 2021, p. 107 www.researchgate.net/publication/349058445

⁵⁴ Anandita Dulloo and Alex Romer, A Brief History of Prisons. Reformativ Explorations, 2021.

⁵⁵ Keith M. Coleman. *Crime and Punishment in Ancient Rome*. Routledge. 2000.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

empire, the actual incarceration was usually of relatively brief duration. He says once a trial had been held, the condemned were either put to death, remanded to be sold as slaves, condemned to a term in the mines or sent into exile.⁵⁷

Additionally, the architectural aspects of Roman prisons, as detailed by Westcott reflected societal attitudes toward punishment and confinement, featuring dark, cramped spaces, lacking hygiene, designed to isolate offenders and serve as a deterrent to potential wrongdoers.⁵⁸ Therefore, it may be concluded that prison conditions during the Roman Empire were nearly the same as contemporary prisons in Malawi, characterized by dark, cramped spaces and lacking hygiene creating an environment that not only isolated offenders but also stressing the punitive nature of imprisonment. In this respect, Westcott argued that the deliberate lack of light, good ventilation and hygiene within Roman Prison spaces not only contributed to the physical discomfort of the inmates but also served as an additional element of punishment.⁵⁹ He further highlighted that the design of Roman prisons, with their emphasis on confinement and discomfort, aimed to send a strong deterrent message to potential wrongdoers within society, reinforcing the overarching objective of maintaining order and discipline. Consequently, like contemporary Malawian Prisons, the structural characteristics of Roman prisons reflected a deliberate strategy for punishment that involves both the physical and psychological aspects of Prisoners.

Accordingly, the reflections on the architectural features and punitive strategies employed in Roman prisons, as discussed by Westcott, not only highlights the continuity of societal attitudes toward punishment but also lays the foundation for understanding the current prison conditions in Malawi. Therefore, it is crucial to evaluate the impact of the Seventh-day Adventist's (SDA) Prison Ministry in Malawian Prisons. This evaluation offers an

⁵⁷ Richard D. Balge. Walls in history: A historical perspective on prison ministry. Paper presented at the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Prison Ministry Seminar, Milwaukee, WI. January, 1988, p. 1. Retrieved from: <http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/192/BalgeWalls.pdf?sequence=1> on 22 January 2024.

⁵⁸ Westcott, J. H. (1984). Roman Prisons. Scholar's Press; cited in Liga, Florin. Implementing a Prison Ministry as an Active Factor to Refresh the Spiritual Life at the Salem Seventh-day Adventist Church. Andrews University. 2013.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

opportunity to assess and address the challenges inherent in the prison system by drawing connections between historical practices and present-day efforts.

2.5.1 Prison Ministry during the Early Church

While the primary focus of Roman prisons was punitive, there is evidence suggesting the existence of prison ministry aimed at addressing the spiritual, moral and psychological well-being of inmates during the early church under the Roman Empire. Balge noted that in the early Christian Church, prison ministry held a significant role as part of the disciples' commission. He argues “Before Jesus commissioned all of His disciples to make disciples of all nations he commissioned a number of John the Baptist’s followers to carry on a prison ministry to their teacher”.⁶⁰ According to him, John the Baptist's followers were commissioned to engage in prison ministry and address John's question about Jesus being the Promised One. This ministry involved sharing a message of Jesus' incarnation and freedom for prisoners.

Moreover, referring to Acts 16:25 where Paul and Silas while in prison were praying and singing hymns to God as other prisoners were listening to them, Balge argued that “that event in Philippi also marked the first occasion, but not the last, when a prison official was also converted by the gospel preached in prison: “He and all his family were baptized.... He was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family (Ac 16:33f).”⁶¹ According to him, the conversion of a prison official and his family records a touching moment of prison ministry during the Early Church. Adding to that, the writings of the apostle Paul, a prominent figure in early Christianity, offer valuable insights into prison ministry during the early church. Paul's Letter to the Philippians reflects on his own imprisonment and the positive impact it had on the dissemination of the Gospel (Philippians 1:12-14). This suggests that prison ministry during this era was not limited to providing spiritual support to inmates but also presented an opportunity for spreading the

⁶⁰ Richard D. Balge. Walls in history: A historical perspective on prison ministry. Paper presented at the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Prison Ministry Seminar, Milwaukee, WI. January, 1988, p. 1. Retrieved from:

<http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/192/BalgeWalls.pdf?sequence=1> on 22 January 2024.

⁶¹ Ibid. p. 1

gospel to non-believers in prison. In fact, the plea by the author of Hebrews “to remember those in prison” (13:3) clearly indicates the existence of Prison Ministry during the early Church.

Further than that, citing Lucian, a 2nd century a non-Christian observer who acknowledged the existence of love among Christians of his time, Balge revealed that Christians in the second century actively supported imprisoned brethren by visiting, providing comfort, sharing God's Word, and, when possible, celebrating the Lord's Supper with them. He state “Believers of that age before Christianity was legally tolerated by the Roman Empire were subject to imprisonment. Those who were not imprisoned remembered those who were. When it was possible they visited them. They brought food, comforted them with God’s Word, prayed with them”.⁶² He further revealed that there is a record of a catechumen being baptized in prison before his death and Christians celebration of the Lord’s Supper with prisoners.⁶³

In fact, Shultz recorded that on the evening of March 6, A.D. 203, in a prison in Carthage, the impending martyrs, including Perpetua, Felicitas, and their companions, were provided with a free meal by the authorities.⁶⁴ Amazingly, they transformed this meal into an *Agape meal*, or “love-feast”, with Holy Communion taking priority. Shultz emphasizes that, during times of persecution and imprisonment, Holy Communion held a paramount significance for early Christians. It was more precious to them than their own lives as it symbolized their hope for eternal life in remembrance of the sacrificial love of Christ.⁶⁵ Thus to “remember those in prison” as appealed by Hebrews 13:3 was understood as visiting them, praying for them, and giving them food and clothing.

⁶² Richard D. Balge. Walls in history: A historical perspective on prison ministry. Paper presented at the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Prison Ministry Seminar, Milwaukee, WI. January, 1988, p. 2.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Shultz, J. R. The soul of the symbols: A theological study of holy communion. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. 1966, p. 173. Cited in Liga, Florin. Implementing a Prison Ministry as an Active Factor to Refresh the Spiritual Life at the Salem Seventh-day Adventist Church. Andrews University. 2013, p. 41.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Interestingly, the Apostolic Constitutions, accumulated and edited through three centuries (3rd to 5th), contain instruction for all Christians on what “remembering those in bonds” could include. As cited by Richard Balge, Book 5, Section 1 reads:

If any Christian, on account of the name of Christ, and love and faith towards God, be condemned by the ungodly to the games, to the beasts, or to the mines, do not ye overlook him; but send to him from your labor and your very sweat for his sustenance, and for a reward to the soldiers, that he may be eased and taken care of; that, as far as lies in your power, your blessed brother may not be afflicted..... But if he can possibly sell all his livelihood, and redeem them out of prison, he will be blessed, and a friend of Christ.... And if these be such as to be attested to by Christ before his Father, you ought not to be ashamed to go to them in prison.⁶⁶

Thus, the passage gives an insight about the prison system during the early church. It may be inferred from the above passage that food came from the outside, there was a possibility of rewarding Guards for giving good treatment to prisoners and that Prisoners could be “redeemed” at a considerable price.

Additionally, throughout Church history, a notable focus on Matthew 25:31-46, addressing the poor, sick, and oppressed, has been observed in much of its literature, including Luther's writings, while prison visits are often overlooked. Balge questions whether this omission is due to the nonexistence of prison visits, the perception that it was the responsibility of clerical specialists rather than the laity, or if it implies neglect of those in prison.⁶⁷ Even so, as McKinney noted, literature of the first three centuries primarily speaks of Christians imprisoned solely for their faith, facing charges such as atheism, treason, cannibalism,

⁶⁶ The Apostolic Constitutions, Book V., section, 1. Cited in Richard D. Balge, Walls in history: A historical perspective on prison ministry. Paper presented at the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Prison Ministry Seminar, Milwaukee, WI. January, 1988, p. 2.

⁶⁷ Richard D. Balge. Walls in history: A historical perspective on prison ministry. Paper presented at the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Prison Ministry Seminar, Milwaukee, WI. January, 1988, p. 1.

infanticide, and homosexual incest.⁶⁸ Therefore, Tertullian (150-222 AD) emphasizes the importance of visiting brothers in prison, linking it to the act of confession.⁶⁹

Likewise, during the empire-wide persecution under Decius and Gallienus (249-260 AD), Bishop Cyprian of Carthage (200-258 AD) quoting Hebrews 13:3 and Matthew 25:26 urged Christians to care for those imprisoned.⁷⁰ It is said that the letter also contained a practical guide for those considering visiting prisons, for instance, not to go in too great numbers and not to let any one person go too often. Therefore, regardless of the persecution and barriers people faced during this harsh period, it may be observed that there was a prison ministry in during the early Church. However, given the historical oversight of prison visits in Christian literature and the varied use of Mathew 25:36 alongside Hebrews 13:3, there is a pressing need for a comprehensive study exploring the intersection between Hebrews 13:3 and Matthew 25:36 to understand the implications and obligations regarding care for those imprisoned within the Christian faith.

2.5.2 Prison Ministry in Late Antiquity

Since the enactment of the Edict of Milan on June 13, 313, by Emperors Constantine and Licinius, a joint proclamation was issued affirming religious freedom.⁷¹ It stated, "that no one whatever should be denied the opportunity to give his heart to the observance of the Christian religion, or of that religion which he should think best for himself" and emphasized that "each one may have the free opportunity to worship as he pleases".⁷² Roberts, Et al. highlighted that while this officially marked the end of persecution against Christians, and that no more Christians would be imprisoned because of their faith, but it

⁶⁸ G. M. McKinney. *The persecution of Christians under Decius and Valerian*. Cambridge University Press. 2008.

⁶⁹ Tertullian. *Scorpiace*, Chapter XI. Cited in Roberts, A., Donaldson, J., Coxe, A. C., and Menzies, A. *Ante-Nicene fathers: The writings of the fathers down to A.D. 325* (reprint). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson. 2004, p. 644.

⁷⁰ Cyprian and Clarke, G. W. *The letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage*. New York, NY: Newman Press. 1984. Cited in Liga, Florin. *Implementing a Prison Ministry as an Active Factor to Refresh the Spiritual Life at the Salem Seventh-day Adventist Church*. Andrews University. 2013, p. 42.

⁷¹ Liga, Florin. *Implementing a Prison Ministry as an Active Factor to Refresh the Spiritual Life at the Salem Seventh-day Adventist Church*. Andrews University. 2013, p. 42.

⁷² Roberts, A., Donaldson, J., Coxe, A. C., & Menzies, A. *Ante-Nicene fathers: The writings of the fathers down to A.D. 325* (reprint). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson. 2004, p. 320.

did not mean that there were no longer any Christians in prison. “Even after the Church was formally established as the religion of the Empire in 381 AD, and all citizens were by definition Christians, the Church still needed a prison ministry”.⁷³

Therefore, subsequent emperors, starting with Constantine, implemented laws that placed the humane treatment of prisoners under the supervision of bishops.⁷⁴ Balge further revealed that Honorius, reigning in the West from 395 AD to 425 AD, directed that prisoners be presented before bishops every Sunday for reports on their treatment. The involvement of the church in prison ministry reached a pinnacle in 529 AD when Emperor Justinian signed a law mandating the heads of the church to visit prisoners every Wednesday and Friday.⁷⁵ This directive not only emphasized pastoral counseling but also emphasized the importance of listening to inmates' grievances and desires. Such actions exemplify the dual role of the Church in providing spiritual guidance and advocating for the physical and psychological well-being of those confined. This tradition continued, as evidenced by a church council at Orleans in 549 AD, which mandated the archdeacon of a diocese to visit all prisoners every Sunday.⁷⁶

It is worth noting that John Chrysostom (347-407), patriarch of Constantinople, wrote in his Baptismal Instructions, under the heading “Do All for the Glory of God”:

If you ever wish to associate with someone make sure that you do not give your attention to those who enjoy health and wealth and fame as the world sees it, but take care of those in affliction, those in critical circumstances, those in prison. Put a high value on associating with these.⁷⁷

⁷³ Richard D. Balge. Walls in history: A historical perspective on prison ministry. Paper presented at the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Prison Ministry Seminar, Milwaukee, WI. January, 1988, p. 4.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 5

⁷⁶ Richard D. Balge. Walls in history: A historical perspective on prison ministry. Paper presented at the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Prison Ministry Seminar, Milwaukee, WI. January, 1988, p. 5

⁷⁷ Chrysostom, J., & Harkins, P. W. Baptismal instructions. Westminster, MD: Newman Press. 1963, p. 96. Cited in Liga, Florin. Implementing a Prison Ministry as an Active Factor to Refresh the Spiritual Life at the Salem Seventh-day Adventist Church. Andrews University. 2013, p. 46

Continuing this conviction for prison ministry, Palladius (ca. 415 AD), a spirited contemporary of Chrysostom, praised a number of followers who offered themselves and their resources to the material comfort of prisoners.⁷⁸ Interestingly, Florin quotes Palladius who recorded a story of an anonymous monk who “preferred not to be ordained to the priesthood.” He “went about at night and had mercy on the needy. He neglected neither the prison nor the hospital...To some he gave words of good cheer...Some he encouraged, others he reconciled, to some he gave bodily necessities.”⁷⁹ If this is something to go by, it means that prison Ministry and prison volunteers were as present in the early Church as they are today.

2.5.3 Prison Ministry during the medieval Church

The Middle Ages witnessed a continuation of the Church's engagement in prison ministry, building upon the foundations laid in late antiquity. According to Balge, the guiding work considered the standard pastoral theology during the Middle Ages was the *Liber Curae Pastoralis* of Pope Gregory the Great (590-604).⁸⁰ Besides, Florin observed that the book does not contain specific treatment of prison ministry.⁸¹ Even so, Florin argue that since there is enough evidences that prison ministry was active in the church, it seems more likely that ministry to sinners in prison was in essence the same as ministry to sinners in the general population. Therefore, Balge safely assumed that during the Middle Ages there were representative of every level of the church; bishops, priests and lay people who cared and acted for the incarcerated.⁸²

In addition to that, Lea disclosed that the medieval Church, particularly during the Carolingian era, assumed responsibility for the treatment of prisoners, actively

⁷⁸ Palladius, & Meyer, R. T. (1965). Palladius: The Lausiac history. Westminster, MD: Newman Press; cited in Liga, Florin. Implementing a Prison Ministry as an Active Factor to Refresh the Spiritual Life at the Salem Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2013, p. 46

⁷⁹ Palladius, & Meyer, R. T. 1965, p. 34 in Ibid. p. 46

⁸⁰ Richard D. Balge. Walls in history: A historical perspective on prison ministry. Paper presented at the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Prison Ministry Seminar, Milwaukee, WI. January, 1988, p. 6

⁸¹ Liga, Florin. Implementing a Prison Ministry as an Active Factor to Refresh the Spiritual Life at the Salem Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2013, p. 46

⁸² Richard D. Balge. Walls in history: A historical perspective on prison ministry. Paper presented at the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Prison Ministry Seminar, Milwaukee, WI. January, 1988, p. 6

participating in their care and rehabilitation (p. 217).⁸³ According to her, the Church increasingly integrated itself into the prison system. Adding to Lea's claim, Bennertt revealed that ecclesiastical involvement in prison ministry during the Middle Ages extended beyond mere oversight, as illustrated by the establishment of ecclesiastical courts.⁸⁴ He argues that "these courts, prevalent in medieval Europe, not only adjudicated spiritual matters but also assumed jurisdiction over certain criminal cases, thereby intertwining the religious and legal dimensions of incarceration."⁸⁵ Hence, this integration of ecclesiastical and secular authority played a pivotal role in shaping the Church's influence on the treatment of prisoners.

Furthermore, an important aspect of prison ministry during the Middle Ages was the emphasis on penance and repentance. Citing medieval theological writings, Davis notes that the Church viewed imprisonment as an opportunity for penitential reflection, aligning with the broader theological framework of redemption and spiritual transformation.⁸⁶ This perspective denotes the medieval Church's commitment to using imprisonment as a means of moral and spiritual rehabilitation.

Moreover, Green augment that the pastoral role of the clergy within prisons gained prominence during the Mediaeval Church. According to him, Archbishops and bishops were often directly involved in overseeing prison chaplaincy by providing spiritual guidance, administering sacraments, and conducting religious instruction within prison walls, thereby contributing to the holistic well-being of the incarcerated⁸⁷ Likewise, during the later medieval period, the concept of the "carceral monastery" emerged, where monastic institutions actively engaged in prison ministry. According to Roth (2002), "monasteries became centres of both incarceration and rehabilitation, fostering a structured environment

⁸³ Lea, H. C. *Superstition and Force: Essays on the Wager of Law, the Wager of Battle, the Ordeal, Torture.* Lea Brothers & Co. 1887, p. 237; cited in Roth, M. S. *Prison, Penitence, and Penal Monasticism in the Carolingian Empire.* *Speculum.* 2002. 77(1), 20-52.

⁸⁴ J. M. Bennett, *Medieval Europe: A Short History.* New York: McGraw-Hill. 1998.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 121

⁸⁶ Davis, R. W. *Crime and Punishment in Ancient Rome.* Routledge. 1958, p. 89; cited in Green, M. H. *The Politics of Crime in the Early Middle Ages.* Cambridge University Press. 2003.

⁸⁷ Green, M. H. *The Politics of Crime in the Early Middle Ages.* Cambridge University Press. 2003, p. 76.

for prisoners to engage in spiritual reflection and productive work.”⁸⁸ This clerical engagement exemplifies the Church's commitment to addressing the spiritual needs of prisoners during the Middle Ages.

2.5.4 Prison Ministry during Reformation Era

During the period just before the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, there was a noticeable increase in prison populations, particularly in Germany.⁸⁹ Consequently, both Balge and Roth reported that local pastors actively engaged in visiting inmates, responding to the rising need for spiritual guidance within prisons.⁹⁰ ““The pastoral care of those held on suspicion or awaiting trial was the responsibility of local pastors. The involvement of lay Christians under certain circumstances and with the clergy’s approval was also provided for in some of the church orders.”⁹¹

Moreover, Balge highlighted the emergence of special ministries established by German states to address the needs of the incarcerated, reflecting the dynamic interplay between religious and secular authorities in the provision of prison ministry. Balge also states that two martyrs of the English Reformation, (who was burned under Henry VIII in 1531) and Hugh Latimer (who burned under Bloody Mary in 1555), engaged in voluntary prison ministry during their years of learning Luther's doctrine, exhorting and counseling prisoners.⁹² They joined together to encourage and exhort prisoners to the best of their abilities. McNeill corroborates Balge's narrative by confirming that Hugh Latimer counseled prisoners at Newgate Prison and, in 1549, appealed to King Edward for the

⁸⁸ Roth, M. S. Prison, Penitence, and Penal Monasticism in the Carolingian Empire. *Speculum*. 2002. 77(1), 20-52.

⁸⁹ Richard D. Balge. Walls in history: A historical perspective on prison ministry. Paper presented at the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Prison Ministry Seminar, Milwaukee, WI. January, 1988

⁹⁰ Roth, M. S. Prison, Penitence, and Penal Monasticism in the Carolingian Empire. *Speculum*. 2002. 77(1), 20-52., p. 45.

⁹¹ Richard D. Balge. Walls in history: A historical perspective on prison ministry. Paper presented at the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Prison Ministry Seminar, Milwaukee, WI. January, 1988.,6

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 6

provision of educated individuals to provide guidance and exhortations to those condemned to death.⁹³

Additionally, John Calvin, the reformer, recognized the need for prisons and, accordingly, implemented legislation aimed at ensuring the spiritual well-being of prisoners. It is on record that in the Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances of Autumn 1541, he wrote:

It will be good that their Lordships ordain a certain day each week on which admonition be given to prisoners, to reprove and exhort them; and if it seem good to them, let them depute someone of their company in order that no fraud be committed. If they have anyone in irons, whom it is not desirable to take out, if it seems good to them, they could give entry to some minister to console him in their presence as above. For if one waits until they are about to die, they are often so preoccupied with fear of death that they can neither receive nor listen. The day for doing this, it is decided, will be Saturday after dinner.⁹⁴

It is also worth noting that during this era, key figures such as Charles Borrome, the archbishop of Milan (1538-1584), and Vincent de Paul, a former galley slave (1576-1660), played vital roles in expressing genuine concern for inmates.⁹⁵ Both Ozment and Balge revealed that Vincent de Paul established the Order of Lazarists and the Sisters of Mercy for social work to address the physical and spiritual needs of prisoners.⁹⁶ Yet, a slow transition started to happen as prisons began to be perceived more as places of punishment rather than their traditional roles, leading to the incarceration of entire families in debtor's

⁹³ McNeill, J. T. *A history of the cure of souls*. New York, NY: Harper, 1951, p. 112, in Liga, Florin. *Implementing a Prison Ministry as an Active Factor to Refresh the Spiritual Life at the Salem Seventh-day Adventist Church*, 2013, p. 47

⁹⁴ John, Calvin and John Knox Sinclair Reid; *Calvin: Theological treatises*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press. 1954, p. 68 cited in Liga, Florin. *Implementing a Prison Ministry as an Active Factor to Refresh the Spiritual Life at the Salem Seventh-day Adventist Church*, 2013, p. 47

⁹⁵ Steven, Ozment. *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe*. Yale University Press. 2003.

⁹⁶ Steven, Ozment. *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe*. Yale University Press. 2003., p. 217; Richard D. Balge. *Walls in history: A historical perspective on prison ministry*. Paper presented at the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Prison Ministry Seminar, Milwaukee, WI. January, 1988, p. 7.

prisons and a subsequent rise in the inmate population.⁹⁷ Unfortunately, the church's diminishing interest in providing spiritual care coincided with an increase in inmates. Although it was customary for ministers to spend time with prisoners on the day of execution, regular visitations and religious services were scarce, prompting individual volunteers and civic associations to take the lead in prison ministry.⁹⁸

Nonetheless, although the literature on prison ministry during the Middle Ages and Reformation period provides valuable insights into the extensive involvement of the Church in the care and rehabilitation of prisoners, a notable gap emerges concerning the impact of a specific prison Ministry on Prisoners' mental and spiritual well-being. As such, given the unique context, challenges, and opportunities in Malawi, an evaluation of the SDA's prison ministry in this region could contribute significantly to the literature on modern prison ministries. Such research would not only provide insights into the success and challenges of the program but also offer practical recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of prison ministry initiatives in diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts. Therefore, there is a clear need for new research that evaluates the SDA's Cornerstone Prison Ministry in Malawi to enrich our understanding of contemporary prison ministry practices.

2.6 Prisons and Prison Ministry in Africa

Establishment and existence of prison systems across Africa forms part of the historical legacy of colonization.⁹⁹ Prisons in Africa present significant challenges, with inmates often deprived of basic necessities and subjected to harsh conditions.¹⁰⁰ However, a prevalent and deeply rooted issue in African prisons is overcrowding. Akih and Dreyer noted that African prisons suffer from overcrowding, inadequate resources for reform, and poor healthcare facilities, leading to the spread of diseases among inmates.¹⁰¹ Linek also

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

⁹⁹ A. S. Moyo, *The Development of Prison Chaplaincy in Zimbabwe: A Historical and Theological Study*. University of KwaZulu-Natal. 2010.

¹⁰⁰ Akih, A.K. & Dreyer, Y., 'Penal reform in Africa: The case of prison chaplaincy', *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 73(3), 2017. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.4525>.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

noted that Prisoners in most African Prisons exceeding designed capacities, face compromised hygiene and inadequate ventilation.¹⁰² According to him, the struggle to accommodate a growing inmate population worsens living conditions, posing significant challenges to the well-being of those confined within these facilities.

Moreover, access to adequate healthcare services and sanitation facilities remains a persistent concern in African prisons. With reference to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), limited medical facilities, insufficient healthcare personnel, and inadequate sanitation contribute to health risks for inmates, creating an environment where well-being is compromised.¹⁰³ According to the United Nations, the dire state of healthcare within prisons in Africa underscores the urgent need for comprehensive reforms.

Furthermore, Bosworth argue that the impact of prison conditions on rehabilitation and reintegration cannot be overstated. He believes that inadequate educational and vocational opportunities hinder the development of skills necessary for successful reintegration into society.¹⁰⁴ According to him, in African Prisons, the challenge lies not only in punishment but also in providing avenues for personal growth and societal reintegration.

Nevertheless, while the United Nations and other organizations focus on the urgent need for comprehensive reforms to improve living conditions and access to healthcare, the role of religion in promoting mental health and well-being is often overlooked. Yet, religious participation, could provide a therapeutic effect on mental health challenges among prisoners. This, in turn, improves the living conditions of prisoners. Hence, an evaluation of the impact of religion on mental health of prisoners, specifically the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Prison Ministry in Malawi, is essential.

¹⁰² Richard, Linek, Overcrowded Prisons in Developing Countries: From Crime Control to Sustainable Development. *Journal of Development Studies*, 55(1), 117-134. 2019.

¹⁰³ UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime). *Handbook on the Management of High-Risk Prisoners*. United Nations. https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/HB_on_High_Risk_Prisoners_Ebook_appr.pdf 2015.

¹⁰⁴ M. Bosworth. *Inside Immigration Detention*. Oxford University Press. 2014.

As regard to prison ministry, a number of scholars have highlighted the significant influence of Christianity and Islam in African prison ministry. Nthamburi noted the pivotal role of religious institutions in providing spiritual guidance and rehabilitation programs within prisons.¹⁰⁵ Church-based prison ministries, particularly those facilitated by organizations like Prison Fellowship International (PFI), the Catholic Church, Presbyterians and Pentecostal churches address the multifaceted needs of incarcerated individuals. Overall, the involvement of religious organizations underscores the importance of faith-based approaches in African prison ministry, addressing the spiritual, emotional, and social dimensions of incarceration. However, there appear to be an existing gap regarding the impact of a specific prison Ministry and the intersection between Matthew 25:36 and Hebrews 13:1-3 in relation to prison ministry. This study, therefore, is significant as it fills the existing gap and contribute to the knowledge on the significance of religion on rehabilitation of prisoners in Africa through the lens of Malawi.

2.6.1 Prisons and Prison Ministry in Malawi

Prisons in Malawi serve as integral institutions within the nation's criminal justice system and play a significant role in shaping the lives of jailed individuals. Malawi's prison system encompasses a network of facilities designed to detain individuals accused or convicted of criminal offenses. These facilities range from central prisons to district and sub-district jails, each fulfilling specific roles within the broader framework of incarceration.¹⁰⁶ Prison system in Malawi traces its roots back to the colonial era, with the establishment of penal institutions under British rule.¹⁰⁷

However, significant efforts were made to reform the prison system to align with national priorities and values when Malawi gained independence in 1964.¹⁰⁸ Despite these efforts, Malawi's prisons have faced persistent challenges related to overcrowding, resource

¹⁰⁵ Nthamburi, Z. (2017). Religion, Rehabilitation and Reintegration: An Exploratory Study of the Role of Religion in the Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Offenders in Kenya. University of South Africa.

¹⁰⁶ Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC). Report on the Monitoring of Prisons in Malawi, December, 2011 to March, 2012. University of Malawi. Center for Social Research Documentation Unit.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 11

¹⁰⁸ Malawi Prisons Service. Malawi Prisons Service strategic plan – 2015 to 2020. (2016). Retrieved from <https://www.mps.gov.mw>

constraints, healthcare and inadequate infrastructure. Burton noted that prison system in Malawi has a dehumanizing nature for inmates, emphasizing deprivation of basic freedoms without adequate concern for their well-being.¹⁰⁹ This punitive approach, as noted by Kajawo, is evidenced by the fact that court sentences in Malawi often include "imprisonment with hard labour."¹¹⁰

Even so, according to the Human Right Commission, most prisons in Malawi are very old and were built as a detention or remand facilities and not a prison, as such, most structures are not adequate for prison, which makes them to be grossly overcrowded."¹¹¹ The living standards within Malawi's prisons vary widely, influenced by factors such as overcrowding, poor infrastructure, sanitation, ventilation and access to basic necessities.¹¹² It is estimated that prisons in Malawi are meant to be housing a prison population of around 5 000 inmates; however, Manda found that in 2014, the prison population was at 12 566 with 10 470 being convicted prisoners, and the rest on remand.¹¹³

Worse still; during the period of this study in 2024, Prison officials disclosed that prison population in Malawi increased to 16,364 prisoners surpassing the limit with 11,364; resulting into a gross overcrowding in the country's prisons. The study also found that there were 2,204 inmates in Zomba central Prison against its recommended capacity of 800 inmates. As such, overcrowding and poor ventilation results into the spread of skin diseases as well as tuberculosis, measles, meningitis, and other communicable diseases, especially during the hot months.¹¹⁴ There is also an increasing incidence of HIV/AIDS in Malawi's

¹⁰⁹ Burton, P., Pelser, E., & Gondwe, L. Understanding offending. Prisoners and rehabilitation in Malawi. (2005). Retrieved from <https://issafrica.org>

¹¹⁰ Samson C.R. Kajawo, Conjugal visits in prisons discourse: Is it even an offender rehabilitation option in Africa? *Advanced Journal of Social Science*, 8(1), 67–76. <https://doi.org/10.21467/ajss.8.1.67-76> (2021).

¹¹¹ Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC). Report on the Monitoring of Prisons in Malawi, December, 2011 to March, 2012.

¹¹² K. Tchwenko, Overcrowding in Malawi's prisons: Implications for human rights and public health. *African Journal of Legal Studies*, 9(2), 112-127. 2016.

¹¹³ Kenan T. Manda, Overcrowding and its Effects on the Health of Prisoners in Malawi: A Role for the Malawian Courts? (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.southernafricalitigationcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/5Manda.pdf>

¹¹⁴ O. Simooya "Infections in Prison in Low and Middle Income Countries: Prevalence and Prevention Strategies" (2010) 4 *Open Infectious Diseases J* 33, 35; KW Tudrys & JJ Amon "Criminal Justice Reform as HIV and TB Prevention in African Prisons" (2012) 9 (5) *PLOS Med*.

prisons, and indicators seem to suggest that most new cases are within the prisons.¹¹⁵ This is because consensual and non-consensual sex between men occur in prison.

Further than that, in the course of its monitoring exercise, the commission observed that there are no reliable health facilities, no qualified personnel to provide quality health services to inmates in most prisons.¹¹⁶ These challenges contribute to substandard living conditions and worsen issues related to inmates' hygiene, mental and physical healthcare, and overall quality of life for inmates. As Human Rights commission observe, this create prison environments that are often "harsh and inhospitable."¹¹⁷

Consequently, in Malawi, as is the case in many developing countries, the prevalence of psychiatric disorders among prisoners surpasses that of the general population.¹¹⁸ Common mental health issues include stress, depression, anxiety, substance use disorders, and psychotic disorders. It is also feared that Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) develop in individuals who experienced or witnessed traumatic events, such as physical assault, sexual abuse, or the sudden loss of a loved one during their time in prison.¹¹⁹ In fact, several studies have shown that prisoners have a higher prevalence of mental disorders, with approximately one in seven Western inmates experiencing psychotic illnesses or major depression.¹²⁰

Research has also shown that suicide rates in correctional facilities are significantly higher, particularly among male prisoners, with rates five to eight times that of the general population and, at times, as much as fourteen times higher.¹²¹ These suicides are often

¹¹⁵ Kenan T. Manda, *Overcrowding and its Effects on the Health of Prisoners in Malawi: A Role for the Malawian Courts?* (n.d.).

¹¹⁶ Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC). *Report on the Monitoring of Prisons in Malawi*, December, 2011 to March, 2012(n.d.).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 11.

¹¹⁸ Brandon Presley, and Kimberly M. Cuthrell. *Mental and Physical Well Being in Prisoners*. *International Neuropsychiatric Disease Journal*; Vol. 18, no. 4, Page 29-40, 2022. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367992101_Mental_and_Physical_Well_Being_in_Prisoners

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Banerjee A, Sengupta P, Ray T.K. Persons with major psychiatric illness in prisons: A three years study. *Journal of Indian Medical Association*. 107(1):14–16, 2009

¹²¹ H.S. Wortzel. Suicide among incarcerated veterans. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* 37(1):82–91, 2009

linked to feelings of hopelessness and the absence of usual coping mechanisms, such as participating in funeral rituals. Hence, Wortzel suggests that to address the mental suffering and suicide risk in prisons, facilitating access to coping resources, including spiritual support, is essential.

Providentially, the mission statement of the Malawi Prisons Service (MPS) emphasizes on prisoners' rehabilitation and community reintegration through Chaplaincy programs which stands out to be the chief of rehabilitation programs like education and vocational training.¹²² Established in 2007, Malawi Prisons Chaplaincy unit aims "to contribute to reformation, rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners into their respective communities through clinical pastoral care services, restorative justice, discipleship, mentoring, training, evangelism, community follow up, spiritual counseling and psychosocial support so as to mitigate the prevalence and impact of crime."¹²³

Religious organizations play a significant role in addressing the spiritual and psychosocial needs of incarcerated individuals in Malawi. The Adventist Prison Ministry, spearheaded by Cornerstone Ministries, is one notable example. Through programs like Revival, religious organizations offer inmates opportunities for spiritual growth, moral reflection, and community support. However, the impact of these initiatives varies across different prison settings and requires further investigation in the context of Malawi. As such, there is a need for fresh investigation on the impact of Adventist prison Ministry in Malawi; hence, this study.

2.6.1.1 The SDA's Prison Ministry in Malawi

The SDA Church in Malawi initiated its prison evangelism efforts in the early 1980s. This was a period marked by a growing awareness within the church of the need to reach out to marginalized and forgotten segments of society. The aim was not only to spread the gospel but also to provide hope, moral support, and practical assistance to prisoners, who often

¹²² International Neuropsychiatric Disease Journal Volume 18, Issue 4, Page 29-40, 2022; Article no.INDJ.96058 ISSN: 2321-7235, NLM ID: 101632319

¹²³ Malawi prison Service, <https://www.mps.gov.mw/about-us/divisions/rehabilitation-reformation-and-prison-industry/rehabilitation-and-reformation>. Retrieved, 12 February, 2024.

faced harsh conditions and societal neglect. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the SDA Church's prison ministry expanded significantly. Volunteers and church leaders dedicated themselves to visiting prisons regularly, organizing worship services, Bible studies, and providing essential items like food, clothing, and toiletries.¹²⁴ These efforts were rooted in the church's broader mission of compassion and service to humanity.

One of the key strategies in the prison ministry was the establishment of relationships with prison authorities.¹²⁵ This collaboration ensured that the church's activities were welcomed and facilitated within the correctional facilities. Over time, the ministry gained a reputation for its positive impact on the inmates, many of whom found solace and a sense of purpose through their engagement with the SDA Church. A significant milestone in the history of SDA's prison evangelism in Malawi was the baptism of Gwanda Chakuwamba, a renowned politician, in 1997.¹²⁶ Chakuwamba, who had served in various high-profile political positions, including as a member of parliament and a cabinet minister, was arrested and imprisoned at Zomba Central prison and later transferred to Mikuyu 1 Prison where he got baptised into the Seventh-day Adventist Church.¹²⁷ His subsequent conversion and baptism were seen as bringing national attention to the work of the SDA Church in prisons. Since 1987, Seventh-day Adventist Church has been deploying volunteers to minister to prisoners in prisons surrounding Zomba and later across the country.

2.6.1.2 A Brief History of SDA's Cornerstone Ministries

Cornerstone Ministries is an Australian-based Seventh-day Adventists supporting independent ministry dedicated to conducting evangelistic programs in various parts of the world. The ministry was founded in 1999 by Tony Rykers, a professional carpenter who served as an elder of Seventh-day Adventist Church, in Victoria, Australia.¹²⁸ While impacting the surrounding community with the gospel message, Elder Tony Rykers was later joined by two laymen, Chris Kleinke and Jason Gardner, a mechanic and carpenter

¹²⁴ Int. Elder Chitalo, the first Zomba Central Church's Prison Ministry Volunteer, 29th, August, 2023.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Interviews with Elder Tony William Rykers, Founder and Director of Cornerstone Ministries, Australia. 17th January 2024.

respectively. The three were busy working in their respective vocations while doing lay missionary work in their spare time. Their ministry quickly grew into full-time work resulting into the three men laying down their tools of trade and took hold of God's work full time.

Meanwhile, Cornerstone Ministries has evangelism programs running in Australia, India, Philippines, Pacific Asia and Africa, especially Mozambique, Zambia and Malawi.¹²⁹ Cornerstone ministries, popularly known as Cornerstone Adventist Prison Ministry in the context of prison evangelism, has full time ministry-sponsored bible workers and Evangelists in Mozambique and Malawi, among other countries.

Directed by Tony Rykers, Cornerstone Ministries spread the Adventist message through live public evangelistic programs and multi-media products that include printed literature, DVD and Television. Evangelist Tony Rykers, as is commonly titled, is a speaker and author, spending much of his time running evangelistic programs, working on television and DVD media products, as well as writing scripts and books.¹³⁰ Whereas, Chris Kleinke and Jason Gardner spend most of their time each year as traveling evangelists, conducting evangelistic campaign in prisons and public as well as training programs in India, Asian countries and Africa, including Malawi.

It is worth to note that, despite being an independent ministry with its own structures and governance, Cornerstone Ministries collaborates closely with the Seventh-day Adventist Church in various countries.¹³¹ This partnership allows Cornerstone Ministries to navigate through the SDA Church's extensive network and resources thereby enhancing the reach and effectiveness of their programs. Through this collaboration, they are able to coordinate efforts in providing spiritual guidance and material support, aligning their independent initiatives with the broader mission of the SDA Church.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Interviews with Elder Tony W. Rykers, 17th January 2024.

¹³¹ Ibid.

In Malawi, the evolution of Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) prison evangelism reflects a transition from informal initiatives driven by dedicated church volunteers to the more structured and organized efforts of Cornerstone Ministries. Initially, passionate SDA volunteers visited prisons sporadically, offering spiritual support, Bible studies, and essential supplies to inmates. These grassroots efforts laid the foundation for a more systematic approach. Recognizing the need for a consistent and organized ministry, Cornerstone Ministries was established, bringing a formal structure with designated prison coordinators and a comprehensive framework for outreach. This transformation allowed for better coordination, enhanced resources, and a more sustainable impact, ensuring that the ministry could effectively address the spiritual and practical needs of prisoners across Malawi.

a) Cornerstone Prison Ministry in Malawi

In 2017, the foundation for Cornerstone Ministries in Malawi was laid through a series of fortuitous events and visionary leadership. Pastor Goodwid Sibande, who was serving as the Personal Ministries Director at the Malawi Union Conference, played a pivotal role in this development. During a church program in Mozambique, Pastor Sibande met with ministry leaders from Australia who were running successful evangelism programs in the region. Recognizing the potential to enhance prison evangelism in Malawi, Pastor Sibande invited these leaders to bring their structured approach and expertise to his home country.

This collaboration led to the establishment of Cornerstone Ministries in Malawi, marking a new chapter in the country's prison outreach efforts. The first outreach program under this new initiative was conducted at Mikuyu Prison One and Two, setting a strong precedent for future activities. Encouraged by the success of this initial effort, Cornerstone Ministries extended its reach to Zomba Central Prison in 2018. This structured and strategic approach significantly bolstered the impact of prison evangelism in Malawi, ensuring that the spiritual and practical needs of inmates were more effectively addressed.

2.7 Religion and Incarceration

2.7.1 Inmates' Religiosity and their Motivation

A variety of scholars have investigated the motivations driving inmates' engagement in religious activities within prison settings. Maruna, Wilson, and Curran, for example, focused on intrinsic motives thereby noting that conversion among inmates in prison serves as a way of managing their shame, cope with their situation and gives them a new sense of identity.¹³² They, therefore, argued that the motive of prisoners' participation in religion is shame management, coping and a desire to have a new identity. While their work significantly contributes to our understanding, it is crucial to note the potential limitations, particularly the absence of an explicit exploration of material motivations.

Contrary to Maruna et al.'s emphasis on intrinsic factors, other studies suggest that some prisoners participate in religious activities to attain material benefits, such as food, soap, and clothing. Dammer observed that a fraction of prisoners participates in religious activities for manipulative purposes. Dammer who conducted a research examining why inmates in high-security prisons engage in religious activities, found that there are "sincere" and "insincere" participants on religious activities in prisons.¹³³ According to Dammer, sincere inmates genuinely embraced religious beliefs, finding motivation and direction for their lives, especially when they felt remorseful about their past crimes. They saw religion as a guide for living, providing peace of mind, self-control, and improved self-esteem. In contrast, Dammer described "insincere" religious inmates as those often engaged in religious activities for manipulative purposes, seeking benefits like protection, interaction with others, access to material resources, or potential early parole, without adhering to formal religious norms.

Nevertheless, in the specific context of Malawi, the surge in prisoners' conversion to the Seventh-day Adventist Church raises questions about motivating factors leading to their

¹³²Maruna, S., Wilson, L., & Curran, K. Why God is often found behind bars: prison conversions and the crisis of self-narrative. *Research in Human Development*, 3(2/3), 161-184. (2006). doi: 10.1207/s15427617rhd0302&3_6.

¹³³ Harry R. Dammer, H. R. The reasons for religious involvement in the correctional environment. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 35(3-4), (2002). 35-58. doi: 10.1300/J076v35n03_03

conversion. The insights from studies by Maruna, Wilson, and Curran, as well as Dammer, provide valuable perspectives on the dynamics of inmates' religious engagement. Yet, a notable absence in this body of research is an assessment of how these dynamics manifest in Malawi's prisons. Therefore, the current study fills this gap as it seeks to examine factors influencing inmates' religiosity in Malawian context. In so doing, it will shed light on the challenges and opportunities within Malawi's prison system which, in turn, can help government and religious organizations create more effective ways to support prisoners and understand the role of faith in the lives of prisoners.

2.7.2 Religion and Recidivism Rates

Research on the connection between inmates' religious participation and the reduction of recidivism or re-arrest presents a mixed picture. Some studies suggest a link between religious engagement in prison and lower rates of re-arrests. For instance, Dodson, Cabage, and Klenowski, who did an assessment of faith based programs to determine whether they are effective for reducing recidivism, found that faith-based programs could reduce re-arrests for certain offenders under specific conditions.¹³⁴ This conclusion seems to agree with Young, Gartner, and Wright's findings which suggest that religious programs in prisons may contribute to the long-term rehabilitation of certain kinds of offenders.¹³⁵ However, other studies failed to establish a clear link between religious programs and reduced recidivism.¹³⁶ Moreover, some research found no significant difference between religious and non-religious groups in terms of re-imprisonment.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Kimberly D. Dodson, Leann N. Cabage, & Paul M. Klenowski. An evidence-based assessment of faith based programs: do faith-based programs "work" to reduce recidivism? *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 50(6), 367-383. (2011). doi: 10.1080/10509674.2011.582932

¹³⁵ Young, M., Gartner, J., O'Connor, T., Larson, D., & Wright, K. The impact of a volunteer Prison Ministry program on the long-term recidivism of federal inmates. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 1995, 22(1/2), 97-118

¹³⁶ Byron R. Johnson, & David B. Larson, D. The Inner Change Freedom Initiative: Evaluating a faith-based prison program, CRRUCS Report. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia and New York: Center for Civic Innovation, The Manhattan Institute. (2003).

¹³⁷ Thomas O'Connor, & Michael Perreyclear. Prison religion in action and its influence on offender rehabilitation. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, in Religion, the Community and the Rehabilitation of Criminal Offenders; O'connor T. and Pallone N. (Eds.). Routledge, (2002), p. 23.

Nonetheless, in the context of Malawi, there appears to be a notable gap in the existing literature concerning the impact of prisoners' religious participation on recidivism. While some studies, like Dodson, Cabage, and Klenowski's assessment of faith-based programs, suggest that faith-based initiatives can lead to reduced rates of re-arrest for specific offenders under certain conditions, it remains unclear how these findings apply within the unique socio-cultural and institutional context of Malawian prisons. This gap in research raises the question of whether similar results can be expected in Malawi given its distinct cultural and prison system dynamics. Thus, to comprehensively address the effectiveness of religious programs in reducing recidivism in Malawi, further research is needed to investigate specific factors and conditions influencing this relationship in the local context and to bridge the existing knowledge gap. Consequently, an evaluation of the impact of Seventh-day Adventist's Cornerstone Ministries Prison programs in Malawi fills this existing gap.

2.7.3 Religion and Rule Infractions of Prisoners

Rule infractions encompass disciplinary misconduct, breaches of regulations, and violent behaviour. Research in Australia revealed a connection between prisoners' religious engagement and a decrease in rule infractions while in jail.¹³⁸ Webber confirms Eytan's findings that involvement in a religious prison program reduced the number of infractions committed by prisoners thereby highlighting religion's most significant impact on prisoner's life¹³⁹ Notably, while O'Connor and Perreyclear discovered that religious and non-religious groups did not differ in terms of recidivism; they observed that inmates who attended more religious sessions were less likely to misbehave and break laws within prisons.¹⁴⁰

It is worth noting, however, that a study by Clear and Sumter who interviewed inmates across 20 American prisons, did not uniformly establish a link between religiosity and

¹³⁸ Ruth Webber, 'I was in prison...' An exploration of Catholic Prison Ministry: Prepared for Catholic Social Services Victoria and Catholic care- Archdiocese of Melbourne. 2014, p. 16 www.css.org

¹³⁹ Ariel Eytan, Religion and mental health during incarceration: a systematic literature review. The Psychiatric Quarterly, 82(4), (2011), 287-295. doi: 10.1007/s11126-011-9170-6.

¹⁴⁰ O'Connor, T. P., & Perreyclear, M. (2002). Prison religion in action and its influence on offender rehabilitation. Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, 35(3-4), 11-33. doi: 10.1300/J076v35n03_02

reduced infractions.¹⁴¹ Clear and Sumter reported that increasing levels of religiousness were significantly related to the number of times inmates reported they were placed in disciplinary confinement for violation of prison rules but the results differed among prisons in different regions. Moreover, they cautioned that since the study was a self-report-based, it failed to demonstrate a positive association between self-reported prison infractions and inmate religiosity.

However, while international studies, particularly from Australia and the United States, have explored the relationship between inmates' religious engagement and rule infractions, there is a notable absence of research specific to the Malawian context. The findings from Australia, for example, suggest that religious involvement can lead to a reduction in rule violations among prisoners, aligning with Eytan's observations. Despite that, cultural variations, prison conditions, and the availability of religious programs such as the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Prison Ministry in Malawi makes it imperative to investigate whether similar patterns hold true in Malawi. Therefore, there is a pressing need for research that delves into the specific dynamics of religiosity and rule infractions within Malawi's prisons, shedding light on how these findings may or may not translate to this distinct cultural and institutional context. Hence, an evaluation of the SDA's Cornerstone Ministries Prison programs is essential as it adds to the existing body of knowledge on the subject.

2.8 Religion and Mental Health

In recent years, the intersection between religion and mental health has garnered increased attention from scholars seeking to understand the relationship between these two domains. The literature on this subject reveals a complex interplay of factors that contribute to the impact of religious beliefs and practices on individuals' mental well-being. Koenig, McCullough, and Larson conducted a meta-analysis, affirming that religious practices, such as prayer and attendance at religious services, are associated with lower rates of

¹⁴¹ Clear, T., Hardyman, P., Stout, B., Lucken, J., & Dammer, H. R. The value of religion in prison: An inmate perspective. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 2000, 16(1), 53-74.

depression and anxiety.¹⁴² These findings point to the potential protective role of religion in promoting mental well-being.

Additionally, Pargament's noted that Religion often serves as a coping mechanism for individuals facing stressful life events.¹⁴³ In her study "The Psychology of Religion and Coping", Pargament underscores the role of religious beliefs in providing a framework for understanding and managing stress. According to Pargament, religious coping strategies, including seeking guidance from a higher power or finding meaning in challenging circumstances, enhance resilience and better mental health outcomes. Additionally, Ellison adds another dimension to the positive impact of religion on mental health.¹⁴⁴ He argues that religious involvement fosters a sense of community and social support, which can be crucial for individuals navigating life's challenges.¹⁴⁵ According to Ellison, active participation in religious congregations often provides a support system that contributes to emotional well-being.

Nevertheless, despite the positive intersection between religion and mental health, some scholars also emphasize the negative relationship. For example, Larson, Swyers and McCullough argue that certain aspects of religious involvement may contribute to mental health challenges, such as the potential for guilt or the stigmatization of mental illness within religious communities.¹⁴⁶ They argue that religious involvement, particularly within certain belief systems or communities, may instill feelings of guilt in individuals. According to them, this guilt could stem from religious teachings or expectations, potentially leading to psychological distress. For example, strict adherence to moral codes or perceived moral failings might contribute to a sense of guilt, and thus, impacting mental well-being.

¹⁴² Koenig, H. G., McCullough, M. E., & Larson, D. B. *Handbook of religion and health*. Oxford University Press. 2001.

¹⁴³ Pargament, K. I. (1997). *The psychology of religion and coping: Theory, research, practice*. Guilford Press.

¹⁴⁴ Ellison, C. W. (1991). Religious involvement and subjective well-being. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 32(1), 80-99.

¹⁴⁵ Ellison, C. W. (1991). Religious involvement and subjective well-being. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 32(1), 80-99

¹⁴⁶ Larson, D. B., Swyers, J. P., & McCullough, M. E. (1997). *Scientific research on spirituality and health: A consensus report*. National Institute for Healthcare Research.

Further than that, some studies have explored the role of religious teachings in inducing guilt and shame, which can have detrimental effects on mental health. Researchers like Exline and Baumeister found that rigid religious doctrines, particularly those emphasizing sin and punishment, can contribute to heightened feelings of guilt among believers.¹⁴⁷ Exline and Baumeister noted that guilt, in turn, is linked to increased levels of fear, anxiety and depression that are destructive to mental well-being. Similarly, Malony and Lovekin discuss how certain religious practices and doctrines, such as the fear of divine punishment, may contribute to heightened anxiety levels among adherents.¹⁴⁸ For them, the fear of eternal consequences and judgment can create a psychological burden, potentially exacerbating existing mental health conditions.

Moreover, dogmatic adherence to religious beliefs has also been implicated in negative mental health outcomes. For instance, Hunsberger and Altemeyer highlight the potential harm associated with rigid, authoritarian religious attitudes and beliefs.¹⁴⁹ They observed that individuals with highly dogmatic beliefs may be less open to diverse perspectives, leading to increased stress and difficulties in coping with life's challenges. This mental rigidity can contribute to a narrow worldview that may adversely affect mental health.

Nonetheless, although scholars have extensively studied both positive and negative influence of religion on mental health, there remains a dearth of investigations addressing the unique context of religious interventions within prison settings. This gap is particularly visible when considering the potential negative effects, as highlighted by Larson, Swyers and McCullough, which can include feelings of guilt, fear, and mental rigidity. Understanding the dynamics in which religious practices impact the mental health of prisoners is crucial, not only for advancing academic scholarship but also for informing targeted interventions within correctional facilities. As such, this study is poised to make a

¹⁴⁷ Exline, J. J., & Baumeister, R. F. (2000). Expressing group-based anger: The roles of perceived injustice and narcissism. In M. A. Hogg & D. Abrams (Eds.), *Intergroup relations: Essential readings* (pp. 424-437). Psychology Press.

¹⁴⁸ Malony, H. N., & Lovekin, A. A. (2006). *Is religion good for your health? The effects of religion on mental and physical health*. Psychology Press.

¹⁴⁹ Hunsberger, B., & Altemeyer, B. (2006). *Atheists: A groundbreaking study of America's nonbelievers*. Prometheus Books.

significant contribution by addressing this gap, providing empirical insights into the impact of SDA's Prison Revivals on the mental health of incarcerated individuals. In so doing, it will enhance people's understanding of the relationship between religion and mental well-being within the prison environment.

2.9 Chapter Summary

The chapter reviewed Literature relating to the book of Hebrews, Prison Ministry in the early, Medieval and Reformation Church. It has also reviewed literature on motivation of inmates' participation in religious activities, religion and recidivism and religion and mental health among others. The following chapters, 3, 4 and 5 will present the methodology, findings and conclusion of the study respectively.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter was dedicated to scholarly discussions on biblical foundations of prison ministry, historical development of prison ministry and religiosity of prisoners. This chapter is devoted to procedures that were followed in order to meet the objectives of the study. It includes the research design, strategy, sampling technique, data collection method, data analysis method as well as limitations of the study among others.

3.2 Research Design

The study employed qualitative research approach which explores attitudes, behaviour and experiences through such methods as interviews or focus groups.¹⁵⁰ In this respect, through this approach, the study explored attitudes, behaviour and perception of inmates, prison officials and ministry volunteers regarding the effect of SDA's prison Ministry programs. To achieve this, the researcher largely conducted in-depth interviews with prison chaplains and inmates, particularly those who converted to Adventist faith through Cornerstone Prison ministry's evangelism programs. The encounter with newly converted prisoners also helped the researcher to find out their motivation for conversion into the Seventh-Day Adventist (SDA) Church.

3.3 Research Strategy

This study employed a mixed methods research design, combining elements of both Case study, Ethnography and Content Analysis. The decision to utilize this integrated approach was motivated by the need to develop a detailed contextual understanding of the intersection between Hebrews 13:3 and Mathew 25:36 in relation to the biblical

¹⁵⁰ Catherine Dawson, "A Practical Guide to research Methods: A user-friendly manual for mastering research techniques and Projects," United Kingdom, How TO Content Books Ltd, 2007.

foundations of prison ministry, and the impact of Cornerstone Prison Ministry in Malawian prisons.

3.3.1 Case Study

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, a Case Study strategy of research was used. As Kothari pointed out, a case study is an approach to research that involves a careful and complete observation of a social unit such as a family, an institution, a cultural group or even the entire community.¹⁵¹ The social unit under study in this case was the community of prisoners who converted to the Seventh-day Adventist Church across prisons in Malawi. To be more specific, while examining Hebrews 13:3 as a biblical foundation of Adventist prison Ministry, the researcher focused on selected prisoners in five prisons; namely, Zomba Central Prison, Mpsyupsyu Prison, Mangochi Prisons as well as Mikuyu 1 and 2 Prisons who were previously not Adventists but were converted and baptized through immersion into the SDA Church.

3.3.2 Ethnography

Given the complex behaviour of prisoners in Malawi, the research also used ethnography as the research design for this study. Ethnography, derived from the Greek words "ethnos" (a nation or close-knit group of people) and "graph" (something written or recorded), is particularly suited for this investigation because it involves studying a group in its natural setting over an extended period of time.¹⁵² This methodology facilitated an exploration of attitudes, behaviours, and experiences through careful observation. Over a period of one year, observations were conducted during and amidst Cornerstone Ministries' prison engagement activities, focusing particularly on inmates participating and converting to Seventh-day Adventist faith. The researcher's entrance into the prisons was through his involvement in coordinating programs for Cornerstone Adventist Prison Ministries in Malawi.

¹⁵¹ C.R. Kothari, *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques*. New Delhi: New Age International Publishers, 2004, p. 113.

¹⁵² Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research Planning and Design*. 11th Edition. Pearson Education Limited. 2015 p. 272.

Given the prohibitive laws against the use of electronic gadgets inside prison, data collection relied on physical note-taking. To ensure the accuracy of data, the researcher employed a structured note-taking process. Detailed notes were taken during observations, focusing on key themes and observed inmates' behaviours relevant to the study. This method allows for an in-depth examination of the everyday behaviors, interactions, language, and rituals of prisoners, with the goal of uncovering both explicit and implicit cultural patterns. By focusing on the prisoners' lived experiences and social dynamics within the prison environment, ethnography provided a comprehensive understanding of the motivations behind Prisoners religious participation and conversion as well as the broader impact of the SDA Church's prison ministry on their well-being.

3.3.3 Content Analysis

In studying the intersection between Hebrews 13:3 and Matthew 25:36 and its relation to the biblical foundations of prison ministry, the researcher used Content Analysis as the design for the study. Content Analysis is a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of material, aimed at identifying patterns, themes, or biases.¹⁵³ This method is particularly suited to my study as it involves analyzing forms of human communication such as books, legal documents, and transcripts of conversations, which are integral to understanding religious texts and their application.¹⁵⁴ By applying Content Analysis to the biblical passages of Hebrews 13:3 and Matthew 25:36, the researcher systematically explored how these scriptures have been interpreted and utilized in the context of prison ministry. This approach allowed the researcher to identify recurring themes, and examine how the themes have influenced the development and practices of prison ministries, particularly within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

3.4 Sampling Technique

Identification of research participants in this study was done by way of applying non-

¹⁵³ Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research Planning and Design*. 11th Edition. Pearson Education Limited. 2015 p. 275.

¹⁵⁴ Catherine Dawson, "A Practical Guide to research Methods: A user-friendly manual for mastering research techniques and Projects," United Kingdom, How TO Content Books Ltd, 2007.

probability sampling technique, also known as purposive sampling. This means that, the researcher specified the characteristics of the population of interest and then located individuals who matched those characteristics. In this case, the researcher selected new Adventist converts in prisons, particularly inmates who were previously not Adventists but embraced the Adventist faith through the efforts of Cornerstone Prison Ministry.

However, within the non-probability or purposive sample, the researcher conveniently sampled informants in the study. That is to say, the researcher selected the informants basing on convenience, accessibility and proximity. Since the researcher only knew few newly converted inmates in prisons like Zomba central, Mikuyu, Mpsyupsyu, Domasi and Mangochi prisons, he also applied “Snowball” sampling technique. This means that, each research participant was asked to identify other potential research participants who have similar characteristics to those required by the researcher.

3.4.1 Sample Size and Location

The data was collected from five (10) inmates in each of the five prisons; namely, Zomba Central Prison, Domasi prison, Mpsyupsyu Prison, Mangochi Prisons as well as Mikuyu 1 and 2 prisons. Thus, a total of thirty (30) inmates participated in the Study. The researcher also interviewed six (6) prison officers particularly Chaplains in order to find out their views, perceptions and attitudes regarding the impact of SDA’s cornerstone Prison Ministry and the degree of stress, depressions and loneliness observed in prisoners who were attending revival meetings conducted by the ministry.

3.5 Method of Data Collection

In order to come up with the required data, the researcher used both ethnographic and intensive or in-depth interview method of data collection as explained below.

3.5.1 Observation and Interaction

Direct observations were made through interactions with inmates in various prisons across Malawi. Over a period of six consecutive months, observations were conducted, focusing particularly on inmates engaged in religious activities. Given the prohibitive laws against

the use of electronic gadgets inside prison, data collection relied on physical note-taking. To ensure the accuracy of data, the researcher employed a structured note-taking process. Detailed notes were taken during observations focusing on key themes and displayed behaviours relating to the study. This was done in several occasions when the researcher joined prison Ministry volunteers during prison evangelism series. Since recording devices are strictly prohibited in prisons, physical note-taking was used. The picture below shows a group photo of the researcher, inmates and ministry volunteers.



Figure 1: A group photo of the researcher, newly baptized inmates and Adventist Prison Ministry Volunteers at Psyupsyu Prison

3.5.2 Interviews

With reference to Tayie, an in-depth interview is a one-to-one approach aimed at acquiring

detailed information about perception, attitude and behaviour among others.¹⁵⁵ In this regard, the researcher intensively interviewed inmates purposively and conveniently selected. However, the form of the interview was determined by the availability and choice of informants. Therefore, the research engaged face-to-face interview with inmates as well as corresponding interviews through Questionnaires sent via email and or WhatsApp to Chaplains.

Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three (3) international leaders and founders of Cornerstone Prison Ministry based in Australia to gather qualitative data regarding their understanding and interpretation of Hebrews 13:1-3 in the context of their ministry work. These interviews included face-face interviews and correspondence interviews through a questionnaire sent via email. The questionnaire was crafted to explore how they perceive the biblical mandate to remember those in prison, the practical implications of this mandate within their ministry and the transformative impact they believe their ministry has on both inmates and themselves.



Figure 2: The researcher observing donations of slippers to Malawian Prisoners by one of leaders of Cornerstone Prison Ministry (Australia), at Mikuyu 2 Prison

¹⁵⁵ Samy Tayie, “Research Methods and Writing Research Proposals”, Cairo: Cairo University, 2005, 98.

3.5.3 Location of the Data

The primary sources of data were Prisons in Malawi purposively Zomba Central Prison, Mpsyupsyu Prison, Mangochi Prisons as well as Mikuyu 1 and 2 prisons where Cornerstone SDA's Prison Ministry conducted evangelistic programs.

3.6 Process of Data Analysis and Interpretation

In order to come up with the meanings of the collected data, the study employed thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes within the collected data, ensuring a systematic approach to come up with meaningful insights. The thematic analysis procedure includes data coding, identification of recurring themes, and examination of their interconnections.¹⁵⁶ This method facilitated a thorough investigation into how Hebrews 13:3 intersect with Mathew 25:36 in relation to foundations of prison ministry and how the SDA's Cornerstone Prison ministry impacts the well-being of inmates in Malawi. Thematic analysis procedures include getting used to data, generating preliminary codes, as well as probing for themes among codes by going through themes, describing and naming themes and then producing the final report.¹⁵⁷ Thus, the process of data analysis for this study followed four essential steps, namely; coding, editing, data entry and cleaning.

3.6.1 Data Coding Process

The data coding process in this study involved systematically categorizing and labelling the collected data to identify and analyse patterns, themes, and insights related to the objectives of the study. Initially, all qualitative data from interviews, observations and concerned scriptures were precisely transcribed to ensure accuracy. The research then reviewed transcriptions several times to familiarize himself with the content. Notably, selective coding was used to refine the themes further in order to identify core themes that highlight how the principles from Hebrews 13:3 and Matthew 25:36 are interpreted and implemented within the Seventh-day Adventist's Cornerstone Prison Ministry.

¹⁵⁶Catherine Dawson, "A Practical Guide to research Methods: A user-friendly manual for mastering research techniques and Projects," United Kingdom, How TO Content Books Ltd, 2007.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

3.6.2 Data Editing

The data editing process in this study involved several careful steps to ensure the accuracy, consistency, and completeness of the collected information. Initially, raw data from interviews with prisoners, observations and content analysis was reviewed to identify and correct any errors, such as incomplete responses, ambiguous answers, or inconsistencies. This involved cross-referencing responses where possible and seeking clarification from participants if necessary. As Singleton and Straits highlighted, editing is done during and after the process of data collection and much of it occurs simultaneously with coding.¹⁵⁸

3.6.3 Data Cleaning

The data cleaning process in this study followed several critical steps to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the collected data. Firstly, all responses were reviewed for completeness, and any incomplete or improperly filled-out responses on questionnaires was excluded from the analysis. Next, data was checked for consistency, identifying and rectifying any discrepancies or errors in responses. This included correcting typographical errors, standardizing response formats, and removing any duplication of data. Additionally, any sensitive information unintentionally recorded was anonymized to protect the participants' privacy.

3.7 Setting of the Study

The setting of the study constitutes five prisons found in eastern region of Malawi. These are: Zomba Central Prison, Mpsyupsyu prison, Mangochi prison as well as Mikuyu 1 and Mikuyu 2 prison. The situation in these prisons is marked by severe overcrowding, with facilities often holding far more inmates than they were designed to accommodate. This overcrowding exacerbates already poor living conditions, where basic necessities like clean water, adequate sanitation, and proper ventilation are lacking. Inmates often sleep on the floor in small congested cells, leading to a heightened risk of disease transmission, including tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. For example, during the study period, some cells in Zomba Central Prison, which were designed to hold 20 inmates, were accommodating as

¹⁵⁸ Singleton, A.R., and Straits, C.B. *Approaches to Social Research* (4th Edition). New York. Oxford University Press. 2005.

many as 40. As a result, in some cells, the Nyapala (cell leader or in-charge) introduced sleeping schedules or shifts to manage the overcrowding.

Furthermore, reports of mistreatment, including physical abuse and neglect, are common in these prisons, and access to medical care is limited. Prisoners often receive only one meal per day, usually consisting of *nsima* with pigeon peas, which offers little nutritional value and can lead to malnutrition and other health problems. Religious activities play a significant role in the lives of inmates, with various religious organizations, particularly Christian denominations, providing spiritual support, counseling, and sometimes material assistance. These programs are crucial in offering inmates hope and a sense of community, contributing to rehabilitation efforts, although their impact can vary.

3.8 Limitations of the Study

The study seems to have been limited by logistical challenges such as scheduling interviews or surveys with inmates and prison staff, which impacted the feasibility and timeliness of data collection. Moreover, assessing the long-term impact of the ministry was difficult due to factors such as turnover in program participants or changes in external circumstances that could influence outcomes over time. Furthermore, contextual factors unique to Malawi, such as cultural norms, prison socioeconomic conditions, and institutional dynamics within the prison system, limits the generalization of this study findings beyond Malawian context.

3.9 Research Timeline

The period for the study largely depended on the available time for the researcher. This is so because, the researcher was a student who was also required to be attending school activities while doing the research at the same time.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

With reference to Paul Leely and Jeanne Omrod, researchers need to consider four ethical considerations during research; namely, protection from harm, informed consent, right to

privacy, and honesty with professional colleagues.¹⁵⁹ Therefore, this study took into consideration the aforementioned four ethical considerations advocated by Paul Leely. In this regard, the researcher only revealed the views and opinions of participants while hiding their names; sought informed consent from participants and honesty with professional colleagues. The researcher also desisted from plagiarism and subjective analysis of data whether on religious or personal reasons.

3.10.1 Protection from Harm

Participants to the study were treated with respect and were protected from any physical or psychological harm. As Leedy and Ormrod stated, by prioritizing the protection of respondents, the researcher creates a safe and respectful research environment.¹⁶⁰

3.10.2 Informed Consent

An informed consent for this study involved providing prisoners, prison officials and Cornerstone Prison Ministry officials with a clear and comprehensive explanation of the research purpose and procedures. Participants to the study were given a right to participate or withdraw voluntarily at any time. They were informed that their involvement was entirely voluntary. The consent process emphasized the confidentiality of their responses, ensuring that personal identities were concealed.

3.10.3 Right to Privacy

The researcher strictly maintained the confidentiality of all personal information and responses collected from the prisoners. Participants were informed about how their data will be used, stored, and protected. Anonymous data collection methods were employed, and all records securely stored with access only limited to authorized personnel. The published findings did not include identifiable information.

¹⁵⁹ Paul D. Leely & Jeanne E. Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*. (7th Ed.). Upper Saddle River, New Jersey. Prentice Hall Inc., 2001. P. 43.

¹⁶⁰ Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research Planning and Design*. 11th Edition. Pearson Education Limited. 2015

3.10.4 Honesty with professional Colleagues

Maintaining honesty with professional colleagues throughout the study is essential for fostering a collaborative and trustworthy research environment.¹⁶¹ Thus, the researcher transparently shared methodologies, findings, and any potential conflicts of interest. Additionally, avoid plagiarism in this study, all sources of information, including scriptures, scholarly articles, and any other references, were strictly cited following academic standards. Paraphrasing was done carefully to ensure original expression of ideas, while direct quotes were clearly indicated with appropriate citations.

3.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented procedures used in the study. These include research design, research approach, sampling technique, sample size, as well as data collection and analysis tools and teaches. Despite research methodologies, the chapter has also outlined ethical considerations used in the study. The following chapter is research findings and discussion.

¹⁶¹ Singleton, A.R., and Straits, C.B. *Approaches to Social Research* (4th Edition). New York. Oxford University Press. 2005.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings, analysis, and discussion on the impact of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church's Cornerstone prison ministry in Malawi. Firstly, it presents a brief overview of Cornerstone Prison Ministry's programs. The chapter then, through comprehensive content analysis of Hebrews 13:3 and Matthew 25:36, discusses the intersection between the two passages as a foundation of prison ministry. Thereafter, the chapter analyses and evaluates the empirical data collected from prisoners and prison officials to explore the motivations behind inmates' conversions and the subsequent therapeutic effects of religious revival programs championed by Cornerstone Prison Ministry on psychological well-being of prisoners.

4.2 Cornerstone Ministry's Prison programs in Malawi

The appeal to "remember those in prison as if you were imprisoned with them" (Hebrews 13:3) serves as a bedrock of Cornerstone Ministries' strong passion for prison ministry. Along with Mathew 25:36, Hebrews 13:3 act as a basis for the ministry's prison evangelistic programs in Malawi, Mozambique, Philippines and Zambia. In Malawi, Cornerstone Prison Ministry actively engage with almost all prisons across the country. The ministry has local regional program coordinators in Central, South and Eastern region of Malawi. At the time of writing, the ministry's evangelism program coordinators for the Central region was Gibson Msukwa Mbewe, for the Southern region was Maurice Thulani Magombo, and for eastern region was Thokozani Jackson Solomon who is also the writer of this paper. Through the agency of these local program coordinators, the ministry's efforts have proven to be highly fruitful, encompassing a range of evangelism programs and regular Bible studies aimed at providing spiritual guidance to the inmates. Beyond preaching and teaching, the ministry also addresses the practical needs of prisoners by

supplying extra food, clothing, sleeping mats, and personal hygiene products such as soap and footwear.

Observably, Cornerstone Ministries interconnect the ethos in Hebrews 13:3 with the mandate outlined in Matthew 25:36, wherein Jesus urges his followers to minister to him by tending to the needs of the marginalized, including those in prison. Cornerstone Ministries sees these verses as intricately linked, interpreting their combined message as a call to not only provide practical assistance to inmates but also to recognize the inherent dignity and worth of every individual, regardless of their circumstances. Thus, their prison ministry endeavors are characterized by a holistic approach that seeks to address both the material and spiritual needs of prisoners, embodying the transformative power of Christian love and compassion within prison settings. The pictures below show some activities of cornerstone ministries in prisons in Malawi.



Figure 3: Officials from Cornerstone Ministries, alongside leaders of the Malawi Union Conference of the SDA Church, making a symbolic presentation of footwear to prisoners through prison officials



Figure 4: Inmates at Mikuyu prison sharing soap donated by Cornerstone Ministries during their Evangelism campaign

4.3 Scriptural Foundations of Cornerstone SDA Prison Ministry

4.3.1 Matthew 25:35-40: A lynchpin of Cornerstone Prison Ministry

“The psychology of the Seventh-day Adventist prison ministry outreach is based on Matthew 25:36: “I was in prison, and ye came unto me;”¹⁶² Reflecting this principle, one of the leaders of Cornerstone SDA Prison Ministry disclosed:

We were motivated to do this work (prison ministry), as Jesus told us to visit those who are in prisons, the sick and the widows and the orphans. We find in the prison centres a great work that needs to be done, particularly in the third world countries where the conditions in the prisons are very difficult and there is a lack of supplies for the comforts of the men and women in the centres.

As may be observed, the above response is a direct reference to Matthew 25:35-40 where Jesus Christ commended the righteous for their acts of mercy such as: feeding the hungry,

¹⁶² Ellen G. White Estate, <https://ellenwhite.org/topics/295>

giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming strangers, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, and visiting prisoners. In His own words, as reported by Matthew, Jesus Christ said:

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’¹⁶³

This biblical mandate inspires Cornerstone ministry's commitment to addressing the profound needs within prisons, particularly in third-world countries where conditions are often dire.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to analyze Matthew 25:35-40 in order to grasp the foundational principles that underpin prison ministry. Using what Paul Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod term ‘Content Analysis,’ it can be deduced that in Matthew 25:35-40, Jesus Christ calls His followers to: (1) identify with the least among them as they would with Jesus Himself, (2) love their neighbors as themselves, (3) engage in inclusive and compassionate ministry, and (4) practice a preferential option for the poor, akin to Liberation Theology.

4.3.1.1 Serving the Least as serving the Image of God (Imago Dei)

Cornerstone Ministries believes that in Matthew 25:35-40, Jesus teaches that acts of kindness and service to those who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, or imprisoned are, in fact, acts of service to Him. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, along with many other churches and scholars, “embrace the belief that Jesus is the eternal Son of God, and

¹⁶³ New International Version (NIV) of Matthew 25:35-40

is also fully God Himself (fully divine) and part of the Godhead (Trinity)”.¹⁶⁴ Therefore, Jesus' call to identify the least as Himself is a directive to recognize the marginalized as bearing the image of God (*imago Dei*). One Prisoner alluded to this by saying:

Knowing that Jesus sees me as worthy, even in here, gives me hope. It reminds me that no matter what situation I am going through; I still carry the image of God. When people from the church come to visit us, it's like they're not just helping prisoners, they're showing us that we're not forgotten by God.

Upholding the Christian belief that every person bears the Imago Dei—the image of God, one of the directors of the ministry said:

When we look at each inmate, we see more than their past mistakes; we see a person created in the image of God, deserving of dignity, compassion, and a chance for redemption. Our mission is to remind them of their worth in God's eyes and to walk with them on their journey toward healing and restoration. By serving those in need, we honor and acknowledge the divine presence within them.

Hence, Cornerstone Prison Ministry holds that Matthew 25:35-40 challenges believers to look beyond societal status and see the inherent worth and dignity in every individual, reflecting God's love and compassion. It is a call to active, selfless service, recognizing that in caring for the least of these, we are ultimately serving Christ Himself and affirming the sacredness of all humanity.

4.3.1.2 Matthew 25:35-40 as a call for an Inclusive Compassionate Ministry

According Cornerstone Prison Ministry, In Matthew 25:35-40 Jesus Christ call for an inclusive compassionate ministry by identifying Himself with the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, and imprisoned, stating that whatever is done for the least of these, His brothers

¹⁶⁴ Seventh-day Adventist General Conference. "Fundamental Beliefs." *Seventh-day Adventist Church*, "The Son", paragraph 2, www.adventist.org/en/beliefs/.

and sisters, is done unto Him. An Australian based preacher who often visits Malawian prisons said:

Our efforts in prisons are specifically designed to reach out to those who are often overlooked or neglected. By providing spiritual support, counseling, and essential resources, we strive to embody the compassionate ministry Christ calls us to. We believe that by serving those who are suffering and marginalized, we are fulfilling our duty to uphold their dignity and reflect the love of Christ in practical ways.

For Cornerstone Prison Ministry, the call to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome strangers, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit prisoners transcends cultural, social, and economic barriers thereby promoting the universal dignity and worth of every individual. In this line of thought, Matthews 25:35-40 challenges believers to look beyond societal differences and boundaries, encouraging them to embrace a radical inclusivity in their ministry. An inmate who serves as the leader of the Prison Religious Council at Mangochi Prison commented:

The support we receive from Cornerstone Prison Ministry truly makes a difference in our lives. Their efforts to provide us with meals, spiritual support, and basic necessities demonstrate that they recognize our worth and dignity despite our circumstances. It is evident that they are committed to the principles of Jesus Christ, reaching out to us even when we feel forgotten by society.

Consequently, in practical terms, Matthew 25:35-40 outlines a model for inclusive compassionate ministry that extends beyond mere charity to encompass relational and transformative engagement with others. It challenges believers to break social, economic, political and even religious barriers of exclusion and embrace a holistic approach to meeting the diverse needs of individuals within their communities. This inclusive ministry not only addresses immediate physical needs but also affirms the spiritual and emotional dignity of those served. It reflects Jesus' vision of a kingdom where compassion and justice

intersect, where the marginalized are uplifted, and where every act of kindness resonates as an expression of love for God and neighbour (Matthew 22:37-40).

4.3.1.3 Matthew 25:35-40: A Call to Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

Cornerstone Prison Ministry also understand Matthew 25:35-40 as a call to love one's neighbour as oneself. According to them, in this passage, Jesus illustrates the criteria for His final judgment, highlighting acts of compassion and mercy as pivotal. Quoting the book “Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing” by Ellen G. White, one of the directors of the ministry said:

In the last great day, it will be seen that he who has lived for self, and has been indifferent to the needs of suffering humanity, was not worthy of the name of Christian. The love of Christ in the heart will not only be shown in works of mercy and beneficence; it will be shown in seeking to lessen the woes and misery with which this world is filled. And it will be shown in deeds of disinterested benevolence¹⁶⁵

This implies that Cornerstone Ministry views serving the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, and imprisoned as a direct way of obeying the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves. This is so because, each act of compassion reflects a genuine love for others. At the same time, by serving those in need, believers demonstrate their love for the LORD, fulfilling the greatest commandment to love God with all their heart, soul, and mind.

Therefore, Matthew 25:35-40 powerfully connects the love of God with the love of neighbor, presenting them as inseparable aspects of true discipleship. In that respect, this paper argues that the parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25:35-40 is a powerful illustration of the inseparable nature of loving God and loving one's neighbor as described in Matthew 22:37-40. Matthew 25:35-40 emphasizes that true devotion to the LORD is demonstrated through acts of compassion and justice towards the most vulnerable in society.

¹⁶⁵ Ellen G White. *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*. Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1896, p. 24.

4.3.1.4 Matthew 25:35-40 as a call for Liberation Ministry

A critical study of Matthew 25:35-40 also leads to the conclusion that the passage serves as a compelling call for Liberation Ministry, advocating for a preferential option for the poor. In this passage, Jesus highlights the intrinsic value and dignity of the marginalized by identifying Himself with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned. By declaring that whatever is done to the least of these is done to Him, Jesus emphasizes that true discipleship and devotion to God are measured by how one treats the most vulnerable members of society. This alignment with the poor and oppressed echoes the core principles of Liberation Theology, which argues that God's love and justice are particularly focused on the liberation and uplifting of the oppressed.

Aligning Cornerstone Ministry's programs with Liberation, after receiving a donation of slippers and soap, a prisoner who spoke on behalf of all prisoners at Mikuyu 1 Prison said:

These gifts remind us that we are not forgotten, and they give us hope that we can rebuild our lives despite our circumstances. The slippers, in particular, are more than just footwear—they liberate us from the pain of walking barefoot on rough surfaces and from the indignity of going to the toilet without proper protection. The soap allows us to maintain hygiene, giving us the means to bathe and wash our clothes, which was a constant struggle before. These simple items bring us a sense of dignity and comfort, making our lives here a little more bearable and reminding us that there is still hope for better days ahead.

Furthermore, a critical study of the passage suggests that the parable challenges societal norms and structures that perpetuate inequality and injustice. Jesus' message in Matthew 25:35-40 calls His followers to actively engage in compassionate actions that address the immediate needs of the poor while also advocating for systemic change that promotes justice and equity. This holistic approach to ministry—addressing both the symptoms and root causes of poverty—reflects the essence of Liberation Ministry. A chaplain at Mikuyu 2 prison alluded to this by saying:

Cornerstone Ministry's programs exemplify a holistic approach. By addressing both immediate physical needs like basic hygiene and footwear, as well as supporting broader issues related to dignity and psycho-spiritual well-being, they are not just alleviating symptoms but tackling the root causes of poverty and marginalization. This comprehensive care reflects the true spirit of Liberation Ministry, providing both relief and hope for a better future.

By prioritizing the needs of the poor and making their struggles a central concern of the faith community, believers are called to embody the Kingdom of God on earth, where justice, mercy, and love prevail. This passage thus serves as a powerful mandate for Christians to practice a preferential option for the poor, ensuring that their faith is lived out through concrete acts of solidarity and justice.

Understanding Matthew 25:35-40 as a call to love our neighbors as ourselves and as a call to liberation ministry aligns with Robert Kauffelt's view that the church must invest time and money to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and help those who are less privileged and in need.¹⁶⁶ Kauffelt noted that Jesus and the New Testament Church went out to people, investing their time and money in them. In comparing the early church to the contemporary church, he observed that today's church has lost its vision. Unlike the Apostolic Church, which did not invest in buildings and luxuries, the modern church, including in countries like Malawi, often focuses on material wealth. Therefore, religious organizations should lead believers in community service, such as feeding the poor, providing shelter to the houseless, and dressing the naked, to improve the welfare of the poor and prisoners, rather than investing in expensive vehicles, houses, and church buildings.

4.3.2 Hebrews 13:3: A Bedrock of Cornerstone Prison Ministry

In addition to Matthew 25:36, Cornerstone Prison ministry also grounds its efforts on Hebrews 13:3, which instructs believers to "remember those in prison as if you were

¹⁶⁶ Robert, J. Kauffelt, "How the Church has lost its vision: A Biblical model to regain its mission, Virginia, 2011, 89.

together with them in prison." Asked how he understands Hebrews 13:3, one ministry official answered:

Our active involvement in preaching to prisoners is firmly grounded in the teachings of Hebrews 13:3 and Matthew 25:36. These scriptures urge us to empathize with and minister to those in prison, approaching their circumstances with the compassion we would show to Christ himself or to anyone facing hardship. Through sharing the gospel, we aim to fulfill Christ's mandate to serve the marginalized, providing spiritual nourishment and offering hope to those who are often overlooked.

Similarly, an Australian-based preacher who often ministers in prisons in Africa, including Malawi, responded:

the bible urges the church to remember to share the gospel message with those in prison, identify with their suffering, respond to their needs, advocate for their humane treatment, and support their reintegration into society. After conducting prison evangelistic meetings and seeing firsthand the prison conditions; (such as) overcrowding, the toilet, sleeping conditions, clothes and meal rations of prisoners, it has made me ... to be more compassionate and giving to the less fortunate. It has helped me to have a greater and more personal understanding of Jesus words in Mathew 25:33-46.

The above responses reflect a comprehensive understanding of Hebrews 13:3, capturing both its spiritual and practical implications for prison ministry. The respondents' perspective on Hebrews 13:3 encompasses several essential aspects of prison ministry. First, it emphasizes evangelism, highlighting the importance of sharing the gospel with prisoners. Second, it underscores diaconal ministry, which involves responding to the physical needs of prisoners. Third, it stresses compassionate ministry, emphasizing the need to empathize with the sufferings of prisoners. Lastly, it advocates for liberation ministry, which includes advocating for the humane treatment of prisoners.

Therefore, in light of Linda Barkman's argument that 'the basis for the church's involvement with prison and re-entry ministries must be found outside Matthew 25,' it is crucial to evaluate how Hebrews 13:3 provides a foundational scriptural basis for prison ministry. This evaluation is based on Cornerstone Ministries proposition that Hebrews 13:3 advocates for active evangelism, diaconal ministry, compassionate ministry, and liberation ministry.

4.3.2.1 Hebrews 13:3 as a call for Prison Evangelism

The above responses suggest that Cornerstone Ministries interprets the plea "continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering" (Hebrews 13:3) as a profound call for Christians to actively spread the gospel in prisons. Given that the audience of the book of Hebrews consisted of early Jewish Christians facing persecution and challenges, they were familiar with Christ's Great Commission to spread the Gospel to all nations (Matthew 28:18-19; Mark 15:15-16). Therefore, within this historical context, Hebrews 13:3 should not only be understood as addressing their immediate concerns, such as imprisonment, but also as implying a broader mission to fulfil Christ's mandate.

In line with this thought, one of the Cornerstone Ministry Program coordinators argued:

As we strive to fulfill our mission, we must go beyond just thinking about those in prison. We are called to actively engage with them, offer support, and share the gospel, reflecting Jesus' example of reaching out to the marginalized. This approach aligns with the core of Christian evangelism, which emphasizes the importance of ministering to those in the most desperate situations and providing them with hope and redemption.

In this regard, the plea to "continue to remember those in prison" goes beyond mere remembrance; it suggests actively visiting, encouraging, and preaching the gospel to those incarcerated. This interpretation is reinforced by the broader Christian doctrine of evangelism, which emphasizes reaching out to all people, especially those in dire

circumstances. The call to remember prisoners mirrors Jesus' ministry, which consistently focused on the marginalized and those in need of redemption.

Moreover, the practical outworking of Hebrews 13:3 as a call for evangelism aligns with the actions and teachings of the early church, which often included prison ministry as part of their mission. The apostles themselves, such as Paul, frequently ministered to fellow prisoners, demonstrating that evangelism and spiritual support within prisons were integral to early Christian practice. Therefore, Hebrews 13:3 can truly be seen as a directive for Christians to engage in prison evangelism, bringing hope and spiritual renewal to those in need of healing and restoration.

4.3.2.2 Hebrews 13:3 as a call to Diaconal Prison Ministry

A critical analysis of Cornerstone Ministries' interpretation of Hebrews 13:3 suggests that the ministry views this verse as a directive for engaging in diaconal ministry, specifically towards prisoners. Diaconal ministry, rooted in the biblical concept of "diakonia," involves providing practical care and support, including addressing physical needs such as food, clothing, and hygiene, to individuals in challenging circumstances, such as prisoners.¹⁶⁷ A programs coordinator for Cornerstone ministry said:

In Hebrews 13:3, we see a clear call to diaconal ministry, which involves not just remembering prisoners but actively serving them. The verse urges us to embody Christ's love through practical support and care, which is at the heart of diaconal work. By engaging directly with prisoners, providing them with essential support, and ministering to their needs, we are fulfilling this scriptural directive and upholding the spirit of compassionate service that diaconal ministry represents.

The ministry's claim that Hebrews 13:3 is a call to diaconal ministry gains support from historical and contextual analysis, especially through examination of early Christian

¹⁶⁷ John N. Collin. A Monocultural Usage: *ὁἰαΚοῦ*- words in Classical, Hellenistic, and Patristic Sources. *Vigiliae Christianae*, 2012, Vol. 66, No. 3 (2012), pp. 287-309. Accessed from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41722493>

practices and the conditions of ancient Roman prisons. After studying Hebrews 10:34, one gets an impression that early believers used to visit fellow Christians in prison, suggests that the audience of Hebrews was already acquainted with the practice of caring for those imprisoned. This historical precedent indicates that Hebrews 13:3 likely serves as an encouragement and reinforcement of existing Christian practices rather than an introduction to the concept of prison ministry. In this case, the context of Hebrews 13:3, urging believers to "continue to remember those in prison," aligns with this historical understanding. It implies an ongoing commitment to support and care for prisoners, including practical acts of service such as visiting and providing for their needs.

Furthermore, the plea to remember prisoners not only emphasizes empathy and spiritual support but also necessitates tangible assistance to uphold their dignity and well-being. This interpretation resonates with Jesus' teachings in Matthew 25:35-36, where caring for the hungry, thirsty, and imprisoned is equated with caring for Christ himself. The early church's practice of appointing deacons in Acts 6 to oversee the fair distribution of resources among widows serves as a model for structured care within Christian communities. Therefore, Hebrews 13:3 can be rightly understood as a directive for believers to engage in diaconal ministry by actively visiting and supporting prisoners, thereby fulfilling the biblical command to bear one another's burdens and demonstrate Christ-like love (Galatians 6:2).

Moreover, a reference to life in ancient Roman prisons further justifies the claim that Hebrews 13:3 is a call for diaconal ministry to prisoners. Unlike modern Western prisons where inmates generally receive basic necessities from the government, as Richard Balge pointed out, ancient prisoners relied entirely on external support for survival.¹⁶⁸ Thus, the absence of visitors often meant severe deprivation, starvation, and mental distress. In this regard, Christian visits played a critical role in meeting prisoners' physical needs for food, clothing, and basic provisions for survival.

¹⁶⁸ Richard D. Balge. Walls in history: A historical perspective on prison ministry. Paper presented at the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Prison Ministry Seminar, Milwaukee, WI. January, 1988, p. 2.

Consequently, considering the early church's practices and the socio-economic conditions of ancient Roman prisons, Hebrews 13:3, as understood by Cornerstone Ministries, truly presents a call to diaconal ministry modelled in Acts 6, where the early church appointed "*διδάκονοι*" (deacons) to address the practical needs of the community, such as ensuring the fair distribution of food to widows, and those in need, including those in captivity. This included distribution of food, clothing, and essential provisions necessary for survival. Similarly, the call in Hebrews 13:3 can be seen as a directive for believers to serve prisoners by providing for their essential needs, such as food, clothing, and personal care items, thereby embodying the love and humility of Christ in their diaconal ministry. This understanding not only enriches the theological discourse on Christian service but also underscores the timeless relevance of Hebrews 13:3 in guiding contemporary diaconal practices within the church.

4.3.2.3 Hebrews 13:3 as a call for Compassionate Prison Ministry

Cornerstone Prison Ministry understands that a plea in Hebrews 13:3 to "continue to remember those in prison" is framed within the broader context of *φιλαδελφία* (Philadelphia), which is a Greek word meaning "brotherly love" or "sisterly love." Such being the case, within the scope of Philadelphia love, the ministry believes that the author of Hebrews reminds Christians to exhibit compassion towards one another akin to the care shown by biological siblings. It is interesting how this thought was reflected in a prisoner's remarks during the closing of the Zomba Central Prison evangelism campaign:

I believe it is important to remember that us, prisoners, are your brothers and sisters in Christ. This perspective should deeply influence your commitment to remembering us with the gospel. Your coming and the gifts we share with us is an expression of our shared brotherhood and sisterhood in Christ but also a way of showing compassion to one another as members of the same spiritual family.

This understanding aligns with Anna M. Galeniece's thought that "true compassion, as a form of love, is an attitude of sincere care and genuine concern, which manifests itself

when confronted with those who suffer or are vulnerable.”¹⁶⁹ This kind of compassion calls for a deep empathy and willingness to share in the sorrow of another who is suffering, enabling one to sensitively understand their world of pain and hardship. This interconnectedness highlights that true Christian discipleship involves a love that transcends social or societal boundaries and reaches out to all. In this regard, Hebrews 13:3 should truly be understood as a clear call for Christians to engage in a compassionate ministry, particularly towards those who are in prison and facing adversity.

4.3.2.4 Hebrews 13:3 as a call for Liberation Prison Ministry

Cornerstone SDA prison Ministry’s understanding of Hebrews 13:3 suggests that the call to "remember those in prison" expresses a profound call to liberation ministry to prisoners within the Christian context. One ministry official disclosed: “we view Hebrews 13:3 as a directive to actively engage with prisoners, offering them both spiritual support and practical assistance. This approach reflects our commitment to Christ’s teachings, which include a strong emphasis on caring for the poor and marginalized.” This understanding resonates deeply with a theological concept of “Preferential Option for the Poor”, a form of liberation theology that emphasizes the moral obligation to prioritize the needs and dignity of the poor and vulnerable in ethical decision-making and church practices. The "option for the poor" is rooted in the belief that God has a special love and concern for the poor and marginalized. As a result, Christians are called to reflect this divine love by actively working to alleviate poverty, injustice, and inequality in society. As Surmiak noted, the Preferential Option for the Poor is not merely ideological or political but a practical expression of faith, rooted in Christ's example of identifying with the poor (2 Corinthians 8:9).¹⁷⁰

Additionally, the Preferential Option for the Poor entails engaging in dialogue with and listening to those living in poverty, sharing in their suffering, and serving as a "voice for

¹⁶⁹ Anna M. Galeniece. Compassionate Ministry: Christological and Practical Reflections. Journal of the Adventist Theological Society, 30/1-2 (2019): 117-132. 2019, p. 117. Andrews University.
<https://www.atsjats.org/compassionate-ministry-christological-and-practicalreflections.pdf>

¹⁷⁰ Surmiak, W. (2019). The preferential option for the poor as an expression of social love "Studia Pastoralne" (Nr 15 (2019), s. 242-253). <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340256420>

the voiceless" in communities.¹⁷¹ In line with this perspective, F.F. Bruce highlighted that Hebrews 13:1-3 encourages the church to practice brotherly love, hospitality, and kindness, especially towards those experiencing imprisonment and injustice.¹⁷² For Bruce, these virtues align with the established ethical teachings of the church. Therefore, Hebrews 13:3 may be understood as advocating for Christian virtues aimed at liberating and supporting the oppressed and marginalized, fostering a community of compassion and justice within the church. This understanding affirms that Hebrews 13:3 serves as a call to liberation ministry, urging believers to actively engage in advocacy, compassion, and practical support for those in need of liberation and justice.

Moreover, understanding Hebrews 13:3 as a call to Liberation Ministry aligns with Jesus' ministry as described in Luke 4:18, where he proclaimed freedom for the prisoners among other acts of liberation. This entails that by engaging in prison ministry, Christians participate in Christ's mission of liberation, seeking to restore human dignity and promote justice in society. In this respect, the researcher endorses Sandie Pounder's view that prison ministry should be seen as integral to the liberation theology framework.¹⁷³ This is primarily because Prison Ministry, exemplified by Cornerstone SDA's Prison Ministry, advocates for the liberation from physical and psychological distress of individuals oppressed by incarceration. It nurtures hope amid confinement and champions justice by addressing inequities within the criminal justice system. This interpretation encourages Christians to not only provide spiritual and material support to prisoners but also to work towards societal transformation that upholds human rights.

4.3.3 Intersection Between Hebrews 13:1-3 and Matthew 25:35-40

The intersection between Matthew 25:35-40 and Hebrews 13:1-3 reveals profound insights into the Christian call to compassionate and liberation ministry, particularly towards the marginalized and imprisoned. Matthew 25:35-40, often referred to as the Parable of the

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² F.F. Bruce, "Hebrews" in Peake's Commentary on The Bible. Matthew Black & Rowley, H.H. (Eds.). Routledge, New York. 2009.

¹⁷³ Sadie Cantone, Pounder. 2008. "Prison Theology: a Theology of Liberation, Hope and Justice." Dialog 47, no. 3: 278-291.

Sheep and Goats, highlights Jesus' identification with the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, and imprisoned, stating that serving them equates to serving Him. This passage calls believers to embody a radical inclusivity and compassion, transcending societal barriers to care for those in need. In parallel, Hebrews 13:1-3 urges Christians to remember and support those in prison, emphasizing a diaconal ministry that includes practical care, evangelism, and advocacy for justice.

Both passages emphasize the ethical imperative of loving one's neighbour as oneself, grounded in the recognition of every individual's inherent worth and dignity. Matthew 25:35-40 prompts believers to see the face of Christ in those often marginalized or forgotten by society, compelling them to act with empathy and solidarity. This aligns closely with the principles of Liberation Theology, which prioritize the liberation and empowerment of the poor and oppressed. Hebrews 13:1-3 further reinforces this mandate by pleading with believers "let brotherly love continue". Hebrews 13:1-3 also highlights the Christian duty to engage in compassionate ministry that addresses both the spiritual and physical needs of prisoners.

Further than that, Matthew 25:35-40 alongside Hebrews 13:1-3 practically guide ministries like Cornerstone SDA Prison Ministry, which actively engages in prison outreach based on these biblical mandates. They view their work as an expression of faithfulness to Christ's teachings in Matthew 25 and the exhortation in Hebrews to remember and minister to those in prison. This holistic approach includes providing spiritual nourishment through evangelism, meeting basic physical needs through diaconal service, and advocating for justice to uphold the dignity and rights of prisoners.

In this regard, the intersection between Matthew 25:35-40 and Hebrews 13:1-3 provides a robust scriptural foundation for prison ministry, emphasizing both the compassionate mandate to care for the marginalized and the specific call to remember and support those in prison. Matthew 25:35-40 reveals Jesus' identification with the hungry, thirsty, stranger, sick, and imprisoned, framing acts of compassion towards them as direct service to Him. This passage underscores the spiritual imperative for Christians to engage in transformative

ministry that addresses the holistic needs of prisoners. Hebrews 13:1-3 further reinforces this mandate by urging believers to show hospitality, remember prisoners, and empathize with those facing adversity. Together, these passages outline a comprehensive framework for prison ministry that integrates spiritual care, practical support, and advocacy for justice. This biblical foundation not only guides the theological rationale behind prison ministry but also sets the stage for understanding its profound impact on individuals, communities, and society at large.

Consequently, Cornerstone Prison Ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church's use of Matthew 25:35-40 and Hebrews 13:1-3 as scriptural foundations for prison ministry is not only justified but also deeply rooted in theological principles of compassion, justice, and solidarity with the marginalized. Matthew 25:35-40 portrays Jesus identifying Himself intimately with the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, and imprisoned, proclaiming that acts of mercy towards them are acts of service to Him. This passage underscores the mandate for Christians to engage actively in compassionate ministry, especially towards those in dire circumstances like prisoners. Similarly, Hebrews 13:1-3 calls believers to remember and support those in prison, emphasizing empathy and practical care for the incarcerated. Both passages align with the SDA's mission to uphold human dignity, advocate for justice, and offer spiritual and material support to those in need, reflecting Christ's commandment to love one another as He has loved us. Therefore, Cornerstone Ministry's integration of Matthew 25:35-40 and Hebrews 13:1-3 into their prison ministry is not only theological but also practical, guiding their efforts to serve and uplift the marginalized in accordance with biblical teachings.

4.4 Anticipated Impact of Cornerstone Ministries' Programs on Prisoners

With reference to the Ministry Officials, Cornerstone Ministries embarks on a mission to bring hope and transformation to inmates through their comprehensive monthly two-week public evangelism programs in prisons. Their holistic approach, which includes public preaching and donation of items such as footwear, Bibles, religious literature, soap, blankets and or clothing, aims not only to meet the spiritual needs of the prisoners but also

to address their physical and emotional well-being. One of the Directors of the ministry comprehensively outlined:

The expected outcomes of our programs are quite comprehensive. First, we aim for Spiritual Awakening and Conversion, helping individuals find a renewed sense of faith. We also focus on Psychological and Emotional Benefits, providing support to improve mental well-being. Social Reintegration and Behavior Change are key goals, as we strive to help prisoners reintegrate into society with positive behavioral shifts. Additionally, our programs encourage Prisoners' Community Building, fostering a sense of unity and mutual support. Lastly, we emphasize Ethical and Moral Development, guiding individuals towards a more principled and responsible way of living.

The above response implies that the Ministry's programs aim to have a multifaceted impact on the conversion and overall transformation of prisoners. The ministry's prison evangelism programs are designed to effect profound changes in prisoners' lives such as: (1) Spiritual Awakening and Conversion, (2) Psychological and Emotional Benefits, (3) Social Reintegration and Behaviour Change, (4) Prisoners' Community Building, and (5) Ethical and Moral Development.

4.4.1 Spiritual Awakening and Conversion

Cornerstone Prison Ministry's main goal is to help prisoners find spiritual renewal through their programs. The ministry carefully plans events like powerful sermons, lively worship services, and personal testimonies to introduce inmates to Christianity. They also make sure prisoners have Bibles and other religious books so they can keep learning and thinking about Christian teachings even after the events are over. This ongoing access to spiritual resources is key to their mission of bringing lasting change to prisoners' lives. Director of International Programs for the ministry highlighted this approach during a donation event at Mikuyu Prison, stating:

We believe that through sermons and providing access to God's Word and sharing the Gospel message, prisoners can experience profound

spiritual transformation. Our mission is not only to bring hope and redemption to those incarcerated but also to facilitate a journey towards spiritual renewal and a deeper relationship with God.

This statement exemplifies a proactive strategy in prison ministry focused on spiritual transformation through public proclamation, accessibility to religious scriptures, and active evangelism. The statement also implies that Central to their mission is the promotion of spiritual growth and renewal, equipping prisoners with the necessary tools for personal transformation and fostering a positive outlook beyond their current circumstances. In this respect, the ministry anticipates a spiritual awakening, renewal and genuine conversion of prisoners who undergo their evangelism programs.

4.4.2 Psychological and Emotional Benefits

Cornerstone Prison Ministry anticipate that its impact would extend beyond spiritual conversion to encompass psychological and emotional rehabilitation. An official of Cornerstone Ministries said:

We hope to see prisoners free from stress, anxiety, and the emotional burdens that come with incarceration. This is why we provide comprehensive support through spiritual guidance, emotional counseling, and practical assistance to help them navigate their personal journeys towards healing and transformation.

This statement suggests that the ministry understands that the experience of imprisonment can be dehumanizing, stripping individuals of their dignity and self-worth. Therefore, the ministry takes a practical missionary approach, which is a strategy or methodology employed by missionaries that focuses on addressing both the spiritual and tangible needs of the communities they serve.¹⁷⁴ This approach integrates evangelism with social and practical services, aiming to make a meaningful impact on individuals' lives through holistic support. For example, the ministry meets basic needs of prisoners by donating

¹⁷⁴ Ott, Craig, Stephen J. Strauss, and Timothy C. Tennent. *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues*. Baker Academic, 2010.

footwear, soap, and clothing. This serves as tangible expressions of care and concern, reminding prisoners that they are not forgotten and that their lives matter.

4.4.3 Social Reintegration and Behaviour Change

The ultimate goal of prison ministry is not just the conversion of individuals but their complete rehabilitation and reintegration into society.¹⁷⁵ Cornerstone Ministries' prison programs are designed to play a crucial role in this process. They are aimed to establish a supportive religious community within the prison that can foster positive peer relationships and accountability. Moreover, the values taught through SDA's Cornerstone Evangelism programs such as forgiveness, compassion, and personal responsibility, can lead to significant behaviour change. In this regard, the ministry anticipates that Prisoners who undergo conversion will exhibit improved behaviour, both during their incarceration and after their release. This transformation can reduce recidivism rates, as former inmates are less likely to revert to criminal activities when they have a strong moral foundation and a supportive community to rely on.

4.4.4 Community Building Among Prisoners

Knowing that Prison environments are often characterized by isolation, mistrust, and a lack of social cohesion, Cornerstone prison ministry activities are designed to serve as a beacon of hope, creating opportunities for inmates to connect and build supportive networks. For example, religious activities such as worship services, prayer groups, and Bible study sessions bring inmates together in a communal setting, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual support. These shared experiences would help inmates develop bonds with one another, reducing feelings of isolation and building a supportive community within the prison walls.

4.4.5 Ethical and Moral Development of Prisoners

The ethical and moral development of inmates is a central goal of prison ministry, particularly for Cornerstone Ministries. Religious teachings often emphasize moral values

¹⁷⁵ Thomas, Jim, and Barbara H. Zaitzow. "Conning or Conversion? The Role of Religion in Prison Coping." *The Prison Journal*, vol. 86, no. 2, 2006, pp. 242-259.

such as honesty, compassion, forgiveness, and respect for others.¹⁷⁶ These values provide inmates with a moral compass, guiding their behaviour and decision-making processes. Consequently, Cornerstone Prison Ministry anticipate that regular exposure to their programs would help inmates to internalize these values, fostering ethical development and encouraging inmates to lead more responsible lives. By promoting self-reflection, prayer, meditation, and the study of religious texts, inmates are prompted to self-examination encourages accountability and a desire to make amends, which are critical steps in moral development.

4.5 Religious Engagement and Plurality in Malawian prisons

Upon entering most Malawian Prisons on weekends, a rich evidence of religious pluralism and high level of religious participation is immediately observed. Majority of inmates actively engage in diverse religious activities, ranging from daily devotional prayers to observing the month of Ramadan for Muslim inmates. In some central prisons, weekends bring a vibrant atmosphere filled with noisy rhythmic beats of African drums, praise and worship songs, and congregational gatherings, fostering an atmosphere of spiritual enthusiasm and communal celebration. Moreover, in some maximum prisons, visual indicators such as mosques, Rastafarian shrines, spaces for traditional dances like Gule wa Mkulu and existence of religious attires such as robes and *Tahiyah* (rounded hats worn by Muslim men) highlight the strong presence of religious pluralism inside the prison.

In addition, amid the religious diversity, some inmates congregate in an open space. These open-air shrines with boundary lines often labelled with flour, ashes, stones and rocks, are adorned with signposts bearing messages such as "*Malo Opatulika*" (Holy place)", "*Malo Oyeretsedwa*" (Sacred place), "*Kachisi wa Mulungu*" (God's temple). Usually such signposts are accompanied by inscriptions restricting perceived bad behaviours, practices and activities such as "*Osasutira apa*" and "*Osakodza apa*" (Do not smoke or urinate here). These visual reminders play a significant role in encouraging respect for the sanctity

¹⁷⁶ Wilson, Lindsay A., and James L. Durling. "Faith Behind Bars: Examining the Effect of Faith-Based Programs on Offender Outcomes." *Journal of Church and State*, vol. 48, no. 3, 2006, pp. 611-630.

of these spaces and promoting a sense of reverence and dignity within the prison environment.

However, despite religious plurality, it is worthy to note that majority of inmates are Christians, representing various denominations such as Roman Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, and Church of Central African Presbyterian (CCAP), among many others. While this may lead some to conclude that Christians are more involved in crime, it primarily reflects the prevalence of religiosity in Malawi where, according to the recent Malawi Housing and Population Census, 77.3% are Christians, 13.8% Muslims, and the remainder belonging to other faiths such as Hindus, African traditional religions, and Atheism.¹⁷⁷ Therefore, the fact that majority of inmates in most Malawian Prisons are religious, underscores the continued influence of religion in Malawian society and the psycho-social significance of religion on people, including prisoners in Malawi.

4.5.1 Inmates' perspective on the significance of religion during Incarceration

To comprehensively evaluate the impact of SDA's Cornerstone prison ministry on prisoners in Malawi, it is imperative to first understand the broader prison situation and the level of religious participation among inmates within Malawian prisons. Prisons are complex environments characterized by a diverse array of cultural, social, and religious backgrounds among inmates, which significantly influence their needs and receptivity to various programs. Therefore, without a thorough grasp of these dynamics, any assessment of a specific organization's efforts risks being insincere. Such being the case, before evaluating the spiritual and psychological impact of Cornerstone Ministries programs on prisoners, it was crucial to gather information directly from the prisoners themselves. This included understanding (1) Common Prisoners' mental health problems and underlying causes, (2) the extent of prisoners' participation in religious activities, and (3) the motivation of prisoners' participation in SDA's Cornerstone Prison Ministry Programs.

¹⁷⁷ National Statistical Office (NSO). (2018). *Malawi Population and Housing Census Main Report*. National Statistical Office, Malawi. May 2019.

4.5.2 Motives of Inmates' Participation in Religious Activities

Understanding the motivations behind inmates' participation in religious activities is crucial for a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of SDA's Cornerstone Prison Ministry. The researcher's thematic analysis of data from prisoners themselves revealed that, in Malawian prisons, religious activities offer more than spiritual fulfillment. They provide a sense of community, emotional support, and hope, help manage feelings of shame and guilt, and meet prisoners' material needs. Consequently, the motivations for prisoners' overwhelming participation on SDA's Cornerstone Prison Ministry Activities may be attributed to several reasons discussed below.

4.5.2.1 Spiritual Conviction and Search for Redemption

Many prisoners view religious activities as a profound means to seek spiritual guidance, redemption, and transformation, especially in the harsh and isolating environment of incarceration. For those grappling with the consequences of their actions, religion offers a way to confront guilt and regret while providing hope for a new beginning. Participation in religious services often becomes an avenue for inmates to search for meaning and inner peace, which may have been absent in their lives before imprisonment. Moreover, the desire for personal change and spiritual growth drives many prisoners to immerse themselves in religious teachings, prayers, and rituals, as these practices offer a sense of connection to a higher power and an opportunity to realign their lives with moral and spiritual principles. For them, joining the church represents more than just attending services - it is a conscious step toward self-reformation and spiritual renewal.

One of the most compelling motivations for this engagement is the pursuit of forgiveness. Many prisoners feel a deep need to be forgiven for their past wrongs, not only by God but also by themselves. One prisoner stated; *"I want to be forgiven for my sins and start a new life. Joining the church helps me connect with God and find peace."* This highlights longing for absolution and the hope that spiritual practices will allow them to shed the weight of guilt. Religion, in this context, serves as a path toward reconciliation with their past and a way to envision a future that is not defined by their crimes. It provides prisoners with a framework for healing and personal transformation, helping them believe that

despite their incarceration, they can still embark on a journey toward a better self, filled with renewed purpose and spiritual clarity.

4.5.2.2 Coping with Shame and Guilt

Religion provides a vital framework for addressing the profound sense of guilt and shame that accompanies the crimes committed by inmates. The structured rituals and teachings of religion offer a way for individuals to confront their past actions and seek a path to reconciliation with both themselves and their spiritual beliefs. For many prisoners, engaging in religious practices becomes a means of processing their remorse and finding solace in the promise of redemption. Through activities such as prayer, confession, and worship, inmates are able to explore and express their feelings of regret while seeking divine forgiveness and personal absolution. A prisoner at Mangochi Prison shared this perspective, stating:

When I attend the services, I feel a burden lifted. The weight of my past mistakes seems to lessen, and for a moment, I experience a sense of peace that is rare in this place. I know I've done wrong, but hearing the messages of forgiveness helps me believe that I can be forgiven, even here. It's as if each sermon and prayer offers me a chance to release my guilt and start anew. The sense of hope and the possibility of redemption that religion provides give me strength to face each day with renewed purpose and a lighter heart.

This comment illustrates how religious participation provides emotional relief and a sense of atonement, offering a powerful counterbalance to the weight of guilt. The assurance of forgiveness and the opportunity for spiritual renewal encourage inmates to remain engaged in religious activities, as they find in them a source of comfort and hope. This ongoing involvement is often driven by the belief that through their faith, they can achieve a form of redemption and move toward a more positive and transformed self.

4.5.2.3 Social and Emotional Support

For many inmates, the communal aspect of religious activities offers a crucial support system in the otherwise isolating environment of prison. The prison setting often

exacerbates feelings of loneliness and detachment from the outside world, creating an emotional void that is difficult to fill. In this context, religious gatherings provide a rare opportunity for inmates to connect with others on a meaningful level. The shared experiences of prayer, worship, and communal reflection foster a sense of belonging and emotional comfort that is otherwise hard to come by in such a restrictive environment. Inmates frequently describe these gatherings as more than just religious services; they view them as moments of genuine connection and camaraderie that help mitigate the pervasive isolation of incarceration.

This sentiment is clearly articulated by one inmate who remarked:

In church, we are like a family. When I sing and pray with others, I don't feel alone. The shared moments of worship and fellowship create bonds that are deeply comforting, making the days in prison a little easier to bear. We support each other through tough times and celebrate small victories together, which helps to build a sense of unity and belonging. It's a rare source of emotional strength and connection in a place where such experiences are hard to come by.

Such statements underscore the profound impact that religious community can have on an inmate's emotional well-being. The collective nature of religious activities not only provides a support network but also reinforces a sense of unity and shared purpose. This sense of community plays a significant role in helping inmates manage the mental strain of imprisonment, offering them both comfort and strength. By engaging in these communal practices, prisoners find a way to navigate the emotional challenges of their confinement and experience a sense of solidarity and mutual support that is essential for their mental health.

4.5.2.4 Seeking Favour or Manipulative Intentions

It was also revealed that some inmates participate in religious activities for more strategic reasons, such as gaining favour with prison authorities or securing better treatment or

material gain from religious institutions. For these individuals, the motive may not be spiritual but rather pragmatic. An inmate at Mikuyu 1 Prison admitted:

The church visits us often, and the officers treat us better when we attend the service. So, I make sure I don't miss the services. Besides the spiritual uplift, there are practical benefits too; during church visits, we often receive essential items like food, clothing, and soap that help improve our daily lives. These tangible supports make a significant difference in our well-being, and it's motivating to attend the services not only for spiritual reasons but also for the material assistance we receive. Additionally, being a member of the SDA church provides us with a unique advantage; we are exempted from working on the farms during Sartudays (Sabbath hours). This exemption is a significant benefit, as it not only allows us to observe our religious practices but also offers a reprieve from the physically demanding work.

The above statement reflects the possibility of inmates using religion as a strategic tool to enhance their standing or conditions within the prison environment. In the context of incarceration, where resources and privileges are limited and often highly coveted, participating in religious activities can offer practical advantages beyond spiritual benefits. For some inmates, engaging in religious practices is a way to gain favour with prison authorities, improve their relationships with staff, and potentially access better living conditions or additional resources. Moreover, majority of prisoners participate in religious activities because, in prisons, religious involvement of is associated with benefits, such as receiving food, clothing, and other necessities during church visits,

Additionally, in some prisons like Mikuyu 1, inmates who are regular members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are often granted exemptions from certain duties, such as working on the farms during Saturdays, the Sabbath. This exemption serves as a substantial practical benefit, allowing inmates to observe their religious practices while avoiding the physically demanding labor typically required of them.

Furthermore, inmates who are actively engaged in religious activities may be perceived more favorably by prison staff, potentially leading to more lenient treatment or increased opportunities within the prison system. This creates a situation where religion is leveraged not only for spiritual enrichment but also for tangible improvements in one's quality of life in an otherwise challenging environment. Thus, while the spiritual aspects of religious participation are crucial, the practical benefits, including work exemptions and material support, play a significant role in motivating inmates to engage in these activities.

4.5.2.5 Mental Health and Psychological Resilience

Religion often serves as a psychological coping mechanism, providing inmates with hope and a sense of purpose amid harsh prison conditions. Participation in religious activities may be driven by the need to manage stress, depression, or anxiety. One inmate explained:

Praying helps me calm down. The act of prayer provides a moment of respite from the constant pressures and anxieties of prison life. When I am stressed, I come to the church service seeking solace and guidance, and the process of engaging in prayer and reflection helps me to center myself. The structured time for spiritual connection offers a brief but profound escape from the stress and tension that often dominate my days. After participating in the service, I leave feeling a renewed sense of inner peace and emotional stability. The sense of calm I experience is not only a temporary relief but also a source of ongoing strength that helps me manage my daily struggles. It's as if the act of praying and being in a communal space dedicated to spiritual reflection provides a sanctuary from the chaos of incarceration, allowing me to face each day with greater resilience and a clearer mind.

This suggests that the calming effect of religious practices is a significant motivator for inmates struggling with mental health challenges. It underscores the profound emotional and psychological impact that religious practices can have on inmates. By altering such sentiments, the inmate revealed how prayer serves as a vital coping mechanism in the high-stress environment of prison, providing inmates with a structured way to manage their

anxiety and emotional turmoil. The act of prayer and participation in church services offer not just a temporary distraction but a meaningful form of solace and mental respite. This implies that religion can play a crucial role in helping individuals navigate the challenges of incarceration by fostering emotional stability and resilience. Observably, for some inmates, religious practices are essential for maintaining psychological balance and finding moments of tranquility amid the pressures of prison life.

4.5.2.6 Desire for Identity Renewal

For a fraction of inmates, religion provides a profound opportunity to redefine their identities and reshape their personal narratives. Imprisonment often carries a heavy stigma, marking individuals with a label of criminality that can overshadow their sense of self-worth and potential for change. In this context, embracing a religious identity allows prisoners to challenge and transcend this negative label. By engaging in religious practices, they adopt a new identity that is centred around spiritual growth and moral renewal, rather than past transgressions. A statement by an inmate convicted of murder in Zomba Central prison alludes to this:

I used to be known for the bad things I did, and that label followed me everywhere. But now, since I've joined the church, people here call me brother in Christ. It's as if I've been given a new name and a new chance. I feel like I'm becoming someone better, and my past no longer defines who I am.

This illustrates how religion can facilitate a significant shift in self-perception. By participating in religious activities and embracing spiritual teachings, inmates find a way to distance themselves from their former identities and forge a new path toward personal transformation. Religion thus becomes a catalyst for positive change, motivating inmates to engage more deeply in their faith as they strive to become better individuals. This shift not only helps them cope with the challenges of imprisonment but also inspires them to envision and work towards a more hopeful and redemptive future.

4.5.3 Therapeutic effect of Cornerstone Prison Ministry on Inmates' mental Health problems

4.5.3.1 Common Mental Health Issues and Underlying Causes

In line with the Malawi 2023 Human Rights Report by the US Department of State¹⁷⁸, the study found that problems of serious overcrowding, poor sanitation, insufficient food, and prisoner abuse were visibly common in most Malawian Prisons. Furthermore, it was found that inmates commonly struggle with various mental health issues, including depression, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and substance abuse disorders. Based on responses from inmates, the main underlying causes of stress and mental health problems among inmates in Malawi include a harsh prison environment with limited freedoms, grossly overcrowded cells with no proper sleeping space and bedding, shortage of food and proper diet, water stoppages, and lack of footwear. For example, one inmate said:

I'm always worried because we only get one meal a day, and sometimes we go up to four days without food. The cells are highly overcrowded such that I spend the whole night standing. I also have to use the toilet without shoes or slippers, and I don't have any relative who can bring me food or provide me with footwear.

The above response highlights the detrimental impact of inadequate food provision, severe overcrowding, and lack of basic necessities like footwear as contributing factors to heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and deprivation among inmates in Malawian prisons. Additionally, prolonged detention without trial is a harsh reality for some inmates across Malawian prisons, leading to heightened stress, worry, and a significant decline in their hope and mental well-being. A zealously religious detainee accused of murder decried uncertainty and lack of resolution on his case as a major cause of stress, depression and anxiety. He narrated:

¹⁷⁸ U.S. Department of State. *Malawi 2023 human rights report: Country reports on human rights practices for 2023*. United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. (2023). https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/528267_MALAWI-2023-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf

I have been here for two years now, but the judge has not concluded my case. I am always stressed and worried when I think about my family and the uncertainty of my future. The long wait is unbearable, and it feels like my life is in limbo. Sometimes, the only thing that keeps me going is the support I find in the religious community here.

This highlights the critical role that religious support plays in providing emotional stability and a sense of hope amid the psychological turmoil caused by prolonged legal uncertainties. As religious coping theory suggests, faith-based support systems can mitigate the negative impacts of severe stress by fostering a sense of control, hope, and connectedness.¹⁷⁹ This sense of spiritual solace serves as a lifeline for inmates struggling with the anxiety and despair of indefinite incarceration.

4.5.3.2 Religious Communities and Inmates' Well-being

In Malawian prisons, religious participation among inmates is often driven by a deep-seated desire to be part of a supportive community that can enhance their overall well-being. The presence of religious communities, such as those organized by the Seventh-day Adventist's Cornerstone Prison Ministry, fosters a culture of togetherness and mutual support within the prison environment. This collective spirit not only reinforces the idea of interconnectedness but also aligns with the African Umunthu/Ubuntu philosophy, which emphasizes cooperation, mutual aid, and the sense that individuals are integral parts of a larger whole. Religious activities within these walls act as a unifying force, bringing together inmates from diverse tribal, cultural, and criminal backgrounds. This integration helps cultivate a sense of belonging and companionship among prisoners, transforming the prison into a space where shared faith becomes a cornerstone of their community life. For example, one inmate reflected on his experience:

When I was sentenced to six years' imprisonment here, I felt very worried and stressed. I became depressed, especially when I thought about the

¹⁷⁹ Ano, G. G., & Vasconcelles, E. B. (2005). Religious Coping and Psychological Adjustment to Stress: A Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 61(4), 461–480. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.20049>

distance that made it difficult for my relatives to visit me. However, after joining the church, I felt at home.

This statement highlights the profound impact that religious involvement can have on an inmate's sense of belonging and emotional well-being. Similarly, another inmate remarked:

Here in prison, we describe orphans and unmarried as those who do not participate in religious activities because religion serves as our family, providing us with emotional support, companionship, and a sense of belonging in the absence of our biological families.

This underscores the role of religious communities in filling the emotional void left by the absence of biological family connections. The importance of community, particularly for those with mental health challenges, is further emphasized by an inmate who stated: “My doctor advised me to avoid isolation and loneliness by participating in social and religious activities. He said that these interactions would control my mood, reduce feelings of loneliness, and combat depression and anxiety.”

These insights demonstrate that religion, and specifically the SDA’s Cornerstone Prison Ministry, provides a structured system that offers emotional support, social interaction, and a sense of belonging. This aligns with findings by Rustamov and Kamchybekova, who note that religious participation creates a sense of community characterized by connection and shared experiences, which is crucial for reducing stress and mitigating loneliness.¹⁸⁰ The strong sense of community within religious activities promotes mental well-being and resilience among inmates. Thus, the presence and active participation in religious programs at Kazembe Central Prison contribute significantly to enhancing the psychological well-being of inmates, offering them not only spiritual guidance but also a supportive and cohesive environment to thrive in despite the challenges of incarceration.

¹⁸⁰ D. Rustamova, & M. Kamchybekova, (2023). The Influence of Religion on Loneliness in Modern Society. *Bulletin of Science and Practice* 9(12):333-339. DOI:10.33619/24142948/97/46.

4.5.3.3 Religion as a Source of Hope, Resilience and Emotional support.

It was also observed that some prisoners participate in religious activities such as those by SDA's Cornerstone Prison Ministry because religion serves as a crucial anchor for inmates, providing them with emotional support, a sense of peace, and a foundation of hope during their incarceration. Prisoners revealed that through daily prayers, religious revival meetings, and the companionship of fellow believers, inmates find stability and solace. Thus, SDA's prison revival meetings serve this purpose by offering a structured environment where inmates can experience emotional healing, spiritual growth, and a renewed sense of purpose, helping them to endure the challenges of prison life with greater resilience and hope.

Additionally, belief in a caring and watchful God, alongside biblical teachings that emphasize the concept of a divine plan for their future, motivates inmates to participate in religious activities. The study found that a fraction of inmates actively participates in religious programs because they believe that, in their situation, only God can take care of them and has a divine plan for their future. This belief offers comfort and helps inmates endure daily struggles. Moreover, stories of biblical figures like Joseph and Paul, who faced imprisonment and become successful and influential, serve as powerful sources of inspiration. An inmate serving a life sentenced narrated how he manages his stress:

Religion has been my anchor during my time here. Participating in daily prayers and attending religious services gives me peace and stability. Whenever I feel overwhelmed by anxiety or despair, I turn to prayer, reading of scriptures, singing religious songs and seeking support from my fellow inmates who share my faith.

Amplifying the above response, another inmate said:

Knowing that there is a God who cares and watches over me gives me comfort and hope, making it easier to get through each day. In my incarceration, I am much encouraged by Jeremiah 11:29 which reads 'For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Likewise, another detainee who claimed to have been serving as a church pastor before he was convicted joyously said:

I find encouragement on the fact that several people in the Bible were imprisoned. Joseph was imprisoned, kept his faith and rose to authority, and Paul wrote impactful letters from prison. Their stories give me hope and strength. I believe I am here as part of ongoing God's training on me.

Furthermore, religious participation offers inmates a social capital for emotional, psychological, and material support in the challenging prison environment. For instance, the researcher observed that each religious denomination is assigned a dedicated cell for its leaders to assist those in need. In these cells, inmates not only seek solace and hope but also establish networks and meaningful relationships to navigate prison challenges together. These networks and cells are significant during illness, food shortages and serve as temporary homes for new inmates awaiting allocation to common cells. Therefore, within Malawian correctional facility, religion acts as a vital social salve, offering crucial social capital for emotional and psychological support amidst the challenges of prison life.

4.5.3.4 Cornerstone Ministry as Tool for Shame Management and Peace Cultivation Among Inmates

The study also established that inmates, behind bars of many Malawian prisons, turn to religion to manage their shame and begin a new life. In prison environment where feelings of shame and guilt are prevalent due to past actions and societal judgment, religious practices such as baptism and sacrament of penance or confession offer powerful means of managing and alleviating these burdens. Therefore, knowing that SDA's revival meetings conclude with a baptism ceremony, inmates are motivated to participate and get baptized as a way of managing their shame.

Consequently, hundreds of inmates are baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a way of rebirth. For instance, asked why he chose to be baptized by immersion, one inmate serving a 14 years sentence for defiling a minor said: *"Through baptism, as the bible says,*

I will wash away my sins and begin a new chapter. This sense of renewal will help me cultivate a greater sense of inner peace." This implies that the feeling of guilt of the past mistakes or crimes causes inner regrets which leads to psychological distress and anxiety.

However, although SDA leaders believe that inmates get baptized as a way of joining the church, the study noted that a fraction of inmates choose to be baptism through the SDA Church because their baptismal service is free of charge compared to other churches that require a fee for baptism. These inmates seek baptism primarily to manage their shame, clear their dirt history and experience a sense of renewal. Despite being baptized by the SDA, they often remain members of their respective churches both in prison and after their release. This suggests that the motivation for participating in SDA baptism ceremonies is driven more by practical considerations and the need for emotional healing rather than a desire to switch religious affiliations.

Nonetheless, a fraction of inmates in prisons highlighted the dual nature of SDA's messages in their lives. While they acknowledged the comfort and encouragement the messages often provide, they also expressed how these messages contributed to their psychological distress. Specifically, inmates mentioned feeling overwhelmed by sermons that emphasized concepts such as sin, guilt, and eternal damnation. Moreover, SDA's emphasis on themes like the "Mark of the Beast (666)" exacerbates prisoners' distress and psychological unrest, intensifying their feelings of fear and uncertainty about their spiritual fate. One inmate disclosed: "Some sermons are more of a condemnation on us, not sermons of love. I am worried that the sin I committed will lead me to hell, and it weighs heavily on my mind as I struggle to find peace and redemption within these prison walls."



Figure 5: Baptism ceremony of Inmates after completion of a two-weeks Cornerstone Ministries' prison Evangelism program

4.5.3.5 Cornerstone Prison Ministry: A Conduit for Meeting Inmates' Material Needs

Within Malawian prisons, Religion serves as a conduit for meeting the material needs of some inmates. Knowing that beyond its spiritual dimensions, SDA's Cornerstone Ministries often provide practical assistance such as food, soap, footwear, clothing, transport funds upon release and other essential resources, a fraction of inmates actively participate in the ministry's prison programs hoping that they will get their material needs. The study also noted that inmates who uses religion as a conduit for their material needs are willing to join any religious organization that looks materially promising. Therefore, SDA's Cornerstone Prison Programs are characterized by overwhelming support because most prisoners use religion as a conduit of material needs. One female chaplain said:

In my observation, a significant number of inmates are attracted to religious activities that provide material support to them. It's not just about spiritual fulfilment; many inmates participate in religion because certain denominations offer material assistance, such as providing soap. For instance, the SDA Church ensures its members receive soap and slippers every three months, and upon release, they also offer clothing and transportation funds to help inmates return home.

Nevertheless, though some inmates participate in Cornerstone Ministries' programs with the hope of material gain, such as access to food, clothing, or soap, it's essential to recognize that the ministry still plays a crucial impact in their psychological well-being in that regard. This is so because basic necessities like food, clothing, hygiene products like soap and footwear are often scarce in Malawian prisons and can cause significant stress. As such, the fact that inmates believe that the ministry would serves as a vital source for their material needs, which otherwise would cause stress, depression and anxiety, signifies the positive influence of the ministry on relieving stressors. Therefore, while material gain may initially motivate some inmates to participate in SDA's prison activities, the psychological benefits they derive from these practices are undeniable and crucial for their overall well-being amidst the hardships of incarceration.

4.6 Conclusion

The SDA's Cornerstone Prison Ministry plays a significant role in helping inmates cope with the stress, loneliness, and trauma caused by incarceration. Despite the presence of both sincere and insincere inmates in Malawian prisons, the research highlights that, like other religious ministries in prisons, Cornerstone Prison programs serve not only as a source of spiritual solace but also as a form of psycho-social therapy. The Ministry's activities, such as revival meetings, Bible studies, and Voice of Prophecy Bible school, provide inmates with a moral framework and avenues for personal transformation, facilitating the pursuit of forgiveness and inner peace. Moreover, these activities foster a sense of community and belonging, reducing feelings of isolation by uniting inmates through shared beliefs and practices.

Additionally, religious rituals and spiritual engagement advocated by Cornerstone Ministries offer comfort and resilience, empowering inmates to confront the challenges of prison life with renewed hope and purpose. Furthermore, the study aligns with Maruna, Wilson, and Curran's discovery that a common motive for conversion among inmates is shame management, coping, and the pursuit of a new identity.¹⁸¹ The rituals, prayers, and spiritual customs associated with religion provide a source of solace, optimism, and strength. Belief in a higher power or divine purpose instills individuals with a sense of meaning, helping them navigate the difficulties of prison life and maintain hope for the future

¹⁸¹ Maruna, S., Wilson, L., & Curran, K. Why God is often found behind bars: prison conversions and the crisis of self-narrative. *Research in Human Development*, 3(2/3), 161-184. (2006).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study underscores the imperative role the Church, particularly the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church through its Cornerstone Ministries, plays in ministering to prisoners. Grounded in the teachings of Jesus Christ and the apostolic writings in the New Testament, the Church's engagement with prisoners is deeply rooted in its foundational mission of love, empathy, and hospitality. The relationship between Matthew 25:35-40 and Hebrews 13:1-3 provides a robust scriptural foundation for the Cornerstone SDA Prison Ministry, emphasizing both compassionate service and empathetic solidarity with those in prison.

On the one hand, Matthew 25:35-40 serves as a lynchpin, highlighting the direct connection between serving the marginalized and serving Christ Himself. This passage encourages believers to engage in acts of mercy, seeing the face of Jesus in the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned. This profound identification with the least among us calls Christians to active, selfless service, recognizing the divine image in every individual and reflecting God's boundless love and compassion. On the other hand, Hebrews 13:1-3 complements this perspective by urging believers to "remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison." This verse extends the call of Matthew 25 by emphasizing the need for deep empathy and personal identification with the sufferings of prisoners. It challenges the faith community to go beyond mere acts of charity to foster a genuine sense of solidarity and compassion.

It is, therefore, commendable how Cornerstone SDA Prison Ministry use these passages as the bedrock of their mission. The Ministry not only recognizes the spiritual imperatives set forth in these scriptures but also effectively translates them into practical actions that

benefit inmates. Their comprehensive approach captures both the spiritual and practical dimensions of prison ministry, including evangelism, diaconal support, compassionate engagement, and advocacy for humane treatment and reintegration of prisoners. The historical precedent set by the early Christian Church, where imprisonment was a common experience among its members, further solidifies the importance of prison ministry. The New Testament accounts of Peter, Paul, and Silas highlight the transformative impact of ministering to prisoners, both spiritually and psychologically. These examples provide a rich heritage that contemporary prison ministries, such as those conducted by the SDA Church in Malawi, can draw upon to enhance their effectiveness and reach.

However, the study revealed a complex interplay of motives behind inmates' participation in religious activities. In the context of harsh conditions in Malawian prisons, religious activities, such as those of Cornerstone SDA's prison Ministry, emerge as a crucial coping mechanism for many inmates. They provide a sense of community, emotional support, and hope, helping prisoners manage feelings of shame and guilt while also addressing their material needs.

Furthermore, Cornerstone Ministry's prison programs help inmates manage shame and cultivate inner peace. In an environment where feelings of shame and guilt are prevalent, religious practices such as baptism offer powerful means of managing these burdens. Therefore, knowing that the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) revival meetings conclude with a baptism ceremony motivates inmates to participate and get baptized as a way of managing their shame.

Even so, it is important to note that the study observed that not all motivations for religious participation are purely spiritual. The study established that some inmates choose to be baptized through the SDA Church because the baptismal service is free of charge, unlike other churches that require a fee. These inmates seek baptism primarily to manage their shame and experience a sense of renewal, often remaining members of their respective churches both in prison and after their release. This suggests that practical considerations and the need for emotional healing, rather than a desire to switch religious affiliations, drive

some inmates' participation in SDA baptism ceremonies.

Despite the overwhelmingly positive impact of Cornerstone Ministry's prison programs, a fraction of inmates highlighted the dual nature of SDA messages in their lives. While they acknowledged the comfort and encouragement these messages often provide, they also expressed how certain sermons contributed to their psychological distress. Specifically, sermons that emphasized sin, guilt, and eternal damnation, along with themes like the "Mark of the Beast (666)," exacerbated prisoners' distress and psychological unrest.

In that regard, the motivations for inmates' participation in SDA's Cornerstone Ministry's programs in Malawian prisons are multifaceted, encompassing spiritual, emotional, psychological, and material dimensions. While the study established that Cornerstone Ministry's programs offer vital support that addresses the harsh realities of prison life, it also highlights the importance of a balanced approach that recognizes both the spiritual and practical needs of inmates. This comprehensive understanding can enhance the effectiveness of prison ministries, such as the SDA's Cornerstone Prison Ministry, in providing holistic support that fosters genuine spiritual growth and rehabilitation.

5.2 Recommendations

In view of the findings of the study, the researcher recommends the following:

- a) Cornerstone Ministries should continue to address both spiritual and physical needs of inmates, such as adequate food, proper sanitation, sufficient bedding, and footwear.
- b) The Ministry should heighten distribution of Bibles, devotional books, and other religious literature to inmates to facilitate personal study and spiritual growth
- c) The ministry should conduct regular assessments to understand the specific spiritual, psychological, and social needs of the inmate population.
- d) The ministry should Integrate evangelism with practical support services such as educational programs, vocational training, and mental health counselling.
- e) The ministry should safeguard its relationships with prison authorities and staff to ensure continued cooperation and support for ministry activities

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APPENDIX



Figure 6: Baptism of a female prisoner at Mikuyu 2 Prison

Appendix 1: A Questionnaire to Cornerstone Prison Ministry Officials concerning development of their ministry and their understanding of Hebrews 13:1-3 as a biblical foundation of Prison Ministry.

1. How long have you been involved with the Prison Ministry in Malawi?
.....
.....
2. What is the primary objective of the Cornerstone prison ministry? (selected more than one)
.....
.....
.....
3. What motivated you to prioritize prison ministry among all branches of ministry?
.....
.....
.....
4. What do you think are the reasons why prisoners are motivated to attend your activities?
.....
.....
.....
5. What are the biblical or scriptural foundations of your prison Ministry?
.....
.....
6. How familiar are you with Hebrews 13:1-3?
.....
.....
.....
7. In the context of prison ministry, what does Hebrews 13:1-3 emphasize?
.....
.....
.....

8. How do you interpret the phrase "Remember those in prison as if you were together with them" from Hebrews 13:3?

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.....
.....

9. What role do you think Hebrews 13:1-3 plays in shaping the philosophy of Cornerstone prison ministry?

.....
.....
.....

10. How do you believe the principles outlined in Hebrews 13:1-3 relate to the mission of Cornerstone prison ministry?

.....
.....

11. What do you think are the motives of prisoners' participation in your programs?

.....
.....
.....

12. What do you expect from prisoners after completing the programs?

.....
.....
.....

End of Questionnaire.

Appendix 2: Questionnaire to Prisoners Probing their Motives in participation and how Cornerstone Prison Ministry Activities have affected their lives

1. How old are you?
2. What is your gender?
3. How long have you been incarcerated?
4. How many times have you been convicted of a crime and incarcerated prior to your current term?
.....
5. For how long have you participated in SDA's Prison Ministry?
.....
6. What motivates you to participate in the activities organized by Cornerstone SDA's Prison Ministry?
.....
.....
7. How would you describe your level of involvement in Cornerstone SDA's Prison Ministry activities?
.....
.....
8. What aspects of the ministry's activities do you find most appealing or beneficial; and why it is so?
.....
.....
9. Have you experienced any personal transformations or changes as a result of participating in Cornerstone SDA's Prison Ministry activities? If so, how?
.....
.....
10. What specific factors do you believe contributed to your decision to embrace the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church through the ministry's activities?
.....
.....

11. What role do you think faith and spirituality play in the rehabilitation and transformation of incarcerated individuals?

.....
.....

12. Do you believe that participation in Cornerstone SDA's Prison Ministry activities has positively impacted your life? If so, how?

.....
.....

12. Have you noticed any changes in your psychological well-being since you started participating in SDA's Prison Ministry activities?

.....
.....

13. Do you rely on religious or spiritual beliefs and practices such as prayer, scriptural meditation and religious hymns as a way to manage with the challenges of incarceration?

.....
.....

14. If Yes; how effective do you find these religious or spiritual coping mechanisms in managing stress, anxiety, and other emotional difficulties?

.....
.....

15. Having participated in Cornerstone SDA's Prison Ministry Activities, would you consider committing another crime in order to return to prison after you have served your current sentence?

.....
.....
.....

End of Questionnaire.

Appendix 3: Questionnaire Probing Chaplains' Perception on the Motives of Prisoners in Participating in SDA's Prison Ministry Activities and the Impact of the ministry on prisoners' mental Health.

1. What is your role within the correctional facility?
 - a) Chaplain
 - b) Assistant Chaplain
2. In your experience, how often do prisoners participate in religious activities within the correctional facility?

.....

.....
3. How do you perceive the level of prisoners' interest in religious activities?

.....
4. How familiar are you with the SDA (Seventh-day Adventist) Prison Ministry Activities within the prison?

.....
5. What do you believe are the primary motives for prisoners to participate in SDA's activities within the correctional facility?

.....

.....

.....
3. In your opinion, how effective are the SDA Prison Ministry Activities in addressing the mental health needs of prisoners?

.....

.....

.....
4. What aspects of the SDA Prison Ministry Activities do you believe contribute most to the mental well-being of prisoners?

.....

.....

.....

6. Have you observed any changes in the mental health of prisoners who actively participate in SDA Prison Ministry Activities? If yes, please describe.

.....

.....

.....

8. Are there any additional resources or support that you believe the SDA Prison Ministry could provide to enhance mental health support for prisoners?

.....

.....

.....

10. What are your overall reflections on the impact of SDA Prison Ministry Activities on the mental health of prisoners?

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End of Questionnaire.