



Servant Leadership and Spiritual Service Quality on Organizational Engagement: The Mediating Role of Sense of Belonging in Faith Based Communities

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Article Info

Article history:

Received April 10, 2026
Approved August 30, 2026

Keywords:

Servant Leadership,
Spiritual Service Quality,
Sense Of Belonging,
Organizational
Engagement, PLSSEM

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effects of servant leadership and spiritual service quality on organizational engagement through the mediating role of sense of belonging in faithbased communities. Employing an explanatory quantitative design, data were collected from 215 active members of a parishlevel faith community through purposive sampling using a fivepoint Likert scale questionnaire. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLSSEM) via WarpPLS 7.0. Results reveal that spiritual service quality significantly predicts both sense of belonging ($\beta = 0.689$, $p < 0.001$) and organizational engagement ($\beta = 0.145$, $p = 0.015$), while sense of belonging is a strong predictor of organizational engagement ($\beta = 0.649$, $p < 0.001$). Sense of belonging fully mediates the pathway from spiritual service quality to organizational engagement ($\beta_{\text{indirect}} = 0.447$, $p < 0.001$), but does not mediate the servant leadership pathway significantly. Servant leadership shows no direct or significant indirect influence on engagement. The model demonstrates substantial explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.599$; $\text{GoF} = 0.595$). The findings underscore that in valuebased organizations, spiritual experience quality and psychological belonging are more decisive drivers of engagement than formal leadership structures. Implications for organizational management theory and practice in faithbased settings are discussed.

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How to cite: Alex, A., Lianto, L., & Ginting, S. (2026). Servant Leadership and Spiritual Service Quality on Organizational Engagement: The Mediating Role of Sense of Belonging in Faith-Based Communities. *Jurnal Ilmiah Global Education*, 7(3), 3191–3201. <https://doi.org/10.55681/jige.v7i3.6082>

INTRODUCTION

Faith-based communities occupy a distinctive position in organizational theory. As value-based organizations, they operate on transcendental commitments, collective identity, and normative meaning rather than on formal incentives or administrative controls (Smith & McSweeney, 2018; Greenwood et al., 2017). In such settings, the continuity and effectiveness of organizational life depend not only on structural rationalization but on the quality of members' experiences, relational bonds, and shared meaning (Fry & Nisiewicz, 2020; Maak & Pless, 2006).

Organizational engagement — the state in which members invest energy, dedication, and psychological absorption into their collective mission — has become a central indicator of organizational vitality (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Saks, 2022). Defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018), engagement in faith communities is not merely managerial but encompasses emotional, interpersonal, and normative dimensions rooted in spiritual experience and shared values. Contemporary scholarship emphasizes that this condition is inherently *identity-driven* and *meaning-centered* — arising when individuals experience value congruence with their organization rather than from structural incentives (Bailey et al., 2017; Saks, 2022; Knippenberg & Hogg, 2022).

Servant leadership — characterized by prioritizing others' growth, empathy, and stewardship — has been conceptualized as a leadership philosophy in which the primary motivation is to serve (Eva et al., 2019; Hoch et al., 2018). In organizational behavior research it is associated with increased trust, psychological safety, and intrinsic motivation that collectively contribute to member engagement (Newman et al., 2017). However, meta-analytic evidence indicates that its influence is frequently indirect, mediated by psychological mechanisms such as trust, empowerment, or organizational identification (Hoch et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2020). In faith communities, where leadership is more relational and facilitative than hierarchical, direct structural effects may be further attenuated. These considerations yield the first hypotheses:

H1: Servant leadership has a significant positive effect on sense of belonging.

H2: Servant leadership has a significant positive effect on organizational engagement.

Spiritual service quality refers to members' perceived quality of spiritually grounded services and experiences provided by the organization, encompassing both transactional and transcendental dimensions of service delivery (Ladhari et al., 2017; Fry & Nisiewicz, 2020). In faith-based settings, service quality extends beyond technical delivery to include the meaningfulness, reverence, and relational depth of shared spiritual practices. High-quality spiritual experiences signal organizational competence and value alignment, reinforcing members' identification with the community and driving loyalty, affective attachment, and sustained participation (Ladhari et al., 2017) — all of which underlie engagement. Fry and Nisiewicz (2020) argue that spiritual experience functions as an *intangible strategic resource* capable of driving sustained organizational vitality. This yields:

H3: Spiritual service quality has a significant positive effect on sense of belonging.

H4: Spiritual service quality has a significant positive effect on organizational engagement.

A critical yet underexplored mediating mechanism is *sense of belonging* — the subjective experience of being accepted, valued, and genuinely embedded as a member of a community (Hagerty et al., 1992, as cited in Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that *relatedness* — the fundamental need to feel connected and cared for — is a prerequisite for intrinsic motivation and autonomous engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2024; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020; Olafsen & Deci, 2020). Social Identity Theory (SIT) complements SDT by highlighting that collective identification, built through meaningful group interactions and shared symbols, generates the cohesion and commitment that sustain organizational engagement (Haslam et al., 2020; Hogg, 2021). In faith organizations, sense of belonging thus mediates between experiential inputs — leadership quality and spiritual service quality — and behavioral outcomes such as engagement: when leaders serve authentically and spiritual services are meaningful, members'

sense of belonging deepens, fueling sustained engagement. These theoretical considerations lead to:

H5: Sense of belonging has a significant positive effect on organizational engagement.

H6: Sense of belonging significantly mediates the relationship between servant leadership and organizational engagement.

H7: Sense of belonging significantly mediates the relationship between spiritual service quality and organizational engagement.

Despite growing attention to engagement in organizational contexts, empirical research on the mediating role of sense of belonging between leadership, service quality, and engagement in faith-based communities remains limited. Most existing studies in Indonesia focus on formal, administratively structured organizations — healthcare, village governance — where direct leadership effects dominate (Sari & Wardhani, 2023; Wismarwatiningsih & Nugraheni, 2023). The specific psychological pathways through which leadership and spiritual service quality operate in values-driven communities have not been sufficiently mapped.

Accordingly, this study develops and empirically tests an integrative model of organizational engagement in faith-based communities, positioning sense of belonging as the mediating mechanism, guided by four research questions: (1) Does servant leadership significantly predict sense of belonging and organizational engagement? (2) Does spiritual service quality significantly predict sense of belonging and organizational engagement? (3) Does sense of belonging significantly predict organizational engagement? (4) Does sense of belonging mediate the relationships from servant leadership and spiritual service quality to organizational engagement? By integrating SDT and SIT within a PLS-SEM framework, the study contributes both theoretically — extending engagement literature to value-based organizational contexts — and practically — providing evidence-based guidance for the management of faith communities.

METHODS

This study employs an explanatory quantitative design to test the proposed causal model (Hair et al., 2022; Sekaran & Bougie, 2019). The population comprised active members of a parish-level faith-based community in West Kalimantan, Indonesia. A total of 215 respondents were recruited via purposive sampling, with inclusion criteria requiring active participation in community activities (liturgical, categorical, or service-based ministry). This sample size satisfies the requirements of PLSSEM for the model complexity and number of indicators involved (Hair et al., 2022).

Four latent constructs were measured using reflective indicator scales adapted from established instruments, rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Servant Leadership (SL) was measured with 10 indicators covering five subdimensions (SL_1 through SL_5) based on the servant leadership framework of Eva et al. (2019). Spiritual Service Quality (SSQ) was measured with 10 indicators reflecting five dimensions (SSQ_1 through SSQ_5) adapted from Ladhari et al. (2017) and Fry and Nisiewicz (2020). Sense of Belonging (SoB) was operationalized with 8 indicators across four dimensions (SoB_1 through SoB_4) grounded in SDT-based belongingness scales (Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). Organizational Engagement (OE) was captured with 6 indicators across three dimensions (OE_1 through OE_3) drawing on Bakker and Albrecht (2018) and Saks (2022).

Data were analyzed using PLSSEM implemented in WarpPLS 7.0, with the PLS Regression outer model algorithm and Warp3 inner model algorithm, using Stable3 resampling with 100 resamples (Kock, 2020; Hair et al., 2022). Analysis followed a twostage procedure. In the first stage, outer model (measurement model) evaluation assessed convergent validity (outer loadings ≥ 0.70 ; AVE ≥ 0.50), discriminant validity (FornellLarcker criterion: $\sqrt{\text{AVE}} >$ interconstruct correlations), and composite reliability (CR ≥ 0.70 ; Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.70$) (Hair et al., 2022; Henseler et al., 2016). In the second stage, *inner model* (structural model) evaluation examined path coefficients (β), pvalues, effect sizes (f^2), R^2 , adjusted R^2 , Q^2 , and model fit indices (APC, ARS, AVIF, GoF). Mediation was tested using the productofcoefficients approach with bootstrapbased pvalues provided by WarpPLS (Kock, 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Model Fit and Quality Indices

Table 1 presents the global model fit indices. All indices meet the recommended thresholds, confirming the model's goodnessoffit. The APC is significant ($p < 0.001$), ARS and AARS exceed 0.59, AVIF and AFVIF remain below 5 (indicating no serious multicollinearity), and GoF = 0.595 classifies as large (≥ 0.36), confirming strong overall explanatory power (Kock, 2020).

Table 1. Model Fit and Quality Indices

Index	Value	Threshold	Remarks
APC	0.322, $p < 0.001$	$p < 0.05$	Acceptable
ARS	0.599, $p < 0.001$	$p < 0.05$	Acceptable
AARS	0.594, $p < 0.001$	$p < 0.05$	Acceptable
AVIF	3.183	≤ 5 (ideally ≤ 3.3)	Acceptable
AFVIF	3.197	≤ 5 (ideally ≤ 3.3)	Acceptable
GoF	0.595	≥ 0.36 (large)	Large
SPR	0.800	≥ 0.7	Acceptable
RSCR	0.992	≥ 0.9	Ideal
SSR	1.000	≥ 0.7	Ideal
NLBCDR	1.000	≥ 0.7	Ideal

Source: WarpPLS 7.0 Output (2025)

Outer Model: Reliability and Validity

Table 2 presents the construct reliability and convergent validity results. All constructs exceed the recommended thresholds: composite reliability (CR) ranges from 0.897 to 0.943 (> 0.70), Cronbach's alpha from 0.861 to 0.933 (> 0.70), and AVE from 0.557 to 0.626 (> 0.50) (Hair et al., 2022). All indicator loadings are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), and values range from 0.662 to 0.836, meeting the recommended loading threshold of 0.70.

Table 2. Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	CR	Cronbach's α	AVE	$\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$
Servant Leadership (SL)	0.943	0.933	0.626	0.791
Spiritual Service Quality (SSQ)	0.926	0.911	0.557	0.747
Sense of Belonging (SoB)	0.919	0.898	0.585	0.765
Organizational Engagement (OE)	0.897	0.861	0.593	0.770

Note: CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted; $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ = square root of AVE (shown for FornellLarcker comparison). Source: WarpPLS 7.0 Output (2025)

Discriminant validity was assessed using the FornellLarcker criterion (Table 3). The square root of each construct's AVE (shown on the diagonal) exceeds all interconstruct correlations in the corresponding row and column, confirming adequate discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2022). Notably, the SLSSQ correlation (0.804) is higher than ideal, warranting caution in interpretation, though AVIF = 3.183 confirms acceptable multicollinearity.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity — FornellLarcker Criterion

Construct	SL	SSQ	SoB	OE
Servant Leadership (SL)	0.791	0.804	0.671	0.557
Spiritual Service Quality (SSQ)	0.804	0.747	0.770	0.655
Sense of Belonging (SoB)	0.671	0.770	0.765	0.763
Organizational Engagement (OE)	0.557	0.655	0.763	0.770

Note: Bold values on diagonal represent square roots of AVE. Offdiagonal values are interconstruct Pearson correlations. All correlations are significant at $p < 0.001$.

Inner Model: Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Table 4 reports the path coefficients and hypothesis test results. Spiritual service quality (SSQ) is a strong and significant predictor of sense of belonging ($\beta = 0.689$, $SE = 0.060$, $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.536$), supporting H3. The effect size is large, explaining a substantial share of variance in SoB. Sense of belonging (SoB) is a strong and significant predictor of organizational engagement ($\beta = 0.649$, $SE = 0.060$, $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.502$), supporting H5. SSQ also shows a significant direct effect on OE ($\beta = 0.145$, $SE = 0.066$, $p = 0.015$, $f^2 = 0.096$), supporting H4. In contrast, servant leadership (SL) shows no significant direct effect on SoB ($\beta = 0.109$, $SE = 0.067$, $p = 0.053$, $f^2 = 0.073$), failing to support H1 at the 0.05 level. Likewise, SL shows no significant direct effect on OE ($\beta = 0.018$, $SE = 0.068$, $p = 0.397$), rejecting H2.

Table 4. Path Coefficients, Standard Errors, and Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis / Path	β	SE	pvalue	f^2	Result
H1: SL $\rightarrow$ SoB	0.109	0.067	0.053	0.073	Not Supported
H2: SSQ $\rightarrow$ SoB	0.689	0.060	< 0.001	0.536	Supported
H3: SL $\rightarrow$ OE	0.018	0.068	0.397	0.010	Not Supported
H4: SSQ $\rightarrow$ OE	0.145	0.066	0.015	0.096	Supported
H5: SoB $\rightarrow$ OE	0.649	0.060	< 0.001	0.502	Supported

Note: β = standardized path coefficient; SE = standard error; f^2 = effect size; pvalues from 100 Stable3 resamples.

Mediation Analysis

Table 5 presents the indirect effects. The mediation pathway SSQ $\rightarrow$ SoB $\rightarrow$ OE is strong and highly significant ($\beta_{\text{indirect}} = 0.447$, $SE = 0.044$, $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.297$), supporting H7. Given the significant direct effect of SSQ on OE alongside the significant indirect effect, the pattern is consistent with partial mediation, indicating that sense of belonging partially (but substantially) transmits the effect of spiritual service quality on engagement. The indirect pathway SL $\rightarrow$ SoB $\rightarrow$ OE is not significant at the 0.05 level ($\beta_{\text{indirect}} = 0.071$, $SE = 0.048$, $p = 0.070$, $f^2 = 0.041$), failing to support H6.

Table 5. Indirect Effects and Mediation Results

Indirect Path	Indirect β	SE	pvalue	f^2
SL $\rightarrow$ SoB $\rightarrow$ OE	0.071	0.048	0.070	0.041
SSQ $\rightarrow$ SoB $\rightarrow$ OE	0.447	0.044	< 0.001	0.297

Source: WarpPLS 7.0 Output (2025)

Predictive Relevance (R^2 and Q^2)

Table 6 presents the Rsquared and Qsquared values for the endogenous latent variables.

Table 6. RSquared and QSquared Coefficients

Endogenous Variable	R^2	Adj. R^2	Q^2	Interpretation
Sense of Belonging (SoB)	0.609	0.606	0.609	Substantial
Organizational Engagement (OE)	0.588	0.582	0.608	Substantial

Note: $R^2 > 0.50$ indicates substantial explanatory power (Hair et al., 2022). $Q^2 > 0$ confirms predictive relevance.

Both endogenous constructs achieve high R^2 values (SoB: 0.609; OE: 0.588), indicating that the predictors explain approximately 61% and 59% of the variance in sense of belonging and organizational engagement, respectively. Q^2 values exceeding 0.50 for both constructs confirm strong predictive relevance beyond mere insample fit (Kock, 2020; Hair et al., 2022).

Discussion

Figure 1 presents the estimated structural model with standardized path coefficients, significance levels, and R^2 values for the endogenous constructs. The visual representation illustrates the relative magnitude of each path and clarifies the central role of sense of belonging as the primary mediating mechanism in the model.

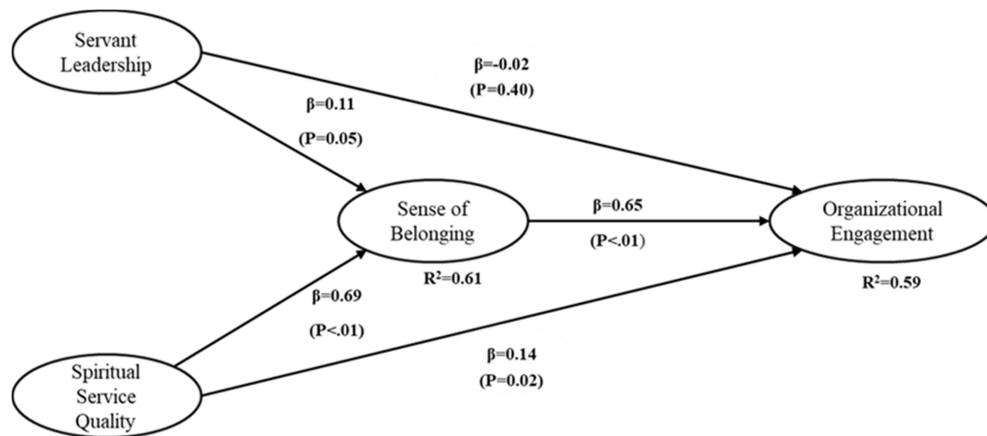


Figure 1. Structural Model Results

Dominance of Spiritual Service Quality

The most striking finding of this study is the dominant role of spiritual service quality in shaping both sense of belonging and organizational engagement. With a path coefficient of $\beta = 0.689$ toward sense of belonging and an indirect effect of $\beta = 0.447$ on engagement, spiritual service quality emerges as the primary strategic lever in faith community management. This finding aligns with Social Identity Theory's proposition that meaningful group interactions and shared symbolic practices are central to collective identification and belonging (Haslam et al., 2020; Hogg, 2021). When members consistently experience highquality spiritual services, they receive validation of their religious identity, perceive value congruence with the community, and develop a stronger sense of psychological membership a process that deepens engagement over time.

These results resonate with Fry and Nisiewicz's (2020) notion that spiritual experience functions as an intangible strategic resource capable of driving sustained organizational vitality. The strong direct and indirect effects of SSQ suggest that community leaders and administrators should view liturgical quality, pastoral sensitivity, and meaningful communal practices as core organizational investments, not peripheral activities.

Sense of Belonging as the Psychological Engine of Engagement

The strong effect of sense of belonging on organizational engagement ($\beta = 0.649$, $f^2 = 0.502$) aligns with Self-Determination Theory's central claim that the fulfillment of the relatedness need generates intrinsic motivation and sustained behavioral commitment (Ryan & Deci, 2024; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). When members feel genuinely accepted and embedded in the community, engagement arises as an expression of internalized motivation rather than external pressure. This intrinsic quality of faithbased engagement differentiates it from engagement in more administratively controlled settings, where compliance mechanisms and formal incentives are more prominent (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Saks, 2022).

The mediation result ($SSQ \rightarrow SoB \rightarrow OE$, $\beta_{\text{indirect}} = 0.447$) reveals a clear psychological chain: quality spiritual experiences build collective identity and belonging, which in turn mobilizes intrinsic engagement. This finding empirically validates the theoretical model integrating social identity and self-determination perspectives within the faithbased organizational context.

NonSignificant Effect of Servant Leadership

Contrary to conventional expectations in organizational behavior, servant leadership did not produce significant direct effects on either sense of belonging or organizational engagement. This result is theoretically consistent with metaanalytic evidence showing that servant leadership's influence is frequently indirect and conditioned by mediating psychological mechanisms (Lee et al., 2020; Hoch et al., 2018; Newman et al., 2017). In the faithcommunity context, where relationships are more horizontal and communitarian, leadership functions primarily as a facilitator of meaning and a guardian of collective values rather than as a direct behavioral determinant. The marginal indirect effect ($\beta = 0.071$, $p = 0.070$) suggests a trend rather than a confirmed mechanism, indicating that servant leadership may operate through pathways not fully captured by the current model (e.g., trust, organizational identification, spiritual modeling).

Importantly, this result contrasts with findings from formal organizations — such as healthcare or village administration in the Indonesian context — where leadership exerts significant and direct effects on performance and engagement. This divergence points to a contextspecific moderation effect: the organizational type (faithbased vs. administrative) shapes the mechanism through which leadership translates into member outcomes.

Methodological Note: Discriminant Validity Between Servant Leadership and Spiritual Service Quality

A noteworthy methodological observation concerns the discriminant validity between servant leadership and spiritual service quality. The interconstruct correlation ($r = 0.804$) exceeds the square roots of both constructs' AVE ($\sqrt{AVE_{SL}} = 0.791$; $\sqrt{AVE_{SSQ}} = 0.747$), indicating that the Fornell-Larcker criterion is not fully satisfied for this pair. This pattern is, however, theoretically explicable within the faithbased organizational context. In parish communities, pastoral leaders are simultaneously the primary agents of spiritual service delivery — they preside over liturgical celebrations, facilitate communal prayer, and provide pastoral care. Consequently,

members' perceptions of leadership quality and spiritual service quality are institutionally intertwined and may not be easily differentiated at the level of subjective experience. The conceptual overlap thus reflects an empirical reality of faithbased organizational life rather than a mere measurement artifact. This interpretation is further corroborated by the full collinearity VIF of SSQ (3.961), which is the highest in the model, confirming the elevated interdependence between these two constructs. Importantly, the AVIF of the overall model remains at 3.183 — well below the threshold of 5.0 — indicating that multicollinearity does not pose a systemic threat to the structural estimates (Kock, 2020). Nonetheless, this limitation warrants explicit acknowledgment and should be addressed in future replications of the model.

Theoretical Contributions

This study makes three theoretical contributions. First, it extends engagement theory to valuebased organizational settings by demonstrating that engagement in faith communities is fundamentally identitydriven and meaningmediated (Saks, 2022; Knippenberg & Hogg, 2022). Second, it operationalizes spiritual service quality as a strategic organizational variable with empirically demonstrated effects on belonging and engagement, enriching the management literature on intangible resources (Maak & Pless, 2006; Rey et al., 2018). Third, it provides an empirical integration of Social Identity Theory and SelfDetermination Theory within a PLSSEM model, validating the theoretical coherence of these frameworks in a nonwork organizational context.

CONCLUSION

This study developed and tested an integrative model of organizational engagement in a faithbased community involving 215 respondents, analyzed via PLSSEM (WarpPLS 7.0). The key conclusions are as follows. First, spiritual service quality significantly and positively affects both sense of belonging ($\beta = 0.689$) and organizational engagement ($\beta = 0.145$), making it the primary organizational driver in faithbased settings. Second, sense of belonging strongly and significantly predicts organizational engagement ($\beta = 0.649$) and substantially mediates the effect of spiritual service quality on engagement ($\beta_{\text{indirect}} = 0.447$, $p < 0.001$). Third, servant leadership does not show a significant direct effect on sense of belonging or organizational engagement in this context, though a marginal trend toward mediation is noted. The model demonstrates high explanatory power ($R^2 \approx 0.60$; GoF = 0.595).

Practically, faithcommunity managers should prioritize the quality of spiritual experiences as a strategic investment, design communitarian activities that reinforce belonging and cohesion, and develop leadership oriented toward meaning facilitation and value consistency. Future research should incorporate variables such as organizational identification, spiritual wellbeing, or meaningful work, adopt longitudinal designs, and replicate the model across diverse faithbased Organizational Settings To Enhance External Validity.

Limitations and Directions For Future Research

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the discriminant validity between servant leadership and spiritual service quality was not fully achieved under the FornellLarcker criterion ($r = 0.804 > \sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ of both constructs). While this overlap is theoretically grounded in the institutional characteristics of faithbased communities — where leadership and spiritual service delivery are performed by the same agents — future research should apply the HeterotraitMonotrait ratio (HTMT) as a more robust and less conservative discriminant validity criterion (Henseler et al., 2015). An HTMT threshold below 0.90, or below 0.85 for conceptually proximate constructs, would provide stronger evidence of construct

distinctiveness. Additionally, future studies could refine the conceptual and operational boundaries between servant leadership and spiritual service quality — for instance, by distinguishing relational leadership behaviors from institutionalized liturgical service practices as separate measurement domains.

Second, the crosssectional singlesource design of this study introduces the possibility of common method bias, which may have artificially inflated interconstruct correlations. Subsequent studies should employ multisource data collection for example, combining member selfreports with leader assessments or observational records and consider longitudinal designs to capture the developmental dynamics of belonging and engagement over time. Third, the sample was drawn from a single parish community in West Kalimantan, Indonesia, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Replication across diverse faith traditions, denominational structures, and cultural contexts is recommended to assess the external validity of the proposed model. Future research might also integrate additional variables such as organizational identification, spiritual wellbeing, or meaningful work to enrich the explanatory power of the framework.

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