

Religious Entrepreneurship and the Proliferation of Prayer Houses in Northern Nigeria: A Historical and Sociological Analysis of Taraba State (1991 – 2023)

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Abstract

Original Research Article

This article examines the phenomenon of religious entrepreneurship and the proliferation of prayer houses in Taraba State, Northern Nigeria, from 1991 to 2023. Employing a qualitative research methodology rooted in historical and sociological approaches, the study utilizes cross-sectional survey design and thematic analysis to gather and interpret data from a diverse sample of prayer house founders, attendees, and non-attendees across the three senatorial districts of Taraba State. The findings reveal that prayer houses have emerged as significant socio-religious institutions shaped by the intersection of spiritual aspirations and economic realities. The study demonstrates that religious entrepreneurship in this context manifests through the commodification of spiritual services, the establishment of prayer houses as economic ventures, and the development of charismatic authority structures that facilitate resource mobilization. While these institutions contribute positively to community development through job creation, entrepreneurial support, and social welfare initiatives, they also exhibit problematic dimensions including financial exploitation, doctrinal manipulation, and the fragmentation of family and community bonds. The analysis highlights the ambivalent nature of prayer houses as both sites of spiritual empowerment and potential sources of exploitation, underscoring the need for regulatory frameworks that promote transparency and accountability. This study contributes to the broader discourse on religion and society in contemporary Africa by providing a nuanced understanding of how religious entrepreneurship shapes and is shaped by socio-economic conditions in Northern Nigeria.

Keywords: Religious entrepreneurship, prayer houses, proliferation, Taraba State, Northern Nigeria, prosperity gospel, spiritual commodification.

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INTRODUCTION

The religious landscape of contemporary Nigeria presents a compelling paradox: while the nation is distinguished by its profound and pervasive Christian piety, this deep-seated spirituality

increasingly coexists with, and is arguably shaped by, pressing socio-economic realities. The proliferation of prayer houses and ministries has emerged as a distinct and rapidly expanding phenomenon, transforming both urban and rural landscapes across the country. Nigeria, as noted by



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Njoku and Kolapo (2022), is a deeply religious country where the goal of most religious expressions is to instill spirituality in their followers (Akinloye, 2018). Christianity, as one of the most popular religions in Nigeria, has attracted numerous converts owing to the promises associated with adopting the faith (Kitause & Achunike, 2013; Ngbea & Achunike, 2014).

Within this religious ferment, the period from 1991 to 2023 has witnessed an unprecedented multiplication of prayer houses and ministries across Nigeria, particularly in Northern Nigeria, including Taraba State. This phenomenon represents a significant shift in the country's religious landscape, driven by a complex interplay of spiritual, social, and economic factors. The growth of independent prayer houses and Pentecostal ministries reflects not merely spiritual revival but also the emergence of what scholars have termed "religious entrepreneurship"—the strategic deployment of religious resources, charismatic authority, and spiritual capital for both spiritual and material ends.

The establishment of prayer houses and ministries in contemporary Nigeria is increasingly recognized as part of a broader trend of the commoditization of religion, where religious practice has been converted into marketable products and services within the Nigerian public space (Afolabi et al., 2024). The socio-economic disorder in the country has inadvertently fueled this trend, as religious practitioners have leveraged widespread uncertainty to gain mass appeal and promote their theological affiliations as desirable commodities (Afolabi et al., 2024). This commercialization is particularly evident in the rise of prophetic prayer ministries and the methods employed by some of their leaders to attract followership and generate wealth.

The religious environment of Nigeria presents a market of existing and potential believers for a wide range of religious groups, movements, and denominations. As Iheanacho and Ughaerumba (2016) observe, religion is omnipresent in Nigeria, with the environment alive with a variety of religious programs, affiliations, faith systems, mosques,

churches, and places of prayer, as well as numerous categories of religious ministers. Within this vibrant religious marketplace, prayer houses and ministries have emerged as distinctive institutions promising spiritual and physical deliverance from the multifaceted crises of Nigerian life.

The emphasis of prayer houses and ministries typically centers on healing and deliverance, with faith positioned as a prerequisite for divine intervention. Absolute faith in God is demanded for healing to occur, with the belief that God heals sicknesses but cannot be compelled to do so. Ailments that persist for extended periods may be attributed to the sufferer's lack of faith, while in some cases, sicknesses and diseases are framed as consequences of sin and guilt requiring confession and repentance before healing can occur (Deak & Mengga, 2023). Many sick individuals, particularly those unable to afford conventional hospital expenses, visit these healing ministries (Obiefuna, Nwadiolor, & Umeanolue, 2014), even though some are required to sow seeds of faith to demonstrate their confidence in God.

These prayer houses and ministries frequently claim divine mandate to address people's physical, economic, and spiritual needs. Physical problems addressed include blindness, deafness, inability to walk, spinal cord injuries, epilepsy, and other illnesses. Economic troubles draw Nigerians to prayer houses in search of solutions to poverty, food scarcity, affordable housing, and other fundamental necessities. Spiritual problems, grounded in the belief that everything disturbing an individual has spiritual underpinnings, further encourage attendance at these institutions (Anyakorah & Ogene, 2021).

Despite the considerable amount of research conducted on religious institutions in Nigeria, there exists a notable absence of literature specifically examining the intersection of religious entrepreneurship and the proliferation of prayer houses, particularly in Northern Nigeria. The growing prevalence of prayer houses and ministries throughout Nigeria, especially in Taraba State, raises

significant concerns. Reported cases of familial fragmentations, mutual suspicion, and in some instances complete breakdown of homes and relationships due to the influences of prayer houses and ministries have become increasingly common. This reality manifests in situations where individuals, typically wives or young adults, become fervent members of a ministry and begin to view their own family members through a suspicious spiritual lens.

The absolute authority wielded by charismatic religious leaders often replaces parental guidance, leading young adults to abandon their families, friends, education, businesses, or career paths for unverified prophetic instructions, thereby creating deep, irreparable rifts within family units and society. Some individuals experience economic drainage through acts of seed sowing and the purchase of prophetic materials. These developments raise fundamental questions about the nature of religious entrepreneurship in this context: To what extent are prayer houses established as genuine spiritual ventures versus economic enterprises? How do charismatic leaders mobilize and deploy spiritual capital for material ends? What are the sociological implications of this religious entrepreneurship for family structures and community cohesion?

This study addresses these questions by examining the phenomenon of religious entrepreneurship and the proliferation of prayer houses in Taraba State from 1991 to 2023. Specifically, it investigates the characteristics of prayer houses and ministries in contemporary Taraba, the reasons for their establishment, their social, spiritual, and economic impacts on attendants and members, and public perceptions of their founders' activities. By providing empirical data and sociological analysis, this research enhances understanding of how religious entrepreneurship operates within the specific context of Northern Nigeria, offering insights into the complex relationship between faith, commerce, and community in contemporary African Christianity.

This article examines religious entrepreneurship and the proliferation of prayer houses in Taraba State

from 1991 to 2023, focusing on the characteristics of these institutions, the motivations behind their establishment, and their socio-economic and spiritual impacts on adherents and communities. By situating this analysis within historical and sociological frameworks, the study illuminates how prayer houses function simultaneously as sites of spiritual devotion and economic enterprise, revealing the complex entanglement of faith and commerce in contemporary Nigerian Christianity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Religious Entrepreneurship

Religious entrepreneurship represents a theoretical framework for understanding how religious actors strategically deploy spiritual resources, charismatic authority, and organizational structures to achieve both spiritual and material objectives. This concept emerges at the intersection of religious studies, sociology, and economics, reflecting the recognition that religious activity in contemporary contexts increasingly operates according to market logic and entrepreneurial principles.

The term "religious entrepreneurship" builds upon broader understandings of entrepreneurship as the process of identifying opportunities, mobilizing resources, and creating value within specific institutional contexts. When applied to religious phenomena, this framework illuminates how religious leaders and organizations function as entrepreneurs who identify spiritual and material needs within their communities, develop products and services to address these needs, and establish organizational structures to deliver value while generating sustainability and growth.

In the Nigerian context, religious entrepreneurship manifests through several interconnected dimensions. First, it involves the identification of market opportunities within the religious landscape, recognizing unmet spiritual, emotional, and material needs among populations facing economic uncertainty, health challenges, and social dislocation. Second, it encompasses the development

of religious products and services, healing sessions, deliverance ministries, prophetic consultations, anointing materials that address these identified needs. Third, it includes the cultivation of charismatic authority and spiritual capital that legitimizes the entrepreneur's position and facilitates resource mobilization. Fourth, it involves the establishment of organizational structures, prayer houses, ministries, outreach programs, that institutionalize the entrepreneurial venture and enable scalability.

Gaiya's observation that "the establishment of churches is one of the most lucrative businesses in Nigeria" (as cited in the primary text) underscores the economic dimension of religious entrepreneurship in this context. However, reducing religious entrepreneurship solely to economic motivation would oversimplify a complex phenomenon. Religious entrepreneurs typically operate from genuine spiritual conviction while simultaneously navigating the material requirements of organizational sustainability and personal livelihood. This dual orientation, simultaneously spiritual and economic, characterizes the ambivalent nature of religious entrepreneurship as practiced in contemporary Nigerian prayer houses and ministries.

Prayer Houses and Ministries

A prayer house or prayer ministry constitutes a religious or spiritual institution dedicated primarily to the practice of prayer, meditation, and spiritual reflection (Pembroke et al., 2022). These entities vary widely in structure, focus, and organization but typically share the common goal of providing space for individuals to connect with their spirituality and engage in communal worship. Awoshiri et al. (2022) define a prayer ministry as a place or institution where people seek solutions to their problems through prayer offered by prophets or prophetesses who own the ministry.

According to Uroko et al. (2023), a prayer house or ministry is a physical building maintained by individuals or groups, with physical, economic, and

spiritual deliverance as their vision and mission statements. The primary purpose of these institutions is to facilitate prayer and spiritual communion, which may involve offering regular prayer services, organizing prayer gatherings or retreats, and providing resources for individuals seeking to deepen their prayer life. Many prayer houses and ministries also serve as community hubs, fostering belonging and connection among members through social events, educational programs, and outreach initiatives.

Several distinctive characteristics differentiate prayer houses and ministries from traditional church structures. First, they typically operate with less formal organizational hierarchy, often centered around the charismatic authority of a single founder or leader. Second, they emphasize experiential spirituality, particularly manifestations of divine power through healing, deliverance, and prophecy. Third, they frequently exist outside formal denominational structures, allowing greater flexibility in doctrine and practice. Fourth, they often focus on addressing specific life challenges, illness, poverty, family discord, spiritual oppression, through targeted spiritual interventions.

In the Nigerian context, prayer houses range from small, informal gatherings in private homes to large, well-established ministries with significant followings and institutional infrastructure. Their common denominator is the promise of direct spiritual intervention in the problems of everyday life, mediated through charismatic leaders who claim special anointing or divine mandate.

The Prosperity Gospel and Spiritual Commodification

The prosperity gospel, also known as the "health and wealth" gospel, constitutes a significant theological framework within which much religious entrepreneurship operates in contemporary Nigeria. This doctrine teaches that material wealth and physical well-being are signs of divine favor and can be attained through faith, positive confession, and

financial giving to religious causes (Baloyi, 2024). The origins of prosperity preaching in Nigeria can be traced to the influence of American televangelists and the spread of Pentecostalism, which reinterprets wealth and health as signs of divine favor (Ijaola, 2018).

According to Omavuebe (2021), whenever the prosperity gospel is preached, it articulates elements including seed faith, positive confession, visualization, faith healing, and donating for hundred-fold returns. Exorcism, the ability of God to conquer satanic forces, victory over demonic agents, and divine intervention in human affairs are also made plain within this theological framework. This message resonates powerfully in contexts of economic hardship, offering hope and promising tangible returns on spiritual investments.

Spiritual commodification refers to the process through which religious practices, objects, and experiences are transformed into marketable products and services. In Nigerian prayer houses and ministries, this commodification manifests through the sale of anointing oils, holy water, miracle handkerchiefs, prayer consultations, deliverance sessions, and specialized spiritual services. Afolabi et al. (2024) describe this as part of a broader trend of the commoditization of God, where religious practice has been converted into marketable products and services within the Nigerian public space.

Critical studies have uncovered methods employed by some religious leaders to amass wealth at the expense of followers, including elaborate seed-sowing schemes, prophetic extortion, and the commercialization of spirituality through the sale of religious items and exorbitant fees for prayer sessions (Ngwoke, 2024). These practices create a culture of dependency and financial strain among vulnerable followers promised miracles in exchange for financial contributions (Ngwoke, 2024). The scholarly discourse points to the unabashed teaching on money and the flamboyant lives of the new generation of pastors as significant issues within Nigerian religious entrepreneurship (Nmah & Obienusi, 2024).

Review of Related Studies

The proliferation of religious institutions in Nigeria has attracted considerable scholarly attention. Adeniji-Soji (2022) examined factors responsible for the proliferation of prayer houses and ministries in Nigeria, finding that the arrival of Christian missionaries created disaffection among native Christians due to the non-contextualization of modes of worship. This resulted in secession from mission churches and the formation of African initiated churches, followed by Neo-Pentecostal churches, prayer houses, and ministries. The economic meltdown in Nigeria drove many people away from mission churches, perceived as cold and lukewarm in their liturgies, toward institutions promising both spiritual and material support.

Tonga et al. (2024) examined the dangers of proliferation of churches, prayer houses, and ministries in contemporary Nigeria, noting that exposure to advertising calls from such ministries has led Nigerians to "bombard God with their problems in form of prayer request keeping vigils, fasting and in attending several healing and deliverance services." This observation highlights how religious entrepreneurship responds to and capitalizes on widespread socio-economic distress.

Ndubisi and Kanu (2019) phenomenologically examined Igbo philosophy of life vis-à-vis the proliferation of prayer houses in Southeast Nigeria, finding that the proliferation of prayer houses in the region encourages laziness, disaster, and family division, constituting a serious threat to the hard-earned philosophy of life of Igbo people. Their study employed the philosophical method of phenomenology to observe that the emphasis on miracles, divine intervention, and devil possession in these prayer houses undermines traditional values of hard work and self-reliance.

Okobia (2022) examined the ambivalence of prophetic ministry in Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, revealing that lack of the fear of God and moral decadence in society led to the rise of false prophets. The study noted that titles like prophet,

pastor, evangelist, apostle, bishop, and reverend, once reserved for genuine servants of God, are now claimed by individuals without spiritual credibility who establish churches and prayer houses to extort money from members and clients. Those who fall prey to these false prophets are desperate miracle seekers looking for the fruit of the womb or financial breakthroughs, prepared to pay required prices for desired outcomes.

Likhi (2021) examined the deliverance ministry by Pentecostal-Charismatic churches from a pastoral perspective in South Africa, questioning why these churches seem to destroy the healing ministry introduced by Christ through their emphasis on questionable healing methods. The research involved qualitative methods based on interviews and secondary literature, finding that extreme Pentecostal denominations have attacked South Africa's religious boundary and undermined its constitution through denominational abuse in healing ministry, particularly targeting poor people desperately needing healing.

Ablorh (2018) studied the practice of deliverance in neo-prophetic churches in Ghana, examining the African Christian experience and understanding of deliverance in people's real-life situations. Adopting phenomenological and historical approaches, the study collected data from leaders and patrons of selected neo-prophetic churches, concluding that these ministries strongly affirm the importance of deliverance ministry in the whole ministry of the Christian church.

Nwosu (2015) examined the effectiveness of faith-healings in prayer houses, questioning whether they constitute a conflicting alternative or complement to conventional medicine. The paper adopted descriptive, analytic, expository, and comparative methods, revealing the dilapidated health structures experienced among Africans and the ravaging effects of deadly diseases as functions of misconceptions about the roles played by faith in relation to conventional medicine. The paper recommended an integrative healthcare system where conventional medicine is properly integrated with faith for more

dependable and sustainable healthcare delivery.

Nwokocha (2021) examined the theology of miracle healing and prosperity message expounded by preachers of new generation churches in Nigeria, gleaning on secondary data to empirically analyze the impact of prosperity preaching and quest for miracle in new religious movements in South-East Nigeria. The study found that new religious movements emerged as a religion of the oppressed in cultural, social, religious, and political spheres, developed as a rescue mission to the already degraded religion and tradition of the people. The study recommended the theology of prosperity and miracle healing as correct and sound teaching for all Christian churches in Nigeria while advocating that it not be expounded beyond proportion.

Uroko et al. (2023) examined prayer ministry in Nigeria from a theological-pastoral perspective, adopting content analysis through a phenomenological approach. Findings revealed that several prayer houses engaged in prayer merchandising, collecting money and material things from victims with promises of prayer for spiritual and physical freedom. Reports of immoral activities such as rape were also documented. The study concluded that prayer houses have become places of economic and material exploitation rather than righteousness, and recommended that Nigerians be better sensitized to prevent themselves from falling victim to religious fraud.

Ogueche et al. (2022) explored the positive effects of Christian prayer ministries in Nigerian contemporary society, empirically examining extant literature. The study found that Christian prayer ministries have helped many Christians solve problems like illness, barrenness, misfortune, trauma, witchcraft, lack of employment, delayed marriage, and lack of progress in profession. The researchers made use of secondary sources of data collection and found that Christian prayer ministries function as solution centers solving people's problems speedily. The work recommended strict rules and regulations for Christian prayer ministries by churches to avoid abuse of their activities.

Afolabi et al. (2024) examined the commoditization of God in religion, analyzing the marketing of Pentecostalism in the Nigerian public space. Their study revealed how Pentecostal practitioners have leveraged widespread uncertainty to gain mass appeal and promote their theological affiliations as desirable commodities. This commercialization, they argued, is particularly evident in the rise of megachurches and prophetic prayer ministries and the methods employed by leaders to attract followership and generate wealth.

Theoretical Framework

Religious Market Theory

Religious market theory, also known as the economic approach to religion, provides a valuable framework for understanding religious entrepreneurship and the proliferation of prayer houses in Northern Nigeria. Developed primarily by sociologists including Rodney Stark, Roger Finke, and Laurence Iannaccone, this theoretical perspective applies economic principles to the analysis of religious phenomena, conceptualizing religion as a marketplace where religious "firms" (organizations) compete for "customers" (adherents) by offering various "products" (beliefs, practices, experiences).

The theory posits that religious pluralism and competition stimulate religious participation rather than undermining it, contrary to secularization theories that predicted religion's decline in modern societies. In contexts of religious freedom and pluralism, religious organizations must innovate, differentiate their offerings, and respond to consumer preferences to attract and retain adherents. This competitive dynamic fosters religious vitality and entrepreneurship as new religious firms enter the market to address unmet needs or serve niche populations.

Applied to the Nigerian context, religious market theory illuminates several dimensions of prayer house proliferation. First, it explains how the religious deregulation following independence and

the subsequent charismatic renewal created conditions for religious entrepreneurship to flourish. As mainline churches failed to address certain spiritual and material needs, particularly healing, deliverance from evil spirits, and prosperity, new religious entrepreneurs identified market opportunities and established prayer houses and ministries to serve these demands.

Second, religious market theory illuminates the product differentiation strategies employed by prayer houses. Each ministry develops distinctive offerings, particular healing specializations, prophetic styles, spiritual warfare techniques, that distinguish it from competitors. The use of specialized prayer items (anointing oils, holy water, miracle handkerchiefs), unique prophetic practices, and targeted ministry focus (barrenness, financial breakthrough, deliverance from witchcraft) represents strategic product differentiation within the religious marketplace.

Third, the theory explains the importance of charismatic authority and branding in religious entrepreneurship. Prayer house founders function as religious brands, with their personal narratives of divine calling, demonstrated spiritual power, and perceived authenticity serving as crucial marketing assets. The high regard accorded to leaders (as documented in the primary text) reflects successful brand development within the religious marketplace.

Fourth, religious market theory illuminates the economic dimensions of prayer house operations. Like any enterprise, religious organizations require resources for sustainability and growth. The emphasis on tithes, offerings, seed sowing, and specialized paid services represents revenue generation strategies within the religious marketplace. While critics may view such practices as commercialization or exploitation, religious market theory frames them as rational organizational responses to competitive pressures and sustainability requirements.

However, religious market theory has limitations when applied uncritically to the Nigerian context.

Critics argue that it overemphasizes rational choice and underestimates the genuinely spiritual dimensions of religious experience. Moreover, the theory's assumptions about religious freedom and competitive markets may not fully account for the complex ways that state power, ethnic identities, and traditional authorities shape religious landscapes in Northern Nigeria.

Human Needs Theory

Human Needs Theory, formulated by Abraham Maslow and further developed by conflict theorists including John Burton, provides a complementary framework for understanding the proliferation of prayer houses in Taraba State. This theory posits that individuals possess fundamental needs that must be fulfilled to maintain well-being and social stability. When these needs are thwarted or denied, individuals experience frustration that may manifest in various forms of social and psychological distress.

Maslow identified a hierarchy of needs including physiological requirements (food, shelter, health), safety needs (security, stability), belongingness and love needs (relationships, community), esteem needs (recognition, respect), and self-actualization needs (fulfillment of potential). Burton expanded this framework to include needs for response, stimulation, security, recognition, distributive justice, and meaning, emphasizing that the frustration of these needs leads to conflict and dysfunction (as cited in Pincus, 2023).

In the Nigerian context, widespread socio-economic challenges—poverty, unemployment, inadequate healthcare, political instability, and insecurity—frustrate basic human needs for large segments of the population. Mainline churches, with their emphasis on formal liturgy, delayed eschatological rewards, and limited engagement with material concerns, often fail to address these frustrated needs adequately. This creates a vacuum that religious entrepreneurs fill by establishing prayer houses and ministries promising immediate, tangible solutions to pressing human needs.

The emphasis on healing in prayer houses directly

addresses physiological and safety needs frustrated by inadequate healthcare systems. The focus on deliverance from spiritual forces perceived as causing misfortune addresses needs for security and meaning. The prosperity gospel and economic empowerment programs address needs for material well-being and esteem. The strong sense of community and belonging cultivated in prayer houses addresses needs for connection and recognition.

Human Needs Theory also illuminates the psychological appeal of charismatic religious leaders. In contexts where individuals feel powerless to meet their own needs through conventional means, charismatic leaders who claim special access to divine power offer an alternative pathway to need fulfillment. The absolute commitment demanded by some prayer houses reflects the depth of need frustration and the perceived value of the spiritual solutions offered.

Furthermore, this theoretical framework helps explain the resistance of prayer house adherents to criticism or regulation of their religious practices. From the perspective of Human Needs Theory, individuals who have found effective mechanisms for addressing deeply frustrated needs will vigorously defend those mechanisms against perceived threats. This explains why even when evidence of exploitation or manipulation emerges, adherents may remain loyal to prayer houses that they perceive as meeting their fundamental needs.

The integration of Religious Market Theory and Human Needs Theory provides a robust framework for analyzing religious entrepreneurship and prayer house proliferation in Taraba State. Religious Market Theory illuminates the supply side of the phenomenon, how religious entrepreneurs identify opportunities, develop products, and compete within the religious marketplace. Human Needs Theory illuminates the demand side, why individuals seek out prayer houses and what needs they hope to fulfill through participation. Together, these frameworks reveal the dynamic interaction between religious entrepreneurs and their target populations. Prayer house founders recognize and respond to frustrated human needs within their communities, developing

religious products and services that promise need fulfillment. Adherents, experiencing various forms of need frustration, evaluate religious offerings and commit to those perceived as most effective. This dynamic creates conditions for both genuine spiritual ministry and potential exploitation, as the intensity of need can make individuals vulnerable to manipulation.

The theoretical integration also illuminates the ambivalent nature of religious entrepreneurship as documented in the primary text. Prayer houses simultaneously function as genuine responses to human suffering and as entrepreneurial ventures operating within competitive religious markets. They provide real benefits, healing, community, hope, economic support, while also creating conditions for potential abuse, financial exploitation, dependency, family fragmentation. This ambivalence reflects the complex intersection of spiritual calling and economic necessity, authentic ministry and strategic entrepreneurship.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research methodology rooted in historical and sociological approaches. The research design adopted was the cross-sectional survey design, which was predetermined for collecting and analyzing information needed to satisfy the study's objectives. The qualitative approach was chosen to capture the nuanced experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of both prayer house attendees and non-attendees. This methodology enabled the study to move beyond surface-level descriptions to explore the meanings that individuals attach to their engagement with prayer houses and ministries, as well as the social dynamics that characterize these institutions.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Taraba State, Nigeria's second-largest state in terms of land mass, situated in the southern section of north-eastern Nigeria along

the Nigerian-Cameroonian borderland. The State lies approximately between latitude 6°25' N and 9°30' N and between longitude 9°30' E and 11°45' E. It shares boundaries with Nasarawa and Plateau States to the west, Bauchi and Gombe States to the north, Adamawa State to the northeast, Benue State to the southwest, and the Republic of Cameroon to the south and southeast. The selection of Taraba State as the study area was strategic, given its religious diversity, ethnic complexity, and representative characteristics of Northern Nigerian socio-economic conditions. The state's three senatorial districts provided a comprehensive geographical coverage that captured variations in religious practice and socio-economic context across the region.

Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of prayer houses and ministries, their members and adherents, as well as non-attendees in Taraba State. A reconnaissance study was conducted to ascertain the number and distribution of prayer houses and ministries across the state, informing the sampling strategy.

The study purposively selected three prayer houses from each senatorial district of Taraba State, north, central, and south, based on criteria of popularity, followership size, and attendance volume. This purposive sampling strategy ensured that the selected prayer houses were significant enough within their communities to generate meaningful data and that their attendees and non-attendee observers could contribute substantive insights.

Specifically, the study examined God's House of Prayer (Prophetess Talatu Malachi), and Salvation Power Deliverance Ministry (Prophetess Jikini Luka Awudu) in Northern Taraba; Deliverance Universal Ministry (Apostle Aloysius Francis), Ndola for Christ Ministry (Apostle Barde Audu Sihiro), and Shalom Healing Evangelistic Ministry (Evangelist Wilson Yaro) in Central Taraba; and, Divine Mandate Fire Assembly (Prophetess Fintirimam Tanimu), Apostolic Grace Christ City Healing and Deliverance Ministry (Apostle Jerome Jibatswen Luka), Dohtah City Ministry International

Worldwide (Apostle Prophet Osaremidah Orobosa Alex), and Merciful Jesus Healing and Deliverance Ministry (Prophet David Uten Ingyaken) in Southern Taraba.

The inclusion of non-attendees in the sample was crucial for capturing perceptions of prayer houses from those not directly involved, providing a more balanced assessment of community impacts and perceptions.

Data Collection Instruments

The study utilized a structured interview guide titled "Impact of Prayer Houses & Ministries" (IPHM) to obtain relevant information for answering the research questions. Three separate interview guides were developed for non-participants, participants and adherents, and founders/operators. The study employed face-to-face interviews in obtaining relevant information from participants. Focus group discussions were also conducted with combinations of both attendees and non-attendees of prayer houses and ministries. Participants for focus groups were individuals who did not take part in the semi-structured interviews, ensuring that findings represented a broad spectrum of views rather than those of a particular section of society.

Data Analysis

The study employed qualitative analysis and thematic analysis approaches. Qualitative data from interview responses were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data. Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed prior to analysis to ensure accuracy and completeness of data.

RELIGIOUS ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND THE PROLIFERATION OF PRAYER HOUSES

The findings of this study reveal the complex and ambivalent nature of religious entrepreneurship and prayer house proliferation in Taraba State. The

analysis is organized around four thematic areas: the emergence and characteristics of prayer houses as entrepreneurial ventures; the economic dimensions of religious entrepreneurship; the social and spiritual impacts on adherents and communities; and the problematic dimensions including commercialization, exploitation, and social fragmentation.

Emergence and Characteristics of Prayer Houses as Entrepreneurial Ventures

The study revealed that prayer houses in Taraba State emerged as entrepreneurial ventures responding to perceived gaps in the religious marketplace and unmet needs within communities. The founders' narratives consistently combined elements of divine calling with strategic identification of market opportunities.

All founders interviewed articulated their ministry establishment in terms of divine calling, typically involving supernatural encounters, visions, dreams, or audible divine communications. Prophetess Talatu Malachi, founder of God's House of Prayer, described her calling as beginning in 2001 when she started hearing God and receiving visions, though the ministry began fully in 2018. She stated, "God always talks to me... God told me not to collect offering because He will take care of me" (T. Malachi, personal communication, July 28, 2024). This narrative of direct divine communication established her charismatic authority and differentiated her ministry within the religious marketplace.

Apostle Aloysius Francis, founder of Deliverance Universal Ministry, reported receiving his apostolic call at age eight through a vision while sleeping. He described seeing himself "with Bible preaching to a crowd and many were being delivered... then I heard a voice in a bright light saying, 'This is your assignment for life. I am Jesus giving you this'" (A. Francis, personal communication, June 27, 2024). This early-life calling narrative legitimized his ministry and positioned him as divinely appointed rather than self-appointed.

Apostle Barde Audu Sihiro of Ndola for Christ

Ministry received his call in 1993 with a specific ethnic mandate: "I will raise you in Ndola land" (O. Okpachi, personal communication, June 26, 2024). This ethnic targeting reflects strategic market segmentation, focusing on the Ndola people as a distinct niche within the religious marketplace. The founder reported that "nearly 90 percent of Ndola people were idol worshippers, and God has liberated many through his ministry and they have abandoned idolatry" (B.A. Sihiro, personal communication, June 26, 2024).

These calling narratives align with findings from studies of Nigerian Pentecostalism. As noted in the primary text, "such calls frequently emphasize charismatic gifts and the ability to perform miracles, thus appealing to followers who seek tangible evidence of spiritual power" (Nmah, 2013). The narratives serve multiple entrepreneurial functions: establishing legitimacy, differentiating the ministry from competitors, and creating compelling brand stories that attract adherents seeking authentic spiritual power.

The prayer houses examined demonstrated strategic specialization and market positioning. Each ministry identified specific needs within their target populations and developed distinctive offerings to address those needs. Prophetess Talatu Malachi's ministry specialized in the use of "miracle water" as a point of contact for healing, along with salt and anointing oil, all provided free of charge. This no-fee model distinguished her ministry from those charging for spiritual items while still utilizing the commodified religious objects characteristic of Nigerian prayer houses. Her ministry attracted 400-500 attendees per meeting, with more females than males, reflecting effective market penetration among women seeking spiritual solutions to health and family challenges.

Apostle Jerome Jibatswen Luka's Apostolic Grace Christ City Healing and Deliverance Ministry positioned itself as a "specialist hospital" compared to churches as "general hospitals." He explained, "Cases that cannot be handled by the church is sent to the ministry, and every Sunday people go back to their individual churches" (T.A. Hikon, personal communication, June 2, 2024). This positioning

strategy allowed his ministry to complement rather than compete directly with established churches, creating a symbiotic relationship within the religious marketplace.

Evangelist Wilson Yaro's Shalom Healing Evangelistic Ministry focused specifically on "healing and deliverance for the sick and oppressed" with services held Thursdays from 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m., attracting 40-50 attendees per meeting (W. Yaro, personal communication, June 27, 2024). This focused specialization and convenient timing catered to working individuals seeking spiritual interventions outside traditional Sunday worship schedules.

The specialization patterns observed align with Religious Market Theory's prediction that religious firms differentiate their products to serve niche markets. As Adedibu et al. (2024) note, prophetic ministries have become defining features of Neo-Pentecostalism, where size and scale matter. However, the Taraba State prayer houses demonstrate that even smaller ministries can achieve significant community impact through strategic specialization and targeted outreach.

The organizational structures of examined prayer houses reflected entrepreneurial approaches to resource mobilization and sustainability. While all founders claimed divine mandate, they employed varied strategies for financial sustainability. Apostle Aloysius Francis reported that his ministry is sustained "through assistance from partners and thanksgiving from members," noting that "the ministry does not collect tithes, but any member who is led to bring his/hers, he collects" (A. Francis, personal communication, June 27, 2024). This flexible approach to resource mobilization allowed the ministry to maintain spiritual credibility while ensuring operational sustainability.

Prophetess Fintirimam Tanimu's Divine Mandate Fire Assembly generated revenue "through the sales of anointing oil, back to sender communion, offering and thanksgiving" (Z.A. Yaro, personal communication, June 30, 2024). This commodification of spiritual items represents direct religious entrepreneurship, converting spiritual products into revenue streams while meeting

adherent demand for tangible spiritual resources. The funding strategies observed reflect the broader trend of spiritual commodification documented by Afolabi et al. (2024) and Ngwoke (2024). Prayer house founders function as religious entrepreneurs who identify market opportunities, develop products (spiritual items, specialized services), and establish organizational structures that generate sustainability while fulfilling spiritual missions.

Economic Dimensions of Religious Entrepreneurship

The study revealed significant economic dimensions of prayer house operations and impacts, both positive and negative. Prayer houses function as economic entities generating employment, stimulating local business, and providing material support to adherents, while also creating conditions for financial exploitation and resource diversion. Multiple respondents reported positive economic outcomes associated with prayer house attendance. C. Francis, a businesswoman attending a prayer ministry in Gembu, stated: "My business has grown and my shop is stocked with goods, and I have been able to buy a machine and have access to more business connections and opportunities since I started attending this prayer ministry" (personal communication, July 24, 2024). This testimony illustrates how prayer houses function as networking hubs that facilitate business development and economic advancement.

T.A. Hikon, a male attendee, reported that his prayer ministry "started a scheme where so many people pushed in money, some people received loan" (personal communication, July 24, 2024). While acknowledging that "some could not pay back," this initiative represents an attempt at community-based economic empowerment through microfinance mechanisms embedded within religious structures. A. Gideon, another attendee, explained: "The teachings and prayers in the prayer ministry have completely changed how I view my business. Economically, I have learned to be disciplined with my finances, and since I started following the prophetic directions, my business has expanded" (personal communication, July 28, 2024). This

testimony highlights how religious teachings can shape economic behavior, promoting financial discipline and entrepreneurial confidence.

These positive economic impacts align with findings by Ogueche et al. (2022), who noted that Christian prayer ministries act as "solution centers" addressing diverse needs including economic challenges. Adeniji-Soji (2022) similarly observed that prayer houses serve as places of refuge providing both spiritual and material support amid Nigeria's economic challenges. The study also documented organized economic empowerment initiatives by some ministries. Apostle Barde Audu Sihiro's Ndola for Christ Ministry organized "entrepreneurship seminars and trainings to teach attendees soup making among others" and planned to establish "an orphanage, fish farm, cocoa farm among other crops" (B.A. Sihiro, personal communication, June 26, 2024). Prophet David Uten Ingyaken's ministry supported farmers with "fertilizers and other farm inputs" and assisted members in completing housing projects (U. Useni, personal communication, August 30, 2024). These initiatives reflect what might be termed "developmental religious entrepreneurship", the deployment of religious organizational structures and resources for community economic development. Such activities position prayer houses as significant economic actors within their communities, addressing material needs alongside spiritual ones.

Alongside positive economic impacts, the study documented significant concerns about financial exploitation and resource diversion. Mrs. E. Madaki, a non-attendee observer, expressed disappointment: "There have been times when the emphasis on giving and generosity feels more like a manipulation tactic than a genuine call to serve God. Because people waste their money in the name of giving to God without any change in their conditions" (personal communication, July 29, 2024). J. Emmanuel observed: "It seems that every service comes with a call to give, and the focus is often on the size of the donation rather than on spiritual growth. Attendees are asked to buy anointing oils, holy water, miracle handkerchiefs, and other items. It feels like a business sometimes" (personal communication,

August 4, 2024). This perception of prayer houses as business enterprises rather than spiritual institutions reflects broader concerns about the commercialization of religion.

The requirement of consultation fees emerged as a significant concern. Ms. Fatima Amos noted: "You'll have to pay consulting fee to see the prophet each time you need prayers or counseling. I believe that faith should be accessible to everyone, regardless of their financial situation" (personal communication, July 28, 2024). Some prayer houses in Jalingo reportedly charge consultation fees of N5,000 or more, creating financial barriers to spiritual access. O. Okpachi, a former attendee, described resource diversion: "We were constantly encouraged to donate large sums of money for projects that were never completed... After raising the funds, there was little to no accountability. The same projects would be mentioned again after a few months, with no sign of progress" (personal communication, June 26, 2024). This lack of transparency and accountability eroded trust and suggested misappropriation of donated resources.

These findings align with Uroko et al. (2023), who documented prayer merchandising and financial exploitation in Nigerian prayer houses. Ngwoke (2024) similarly described "elaborate seed-sowing schemes, prophetic extortion, and the commercialization of spirituality through the sale of anointing oils, miracle stickers, and exorbitant fees for prayer sessions" as methods employed by religious leaders to amass wealth at followers' expense. The economic dimensions of prayer houses thus reveal fundamental ambivalence: these institutions provide genuine economic benefits and support to many adherents while simultaneously creating conditions for exploitation and resource extraction. This ambivalence reflects the dual nature of religious entrepreneurship, simultaneously ministry and business, spiritual calling and economic venture.

Social and Spiritual Impacts of Prayer Houses

The study documented significant social and spiritual impacts of prayer house participation,

including community formation, emotional support, personal transformation, and moral reform, alongside concerning patterns of social fragmentation and family division. Prayer houses function as vital community hubs fostering belonging, mutual support, and social connection. R. Luka, an attendee, stated: "I was dealing with solitariness and isolation, and after participating in prayer sessions and interacting with fellow attendees, I feel much better physically. I now have quality network of supportive people around me" (personal communication, June 13, 2024).

M.A. Punarimam, another attendee, elaborated: "The prayer house has provided me with a sense of connection and community. I've made many friends and connections through the ministry, and we support each other in various ways. We have a strong sense of friendship and mutual support, which has been a blessing to me and my family" (personal communication, June 20, 2024). This testimony highlights how prayer houses create social capital that extends beyond spiritual activities to encompass practical support networks. A focus group participant, F. Jibo, described the prayer house as "a place of refuge and encouragement," noting: "When I lost my job last year, members of the prayer house stood by me. They not only prayed with me but also connected me with opportunities, which eventually helped me find a new job. It's a community where you feel seen, supported, and valued" (focus group discussion, November 19, 2024).

These social support functions align with Ogueche et al. (2022), who emphasize that prayer ministries act as "solution centers" providing social support and fostering community ties. Adeniji-Soji (2022) similarly found that prayer houses serve as places of refuge that meet both spiritual and material needs, reinforcing social cohesion among attendees. The study also documented how prayer houses facilitate professional networking and career advancement. A. Sanda, a banker, explained: "The prophecies I've received have guided my career choices, leading to a promotion at work. And, I've connected with other men who share similar values, and we support one another in our personal and professional lives" (personal communication, June 19, 2024). This

intersection of spiritual guidance and professional networking illustrates the comprehensive support that prayer houses provide to adherents.

The spiritual impacts of prayer house participation emerged as significant themes in attendee testimonies. M. Agya, a retiree and farmer, described profound personal transformation: "Before, I was struggling with feelings of uncertainty and drunkenness, but after attending the prayer house, I started to receive guidance and wisdom on how to navigate my life challenges. The prayers and teachings have also helped me to develop a sense of hope and optimism" (personal communication, June 21, 2024). Pastor J. Ayuka, a clergy member who attends a prayer ministry for personal renewal, explained: "Before, I was struggling with feelings of burnout and exhaustion, but after attending the ministry, I started to receive healing and restoration through prayer and the word of God" (personal communication, July 27, 2024). This testimony reveals that prayer houses serve not only lay attendees but also religious leaders seeking spiritual refreshment and renewal.

G. Audu, a trader, described her spiritual journey: "Before I joined the prayer ministry, I felt lost and disconnected. The prayers and prophecies have given me a renewed sense of purpose. I feel more grounded and connected to my faith, which helps me navigate life's challenges" (personal communication, July 28, 2024). This testimony highlights how prayer houses address existential needs for meaning and purpose. These spiritual impacts align with findings by Nwosu (2015) and Nwokocha (2021), who discuss how faith practices foster personal transformation and provide frameworks for navigating life's challenges. The emphasis on personal transformation and moral reform positions prayer houses as significant institutions for character development and behavioral change within communities.

Despite positive social and spiritual impacts, the study documented significant concerns about family fragmentation and community division attributed to prayer house teachings and practices. J. Serah observed: "There are controversies where prayer ministries set confusion in families and their main churches as a result of their teachings, prophecies

and practices. The teachings are sometimes very critical of attendees' family members who are non-attendees and other churches' belief system and practices" (personal communication, July 22, 2024). Elder I.G. Solomon, a church leader, elaborated: "Some perceive prayer houses and prayer ministries as trouble makers especially in families, by telling them that their relations such as aunties, uncles, fathers, mothers or siblings are responsible for their predicament or that they wanted to kill them or tied their destiny" (personal communication, July 19, 2024). This practice of attributing personal misfortunes to family members' malevolent spiritual actions creates profound distrust and division within families.

Elder A. Lazaru, in a focus group discussion, noted: "I've seen instances where prayer houses cause divisions in families and communities. Certain leaders discourage members from associating with non-members, including family members, labeling them as 'unbelievers' or 'spiritually weak.' This creates unnecessary tension and alienation within families and communities" (focus group discussion, November 19, 2024). The study documented a specific case where a family was instructed to cut down mango trees on their property based on prophecies that witches held meetings there. The disagreement over cutting down a second tree led to the separation of husband and wife. Another case involved siblings who attacked their uncle based on a prophet's declaration that he was responsible for their parents' death; the siblings were subsequently imprisoned in Jalingo.

M. Blessing described community-level impacts: "In my area, the prophecies from prayer houses have caused a lot of conflict. There was a case where a prophet prophesied that certain people were enemies of progress, and it led to mistrust and fighting. People stopped working together in farming cooperatives because they believed some were cursed. These teachings don't unite us; instead, they tear us apart" (personal communication, August 6, 2024). M. Chinyere added: "I know a woman whose marriage was destroyed after a prophet prophesied that her husband was possessed by an evil spirit. She left her husband, believing the prophet's words without any

evidence. These kinds of teachings divide families and even affect how people interact in the community" (personal communication, June 27, 2024). These findings align with Ndubisi and Kanu (2019), who observed that prayer houses in Southeast Nigeria encourage "family division" and constitute "a serious threat to the hard-earned philosophy of life of Igbo people." The study's documentation of similar patterns in Taraba State suggests that family fragmentation represents a widespread consequence of certain prayer house practices across Nigerian regions.

The Ambivalence of Religious Entrepreneurship: Synthesis and Discussion

The findings reveal fundamental ambivalence in the phenomenon of religious entrepreneurship and prayer house proliferation in Taraba State. Prayer houses simultaneously function as genuine spiritual ministries and entrepreneurial ventures; as sources of community support and sites of exploitation; as agents of personal transformation and causes of family fragmentation. The founders' narratives demonstrate genuine spiritual conviction alongside strategic entrepreneurial behavior. The divine calling narratives are sincerely held and deeply meaningful to the founders, yet they also function as powerful branding and marketing tools within the competitive religious marketplace. The specialization in particular healing ministries or target populations reflects both authentic spiritual gifts and strategic market positioning. This duality is not necessarily hypocritical or contradictory. As Religious Market Theory suggests, religious organizations operating in competitive environments must balance spiritual authenticity with organizational sustainability. The challenge lies in maintaining this balance without allowing commercial considerations to overshadow spiritual mission. The study documented both successful balancing and significant imbalances. Ministries like that of Prophetess Talatu Malachi, who provides spiritual items free of charge and emphasizes voluntary giving, demonstrate that religious entrepreneurship can prioritize spiritual mission while maintaining sustainability. Conversely, ministries charging substantial

consultation fees and emphasizing financial contributions as prerequisites for spiritual blessings illustrate the tilt toward commercialization that concerns critics. Human Needs Theory illuminates how prayer houses effectively address genuine needs, for healing, security, belonging, esteem, and meaning, that mainline institutions and state services inadequately meet. The testimonies of healing, personal transformation, community support, and economic empowerment represent authentic need fulfillment that explains the continued attraction of prayer houses despite recognized problems.

However, the intensity of need also creates vulnerability to exploitation. Individuals desperate for healing, financial breakthrough, or deliverance from perceived spiritual attacks may accept financial demands, questionable practices, or family-divisive prophecies that they would otherwise reject. The very effectiveness of prayer houses in meeting certain needs creates conditions for potential abuse. This dynamic reflects what might be termed the "vulnerability paradox" of religious entrepreneurship: the more effectively a religious institution addresses deeply felt needs, the more dependent adherents become and the more vulnerable they are to exploitation. Breaking this paradox requires institutional mechanisms for accountability and transparency that protect adherents while preserving the genuine benefits of religious participation.

The study's findings on social impacts reveal a troubling pattern: the same institutions that create strong bonds of community and mutual support among insiders simultaneously generate division and conflict with outsiders, particularly family members not affiliated with the ministry. The strong in-group cohesion cultivated by prayer houses, what scholars term "bonding social capital", comes at the cost of "bridging social capital" that connects diverse groups within communities. The prophetic practices that identify family members as sources of spiritual attack or misfortune represent particularly damaging interventions. By reframing normal family tensions and challenges through the lens of spiritual warfare, prayer houses transform manageable relational difficulties into existential spiritual threats requiring

radical responses, separation, confrontation, or ostracism of accused family members. This pattern reflects a broader challenge facing religious movements that cultivate strong boundaries between insiders and outsiders. While some degree of boundary maintenance is necessary for group identity and cohesion, the prayer house practices documented in this study often cross into destructive territory, undermining rather than strengthening the family structures that are essential for community well-being.

A recurring theme across the negative findings concerns the lack of accountability structures within prayer houses. Financial accountability is minimal or nonexistent, with founders exercising unilateral control over resources. Doctrinal accountability is absent, with no external review of prophetic pronouncements or teachings. Relational accountability is limited, with no mechanisms for addressing harm caused by divisive prophecies or exploitative practices. This accountability deficit reflects the organizational structure of prayer houses as independent, founder-centered institutions operating outside formal denominational oversight. While this independence enables flexibility and responsiveness to local needs, it also removes the checks and balances that might prevent abuses. The comparison offered by one respondent between mainline churches as "filling stations" and prayer houses as "black markets" (S.A. Samuel, personal communication, June 2, 2024) captures this accountability differential. Mainline churches, with their formal governance structures, denominational oversight, and established doctrinal standards, provide greater accountability but may be less responsive to immediate felt needs. Prayer houses, with their charismatic, founder-centered structure, provide greater responsiveness but less accountability.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the phenomenon of religious entrepreneurship and the proliferation of prayer houses in Taraba State, Northern Nigeria, from 1991 to 2023. Through qualitative methodology rooted in historical and sociological

approaches, the research has illuminated the complex and ambivalent nature of prayer houses as simultaneously spiritual ministries and entrepreneurial ventures, sources of community support and sites of potential exploitation, agents of personal transformation and causes of family fragmentation. The findings demonstrate that prayer houses in Taraba State constitute influential religious and social institutions that have emerged in response to the intersection of spiritual aspirations and socio-economic realities. Founders establish these ministries based on genuine experiences of divine calling while simultaneously identifying and responding to market opportunities within the religious landscape. They develop specialized offerings, healing ministries, deliverance services, prophetic consultations, spiritual items that address the frustrated needs of populations facing economic uncertainty, health challenges, and social dislocation.

The economic dimensions of prayer houses reveal significant positive contributions alongside problematic practices. These institutions generate employment, stimulate local business development, provide material support to vulnerable populations, and foster economic empowerment through skills training and microfinance initiatives. Simultaneously, some prayer houses engage in financial exploitation, charging substantial fees for spiritual services, pressuring adherents to give beyond their means, and diverting donated resources from promised projects to personal enrichment. This economic ambivalence reflects the dual nature of religious entrepreneurship, simultaneously ministry and business, spiritual calling and economic venture. The social and spiritual impacts of prayer houses demonstrate similar ambivalence. Adherents report profound personal transformation, healing from physical and psychological ailments, strengthened faith, moral reform, and the development of supportive community networks that enhance well-being and resilience. Yet these same institutions contribute to family fragmentation through teachings and prophecies that generate suspicion and division among relatives, labeling non-attending family members as spiritual enemies or obstacles to destiny. The strong in-group cohesion cultivated by prayer

houses often comes at the cost of broader community integration and family harmony.

Prayer houses and ministries in Taraba State represent a significant and ambivalent feature of contemporary Northern Nigerian Christianity. They embody the creative adaptation of religious traditions to address pressing human needs within challenging socio-economic contexts while also manifesting the risks inherent in unregulated religious entrepreneurship. Understanding and addressing this ambivalence requires nuanced approaches that preserve the genuine benefits of prayer house participation while establishing accountability mechanisms that protect vulnerable adherents from exploitation and harm.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed for various stakeholders concerned with religious entrepreneurship and prayer house proliferation in Taraba State and Northern Nigeria more broadly:

1. Prayer house leaders should establish clear financial reporting and accountability mechanisms to ensure that donated resources are utilized for their intended purposes. Regular updates on projects and transparent accounting practices will build and maintain trust among adherents.
2. Leaders should develop and adhere to ethical guidelines governing prophetic pronouncements, particularly those affecting family relationships. Prophecies that accuse family members of malevolent spiritual activity should be subject to verification processes and delivered with pastoral sensitivity that preserves family unity.
3. Prayer houses should emphasize spiritual growth, character development, and genuine discipleship rather than focusing primarily on financial contributions. Teachings on giving should be grounded in biblical principles of cheerful, voluntary generosity rather than manipulative promises of proportional returns.
4. Prayer house leaders should create advisory boards or accountability relationships with other respected

religious leaders to provide external oversight and guidance. Such structures can help prevent the abuses that flourish in isolated, unaccountable leadership contexts.

5. Prayer houses should expand their community engagement beyond their immediate membership to foster bridging social capital that connects diverse groups. Collaborative projects with other churches and community organizations can counteract the fragmenting tendencies documented in this study.

6. Organizations such as the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) should develop voluntary standards and best practices for prayer houses and ministries, addressing issues of financial accountability, prophetic ethics, and pastoral care.

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