

“The Shadow of Contemporary Power: When Servant Dominance Shatters the Harmony of the Church X¹ Congregation.”

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how informal power exercised by non-clergy ministers within Church X creates ‘shadows of power’ that disrupt congregational harmony and undermine the effectiveness of church ministry. Using a qualitative approach and intrinsic case study, data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and internal document analysis, then analyzed thematically reflectively. The results identified five main themes: (1) the polarization of the meaning of ministry between divine calling and formal authority; (2) the dominance of informal power in church ministry; (3) the destructive impact of informal domination on harmony and effectiveness of ministry; (4) recovery strategies through humility, open communication, and reflective dialogue; and (5) the dilemma of tension between structural assertiveness and relational inclusivity. These findings emphasize the need to integrate the principles of servant leadership and an understanding of Foucault’s micro-physics of power to organize power relations ethically and spiritually. Practically, this study provides insights for charismatic churches in building a more participatory, collaborative, and harmonious ministry model, so that non-clergy ministers can become agents of harmony, not sources of conflict.

Keywords: Non-formal power, Non-pastoral servants, Servant leadership, Congregational harmony, Micro-physics of power

INTRODUCTION

The church is an ideal spiritual community that should be a model of harmony and service, in accordance with the Christian principle that leadership is a form of service (Matthew 20:25–28). Through the example of Jesus Christ, the church is invited to always prioritize humility, empathy, and devotion as the foundation of true leadership. However, in contemporary reality, the church faces significant challenges in the form of internal dynamics that often involve power conflicts, unhealthy competition, and selfish ambitions that threaten the integrity of the congregation and tarnish Christian witness. This phenomenon is known as the "shadow of power," a form of informal authority that operates subtly behind the church structure, yet has a strong influence on the direction of service and the life of the faith community. This condition emphasizes the need for re-reflection on the concept of ecclesiastical leadership within the framework of practical theology.

In global practical theology, the dynamics of power within the church cannot be separated from the social, symbolic, and theological contexts that surround it. Various approaches to global practical theology, such as pneumatocracy (Kgatle, 2023) and critique of gender-based discourse on power and coloniality (Cornwall, 2023), This demonstrates that ecclesiastical power is always multi-layered: spiritual, social, and symbolic. Thus, the "shadow of power" is not always explicitly present, but rather through symbols, social relations, and ministry practices that appear spiritual yet are imbued with the meaning of power.

Global studies show that church leadership often faces tensions where spiritual authority is contested as a source of dominance (Blake, 2024; Goti, 2024; Onuorah, 2024). This phenomenon reflects a shift from a calling to service to a competitive pattern, which is also seen in the Indonesian church, through the politics of electing leaders (Amid, 2021; Boateng-Agyenim, 2024). This shift marks a change in the face of the church

from a space of service to an arena of social legitimacy, where power is often disguised in the form of spiritual and symbolic influence.

This change, reinforced by post-pandemic social media, has magnified the symbolism of power among church ministers (Braun & Clarke, 2024; Christou, 2023), thereby increasing informal conflict and disrupting congregational cohesion (Zwijze-Koning & De Roest, 2023). Digital media has become a new space for power negotiations, where ministers can project a spiritual image while simultaneously expanding their social influence beyond the structural boundaries of the church.

In this context, this research specifically focuses on non-pastoral ministers, namely individuals who carry out ministry responsibilities without formal pastoral positions, yet have significant social and spiritual influence in the life of the congregation. Their positions often serve as a link between the church's structural leadership and the congregational community, so the power dynamics between them have a direct impact on the harmony and effectiveness of ministry. When this informal influence develops without healthy spiritual oversight, symbolic domination emerges that can erode congregational harmony.

This global dynamic finds its relevance in the context of the Indonesian church, including at the Church X, where informal power relations among non-clergy ministers are a prominent phenomenon. Empirically, the informal domination exercised by non-clergy ministers at the Church X congregation is a concrete representation of the ecclesiastical power dynamics examined in this research. At the Church X, a charismatic community with hundreds of members on the outskirts of Jakarta, this informal domination of non-clergy ministers is manifested through everyday social influence. This has a direct impact on internal harmony and ministry collaboration, congregation, and shaping patterns of leadership and social relationships within the body of Christ. The selection of the Church X congregation was based on its characteristics as a medium-sized charismatic church with high participation rates but facing post-pandemic social tensions, thus representing the complexity of informal leadership in Indonesia's urban religious context. This context demonstrates how the "shadows of power" operate subtly through service relationships, influencing the symbolic and moral structures of the community.

This research uses a qualitative approach through thematic analysis of data collected from interviews and observations. This reflexive case study is expected to provide an in-depth description of micro-power relations and their impact on congregational dynamics (Campbell et al., 2020; Naeem et al., 2023). This approach is supported by a theoretical framework that integrates Robert K. Greenleaf's concept of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1979), which places humble service as the foundation of leadership, and Michel Foucault's micro-physics of power perspective (Foucault, 1995), which sees power as a network of social relations and discursive practices, not merely a formal hierarchy (Savić, 2023). These two theories serve as complementary reading tools, with Greenleaf emphasizing the ethical and spiritual aspects of service, while Foucault opens up an understanding of the hidden mechanisms of power at work behind service relations. Thus, the application of both in the context of Church X is expected to reveal how the ideal of spiritual service confronts the social reality of power.

The urgency of this research lies in the risk of internal fragmentation, weakening of moral authority, and decreasing congregational participation, which can hinder the spiritual growth and mission of the church (Bamigboje, 2020; Gourley et al., 2023). Servant leadership theory emphasizes values such as humility, empathy, and a commitment to community development as key to successful leadership in a spiritual context. By applying this model, it is hoped that leaders can empower congregations and foster sustainable harmony. Meanwhile, Foucault's theory provides a critical perspective on how power is distributed and utilized in social relations, opening up an understanding of the informal mechanisms of power often hidden in everyday church activities. While Greenleaf emphasized the ethical dimension of service as the basis of authority, Foucault highlighted the relational dynamics and discursive practices through which power is distributed. The integration of the two emphasizes that power in the church is not merely a matter of structure, but also a matter of spirituality manifested in human relations.

The existing research gap highlights the lack of empirical studies directly examining the informal dominance of non-clergy ministers and the impact of post-pandemic digitalization on power relations in local churches in

Indonesia. Therefore, this research is expected to make significant contributions both conceptually and practically to the development of church leadership theory and collaborative ministry practices, particularly in the context of charismatic churches such as Church X. This research approach is grounded in an interpretivist-theological paradigm, which views the social reality of the church as a construction of spiritual meaning born from symbolic interactions between ministers and congregations. Within this framework, the dominance of non-clergy ministers is understood not only as an ethical deviation but also as a theological symptom reflecting the crisis of ministry and identity in the contemporary church.

Based on these research gaps, this study aims to provide new insights into the relationship between power and ministry within charismatic churches. Its originality lies in its focus on informal power relations among non-clergy ministers in the context of post-pandemic Indonesian charismatic churches. While most previous studies have focused on formal pastoral leadership or power dynamics within the church hierarchy, this study highlights how symbolic and social authority can operate outside of official church structures, shaping subtle yet powerful patterns of influence and legitimacy. The involvement of digital media as a “shadow space” where power negotiations take place underscores the relevance of the term “shadows of power” in the contemporary church context.

Theoretically, this research enriches the discourse on practical theology by integrating Michel Foucault's theory of servant leadership and the microphysics of power in analyzing power relations in the contemporary church. This approach emphasizes that Christian leadership must be viewed not only from a spiritual and moral perspective, but also from the social and symbolic dynamics that shape it.

Practically, the results of this study are expected to serve as a reference for local churches, particularly those in the charismatic tradition, to develop more participatory and collaborative ministry models. These findings provide insights into how non-clergy ministers can be directed to become agents of harmony, rather than sources of conflict, through spiritual development, managing power relations, and applying Christ-centered ministry principles.

Formulation of the problem:

How does the pattern of dominance of non-pastoral ministers in the Church X congregation create a "shadow of power" that impacts congregational cohesion? What strategies can be implemented based on Christian ministry principles to prevent conflict and restore harmony?

Research purposes:

This study aims to (1) identify key themes of the dominance of non-pastoral ministers through thematic analysis; (2) analyze the impact of domination on the harmony and effectiveness of ministry; and (3) formulate theological-practical solutions for the restoration of congregational communities.

Thus, this study aims not only to strengthen the integrity of the local church and uphold ministry as the core of leadership, but also to support the development of a harmonious and mission-oriented congregation amidst the complexity of contemporary social and technological challenges. The theoretical framework integrates Foucault's micro-physics of power and the principles of servant leadership. This combination is essential because Foucault explains how power circulates through everyday practices, while servant leadership provides the ethical and spiritual grounding needed to evaluate these dynamics. Together, these frameworks allow a more holistic interpretation of power both its structural mechanisms and its moral implications in church ministry. To comprehensively understand the dynamics of the dominance of non-clergy ministers and its impacts, this study uses a qualitative approach with thematic analysis. A more detailed explanation of the research design, data collection techniques, and analysis methods will be outlined in the following methodology section.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative intrinsic case study design to explore the dominance of non-pastoral ministers and its impact on congregational harmony at Church X, a unique Indonesian charismatic church

(Craun & Henson, 2022; Eni Purwanti, Antonius Missa, 2021). As part of ethical procedures, the name of the church has been anonymized as “Church X” to respect the institution’s confidentiality and pastoral request. This anonymization does not affect the data or analysis. This anonymization procedure complies with standard ethical guidelines for qualitative research and institutional confidentiality. The study aims to understand the “Contemporary Shadows of Power” phenomenon within a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, viewing social reality as constructed through interactions and distributed power (Campbell et al., 2020; Onuorah, 2024).

Conducted from January to May 2025, the research includes continuous observation and researcher presence as observer-participants to capture hidden power dynamics in service practices (Blake, 2024; Cordelia Beauty Uwamusi Adekunle Ajisebiyawo, 2023; Grigoni, 2021; Zwijze-Koning & De Roest, 2023). Ten participants non-pastoral ministers and core congregation members were purposively and snowball sampled based on minimum experience criteria until data saturation (Bulan & Kosasih, 2020; Christou, 2023).

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis such as church articles of association and activity reports (Christou, 2023). Reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke’s six stages was applied, using Foucault’s theory to identify hidden power mechanisms and servant leadership principles for ethical assessment (Braun & Clarke, 2024; Etukumana, 2024; Gourley et al., 2023; Naeem et al., 2023).

Validity was ensured through member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation (Christou, 2023; Zwijze-Koning & De Roest, 2023). Ethical standards included informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, reflexivity, and approval from church authorities (Braun & Clarke, 2024; Craun & Henson, 2022).

This methodology delivers a comprehensive understanding of contemporary power dynamics in church leadership, enriching practical theology and modern church leadership studies through critical integration of Foucault’s framework and servant leadership.

Research Result

After all data were obtained through interviews, participant observation, and a review of internal church documents, the next step in this research was to interpret the meanings that emerged from the experiences of the informants. This process was carried out through reflective thematic analysis, as explained in the methodology chapter, to find the main patterns and themes that explain the dynamics of power and service at Church X. Thematic analysis of data from semi-structured interviews with ten informants (non-pastoral servants and active congregation members at Church X), participant observation of cell group activities and general worship, and internal documentation such as meeting minutes and articles of association (AD/ART), resulted in five main themes.

In this study, the researcher acted as a reflective observer-participant directly involved in the activities of the cell group and church services to understand the social and spiritual dynamics of the congregation contextually. This position placed the researcher as an insider-outsider, that is, part of the observed community while maintaining a critical distance from the phenomena being studied. This involvement provided an epistemic advantage in capturing relational and spiritual nuances that do not always emerge in formal interviews, but also required self-reflection to avoid being trapped in interpretive bias. To maintain reflective objectivity, the analysis process was accompanied by an audit trail, peer discussions, and member checking, ensuring that the resulting meanings were not merely subjective representations of the researcher, but rather the result of shared interpretations with the informants (Christou, 2023; Naeem et al., 2023).

The analysis process follows six steps developed by (Braun & Clarke, 2024), namely data familiarization, initial coding, theme search, theme review, theme definition, and report preparation. In the process of initial coding and theme review, Foucault’s theoretical framework on the micro-physics of power and the concept of servant leadership were used as sensitive lenses to identify patterns of informal domination and service dynamics (Davis & Spears, 2024; Onuorah, 2024). Source triangulation (servant and congregation

perspectives) and member checking were applied to increase validity and ensure the credibility of the findings (Christou, 2023; Zwijze-Koning & De Roest, 2023).

Data saturation was reached after the ninth interview, with the tenth interview merely confirming existing themes without providing significant new information. Analysis was conducted reflexively (Christou, 2023; Naeem et al., 2023), and produced themes that reveal patterns of servant dominance and their implications for congregational harmony. The results of this analysis revealed five major themes that illustrate the complexity of power relations behind church ministry a subtle tension between formal structures and the spirituality that animates congregational life. From this thematic reflection process, five major themes were identified that reveal the subtle tension between the spiritual dimension and formal structures in congregational ministry life.

Theme 1: Polarization of the Meaning of Service, Between Divine Calling and Formal Authority

The majority of informants (8/10, or 80%) interpreted service as a calling based on Christ's love, in line with the principles of servant leadership. For example, Informant 1 stated: "Serving is a sincere attitude of heart to be an example of Christ's love, not to be respected." In contrast, a minority (2/10, or 20%) saw it as a formal authority inherent in position, such as Informant 10: "As a manager, I believe my way of serving is correct and serves as a guideline for others, so there is no need for much discussion." This difference in perception creates significant latent tension, where the ideal of love-based service often clashes with more power-oriented leadership practices, even at the informal level. Observational triangulation reinforced this contradiction in servant meetings, where discussions of calling are often marginalized by structural demands or predetermined decisions, such as the rejection of input that does not come from servants who have an informally higher 'status' (Gourley et al., 2023; Pantan, 2025).

This tension of meaning emphasizes that church ministry is not simply a ritual or administrative act, but a spiritual expression continually negotiated between the values of Christ's love and human structures. This is where the second theme emerges, showing how this tension manifests in informal practices of power within the everyday sphere of ministry.

Theme 2: Manifestations of Informal Power Dominance in Church Ministry

Nearly all informants (9/10, or 90%) reported experiencing power domination from non-clergy ministers who lacked formal hierarchical legitimacy but nonetheless exercised strong control. Informant 1 described: "There are ministers who use their position to control or impose their will, as if they want everything done their way." Informant 2 added: "Some ministers place too much importance on their authority, even ignoring input from others on the grounds of seniority or experience." Informant 3 added: "In the cell group, decisions are always made by seniors, even though our younger, fresher ideas are often more relevant. We feel unheard." Triangulation with internal documentation confirmed this pattern of domination, with meeting notes showing senior ministers dominating 85% of the cell group's agenda and decisions, often without meaningful consultation with other members (Etukumana, 2024; Onuorah, 2024). These findings show that micro-power can be realized without formal legitimacy, but through repeated social influence in service practices.

This phenomenon demonstrates that power in the church stems not only from position but also from relational narratives that shape social legitimacy among ministers. In the context of practical theology, this challenges the church to reexamine how authority is exercised and lived out in the spirit of Christ's service. The impact of this imbalance becomes even more evident in the next theme, when informal domination begins to cause dysfunction and relational wounds in ministry.

Theme 3: The Destructive Impact of Informal Dominance on Harmony and Service Effectiveness

This dominance has had a destructive impact, manifested in emotional tension and division, as reported by 8 out of 10 informants (80%). Informant 1 stated: "The service atmosphere has become less harmonious, there is a fear of expressing opinions, and relationships between ministers have become strained. Many ultimately choose to remain silent." Informant 6 added: "This situation is very disruptive to the harmony of the congregation and creates long-standing, unresolved tensions." Participant observation clearly supports this

finding, as evidenced by the significant decline in cell group participation, from an average of 12 to 7 participants following the conflict in three consecutive sessions in some cell groups. This indicates that informal dominance not only affects individuals but also undermines the cohesion and functioning of the group collectively (Craun & Henson, 2022; Zwijze-Koning & De Roest, 2023).

These destructive impacts underscore that power without love breeds distance and distrust. From a theological perspective, the harmony of the congregation reflects the unity of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12–27), so any form of oppressive domination actually weakens the witness of faith itself. However, behind this tension, an awareness of the need for spiritual renewal through communication and humility emerges, as illustrated in the fourth theme.

Theme 4: Recovery Strategies, Humility, Open Communication, and Reflective Dialogue

Seven out of 10 informants (70%) consistently proposed spiritually based solutions for restoration. Informant 1 suggested: “The key is to maintain humility and be open to listening to input from all members, regardless of position.” Informant 2 emphasized: “Building open communication and mutual understanding among servants is an important key to preventing conflict.” Informant 4 added: “Regular, structured, and safe dialogue can prevent small conflicts before they escalate and damage the atmosphere.” Member checking confirmed the effectiveness of better dialogue and communication, with post-meeting observations showing increased positive interactions and mutual respect in the two cell groups that implemented this method. These findings underscore the importance of servant leadership principles as a foundation for restoration, not only in concept but also in actual practice through empathetic and inclusive communication, as emphasized by (Craun & Henson, 2022; Davis & Spears, 2024; Pantan, 2025; Zwijze-Koning & De Roest, 2023).

This healing effort reflects the practical dimension of Christian love, where humility and open communication serve as means of relational healing within the body of Christ. However, this healing practice is not always easy to implement amidst structural demands that emphasize order and strictness. This struggle between structural discipline and relational inclusiveness is the focus of the final theme.

Theme 5: The Dilemma of Tension between Structural Firmness and Relational Inclusiveness

Four of the 10 informants (40%) highlighted the dilemma that arises between the need for firmness for orderly service delivery and the desire for relational inclusivity. Informant 10 stated: “Firmness is necessary for service delivery to run smoothly and according to standards, although it can sometimes cause tension or misunderstanding.” Informant 8 added: “I personally try to act as a mediator to create dialogue and bridge between those who are too rigid and those who want to be more flexible.” Document triangulation revealed that while the church’s articles of association (AD/ART) support structure and firmness (e.g., a clear decision-making hierarchy), their implementation often underemphasizes inclusivity and participation, leading to relational distance and feelings of marginalization in 60% of the meeting notes. This theme highlights that ‘shadows of power’ often arise from an imbalance between existing formal structures and a less adaptive relational culture. This finding parallels the results of (Gourley et al., 2023; Onuorah, 2024) that a church with a rigid formal structure risks losing cohesion if it is not accompanied by a participatory culture and just spiritual discernment.

These five themes collectively demonstrate that the dynamics of power within the church cannot be separated from the interacting spiritual, relational, and structural contexts. Behind the seemingly orderly structure of the church organization lies a human struggle between power and love, between order and togetherness. Herein lies the church's call to continually reinterpret leadership as a form of service faithful to the example of Christ, who reigns supreme through service (Mark 10:45).

Validation of Findings and Data Saturation

These findings were validated through triangulation of sources (informants, observation, documentation), methods, and theory, as well as an audit trail, with high theme frequencies (Themes 1–3: $\geq 70\%$ of informants;

Theme 4: 70%; Theme 5: 40%), indicating data stability and richness. Data saturation was reached after the 9th interview, with the 10th interview no longer yielding significant new categories or insights.

Overall, the data empirically illustrates how the dominance of non-pastoral ministers, manifested as 'shadows of power', concretely disrupts the harmony of the congregation, accompanied by the identification of potential restorative solutions from the informants' perspectives (Craun & Henson, 2022; Davis & Spears, 2024; Onuorah, 2024; Pantan, 2025; Zwijze-Koning & De Roest, 2023).

From a reflective and theological perspective, this validation process not only confirms the scientific consistency of the data but also fosters a spiritual awareness that every form of power in the body of Christ must be measured in the light of love and humility. Thus, the integrity of the data reflects not only empirical stability but also echoes the relational principle of the Gospel that true service grows from example, not domination. In pastoral practice, these results serve as a mirror for the church to continue balancing formal structures and community spirituality, so that congregational harmony can be fully and sustainably restored.

Table 1 Summary of Main Themes

Theme	Frequency (% Informants)	Informant Data	Triangulation Source
1: Ministry as Calling vs. Authority	80%	Quotes from Informants 1 & 10	Meeting observation
2: Dominance of Power	90%	Informant Quotes 1–3	Meeting notes
3: Impact on Harmony	80%	Quotes from Informants 1 & 6	Cell group observation
4: Recovery Efforts	70%	Quotes from Informants 1, 2 & 4	Member checking
5: Structural-Relational Tensions	40%	Quotes from Informants 8 & 10	Articles of Association/Articles of Association Documents

DISCUSSION

This section interprets ecclesiastical power not only as a social phenomenon but as a reflection of ministry spirituality under pressure in contemporary congregational life. To avoid repetition, the discussion integrates theoretical perspectives more concisely by directly linking empirical findings with key concepts rather than restating them. The phenomenon of "Contemporary Shadows of Power" is understood through a critical synthesis of servant leadership and micro-power theory (Foucault, 1995; Greenleaf, 1979; Putrawan, 2024; Nouwen, 1989; Black, 2023).

Rather than presenting Michel Foucault and Robert K. Greenleaf separately and repeatedly, this study positions them in dialogue: Foucault explains how power operates informally through relational and discursive practices (Foucault, 1995; Putrawan, 2024), while Greenleaf provides a normative framework that reorients authority toward service, grounded in humility and ethical responsibility (Greenleaf, 1979; Cassandra Laurensia Lolowang et al., 2023; Nouwen, 1989). This synthesis allows the analysis to move beyond description into critical interpretation.

In addition, these findings are compared with the inclusive democratic leadership model (Ephesians 4:11–16) and the global literature on church power dynamics, which shows that power relations in religious organizations often emerge in symbolic and interpersonal praxis forms (Abossey, 2022; Magai, 2025).

This comparison highlights the conceptual contribution of the study within the Indonesian church context, particularly in addressing the limited discussion of informal power in non-Western charismatic settings.

Rather than merely adopting Western frameworks, the findings demonstrate how local socio-religious practices reinterpret the theology of service in ways that reflect contextual spiritual autonomy.

This synthesis of modern power theory and the theology of service offers a renewed perspective on spiritual authority as a practice of restoration rather than domination, thereby contributing to interdisciplinary discussions on power dynamics in charismatic churches.

1. Service as a Calling vs. Formal Authority

The research findings reveal the polarization of the meaning of service at Church X: the majority of informants (80%) interpret it as a calling of the heart based on the love of Christ, in line with the principle of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1979; Nouwen, 1989). As expressed by Informant 1: “Serving is a sincere attitude of heart to be an example of Christ's love, not to be respected.” However, a minority (20%) interpret ministry within a framework of structural authority, viewing position and title as spiritual legitimacy. This is reflected in Informant 10’s statement: “As a manager, I believe my way of serving is correct and serves as a guideline for others, so there is no need for much discussion.”

This difference in perception creates a latent tension between the ideal of love-based ministry and power-oriented leadership practices. This orientation aligns with the findings of (Cassandra Laurensia Lolowang et al., 2023), which found that conflicts in pastoral ministry often arise when spiritual authority is interpreted hierarchically, rather than as a function of loving service.

In addition, (Abossey, 2022) asserts that faith-based organizations lose social effectiveness when their leaders fail to position leadership as an ethical calling, not a symbolic position.

The novelty of this research lies in its empirical focus on the context of non-clergy ministers, which is rarely discussed in international studies. Rather than treating theoretical perspectives separately, this study synthesizes them: Foucault's perspective asserts that power operates through discursive practices and symbolic relations, not merely formal structures, which explains the emergence of tacit authority among these non-clergy ministers despite the lack of hierarchical legitimacy (Foucault, 1995; Putrawan, 2024), while servant leadership reorients authority toward relational service rather than control.

This difference in meaning challenges the church to reconsider the true nature of service: not about position, but about participation in the love and sacrifice of Christ, who serves without demanding power. Thus, the polarization of meaning is not merely conceptual but becomes a practical entry point for the emergence of relational domination, as reflected in the following findings.

2. Dominance of Informal Power in Church Services

Nearly all informants (90%) witnessed and experienced the dominance of servants who used their positions to control or impose their will, indicating a deviation from the essence of spiritual leadership as relational service. For instance, Informant 1 noted: “There are ministers who use their position to control or impose their will,” while Informant 2 added: “Some ministers place too much importance on their authority, even ignoring input from others.” This pattern reflects a form of informal authority that operates through social influence rather than formal structures.

This result echoes the findings of (Putrawan, 2024), which explain that power in religious organizations often emerges from social networks that normalize domination, and is reinforced by previous research (Magai, 2025), which shows that leadership crises frequently arise from struggles over spiritual influence that lead to division. Rather than listing multiple studies separately, these works point to a shared pattern: informal power becomes problematic when it overrides relational accountability and mutual service.

This dynamic also resonates with previous research (Cassandra Laurensia Lolowang et al., 2023), which argue that pastoral leadership loses its essence when symbolic authority is exercised without a foundation of service.

The novelty of this research lies in demonstrating how the dominance of non-clergy ministers, despite lacking formal hierarchical authority, functions as a “Contemporary Shadow of Power” through repeated relational practices and socially constructed legitimacy within the Indonesian charismatic church context.

Instead of restating theory, this study applies Foucault’s concept of micro-power to explain how domination operates subtly through normalization, self-surveillance, and informal discipline (Foucault, 1995; Putrawan, 2024).

From a relational perspective, this suggests that ministry relationships not grounded in mutual service can shift into arenas of spiritual competition rather than collaboration. Therefore, restoring relationships within the body of Christ requires re-centering leadership on humility, participation, and shared discernment rather than control.

Thus, informal domination is not merely a behavioral issue but a manifestation of micro-power that calls for critical theological and relational reflection in church life.

3. The Destructive Impact of Informal Power on Harmony and Service Effectiveness

Servant dominance creates emotional tension, fear, and damaged relationships between servants, which in turn disrupt congregational harmony and weaken ministry effectiveness. This impact is clearly reflected in participant experiences, as expressed by Informant 1: “The service atmosphere has become less harmonious, and there is fear of expressing opinions,” and Informant 6: “This situation is very disruptive to harmony and creates long-standing, unresolved tensions.”

This finding is consistent with previous research (Osumba & Getui, 2024), which show that power struggles in church contexts can lead to community fragmentation and weakened spiritual commitment, and is supported by previous research (Gultom & Ming, 2024), which argue that unmanaged power relations erode spiritual solidarity and the collective spirit of service.

Rather than presenting these studies separately, they point to a shared pattern: when power is exercised without relational accountability, it produces disintegration rather than unity. This condition may also lead to withdrawal or disengagement from ministry, as members feel marginalized or unheard.

The novelty of this research lies in demonstrating how informal dominance by non-clergy ministers operates at a micro-level, triggering emotional strain and social disintegration within everyday ministry interactions. This extends organizational conflict theory into the domain of ecclesiastical spirituality, particularly in a post-pandemic context marked by increased expectations for transparency and participation.

Similar patterns observed in digital and global church contexts (Black, 2023; Magai, 2025) further highlight that informal power dynamics are not isolated but widely relevant across contemporary religious institutions.

From a theological perspective, this finding underscores that the misuse of power is not merely a structural issue but a spiritual failure to embody the love of Christ within the community. Therefore, restoring harmony requires intentional relational and spiritual renewal, as discussed in the following section.

4. Recovery Efforts through Humility, Open Communication, and Reflection

Informants consistently proposed humility, openness, and communication as key pathways to restoration. This emphasis is reflected in participant statements such as Informant 1: “The key is to maintain humility and be open to listening,” and Informant 2: “Building open communication is an important key.”

These findings are consistent with previous research (Olugbenga, 2024), which outlines Paul’s mediation model of conflict resolution, emphasizing empathy, self-reflection, and mutual listening as expressions of genuine service, and are supported by (Cassandra Laurensia Lolowang et al., 2023), who show that humble and communicative leadership can restore trust through inclusive and intergenerational dialogue.

Rather than treating these perspectives separately, they point to a shared principle: restoration occurs when leadership shifts from control to relational engagement.

This study contributes by demonstrating that spiritual restoration in micro-power conflicts can be practically achieved through reflective dialogue and participatory communication practices within everyday ministry contexts. This provides empirical support for servant leadership as a micro-level conflict resolution strategy, reinforcing the relational vision of Ephesians 4:11–16.

The implication is that the church needs to cultivate a culture of reflective spirituality in leadership formation, where power is understood and practiced as a means of restoration rather than domination. In this sense, spiritual authority emerges from humility and relational accountability, not from symbolic control or formal position.

However, these restorative efforts are not without challenges, as structural demands for order and efficiency may limit the practice of openness and participation, as explored in the following section.

5. Tension between Structural Firmness and Relational Inclusiveness

Several informants expressed a dilemma between the need for firmness to maintain order and the desire for inclusivity in ministry practices. For example, Informant 10 stated: “Firmness is necessary... although it can sometimes cause tension,” while Informant 8 noted: “I try to act as a mediator to create dialogue.” This tension reflects the broader challenge of balancing effective leadership with an egalitarian spirit of service.

This pattern supports previous research (Putrawan, 2024), which emphasizes that contemporary church leadership must integrate organizational discipline with egalitarian relationships to prevent power from becoming symbolic domination. On the other hand, (Osumba & Getui, 2024) identify similar tensions in the Legio Maria Church, where formal authority often conflicts with the congregation’s desire for participatory decision-making.

Rather than viewing these as separate issues, they indicate a common structural-relational imbalance in church leadership practices. The novelty of this research lies in showing how such tensions are intensified by the presence of non-clergy ministers who, despite lacking formal authority, exercise influence through subtle mechanisms such as social surveillance and relational pressure.

The practical implication is the need to develop participatory and adaptive ministry structures that respond to post-pandemic social changes, where internal discipline is shaped by spiritual awareness rather than external pressure (Foucault, 1995; Putrawan, 2024).

In this context, leadership must be reoriented as a relational practice that integrates firmness with inclusiveness, so that authority functions not as control but as facilitation of collective growth. Thus, the church is called to develop a leadership model rooted in love and truth, where assertiveness does not negate inclusiveness, and formal structures become platforms for shared spiritual formation.

This balance between structure and relationship ultimately reflects a theological vision of the unity of the body of Christ, where order and love are held together in dynamic tension.

Overall, this discussion confirms that the “shadow of power” in church ministry is not merely a structural phenomenon but also a spiritual and cultural one, requiring restoration through reflective, communicative, and theological practices.

Theologically, the study calls for a critical ecclesiastical hermeneutics of power so that ministry structures do not reproduce forms of domination that obscure the work of the Holy Spirit within the congregation.

Its primary contribution lies in synthesizing micro-power theory and servant leadership within the empirical context of the Indonesian charismatic church, thereby extending global understanding of how religious power operates at the micro-level and how it can be reoriented toward restorative service (cf. Ephesians 4:11–16).

By presenting a case of informal domination in a non-Western church, this study contributes to ongoing discussions in the sociology of religion, practical theology, and leadership studies.

Accordingly, ecclesiastical power must be continually reinterpreted as participation in Christ's ministry, one that serves rather than dominates.

Thus, beyond its local empirical contribution, this research opens space for global theological dialogue on how power can be transformed into a form of liberating and restorative service.

CONCLUSION

Based on research findings and reflective thematic analysis of interviews, participant observation, and internal documents from Church X, this study concludes that power dynamics in church ministry occur at the micro level, with complex interactions between spiritual, relational, and structural dimensions. Five main themes that emerged empirically provide a comprehensive overview of this phenomenon:

- 1. Polarization of the Meaning of Service:** The majority of ministers understand ministry as a calling based on Christ's love, in line with the principles of servant leadership, while a minority interpret ministry as formal authority. This difference in interpretation creates a latent tension between the ideal of loving service and the practice of power-oriented leadership.
- 2. Dominance of Informal Power:** Micro-power emerges from non-clergy ministers who lack formal legitimacy but are able to influence and control the course of ministry. This phenomenon confirms that power in the church stems not only from formal structures but also from relational influences and recurring social practices.
- 3. Destructive Impact on Harmony and Effectiveness:** Informal domination creates emotional tension, fear, and damaged relationships among ministers, ultimately disrupting congregational harmony and reducing ministry effectiveness. This confirms that the abuse of power within the body of Christ directly impacts the spiritual and social well-being of the congregation.
- 4. Recovery Efforts:** The restorative strategies suggested by informants, such as humility, open communication, and reflective dialogue, have proven effective in restoring relationships and increasing mutual respect. These findings underscore the relevance of servant leadership principles as a concrete practice for transforming domination into liberating service.
- 5. Structural Relational Tension Dilemma:** The church faces the challenge of balancing structural rigidity with relational inclusiveness. An imbalance between rigid formal structures and a less adaptive relational culture can create a "shadow of power," threatening congregational cohesion. Therefore, ministry structures need to be designed to be adaptive, participatory, and rooted in the value of Christ's love.

Theologically, this research asserts that every form of power in the body of Christ must be measured in the light of love and humility, so that service does not turn into domination. The combination of Foucault's perspective on the microphysics of power and servant leadership theory provides a strong conceptual framework for understanding how informal domination is formed, its impact on congregational harmony, and the restorative strategies that can be implemented.

Theoretically, this study contributes to contemporary discussions on church leadership by integrating Foucault's power theory with servant leadership ethics. Practically, it provides guidance for charismatic churches seeking to reduce conflict and enhance collaboration among non-clergy ministers. Contextually, it enriches Indonesian practical theology by documenting the dynamics of informal authority in local congregations. Spiritually, this research encourages churches to restore harmony through humility, accountability, and dialogical leadership.

Overall, these findings suggest that authentic church ministry demands a balance between formal structures, interpersonal relationships, and spiritual calling. Servant, communicative, and reflective leadership practices prove to be key to restoring harmony, enhancing ministry effectiveness, and maintaining the unity of the body of Christ. Thus, this study not only makes an empirical contribution to the local context of the Indonesian charismatic church but also offers theological and conceptual insights for global studies on ecclesiastical power dynamics and service-oriented leadership practices.

Research Implications

1. Practical Implications

- **Church Leadership Management:** The findings of informal domination underscore the need for churches to develop more participatory and adaptive ministry structures. Ministry cannot simply be based on formal authority; it must also consider the relational dynamics between ministers and congregations.
- **Restorative Strategies:** An approach of humility, open communication, and reflective dialogue can be made standard practice in minister training to minimize conflict and increase congregational cohesion.
- **Improving Service Effectiveness:** By balancing structural rigor and relational inclusiveness, the church can ensure that ministry decisions are carried out in an orderly manner while still accommodating members' aspirations, thereby increasing active congregational participation.
- **Formation of Non-Clergy Servants:** The research results highlight the importance of mentoring and supervision for non-clergy ministers so that micro-power does not transform into domination, but rather becomes a means of constructive service.

2. Theological Implications

- **Understanding True Service:** Informal domination that destroys the harmony of the congregation emphasizes that service in the body of Christ must always be rooted in love, humility, and the example of Jesus as a true servant.
- **Reinterpretation of Authority:** Power in the church should be seen as a responsibility to serve, not to control or impose one's will. This aligns with the principle of servant leadership, which emphasizes that spiritual leadership should be liberating, not oppressive.
- **Strengthening the Spiritual Integrity of the Community:** Consistent strategies of spiritual recovery and reflection can build an ethical and harmonious culture of service, minimize interpersonal conflict, and enhance the unity of the body of Christ.
- **Contemporary Church Leadership Models:** This research presents a new conceptual framework that combines Foucault's micro-physics of power and servant leadership, thus providing a theological and practical basis for the modern church in balancing structure, relationships, and spiritual calling.

Research Limitations

1. **Limited Number of Informants:** This study involved only 10 informants, consisting of non-pastoral ministers and active congregation members. Although data saturation was achieved, this number may limit the generalizability of the findings to other church contexts or larger congregations.
2. **Local Context of the Charismatic Church:** The research focus on Church X makes the results highly contextual, so the findings may not be fully applicable to churches with different ministry structures or cultures, including other denominations or churches in different regions.

3. **Researcher Position as Insider–Outsider:** The researcher's direct involvement in group and worship activities provides rich epistemic access, but the potential for reflective bias remains even after conducting audit trails and member checking.
4. **Focus on Non-Clergy Ministers:** This study emphasizes the dominance of non-clergy ministers and their interactions in ministry. Aspects of clergy power or other formal hierarchical structures are not analyzed in depth, leaving an incomplete picture of church power as a whole.
5. **Qualitative Data:** Relying on interviews, observations, and internal documents provides narrative depth, but does not provide quantitative measures that can be used for statistical analysis or generalization to a broader population.

Further Research Recommendations

1. **Sample and Context Expansion:** Similar research could be conducted with a larger number of informants, including various charismatic churches and other denominations, to test the relevance of the “shadow of power” phenomenon in different contexts.
2. **Pastor Analysis and Formal Structure:** Further research could examine the role of clergy, formal hierarchical structures, and their interactions with non-clergy ministers, thereby obtaining a holistic picture of ecclesiastical power.
3. **Mixed-Methods Approach:** A combination of qualitative and quantitative data can provide a more comprehensive understanding, including measuring the impact of informal domination on congregational engagement, ministry participation, and spiritual satisfaction.
4. **Longitudinal Study:** Long-term research can trace changes in power dynamics, the effectiveness of restorative strategies, and the influence of spiritual formation on congregational cohesion over time.
5. **Integration of Theological and Sociological Perspectives:** Future research could deepen the synthesis between theories of power (e.g., Foucault) and theology of service, including the practical application of servant leadership in the context of digital or hybrid ministry.

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Attachment

Table 2 of Questions Asked

No.	Question Core	Focus Excavation
1	Understand, Sir/Madam the meaning of " serve " in context not quite enough answer ecclesiastical?	Dig perception And mark theological trusted service respondents.
2	Have you ever experienced or witnessed this? Situations where church servants use position the service as form power? What is the impact? To atmosphere service And connection between servants?	Dig experience real And impact social from dynamics power.
3	According to you, what is the difference? Power - centered leadership versus service - centered leadership?	Push respondents linking experience with the concept Weber & Greenleaf leadership.
4	How it should be a church servant organize attitude And his actions so that his leadership unite, not divide congregation?	Dig values corrective And solution based ethics service.

Table 3 Generating Initial Codes table

Initial Code	Meaning or Context
serving_as_heart	Serve as sincerity And love Christ
serving_as_duty	Serve as obligation And formal authority
witnessed_abuse	Experience witness abuse power in service
impact_conflict	Conflict , tension , and division congregation
impact_fear_distrust	Fear and distrust between waiters
solution_humility	Humility heart as solution reconciliation

solution_communication	Communication open and dialogue between waiters
solution_inclusion	Involvement of all parties in the decision making decision
need_for_firmness	Firmness considered important to maintain regularity
mediator_role	Role shepherd as mediator
spiritual calling	Service seen as calling faith and morals

Table 4 Thematic Results Table

Theme	Frequency (from 10 informants)	Quote Key
1. Service as Calling vs Authority	8/10 (majority heart, minority authority)	" Attitude sincere heart " (Informant 1)
2. Dominance Power	9/10	" Controlling or forcing will " (Informant 1)
3. Impact to Harmony	8/10	"It's less harmonious, there's a feeling of fear" (Informant 1)
4. Efforts Recovery	7/10	" Communication open " (Informant 2)
5. Tension Firmness vs Inclusivity	4/10	" It is necessary to be organized " (Informant 10)

Table 5 Summary Validation Findings Thematic

Theme	Code Main	Informant & Quotes Supporters	Validation (Yes / No / part)	Notes & Improvement Suggestions
1. Service as Calling vs Authority	serving_as_heart, serving_as_duty, spiritual_calling	- Informant 1: "Serving ... attitude sincere heart ... to be example love Christ" Informant 10: "As administrator, I Certain that method I serving is correct And become a guideline for others."	Yes	This theme is strong And representative (appeared in 8/10 informants). The majority (Informants 1-8) emphasized calling heart; minority (9-10) formal authority. Suggestion: Add sub- theme "contradiction" orientation " to highlight this tension, to be more in-depth during the discussion.
2. Dominance Power in Service Church	witnessed_abuse	- Informant 1: "The waiter who took advantage of his position to control or enforce will." Informant 2: "Some of the waiters are	Yes	Consistent across almost all informants (9/10), including variation view (Informant 9 considered "necessary"). Validation tall Because pattern

		too prioritize their authority, even sometimes ignore input." Informant 9: "I have seen some servants who sometimes too highlight his authority."		repeat. Suggestion: Count more precise frequency (eg, 7 cases) negative vs. 2 neutral) to strengthen argument domination as phenomenon general.
3. Impact Power to Harmony And Effectiveness Service	impact_conflict, impact_fear_distrust	- Informant 1: "The atmosphere service becomes less harmonious, there is a feeling of fear, and connection between servants to be" Informant 2: "Causes conflict hidden destructive atmosphere family." Informant 6: "This is very bother harmony And cause tension in service."	Yes	Supported strong (appeared in 8/10 informants), with an impact emotional (fear, division) dominant. Suggestion: Add triangulation with literature from Table 4.1 documents You, eg, study Ahmar et al. (2024) about tension consequence structure power imbalance in the Indonesian church.
4. Efforts Recovery through Humility Heart And Communication	solution_humility, solution_communication, solution_inclusion	- Informant 1: "Maintaining humility heart, open listen input." Informant 2: " Building communication open And each other understand between servers is important key." Informant 5: "The importance of dialogue and deliberation in decision making decision."	Yes	Theme This solution is proactive And appeared in question 4 & closing (7/10 informants). Validation is good because based experience. Suggestion: Develop with examples practical, such as "rotation position" of recommendation You, and link to Greenleaf (1977) for servant leadership.
5. Tension between Firmness Structural And Inclusivity Relational	need_for_firmness, mediator_role	- Informant 10: "That is necessary for the service walk regular, even though cause tension." Informant 8 (shepher): "I have witnessed a number of tension ... i try play a role as mediator." Informant 9: "Firmness in decision making decisions must be accompanied by clear communication."	Part	Appears in a minority (4/10 informants, mainly 8-10), but is less dominant compared to other themes. Validation part Because potential under-represented. Suggestion: Strengthen by adding code from Informants 3 & 4 (eg, " prioritize togetherness "), or combine it into Theme 2 if too thin. This could be an emergent topic for discussion ethical.