

## **STRUCTURED MEDIATION SYSTEMS ON INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS AMONG PRIESTS IN THE CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF LUSAKA**

BY

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### **ABSTRACT**

Conflicts among priests may lead to the deterioration of fraternity, collaboration, and pastoral work. If not well managed, such conflicts can result in divisions that negatively affect interpersonal relationships among the clergy. This study sought to assess the influence of structured mediation systems on interpersonal relations among priests in the Catholic Archdiocese of Lusaka. A quantitative research approach was adopted, employing a cross-sectional survey design. The target population comprised 91 diocesan priests and 164 religious priests serving in the Catholic Archdiocese of Lusaka. A sample size of 156 respondents was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula, and participants were selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected using structured, self-administered questionnaires. Analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23, employing both descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) and inferential statistics to examine relationships among the study variables. Pearson correlation was used to assess the relationship between church-led conflict resolution mechanisms and interpersonal relations among priests. The findings revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between structured mediation systems and interpersonal relations among priests ( $r = 0.347, p < .001$ ). Similarly, restorative and dialogical strategies showed a positive correlation with interpersonal relations ( $r = 0.355, p < .001$ ). Leadership involvement demonstrated a moderate positive correlation with interpersonal relations ( $r = 0.351, p < .001$ ), while conflict resolution capacity building exhibited a strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.410, p < .001$ ). The study recommends institutionalizing structured mediation, dialogical approaches, leadership involvement, and conflict resolution capacity building as pillars of unity in ministry. Priests can achieve this through training, workshops, and collaborative learning to foster trust, fairness, and transparency in their relationships. These strategies promote sustainable cooperation, resilience, and harmony, both in interpersonal relationships and in the Church's mission.

**Keywords:** Structured Mediation Systems, Interpersonal Relations, Conflict Resolution, Priests, Catholic Archdiocese of Lusaka, Leadership Involvement, Conflict Resolution Capacity Building.

### **Introduction**

Clashes within religious organisations, especially among priests, pose challenges to organisational cohesion, cooperation and pastoral care. For the Catholic Church, priests are expected to live out brotherhood and unity in mission; yet, interpersonal conflict is inevitable due to variations in personalities, roles and expectations. If left unresolved, these disputes can undermine trust and collaboration, and potentially impact on the Church's pastoral and social mission. In the Archdiocese of Lusaka, Zambia, these

tensions highlight the need to strengthen processes leading to interpersonal engagement and reconciliation among priests.

This research assesses the influence of structured mediation systems on interpersonal relations among priests in the Catholic Archdiocese of Lusaka. Drawing on Organizational Conflict Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Structural Functionalism, the study employs a quantitative cross-sectional survey methodology to assess the impact of formalized mediation, dialogue and leadership on priestly

relations. Through a survey of a representative sample of diocesan and religious priests, the study underscores the beneficial effects of structured mediation systems on trust building, collaboration and unity. The results highlight the importance of institutionalized conflict resolution approaches as critical factors for maintaining unity and effectiveness in pastoral work.

### **Background to the study**

The ministry and the activity of Catholic priests are based on the interpersonal relations. Priestly ministry is essentially a relational venture as the priest collaborates with other members of the clergy, bishops, the parish workers and the faithful in the process of performing priestly tasks (Hoge and Wenger, 2005; Miner, 2007). In order to perform priestly functions successfully, a cooperation, communication, and trust should exist between the members of the clergy. Catholic priests however belong to different cultural, generational, educational and theological backgrounds. Although the Catholic Church has a strength in terms of diversity, it also leads to the emergence of different perspectives and leadership styles. These conflicting perceptions lead to a situation in which interpersonal conflicts may arise.

Recent scholarship has started acknowledging conflicts in ministerial situations as an ordinary aspect of organizational and relational life as opposed to exceptions (Mwania, 2020). It is not just the fact of conflict that becomes analytically important but the institutional and relational processes which are adopted in its resolution. Modern research points out that interpersonal relations between clergy can be enhanced with the help of the mediation, reconciliation, joint decision-making, and structured communication processes (Driessen, 2025). These processes, when applied methodically, have been found to bring about trust, understanding and collaboration between sides, making the relational framework of ministerial leadership stronger. Conversely, interpersonal relationships can also be undermined through a conflict resolution mechanism with adverse effects on pastoral ministry. However, in most instances, the argument is that mistrust of the Church leadership, failure of leadership, resistance to change, personality differences among the clergy among other reasons can increase the tensions in the

interpersonal relationships, hence the necessity of effective conflict resolution mechanisms. The effects of conflict resolution mechanisms on the interpersonal relationships among priests should be considered in a positive light to the well-being of the clergy, the effective pastoral ministry, and the unity of the Church (McCully, 2021; Umeanwe, 2024; Vaidyanathan et al., 2025).

Moreover, research done in Catholic ministry environments has always indicated that inter-personal conflicts are quite common in the clergy leadership system. According to data presented by Faith Communities Today, about 75% of parishes have at some point over five years a conflict of some type, which is typically over a leadership or governance matter (FACT, 2019). Equally, studies conducted by the Barna Group indicate that almost every year, close to 40 percent of Catholic priests experience serious conflicts in their parish, which makes some clergy think about quitting the ministry altogether (Barna Group, 2017). These results highlight the fact that interpersonal relations are essential in determining the lived experience of Catholic clergy, and have a direct impact on their pastoral effectiveness and dedication to ministry.

Furthermore, support for the role of interpersonal relationships in the well-being and job satisfaction of priests comes from other investigations into the Catholic clergy. Hoge & Wenger (2005), for example, have noted relational problems with fellow priests, staff, and diocesan officials as key areas of dissatisfaction among clergy. Similarly, other investigations have confirmed the role of relational problems as a key predictor of emotional exhaustion and burnout among ministers (Miner, 2007). Recent investigations have also provided further support for the role of relational problems and pressures on priests' well-being by demonstrating the impact of relational tensions and pressures on the mental well-being of Catholic priests (Upenieks, 2024). Overall, the investigations into the well-being and job satisfaction of priests suggest the importance of conflict resolution skills to positive interpersonal relationships among clergy.

In the African pastoral context, relationships are very important because ministry takes place within very communal social settings. In many cases, clergy live

and work close to each other and often share pastoral duties with their congregations. Although communal settings promote unity among people, they may sometimes create interpersonal challenges when differences in leadership style, culture, or expectations emerge. In Africa, studies on clergy stress and burnout have shown that relational pressure is a major contributor to clergy stress and burnout. For example, (Nganga, Ndung'u, & Muasa, 2025) established a strong relationship between burnout and psychosocial well-being among priests within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi, which shows that relationships play a very important role in the well-being of clergy. In another study on servant leadership within the African Church setting, interpersonal relational competencies such as empathy, ethical leadership, and emotional healing were established as important skills required to manage interpersonal tensions within the pastoral setting (Musya, 2024).

Other studies carried out in different regions of Sub-Saharan Africa have revealed various factors that lead to interpersonal relational strain among priests in different regions of Sub-Saharan Africa. For example, factors revealed in these studies include hierarchical church structures, increased work demands, generational differences, cultural diversity, and church growth (Nyongesa, 2025). In these regions, conflict resolution strategies are likely to prove useful in enhancing relationships among priests in different regions of Sub-Saharan Africa. For example, strategies such as mediation, dialogue, and collaborative leadership are likely to help mitigate relational strain among priests in different regions of Sub-Saharan Africa.

In Zambia, where Christianity is an established religion, priests have significant roles to play in their respective churches and society. However, conflicts among Catholic priests in Zambia are often an extension of the challenges experienced by the Catholic Church in Africa. Despite the limited research carried out on interpersonal conflicts among Catholic priests in Zambia, available literature suggests that Catholic priests experience leadership conflicts, governance conflicts, and relationship conflicts in church institutions (Mwenda, 2022). The conflicts often stem from differences in pastoral roles, management of church resources, leadership

succession, and communication in the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church. Consequently, this often results in mistrust and emotional stress among Catholic priests. However, in the presence of effective conflict resolution strategies, relationship conflicts have the potential to enhance relationships by promoting mutual understanding and cooperation among Catholic priests (Cheyeka, 2020).

Additionally, the nature of the interpersonal conflicts between Catholic priests in Zambia is attributed to differences in personality, power, and the inconsistency of the processes of addressing the issues. Although the Catholic Church has laid down mechanisms for the resolution of conflicts between priests, the processes have been informal in practice. For instance, priests have largely relied on dialogue and the intervention of the bishop in the resolution of the issues. A study carried out in Ndola, Zambia, revealed that the most frequently used mechanisms in the management of the conflicts between Catholic priests in the country included dialogue, mediation, forgiveness, sermons, and the transferring of priests in the management of the conflicts (Banda, 2023). However, the unaddressed issues in the conflicts between the priests have the potential of compromising the trust and the relationship between the priests. On the other hand, the existence of structures in the management of the conflicts between the priests in the Catholic Church has the potential of enhancing the relationship between the priests.

Priests in the Archdiocese of Lusaka work collaboratively in various activities, including pastoral, administrative, and community work. Collaboration in priestly work demands constant interactions among priests. While collaboration in priestly work promotes brotherhood and teamwork, it also presents opportunities where differences in opinions, leadership styles, and pastoral approaches may lead to interpersonal conflicts. Local initiatives in the Archdiocese of Lusaka on priestly well-being, stress management, and priestly fraternity imply that priests in this diocese are conscious of the potential impact of interpersonal relationships on priestly work. Such initiatives imply that priests recognize the significance of positive interpersonal relationships in priestly work. In this instance, the conflict resolution mechanisms will play a significant role in enhancing good relations

and brotherhood among priests. Although the Archdiocese has put in place mechanisms like Presbyteral Council, diocesan councils, episcopal oversight, canon procedures, and informal support networks, in most cases, these mechanisms are not consistently applied, are not well supported by strong institutionalization, or do not fully take into account the local pastoral and socio-cultural realities (Cheyeka, 2020; ZCCB, 2023).

Although the above-mentioned mechanisms are important, empirical literature regarding the role of conflict resolution mechanisms on interpersonal relations among Catholic priests in the Archdiocese of Lusaka appears to be limited. This constitutes a big gap in the literature concerning the conflict resolution among the clergy and its contribution to the relations between the priests in the presbyterate. Therefore, the aim of the research is to investigate the connection between conflict management systems and interpersonal relationships among Catholic priests in the Archdiocese of Lusaka.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

The priests in the Catholic Archdiocese of Lusaka operate under a teamwork system that needs fraternity, trust and mutual responsibility. However, such relationships are frequently eroded by conflicts that are caused by communication barriers, differences in theology, the pastoral styles, and governance matters (Fitzgibbons, 2015). According to global research, the number of conflicts between clergy is rampant with 75% of parishes reporting conflict in the past five years (FACT, 2019), 40% of priests experiencing serious conflict each year (Barna Group, 2017), and more than half of religious leaders have thought about leaving ministry due to relational tensions (Religion Research Institute, 2024). Over 80% of clergy in Sub-Saharan Africa give reports of emotional hurt due to leadership wrangles (Nyongesa, 2025). Although these statistics are very much indicative of the prevalence of conflict, it is rather global or regional, not specific to Zambia. There is little empirical evidence on the impact of such conflicts on Catholic priests in Lusaka. This gap highlights the necessity of local research that places conflict resolution within the realities of lived life of Zambian clergy. The fraternity and reconciliation of the priests was taught by the church

according to *Presbyterorum Ordinis, Pastores Dabo Vobis*, the Directory of the Ministry and Life of Priests, and the Ratio Fundamentalist Institutions Sacerdotalis. Canon Law (cc. 1733-1734) promotes mediation and dialogue as well, and recent papal teachings emphasize the value of fraternity and communion (Francis 2013 and 2020). Regardless of these frameworks, very little is known concerning the influence of structured mediation systems on interpersonal relations among priests in the Catholic Archdiocese of Lusaka.

#### **Literature Review**

This section reviews literature based on one research objective; The influence of structured mediation systems on interpersonal relations among priests in the Catholic Archdiocese of Lusaka

#### **The influence of structured mediation systems on interpersonal relations among priests in the Catholic Archdiocese of Lusaka**

The use of systematic methods to conflict resolution has been a traditional approach that has been used by religious organizations in the world, whether an individual is an internal or external member of the clergy or not, including the conflict among the clergy. It is in spite of the fact that the conflict may be internal or external to the organization. Most of the techniques involved include conversation frameworks, institutional mediation processes, reconciliation commissions, and actions directed by the leadership all of which are oriented towards building cohesiveness. Though a few studies have been conducted to investigate the theological and institutional backgrounds of the dispute resolution process within the religious societies, there is a clear gap in the literature of research that address the impacts that the processes have on the interpersonal relationships that exist among the clergy.

Driessen (2025) pays attention to the value of interreligious dialogue in managing conflicts and peace building, and the procedural steps of mediation and reconciliation. Although this view holds some merit in the interpretation of inter traditional dialogue, it posits that only structured dialogue will promote cooperation. The drawback lies in the fact that it has nothing to say about intra-denominational discord,

especially among Catholic priests, where the relationships between superiors and subordinates are so powerful that mutual pastoral care affects the relationships between people. This gap highlights the importance of studying how conflict resolution processes in the church that are led by church leadership like leadership involvement, mediation, and capacity building can enhance the relationship among the priests in the Archdiocese of Lusaka.

Hinton (2021) cased the tension existing in African American churches, especially between senior pastors and ministry teams. This study concluded that personal backgrounds and individual differences were the most common causes of conflicts as opposed to an organizational or a theological difference. Even though the findings emphasize the need of leaders and volunteer-specific conflict resolution training, the assumptions are context dependent. The research fails to consider the hierarchical and theological framework of Catholic Church, which restricts its generalization to Lusaka. This gap gives way to localized studies that take into account the influence that Catholic institutional structures have on conflict resolution among the clergy.

Majilang (2024) reviewed the biblical practices of overcoming conflicts and used Matthew 18:15 -17 as a guideline that entails a personal talk, a mediated dialogue, and community intervention. The research mentions the personal responsibility, impartiality in mediation, and confidentiality as the main aspects of reconciliation. Although there is a good application of biblical principles to communication strategies, this integration assumes that all the cultures can be universal. The paper fails to adequately capture the impact of cultural, hierarchical, and institutional forces that may shape the adoption of such models by Catholic priests in Lusaka. This omission depicts a lack of knowledge on the interpretation and application of scriptural conflict resolution to the particular ecclesial and cultural context of the clergy.

Combined, these studies demonstrate that although dialogue, mediation, and reconciliation are universally accepted as effective conflict resolution methods, their implementation differs according to the denominational background, cultural, and organizational contexts. The main assumptions according to which dialogue leads to cooperation

(Driessen), that individual differences are what cause conflict (Hinton) and biblical models are universal (Majilang) need critical adaptation to the application in Lusaka Catholic clergy. This paper combines Conflict Theory (inevitability of conflict), Social Exchange Theory (trust and reciprocity), and Structural Functionalism (stabilizing role of institutions), to contextualize conflict resolution inside the lived lives of priests in the Archdiocese of Lusaka.

This synthesis identifies the gap in the research: the literature is not sufficient in its discussion of the functioning of church-led conflict resolution mechanisms in the context of Catholic hierarchical structures in Zambia. The present analysis therefore makes a contribution in that it studies the variables such as structured mediation, dialogical strategies, leadership involvement and capacity building as its variables in determining interpersonal relations among priests in Lusaka.

Christian (2024) has analyzed clergy and laity conflict, the gaps in leadership, the theological differences, resistance to change, and personality conflict as the main causes. Although the causes of the conflict are rightly preempted in the study, it presupposes that clergy are a homogenous group and does not take into account cultural, geographical, and relational differences. This weakness is critical in scenarios like the Archdiocese of Lusaka where there is contrast among priests of the city and the rural and cultural pluralism. The gap brings out the necessity of localized studies relating to how interpersonal relations among clergy determine conflict resolution in the diocesan structures.

A case study of the Methodist Church in Ghana revealed that without transparency (28.8) and without effective communication (34.4) was the root cause of conflict, with pastors using personal meetings (49.6) and mediation (26.4) as the most common conflict resolution mechanisms (Maame, 2025). Although the research illustrates the significance of pastoral style of leadership in conflict management, its emphasis on pastor-congregation relations inhibits its generalization in Catholic clergy where the hierarchical system and the relationships between priests and priests are the main focal points. The lack of focus on the issues of interpersonal dynamics in priests highlights a gap that this research aims to fill in Lusaka where relational

skills and emotional intelligence are the key factors in the mediation capacity.

Steiner (2024) investigated the role of faith-based mediation in Kenya, revealing how religious practices, including media outreach, teachings, and community meetings, promote peaceful coexistence among ethnic groups. Although the study illustrates the potential of religious interventions to transform, it concentrates on conflicts at the community level, as opposed to inter-clergy conflicts. Furthermore, it presupposes that faith-based mediation is applicable universally, and does not take into account the hierarchical and institutional pressures peculiar to the Catholic dioceses. This is where a research on the influence of relational skills, leadership styles, and pastoral practices in conflict resolution among priests in Lusaka is required.

Combined, these studies indicate that the resolution of conflicts in religious settings tends to focus on dialogue, mediation, and leadership. Nonetheless, the assumptions that they make, namely, homogeneity of clergymen (Christian), pastor-congregation orientation (Maame), and universality of faith-based mediation (Steiner) restrict their applicability to Catholic priests in Lusaka. Using a combination of the Conflict Theory (necessity of conflict), Social Exchange Theory (confidence and retribution), and Structural Functionalism (institutional stability), this paper places the conflict resolution process in the real life of priests in the Archdiocese of Lusaka.

This synthesis highlights the research gap: the literature lacks sufficient analyses of how the conflict resolution mechanisms by church operate in the context of Catholic hierarchical institutions in Zambia. The current research is thus a contribution in that it examines variables such as structured mediation, dialogical, leadership involvement, and capacity building that affect interpersonal relations among priests in Lusaka.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A quantitative research approach was adopted, employing a cross-sectional survey design. The research design was especially appropriate in the study of quantifiable relationships between the mechanisms of conflict resolution in churches and interpersonal relationships between priests in the Catholic Archdiocese of Lusaka. The quantitative approach was

a reasonable selection as there was the need to produce empirical data that can be statistically assessed to identify patterns of association between structured mediation, dialogical practices, leadership involvement and capacity building. The quantitative design enabled measurement to be systematic in a larger sample, thus offering a wider context of clergy dynamics in the Archdiocese (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Pandey, 2023).

The research was carried out in the Catholic Archdiocese of Lusaka, and it was in Lusaka Province, Zambia. The sample size was 255 priests who were actively serving in the Catholic Archdiocesan of Lusaka (91 diocesan priests and 164 religious' priests). The sample size was calculated based on the Yamane (1967) finite population formula and a sample of 155 priests was obtained out of the total population of 255.

**Table showing the Sample Size**

S/N	Category	Frequency	Sample	Percentage (%)
1	Diocesan priests	91	56	36%
2	Religious priests	164	100	64%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source (Sample Size by the researcher, 2026)*

Probability sampling method was used so that every individual in the population could be given an equal and known opportunity to be selected and thus boosting representativeness and generalization of the results (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Particularly, simple random sampling was employed to sample participants out of the official list of priests that the Archdiocesan administration had provided.

In Data Collection Instruments, a structured, self-administered questionnaires with a scale of 5 (Linkert) was the main data collection tool to collect quantitative data of priests within the Catholic Archdiocese of Lusaka. Cronbach's Alpha was used to determine the reliability of the items in the questionnaire and the scale internal consistency. The pilot test was done on 15 priests who were members of the Catholic Archdiocese of Lusaka representing about 10% of the final sample size (N = 155). The alpha results of the Cronbach showed that the scales had good to

acceptable internal consistency levels thus proving the scale to be used in the main study. Table 3.3 shows the reliability coefficients of the pilot study.

**Table showing Reliability Statistics**

Variables	Reliability coefficient	Number of items
Structured Mediation Systems	0.82	8
Restorative & Dialogical Strategies	0.85	8
Leadership Involvement	0.88	8
Conflict Resolution Capacity Building	0.80	8
Interpersonal Relations	0.86	8
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>0.842</b>	

*Source: Author's Survey Data, 2026*

Primary data collected through structured questionnaires were checked for accuracy and consistency, with reverse-coding applied to ensure reliability. Descriptive statistics—frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations

summarized demographic features and respondent attitudes. Pearson's correlation was then employed to assess associations between conflict resolution mechanisms and interpersonal relations, an appropriate choice for the study's cross-sectional design and focus on relational linkages.

**Results**

This study interviewed the respondents and the finding is herein below given based on the research the objective of this study;

**Influence of structured mediation systems on interpersonal relations among priests in the Catholic Archdiocese of Lusaka**

The initial aim was to determine the role of structured mediation systems on interpersonal relations among priests in Catholic Archdiocese of Lusaka. The respondents were asked to respond to the extent of their agreement/disagreement with different statements relating to the organized mediation systems of interpersonal relations among priests in Catholic Archdiocese of Lusaka. It was done on a 5-point Likert scale wherein 1 represents strongly disagree, 2 represents disagree, 3 represents neutral, 4 represents agree and 5 represents strongly agree. The results were tabulated under table 4.7.

**Table showing the Structured Mediation Systems and Interpersonal Relations Among Priests**

	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std. Deviation
The Church has clear procedures for resolving conflicts among priests.	8(5.2)	13(8.5)	14(9.2)	73(47.7)	45(29.4)	3.88	1.090
Priests are aware of the official channels for reporting conflicts.	6(3.9)	18(11.8)	15(9.8)	69(45.1)	45(29.4)	3.84	1.095
Designated mediation committees help handle disputes among priests.	5(3.3)	13(8.5)	22(14.4)	69(45.1)	44(28.8)	3.88	1.028
Formal mediation procedures are usually followed when conflicts arise.	6(3.9)	24(15.7)	38(24.8)	60(39.2)	25(16.3)	3.48	1.064
The mediation system helps resolve conflicts in a fair manner.	4(2.6)	9(5.9)	20(13.1)	74(48.4)	46(30.1)	3.97	.0952

The Church encourages priests to use formal mediation structures when conflicts occur.	2(1.3)	8(5.2)	17(11.1)	71(46.4)	55(35.9)	4.10	.890
Some conflicts are resolved without following the established mediation procedures.	7(4.6)	15(9.8)	17(11.1)	67(43.8)	47(30.7)	3.86	1.101
Formal mediation systems are sometimes ignored during conflict resolution.	7(4.6)	13(8.5)	14(9.2)	74(48.4)	45(29.4)	3.90	1.065
<b>Composite Mean and Standard Deviation</b>						<b>3.8644</b>	<b>0.61471</b>

*Source: Author's Survey Data, 2026*

Table 4.7 demonstrates that priests tend to be aware of the presence of structured mediation systems in the Church and to value them. To illustrate, 47.7 percent concurred and 29.4 percent strongly concurred with the statement that there are clear procedures to resolve conflicts, which gave an overall mean of 3.88. Likewise, 45.1 and 29.4 percent respectively replied with affirmation and strong affirmation that there are official reporting channels (M = 3.84). These results indicate that there is widespread knowledge on formal conflict resolution structures.

The mediation committees are also perceived in a positive manner, as 45.1% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that they assist in managing disputes (M = 3.88). The greatest mean score of 3.97, with a percentage agreement of 48.4 and 30.1, indicates confidence in fairness of the mediation systems, in that they are seen as fair in resolving conflicts. Similarly, mediation structures were the most endorsed structures (M = 4.10) with 82.3% of the respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing.

But practice is not necessarily in line with promotion. The average of 3.48 of the statement on whether formal procedures are generally followed is an indication of inconsistency. Although 55.5% of them agreed or strongly agreed, 24.8% were neutral and 19.6% disagreed. Indifferent reactions in this case can be the indication of reluctance, indecision, or unwillingness to blame the current systems.

This inconsistency is reinforced by items that are negatively worded. As an illustration, 43.8% concurred

and 30.7% strongly concurred that sometimes conflicts are resolved without any formal procedures (M =

3.86). Likewise, 48.4% and 29.4% of the respondents answered in the affirmative and strongly in the affirmative that mediation systems are sometimes disregarded (M = 3.90). Such results indicate institutional policy-practice gaps.

The standard deviations were grouped around 1.0 with moderate variation in experiences. It would be wise to have cautious confidence with the composite mean of 3.86 and a fairly low standard deviation of 0.61: priests tend to think that the Church has workable systems, but there is uneven implementation.

These results show that priests in the Archdiocese have ample knowledge of and are generally confident with structured mediation systems. The high rates of agreement (more than 75% confirm that there are definite procedures, reporting lines, and mediation committees and high confidence in fairness when systems are utilized. Nevertheless, poorer means scores and high neutral scores indicate a lack of compatibility between promotion and practice. Most priests admitted that sometimes conflicts are dealt with in an informal or non-procedural manner. These findings demonstrate that although structured mediation systems are appreciated, their usage is still a problem. Notably, outcomes of correlation only show association and not causation and the results cannot be generalized elsewhere besides the Archdiocese setting. To inform policy and training, the results indicate that it is important to enhance compliance with formal mediation procedures, develop confidence in their

regular application, and offer capacity-building training to deemphasize the use of informal conflict management.

**Correlation Analysis between Structured Mediation Systems and Interpersonal Relations Among Priests**

Pearson’s correlation analysis was conducted to assess the relationship between Structured Mediation Systems and Interpersonal Relations Among Priests in the Archdiocese of Lusaka.

**Table showing Correlation between Structured Mediation Systems and Interpersonal Relations Among Priests**

	<b>Structured Mediation Systems</b>	<b>Interpersonal Relations Among Priests</b>
<b>Structured Mediation Systems</b>	Pearson Correlation 1 Sig. (2-tailed) .000 N 153	.347** .000 153
<b>Interpersonal Relations Among Priests</b>	Pearson Correlation .347** Sig. (2-tailed) .000 N 153	1 153

**\*\*.** *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Pearson correlation analysis revealed that there was a positive relationship between the structured mediation systems and interpersonal relations among priests ( $r = 0.347, p < .001$ ). This implies that the more formal conflict resolution systems are used, the more trust, cooperation and harmony there is in the priestly fraternity. But the findings are to be regarded as correlations and not causation; they indicate that there are statistical associations but do not prove cause-effect relationships. The research is founded on the replies of 153 priests and offers information that can be generalized in the Archdiocese of Lusaka only due to the contextual and cultural specifics of the sample. Such results indicate the theoretical hypotheses that structured mediation leads to better communication and cohesion, which is in line with the recent literature (Coleman et al., 2022; Pruitt and Kim, 2021). The findings support the significance of mediation systems as the mechanisms of relationships, but indicate that the interpretation is to be done carefully, and additional studies are necessary to investigate the causal directions.

**Discussion**

The discussion herein is from the results through the survey based on the one objective to this study

On the Structured Mediation Systems and Interpersonal Relations Among Priests, the results indicate that, as the results reveal, mediation structures in the Archdiocese of Lusaka exist and are

generally viewed as supportive. Most priests confirmed that the Church offers guidance in solving conflicts (47.7% agree, 29.4% strongly agree), official reporting channels are known (45.1% agree, 28.8% strongly agree), and that mediation committees are helpful and just (45.1% agree, 30.1% strongly agree). These results indicate that mediation is appreciated and accepted within the framework of conflict resolution in the Church.

But the findings also indicate that there are inconsistencies in implementing these systems. Most of the priests may have accepted the usage of formal mediation structures (39.2% agree, 16.3% strongly agree), but large numbers also indicated that conflicts are sometimes dealt with informally (43.8% agree, 30.7% strongly agree) or that mediation systems are sometimes disregarded (48.4% agree, 29.4% strongly agree). This duality creates a conflict between formal structures and informal practices, and implies that interpersonal trust and relationships can determine the adoption of formal mediation mechanisms by priests.

These results are also consistent with those of Driessen (2025) and Majilang (2024), who underline the role of

structured and guided processes in resolving conflicts in churches. They also agree with Hinton (2021), who highlights the importance of formal systems in the stability of organizations. Simultaneously, the dependence on informal strategies is familiar to Maame (2025), who discovered that church leaders tend to use personal meetings even though the formal systems are available. The current study builds up on this body of literature by demonstrating that the decision to use formal or informal mediation depends on interpersonal relations between priests in Lusaka. The information contributes to the existing scholarship because it emphasizes the role of relational dynamics as an intermediary factor.

Unlike Steiner (2024), who claimed that effectiveness relies mostly on the consistent use of mediation systems, the existing results indicate that the reliability of the systems is recognized in Lusaka, although the use is not always consistent. This difference shows that the problem is not in the presence of the mediation structures but in their regular use.

In general, the results indicate that the importance of structured mediation systems in the Archdiocese is evident, but the effectiveness of the system is determined by the relationships between priests. The research adds to the body of the literature in terms of more consistency, awareness, and combination of formal and informal approaches. The findings must be viewed with caution: they indicate correlations between mediation structures and perceptions of fairness, but are not causal.

### **Conclusions**

The study concludes that when mediation systems are well applied, conflict will be resolved and relationships amongst the priests will be reinforced. Their success is based on congruence with relational and pastoral strategies. The study recommends that the process of mediation be institutionalized in a well-organized and sustainable system in the diocesan government such that the processes are always followed and monitored. It also suggests the application of mediation as a conflict resolution mechanism as well as proactive approach towards enhancing relationship among clergy. The study also recommends feedback mechanisms to be put in place

to measure the effectiveness of the mediation in order to ensure accountability and ongoing improvement.

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