



**UNIVERSITY OF
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Because the Bible tells me so:

**Engaging the Role of Bible Interpretation in the Engagement of the Queer Community
by the Methodist Ministers in Pietermaritzburg.**

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In the

DISCIPLINE OF GENDER AND RELIGION

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February 2025

Supervised by

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Declaration

I, Emmanuel Vusumuzi Radebe, declare that this thesis titled **Because the Bible tells me so: Engaging the Role of Bible Interpretation in the Engagement of the Queer Community by the Methodist Ministers in Pietermaritzburg**, unless otherwise stated in the text, is the result of my research and that all sources used have been acknowledged using complete references.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Background to the Research Problem

The gospels portray Jesus as consistently reaching out to and embracing persons who were excluded by society, including social misfits and those considered to be sexual sinners (Jennings, 2013). His teachings emphasized the importance of God's infinite love and the imperative of sharing that love with all people without any exceptions (Goh, 2023). Galatians 3:28 highlights the solidarity of all followers of Christ Jesus, irrespective of their origins or societal positions, as emphasized by the apostle Paul (Brownson, 2013). However, the current situation within various Christian churches, including the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) in South Africa, has often fallen short of achieving this comprehensive objective (Methodist Church of Southern Africa Report, 2023). Given the MCSA's expressed dedication to diversity and tolerance, it is sad to observe that some ministers have opted to convey discriminatory sentiments targeting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual (LGBTIQ+) individuals. This was apparent from the contentious comments made during a recent Covenant service in Mdantsane (News24, 2023).

In this study, I aim to approach the subject of sexual and gender diversity with cultural sensitivity and contextual relevance. The abbreviation "LGBTIQ+" is mainly used as it aligns with both advocacy and academic contexts (Goh, 2023). In addition, the term "queer" is used interchangeably, acknowledging its role in challenging binary identities and encompassing diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (Jennings, 2013). Within the South African context, culturally relevant terms such as Izitabane will also be recognized and respectfully incorporated where appropriate (van der Walt, 2019). LGBTIQ+ people of religion in South Africa have suffered significantly from discrimination. Religious communities have rejected, marginalized, and promoted attacks on the LGBTIQ+ community (van der Walt, 2019; Phejane, 2020). The late Archbishop Desmond Tutu was once quoted by the Daily Maverick stating that LGBTIQ+ people in South Africa "Are often ignored, ostracised, and alienated from church groups..." (Daily Maverick, 2023). While some churches welcome and acknowledge LGBTIQ+ people, research shows that many churches still marginalize and discriminate against queer people (Brownson, 2013).

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa is one of the largest Wesleyan Methodist denominations, with local churches across South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, and other Southern African countries. The church forms a part of a larger mainline Protestant

denomination in South Africa – 7,3% of the South African population recorded their religious affiliation as ‘Methodist’ in the last national census. The denomination has nearly 2 million members (Mukhutso, 2023, Methodist Church of Southern Africa — World Council of Churches). More recently, the church has considered itself one of the liberal churches when it comes to issues of gender and sexuality and has announced how they will be welcoming to the LGBTIQ+. While some have lauded the church's statement against discrimination, many believe that the Church must do more to combat homophobic victimization of the LGBTIQ+ community (Daily Maverick, 2023; News24, 2023). In this study, I argue that it is crucial to examine how MCSA clergy, who interpret and teach Bible scriptures, regard LGBTIQ+ individuals. The Bible's interpretations by clergy influence followers' beliefs and conduct. Thus, this study examines pastors' biblical interpretation and its effects on LGBTIQ+ people. I argue that ministers should read Scripture contemplatively, contextually, and compassionately to reflect the church's love and inclusiveness (Goh, 2023; Malakyan, 2023).

Research shows that a more nuanced and situational interpretation of biblical Scriptures reveals themes of unconditional compassion and affection for all persons, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity (Jennings, 2013; Goh, 2023). Biblical scholars emphasize the importance of understanding and considering the historical and cultural circumstances before understanding them as condemning only homosexuality (Malakyan, 2023). They further suggest interpreting biblical scriptures aligning with biblical principles such as justice, mercy, and love (Brownson, 2013; Malakyan, 2023). In addition, some scholars argue that Levitical regulations that are used to condemn and marginalize LGBTIQ+ people were part of purity codes no longer applicable to Christians and that Jesus never discussed homosexuality (Davis et al., 2023). The following section briefly discusses the Methodist Church of Southern Africa Policy on same-sex relationships related to this study.

1.2 The MCSA Policy on Same-Sex Relationships

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) bases its same-sex relationship policy on John Wesley. Wesley stressed respecting others with different views, especially faith (Davies, 2019). The MCSA policy acknowledges past intolerance and mistreatment of homosexuals and emphasizes the need to respect the dignity and intrinsic worth of all people. It provides genuine empathy and attentive concern to all (Methodist Church of Southern Africa, 2003). In addition, the MCSA is committed to fostering unconditional love and acceptance for LGBTIQ+ people while acknowledging the church's harm. The church's goal is to encourage healing, personal

growth, and the sacredness of human sexuality (Methodist Church of Southern Africa, 2003). The church values sexual expression in a loving marriage. Sexually varied people are said to be welcome in all church activities, including leadership (Methodist Church of Southern Africa, 2003).

This policy also demonstrates the MCSA's dedication to respecting individual dignity while addressing complicated sexuality-related theological and ethical issues (Jennings, 2013). However, there is a contradiction between what is declared in the church's policy and the lived experiences of LGBTIQ+ people in this space. This contradiction highlights the necessity for a complete investigation into how biblical interpretation impacts MCSA attitudes and behaviors toward LGBTIQ+ people.

1.3 Reality on the Ground

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa's purported dedication to diversity and inclusion is inconsistent with the actual execution of these values, as emphasized in the 2023 Methodist Church of Southern Africa Report. Having first-hand experience in ministry, I have directly witnessed the disparity between the church's teaching of tolerance and the discriminating conduct displayed by specific individuals within my profession. This was regrettably demonstrated at the yearly Covenant service in Mdantsane in 2023, where a colleague pastor used the platform to make insulting and condemnatory comments about LGBTIQ+ people (News24, 2023). The Covenant service is of significant importance within the MCSA community, attracting a substantial number of participants, including both members and non-members. As someone who is part of the church, it was very distressing to hear such disrespectful language from a church leader, which contradicted the MCSA's proclaimed ideals.

The MCSA has frequently voiced its condemnation of discriminatory behaviors, acknowledging the adverse effects they have had and reiterating its commitment to LGBTIQ+ inclusivity (Methodist Church of Southern Africa, 2023). However, it is an undeniable fact that many LGBTIQ+ individuals continue to face discrimination and marginalization inside the church (Phejane, 2020; Davis et al., 2023). As someone who is in ministry and who has interacted with LGBTIQ+ people, I have seen the pain, suffering, and marginalization that LGBTIQ+ people go through in a place that is supposed to love and embrace everyone regardless of their gender or sexual orientation. The observed discrepancy

between policy, implementation, and practice underscores a more profound concern regarding interpreting biblical texts within the MCSA. Despite the church's assertion of inclusivity, certain ministers within it nevertheless utilize particular readings of Scripture to justify their discriminatory actions towards the LGBTIQ+ population (Methodist Church of Southern Africa Report, 2023). This matter has resulted in a worrisome rift that demands prompt attention through a more deliberate, thorough, and compassionate approach to the Bible.

1.4 Personal Reflection

My passion for faith, scripture, and LGBTIQ+ community engagement is the foundation for this study. Growing up in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, I experienced how biblical interpretation affects queer churchgoers. I was thus motivated to question biblical scriptures that are used to condemn and dehumanize LGBTIQ+ people, taking these scriptures and reconciling them with inclusivity, justice, and compassion. This decision motivated me to do this study and be an example to my colleagues in making faith spaces more compassionate and inclusive. I know queer scripture readings are impactful from my faith and queerness experience. Queer scripture reading challenges assumptions and promote church healing, discourse, and inclusivity. I believe that queer biblical interpretation may help church leaders practice inclusivity and compassion, and it can help LGBTIQ+ people feel accepted and valued.

This study represents my church participation and observation of how queerness and scripture relate to the MCSA. I adopt a narrative-driven method that lets me critically evaluate queer readings and their social and theological implications for the church and pastors. I hope to inspire clergy and religious groups to use scripture for love, justice, and inclusivity. This is my personal and intellectual tale about my experiences and wishes for a more inclusive Christianity, not a sermon. In the following section, I write about why I decided to do this research project. I get into details about my personal experience of how my ministry matured through scripture and how, through the conviction of the word of God, my perspective on the subject of homosexuality and the inclusion of queer people in faith spaces has changed entirely. I talk about scriptures that tore me apart but also helped me to see a different world where LGBTIQ+ are welcomed and embraced. I begin the section by reflecting on my formative faith years in the Nyanyadu Methodist Church.

I am the product of the Nyanyadu Methodist Church. I was raised in this small, rural, traditional, conservative Methodist Church. In 1994, I was dedicated to the altar of this church in my village. At 14, I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior and was accepted as a whole church member. We got up every Sunday at my granny's house, and there was no doubt where we were going. My grandma did not care how late you stayed up on Saturday night because, on Sunday morning, everybody in this house was going to church. We did not only go for Sunday worship; we also went to Sunday school and morning worship, and in the afternoon, we attended confirmation class, where we were taught to be good Methodists. My granny made sure I was active and involved in the church. Everything I started to understand about God was shaped by the preaching of my church minister in the Nyanyadu Methodist Church. My formative theology, beginning doctrine, understanding of God, and first lessons in the Bible came from the Nyanyadu Methodist Church. I am the product of Nyanyadu Methodist Church.

Whenever I reflect on my years at Nyanyadu Methodist Church, there was no "come as you are." You came with your Sunday best on. Sometimes, you would be turned away at the door if you were "not properly dressed." In this small, rural church of mine, if you were a teenage girl and became pregnant, you not only stepped out of the church organization but would also be excommunicated from the church. I never observed men being excommunicated, but only women were excommunicated. A bench on the side did not run parallel to all the others. It ran perpendicular and was called the mourner's bench. The mourner's bench was where you would be made to sit when the church leaders realized you were a sinner and needed to receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. You would sit on that mourner's bench, and everybody at church would look at you, knowing you were a sinner. Again, I never saw a man sitting on that bench, only teenage girls or women.

In the Nyanyadu Methodist Church, women did not serve in leadership. Society and circuit stewards were exclusively men. I never saw a woman appointed as a steward at my small rural church. Women were not allowed to preach. We were made to believe God did not call women to declare God's Holy Word. I will never forget one Sunday when a visiting church came, and a preacher from another church was a woman. She got up to give remarks on behalf of the pastor. We were taught that women did not preach, as noted by Paul in verse 1 Corinthians 14, that women should keep silent in the church. We were also taught that women do not serve in leadership because 1 Timothy 2 said women should have no authority over men. This woman dared to walk up to the pulpit, and one steward stood up and asked her to move out of the pulpit in full view of the congregation.

Homosexuality was a taboo, never even talked about. Not that there were no queer people in the church. They were there but hid themselves. We were raised with language that I am ashamed to admit we used. There were gay men in the church, but the only safe place for them was in the choir and then in the closet. I am the product of this church. The church taught that Leviticus 18:22 forbids a man to sleep with a man the way a man sleeps with a woman; that is an abomination to the Lord. It was drilled into us that Deuteronomy 21 declared that fornicators ought to be stoned. It also taught us that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because the men were gay. That is what I was taught when I was growing up. This is what I believed was true. That is what I subscribed to. That is what I preached and practiced.

1.4.1 Changing the Perspective?

Witnessing misery challenges all we know. My path and this study are based on this truth. After realizing it was wrong to witness someone else's grief and stay unmoved, I started my investigation. Queer people in the church suffered agony, oppression, and injustice, which forced me to ask questions that changed my faith and theology. I saw a connection to my metamorphosis in the centurion at Jesus' cross. What made this centurion question all he had learned? What drove him so far from his upbringing? What allowed him to disregard everything he had studied and learned and say words that may have cost him his career, reputation, and life? At the cross, the centurion said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39). This was not just an observation; it contradicted everything Rome had taught him.

The centurion encountered agony firsthand at the cross, challenging everything he knew. Crucifixion was meant to cause maximum anguish for as long as possible. Crucifixion victims were beaten, stripped, and made to carry the heavy crossbeam to their execution. Nailed to the cross, they bled and suffocated slowly. It was meant to terrorize and dehumanize. Such anguish may be overlooked from afar, but proximity reveals the agony. This exposure affected the centurion around Jesus. This tale touches me because, like the centurion, I had to face suffering in my faith community. I asked myself difficult questions after seeing queer churchgoers suffer: What did I do to place them on that cross? How am I contributing to their pain? What have I done to hurt and reject gay individuals in faith? How has my theology supported their oppression? How can my Bible interpretation condemn others when I should be held accountable?

Using the above questions, this study examines how biblical interpretation affects LGBTIQ+ people in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA). They also raise a crucial question: How do we foster compassion? How may this notion motivate MCSA members to rethink scripture and LGBTIQ+ community participation if others' suffering can transform me? The understanding that suffering requires a solution is personal and urgent for the church. When we see others' sorrow and do nothing, something is wrong. Continuing to sanctify homophobia when gay adolescent suicide rates rise is unacceptable. We should not rationalize rape by saying the woman's clothes welcomed it. When a bereaved daughter cannot eulogize her mother because the church prevents women from preaching, something is wrong.

These injustices require action, and I want to explore ways to help the church and its people fight against these injustices. My goal is to eliminate gender inequity and level the playing field for faith community leadership regardless of gender or sexuality. I want to end the hypocritical sin hierarchy that convicts some but excuses others. I want LGBTIQ+ people to be accepted with Godly love, dignity, and equality. I argue that the church should be a place that recognizes that we are messengers of God's mercy, not His vengeance. Church teachings should point people to Jesus Christ's transformational love, not hell. This study reflects my journey, not just academics. Like the centurion, my experiences have transformed me. I hope this work will encourage others to change for justice, love, and inclusivity. Now that I have outlined the background of this study, I will move my attention to a review of the relevant literature in the following section. The literature review is organized into thematic subsections that align with the study's research topics for clarity and structure.

1.5 Preliminary Review of Literature

The global Church, using the Bible, has justified LGBTIQ+ exclusion, injustice, and discrimination (Brownson, 2013). Emerging scholarship reveals that a sophisticated and context-dependent reading of religious texts might promote healing and personal development. This method also challenges the Church's tendency to ignore underprivileged groups (Goh, 2023; Malakyan, 2023). The first section of the literature review, "LGBTIQ+ MCSA members' personal experiences," discusses how LGBTIQ+ people experience faith and how their sexual orientation or gender identity interacts. It also places these experiences in African and South African contexts, underlining sexual minority social and cultural issues. The second section, "LGBTIQ+ Identities and Faith," explores the complex relationship between queer identities and religion. Theological conflicts, orthodox interpretations of scripture that

marginalize LGBTIQ+ people, and developing queer-affirming theologies that include biblical texts are also examined.

The third section, “LGBTIQ+ Experiences in the MCSA,” discusses LGBTIQ+ concerns in the MCSA, including discrimination, exclusion, and church leadership's role in perpetuating or addressing these concerns. Genesis 19, Leviticus 18:22, and Romans 1:26-27 are sometimes used to legitimize queer discrimination. This section critically focuses on these scriptures. Modern scholarship promotes contextual and affirming readings, contrasted with traditional views. The last subsection, “Ministers' Contribution to Pietermaritzburg's Queer Discrimination,” discusses how Methodist ministers shape congregational LGBTIQ+ inclusion attitudes. It explores pastors' biased teachings and finds ways to promote diversity in church leadership. The literature review lays the groundwork for understanding MCSA queer experiences, scriptural interpretation, and ministerial practices by arranging the literature review. This structure supported the research's primary goal: to critically analyze how Methodist preachers in Pietermaritzburg engage with the gay population through Bible interpretation.

1.6 Location of the Study

The study was carried out in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in the Pietermaritzburg region among newly appointed Ministers from a seminar to create an overview of the effect of biblical interpretation on prejudice against the LGBTIQ+ population. Pietermaritzburg is home to the Seminary, where all Methodist Ministers are now taught, and the Methodist Church is formed. Pietermaritzburg is the capital and second-largest city in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province. It was established in 1838 and is now under the Msunduzi Local Municipality. The district municipality is known by its Zulu name, uMgungundlovu (Statistics South Africa, 2019). The Methodist Church of Southern Africa has around eighty churches in the Pietermaritzburg district.

1.7 Key Research Question

How does Bible interpretation influence the engagement of the Methodist ministers in Pietermaritzburg with the LGBTIQ+ community?

1.7.1 Research Sub-Questions

- What are the experiences or lived realities of LGBTIQ+ within the MCSA?
- What are the biblical texts related to sex, sexuality, and gender used by Ministers in the Methodist Church to discriminate against the LGBTIQ+ community in Pietermaritzburg?
- How have the Ministers in the Methodist Church contributed to discrimination against the LGBTIQ+ community in Pietermaritzburg?
- What are the actions Ministers in the Methodist Church should take to prevent the discrimination of the LGBTIQ+ community in Pietermaritzburg using sex, sexuality, and gender biblical texts?

1.7.2 Study Objectives

- To understand the experiences or lived realities of LGBTIQ+ individuals within the MCSA.
- To understand biblical texts related to sex, sexuality, and gender used by Ministers in the Methodist Church to discriminate against the LGBTIQ+ community in Pietermaritzburg.
- To ascertain how Ministers in the Methodist Church have contributed to discrimination against the LGBTIQ+ community in Pietermaritzburg.
- To establish actions Ministers in the Methodist Church should take to prevent the discrimination of the queer community in Pietermaritzburg using sex, sexuality, and queer hermeneutics as a guiding tool?

1.8 Theoretical Framework

Starting from the theoretical framework of Queer Biblical Hermeneutics (QBH) within the larger field of biblical Studies, this study is based on Theoretical Framework. Queer biblical interpretation aims to understand the Bible from a queer perspective, which defies orthodox interpretations that are heteronormative. The background of QBH is rooted in Queer Theory and Queer Theology that must be initially explored for a thorough understanding of QBH. This theory argues that sexual and gender identities are socially constructed and fluid (Butler, 1990). It posits that sexual orientation can vary over time. Therefore, Queer Theology seeks to interrogate and contest existing Christian theologies that have traditionally excluded or oppressed LGBTIQ+ people (Cheng, 2011). Within theological discourse and practice, it endeavors to put the experiences of queer folk at the center.

Specifically, the hermeneutical approach known as QBH has evolved out of an intersection between Queer Theory, Queer Theology and biblical Studies. In terms of the classical hermeneutical framework then, the analysis includes studying what was happening around the text (historical context), what is happening in the text itself (literary/rhetorical analysis), and that continues to occur owing to or in spite of it today (contemporary application/usage) (Thiselton, 2009). In terms of the ‘world before,’ where biblical texts were created by queer readers who had influenced their realities, there is concentrated attention given by QBH. Goss states that it connects queer theology with queer theory as well as queering bible reading in relation to traditional Christian interpretations through his argument (2018). Similarly, Van der Walt asserts that QBH recognizes LGBTIQ+ perspectives while highlighting how heterosexist theologies have historically marginalized queer people (2019).

In this study exploring how Methodist ministers in Pietermaritzburg engage the queer community, QBH is a critical tool through which the interpretations of clergy in this context can be understood to shape attitudes and practices towards LGBTIQ+ persons. By employing traditional Biblical Hermeneutics together with QBH, this investigation seeks to expose how the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in KwaZulu-Natal perpetuates discrimination against LGBTIQ+. Finally, this study adds biblical insights on LGBTIQ+ experiences in religious groups to this growing body of literature.

1.9 Research Methodology

This qualitative study examines biblical interpretation and LGBTIQ+ prejudice in Pietermaritzburg's Methodist Church of Southern Africa. According to Creswell, qualitative research can capture the depth and quality of human experiences, making it ideal for investigating biblical interpretation and prejudice (2014). Exploring pastors' attitudes, experiences, and viewpoints gives an accurate picture of the research subject. Semi-structured interviews provided detailed data for the study. This method employs structured, open-ended questions to examine participants' responses while addressing research challenges. Ministers were interviewed to capture new and current opinions on LGBTIQ+ inclusivity and biblical interpretation.

The purposive sample selected twenty pastors from Pietermaritzburg's twenty Methodist congregations, focussing on those with 1–6 years of ministry experience. Teddlie and Tashakkori describe this sampling technique as allowing researchers to select participants with relevant knowledge and expertise (2016). This careful selection meant that participants could

shed light on how biblical interpretation affects LGBTIQ+ attitudes. Braun and Clarke (2006) recommended thematic analysis for qualitative data. This method finds, studies, and reports data themes. NVivo 12 was used to code and organize data to create research questions-related themes. Participants' experiences were analyzed to reveal their meanings and patterns, revealing scripture interpretation and prejudicial dynamics.

To ensure rigor, the study followed qualitative research standards:

- **Transferability:** Future researchers can assess the results' applicability using detailed contextual descriptions of the research process and conclusions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013).
- **Dependability:** Study methodology and data collection instruments were consistent, permitting replication (Hill, 2012).
- **Credibility:** Only volunteer participants were interviewed to portray their perspectives and experiences accurately (Patten, 2007).
- **Confirmability:** Data and literature-informed findings, ensuring they matched interview responses (Leedy and Ormond, 2015).

Fink defines a pilot study as a small-scale preliminary study used to assess feasibility, enhance research design, and resolve potential issues (2015). In a pilot study, three ministers validated the interview guide, identified ambiguities, and improved methodological efficacy, saving time, effort, and money (Crotty, 2015). The study was ethically done to respect participant rights and integrity. After receiving ethical approval, all participants gave informed consent and were told of the study's aim and ability to withdraw. Data was securely kept to ensure privacy and anonymity. Following ethical research guidelines, harm and pressure were avoided (Fink, 2015).

1.10. Outline of Chapters

1.10.1 Chapter 1: Overview

Chapter One summarises the whole study. The study will cover the research challenge, highlighting biblical inclusivity and the historical use of the Bible to justify LGBTIQ+ church exclusion. The chapter will explain the research problem by contrasting the Methodist Church of Southern Africa's (MCSA) inclusive values with certain clergy's discriminatory behavior. The importance, objective, and research goals shall be clearly explained throughout the study.

1.10.2 Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter examines current scholarly literature on the topic. The project will examine LGBTIQ+ people's lives in South Africa and the MCSA, the intersection of queer identity and Christian faith, and how biblical interpretation affects LGBTIQ+ community attitudes and behavior. To conceptualize the research, queer biblical hermeneutics and queer theology will be examined. The chapter will look at the existing scholarly literature on the topic. The project is divided into four sub-themes which are about; 1) experiences of LGBTIQ+ persons and the MCSA in South Africa, 2) queer identity in relation to Christian faith, 3) biblical misinterpretations and their consequences on attitudes towards gender identities and sexual orientation, and 4) conceptual frameworks of queer biblical hermeneutics and queer theology.

1.10.3 Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

The chapter will have a very detailed explanation of the theoretical framework and research methodology used in this study. The theoretical framework section will cover Queer Biblical Hermeneutics (QBH) which is rooted in both Queer Theory and Queer Theology so that it can be understood how these relate to religious experiences of LGBTIQ+ subjects and biblical interpretations that shape attitudes and behaviors. The research methodology section expands on the qualitative approach, giving reasons for its use as applied in the study guide. It further explains how data was collected with special attention on semi-structured interviews and finally discusses why purposeful sampling was done. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data in this chapter, while validity, reliability, and rigor were ensured through methodological steps.

Ethical issues, such as informed consent, confidentiality, and protection of participants' rights, would also be considered. The pilot study will be discussed, including its objectives, procedures, and any changes made to the research design. This comprehensive discussion on the theoretical framework and research methodology sets the ground for understanding this study's conceptual foundations as well as its practical execution.

1.10.4 Chapter 4: Data Presentation

Semi-structured interviews with Pietermaritzburg Methodist ministers yielded significant findings in this chapter. The primary themes will be identified by organizing and synthesizing tool data. The chapter presents participants' comments, experiences, and viewpoints clearly and

structuredly, laying the groundwork for thematic analysis and debate in the next chapter. Each component of the findings will describe individual data points. The chapter concludes with a summary of the emerging themes, preparing for a deeper examination and interpretation in the discussion chapter.

1.10.5 Chapter 5: Data Analysis and Discussion

Chapter Five presents the data in this research. This section focuses on a thorough interpretation of the findings. Such emerging issues will be analyzed against current research related to Queer Biblical Hermeneutics (QBH), which is the theoretical background for this study. This segment examines how these findings fit or challenge existing knowledge within the given field. Besides, it explores what these results mean for understanding LGBTIQ+ experiences in the Methodist Church and biblical interpretations that shape attitudes towards them.

1.10.6 Chapter 6: Conclusion

Finally, Chapter Six evaluates the study, suggesting recommendations that might help with promoting an inclusive environment where LGBTIQ+ people would feel accepted and valued. It is also important to underline that by taking into account the objectives concerning LGBTIQ+ experience in religious contexts and biblical interpretation, one can make a distinction between two significant parts of Chapter 6. This chapter also has some limitations that researchers should address in future work. Finally, the practical implications of relevant findings regarding the Methodist church and other religious institutions are examined.

1.11 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a summary of the proposed research investigation on the impact of biblical interpretation on the involvement of Methodist pastors in Pietermaritzburg with the LGBTIQ+ community. The chapter examined the historical utilization of the Bible to rationalize the exclusion and prejudice against LGBTIQ+ individuals inside the church. It also acknowledged the increasing amount of scholarly work that questions these inflexible readings. The primary research challenge highlighted the contradiction between the Methodist Church of Southern Africa's professed dedication to diversity and inclusion and the discriminating behavior exhibited by certain clergy. The study employed a qualitative methodology, explicitly utilizing semi-structured interviews with purposely selected ministers in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of this intricate subject. Queer biblical

hermeneutics is a theoretical framework that aims to analyze the interaction of queer identity, Christian faith, and biblical interpretation in a critical manner. The following chapters will provide a more thorough examination of the pertinent literature, methods, findings, and suggestions that have arisen from this current study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

“We reject them, treat them as pariahs, and push them outside of the confines of our church communities, and thereby, we negate the consequences of their baptism and ours. We make them doubt that they are the children of God, and this must nearly be the ultimate blasphemy.” (**Archbishop Desmond Tutu**)

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature on Bible interpretation and LGBTIQ+ people engagement, focussing on Pietermaritzburg Methodist Ministers. The review has three main parts. First, it examines LGBTIQ+ South Africans' lived experiences of faith, particularly within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. Second, it investigates how orthodox Bible readings have justified LGBTIQ+ prejudice. Finally, it examines affirming Bible interpretation methods and the Ujamaa Centre's role in promoting inclusive and affirming theology. This framework explains how LGBTIQ+ experience scriptural interpretation and MCSA pastoral practices. It situates the study in religion, inclusion, and justice and identifies ministerial LGBTIQ+ inclusivity deficits this research seeks to fill.

2.2 The Context of LGBTIQ+ People in South Africa and the Role of Faith

2.2.1 LGBTIQ+ Lived Realities in Africa and South Africa

LGBTIQ+ people in Africa and South Africa have complex social, cultural, religious, and political experiences. Despite progress in the South African constitution, some LGBTIQ+ people still face prejudice, antagonism, and marginalization across the continent (Msibi, 2011). Many African states still criminalize same-sex encounters, sometimes under colonial laws (Ibrahim, 2015). These laws perpetuate stigma and restrict access to healthcare and legal aid (Mbote et al., 2020). LGBTIQ+ populations are further marginalized by cultural and religious norms that promote heterosexuality and traditional gender roles (Epprecht, 2013). LGBTIQ+ people fear repercussions if they publicly identify with their sexualities in society (Nyanzi, 2013). South Africa has progressive laws against sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination; however, LGBTIQ+ people's lived experiences occasionally contradict this. Despite supportive legal frameworks, black lesbian women in South Africa face high rates of violence, including hate crimes and corrective rape (Muholi, 2004).

Race-class intersectionality and gender-related violence oppress LGBTIQ+ populations (Matebeni, 2011). Traditional religious views affect entire cultures, especially Christian groups that marginalize homosexuals (Chitando & van Klinken, 2016). LGBTIQ+ Africans in South Africa have shown incredible endurance, inventiveness, and defiance despite institutional persecution and violence. Queer activists fight discriminatory laws, detrimental social norms, and inclusive policies. The Triangle Project in South Africa and TIERS in Nigeria fight homophobia, promote human rights, and empower LGBTIQ+ people at the grassroots and institutional levels (Currier, 2012). Many LGBTIQ+ activists risk their lives to stage pride marches, awareness campaigns, and legal challenges to severe laws like Botswana's 2019 anti-homosexuality law repeal. These brave deeds defy authoritarianism and inspire queer equality. LGBTIQ+ Africans create safe spaces under challenging conditions. LGBTIQ+ people experiencing rejection, abuse, or legal persecution are protected by informal support networks, underground social gatherings, and community-led enterprises.

Help, resources, and empowerment are available in secret. Community-led shelters house LGBTIQ+ evicted families and provide mental health care. LGBTIQ+ Africans exchange tales, establish solidarity, and link with worldwide LGBTIQ+ rights organizations via Twitter and Instagram (Macharia, 2019). Art, music, and literature empower LGBTIQ+ people and dispel stereotypes. Popular artists like Zanele Muholi turn marginalization into pride and exposure for black LGBTIQ+ South Africans. LGBT musicians and authors throughout the continent are altering culture by promoting diversity and opposing discrimination. Creative expression lets LGBTIQ+ Africans contribute to their communities. Cultural resilience promotes LGBTIQ+ acceptance (Kaoma, 2018). Despite recent progress, LGBTIQ+ people face societal, artistic, and religious impediments to equality. Many African countries stigmatize non-heteronormative identities due to patriarchal and spiritual standards. Sexual minorities in Africa face familial and public rejection and violence. Despite challenges, they persist. Queer groups can adapt, innovate, and develop support networks under adverse conditions.

South Africa has high homophobic hate crimes and violence, notwithstanding LGBTIQ+ protections. Despite increased exposure and decriminalization of homosexuality in many African countries, queer people face daily systemic injustice and discrimination (Nyeck & Epprecht, 2013). Black lesbian women are more likely to experience "corrective" rape (Chitando & van Klinken, 2016). Such violence highlights human rights violations and underlying attitudes that imperil LGBTIQ+ people. Society undermines South Africa's

advanced legal system, including constitutional LGBTIQ+ rights, presenting a gap between the law and the lived experiences of LGBTIQ+ people (Beagan, 2020).

This gap highlights the need for more vigorous law enforcement and social change—religious and cultural homophobia and transphobia harm LGBTIQ+ people. A broad strategy is needed to strengthen legal safeguards and challenge intolerance-causing cultural and spiritual narratives. Chitando and Manyonganise urge religious institutions to embrace inclusive theologies that value all sexual orientations and gender identities (2016). Resistance and activism by LGBTIQ+ people fight these injustices. Aspiring to end structural injustice, activists and organizations tirelessly raise hate crime awareness and demand accountability. Awareness and representation undermine societal norms and encourage theological and cultural critique (Cornwall, 2015). LGBTIQ+ people face a complex socio-religious landscape without safety or acceptance, making equality difficult (Boonzaaier & van der Walt, 2016).

2.2.2 The Intersection of LGBTIQ+ Identities and Faith

The intersection between LGBTIQ+ identities and faith, particularly in Christianity, can be complex and delicate. For many LGBTIQ+ individuals, their sexual orientation or gender identity is a defining part of who they are. Nonetheless, their religious environments may pose difficulties regarding this condemnation (Macharia, 2016). Sexuality versus religion could bring about intense feelings of shame, guilt, and loneliness among the LGBTIQ+ community as they try to resolve the complexity of reconciling their deeply rooted beliefs with personal experiences (Chitando & Mateveke, 2017). This conflict is rooted in several biblical verses that have long been interpreted as disapproving of same-sex relationships and gender identities that do not conform to societal norms. Various biblical texts highlight same-sex sexual acts, for example, Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19, the Levitical prohibitions in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, and Pauline epistles such as Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:10 which condemn same-sex relations (Brownson, 2013). These scriptures have frequently been used to legitimize the exclusion of LGBTIQ+ persons from the Christian faith (Gunda, 2010).

On the other hand, increasing volumes of theological scholarship have reposed these traditional understandings by advocating contextualized inclusive readings of these texts (Boonzaaier & van der Walt, 2016). Despite this obstruction, however, countless members of the LGBTIQ+

community have found a way to blend their sexuality or gender identity into their religion harmoniously, resulting in an incredible life-changing experience (van Klinken & Phiri, 2015). Some found solace within Christian communities where inclusiveness is taught to everyone, regardless of his/her sexual orientation or gender identity (Kaoma, 2015). Some individuals have been able to reinterpret biblical texts and theological traditions for themselves, drawing on their own backgrounds. They have thus constructed queer-affirming theologies that embrace and celebrate diversity within God's creation (Cheng, 2011). While others have engaged in new religious beliefs or individually oriented spiritualities in search of spiritual fulfillment (Nyanzi, 2020).

Meanwhile, the encounter between faith and LGBTIQ+ identities continues to provide ongoing challenges and debate. Christian denominations like the Methodist Church in Southern Africa still grapple with inclusion and affirmation issues. These arguments frequently cause deep divisions within the congregational body (Robertson, 2020). Further still, debates about sexual orientation and gender within African Christian contexts remain strongly shaped by the legacies of colonialism as well as conservative theological movements originating from the Global North (Ratele, 2011). Therefore, while constructing their identities regarding faith communities, such persons often struggle with clashing cultural forces, mainly from religion, society, or even politics (van Klinken, 2013).

2.2.3 LGBTIQ+ Experiences within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA)

The diverse experiences of LGBTIQ+ people in the Methodist Church Southern Africa (MCSA) reveal complex dynamics and tensions wherein their identities interact with their faith. The principles of the church are not always consistent with the lived experiences of LGBTIQ+ Methodists (Robertson, 2020). LGBTIQ+ still face various barriers to full inclusion and participation in the MCSA. These barriers include biases and segregation from fellow church members and leaders within the church (Dlamini, 2021). Conservatively inclined theological views that abhor same-sex marriage and other sexual relationships between non-gender conforming persons continue to haunt gay Methodists. These views often stem from conservative interpretations of particular scriptural passages such as Leviticus 18:22; 20:13, which prohibit homosexual acts; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; and 1 Timothy 1:10, among others (Mtshiselwa, 2010). Many LGBTIQ+ persons are excluded from MCSA because of arguments based on these understandings, creating an unfavorable environment (Moyo, 2019).

Many wonder how the MCSA views same-sex partnerships. The church does not encourage homosexual weddings or openly gay priests, but it values everyone in its society. This problem has divided churchgoers owing to its ambiguity and inconsistency. LGBTIQA+ Methodists have overcome many obstacles by staying strong-willed. Inclusive Methodist groups like Inclusive Affirming Ministries (IAM) have given many people a sense of belonging and togetherness. IAM promotes LGBTIQA+ church inclusivity. Other activists and advocates have challenged church discrimination and called for accountability and reform (Shabalala, 2019). Reverend Nokuthula Dhladhla, an openly lesbian Methodist priest, has led MCSA LGBTIQA+ inclusiveness efforts. Even though many in her congregation opposed her, Rev. Dhladhla has supported LGBTIQA+ Methodists. She firmly believes a loving or justice-oriented church must welcome people regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity (Dhladhla, 2018). Another influential figure in this fight is Rev. Megan Robertson, a cis-hetero women researcher who has challenged rigid views about gender held by her denomination. Robertson envisions a broader theology recognizing diversity as God's creation (Robertson, 2020).

The experiences of queer Methodists within the MCSA depend on broader social class, cultural and political aspects. For LGBTIQA+ persons, apartheid's heritage of racial disparity and continued racial inequality intersecting with gender and sexuality inject particular problems and barriers into church life (Nadar & van Klinken, 2018). Additionally, conservative theological movements from the Global North, such as the prosperity gospel and evangelical fundamentalism, complicate inclusivity or affirmation discussions within the MCSA (Forster, 2019). Nevertheless, LGBTIQA+ Methodists stand up for their right to belong in their spiritual communities despite all these challenges. Their unwavering determination, innovative thinking, and robust advocacy force the church to live and practice its highest ideals of love, justice, and inclusivity so that everyone, including the LGBTIQA+ community, can witness it (West, 2019). According to Rev. Nontando Hadebe, a queer Methodist theologian, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa has immense potential to bring hope and transformation in a world where LGBTIQA+ individuals continue to be marginalized and oppressed.

In order to achieve this goal, a church like the Methodist Church of Southern Africa must fully endorse every individual's inherent worth and dignity, thereby exemplifying an alternative approach with respect for diversity while still acknowledging differences through embodying Christ's great love (Hadebe, 2015:23). The life experiences of LGBTIQA+ persons in the

MCSA are emblematic of a strained relationship between their self-identity and faith and are accompanied by intense obstacles to full participation. Although the MCSA, as such, does not openly discriminate against sexual orientation, in practice, queer Methodists face insurmountable barriers in the shape of prejudice, discrimination, and exclusion by other church members and leadership. More pointedly, the conservative theological interpretation of scripture, such as Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, has also continued to impact the lives of LGBTIQ+ individuals, thus entrenching an environment that can also be hostile and unwelcoming to them (Mtshiselwa, 2010; Moyo, 2019). The gap between this formal position of the Church and the lived realities of its queer members reflects well the continuing struggle towards genuine inclusivity in the MCSA.

The Methodist Church worldwide is also the focal point of heated debates on LGBTIQ+ rights and preservation. Denominations like the United Methodist Church have certainly been as profoundly divided on similar issues, mirroring greater societal and theological conflicts within the global Methodist community. This division attests to these religious groups' big debates and schisms, yet they mirrored the internal tensions still prevalent in the MCSA. Many have found some Methodist congregations where these groups have opened up, portraying a much more inclusive approach to them, whereas many of them are still very conservative regarding the full acceptance of people who are LGBTIQ+. Global conversations influence local circumstances and produce a complicated terrain for LGBTIQ+ Methodists globally. Despite these hurdles, LGBTIQ+ Methodists in South Africa are resilient and activist. Queer Methodists have made progress through inclusive groups like Inclusive and Affirming Ministries, which provide comfort, support, and campaign for queer church acceptance.

Committed activists like Reverend Nokuthula Dhladhla and Rev. Megan Robertson have been at the vanguard of this advocacy, pushing back against discriminatory practices and moving for more inclusionary theologies in their work (Dhladhla, 2018; Robertson, 2020). Their efforts and the sustained efforts of queer Methodists can transform the church with a vision fixed on realizing their loftiest values regarding love and justice in their collective effort toward a community of actual diversity that values and celebrates one another.

2.3 Traditional Bible Readings and Their Implications

2.3.1 An Overview of Biblical Texts Addressing Gender and Sexuality

Throughout history, biblical passages addressing gender and sexuality have been subject to diverse interpretations and applications. Genesis 1:27 stands as one of the earliest and foundational texts for advocating binary genders, stating, "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gagnon, 2001). This passage has traditionally been used to support the idea of gender as a binary construct. Researchers like Cornwall (2015) contend that the text emphasizes the intrinsic dignity of all persons, regardless of sexual orientation, which may conflict with a more extensive inclusive definition of humanity. The creation of Eve as Adam's companion in Genesis 2:18-25 has also been understood as establishing heterosexual marriage as the norm. The passage says, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Davidson, 2007). This verse has traditionally been seen as divine approval of heterosexuality. Brownson argues that this narrative is more symbolic as a poetic meditation on human connection than relationship advice (2013).

Because Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 explicitly forbid same-sex relations, they are commonly used in gender and sexuality issues: "Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable" (Laws 18:22, Hays, 1996). These passages have historically been used to argue against homosexuality. However, Nissinen suggests that these prohibitions must be understood within their ancient context, where they were part of broader purity laws intended to distinguish the Israelites from surrounding nations such as the Canaanites (1998). In the New Testament, Matthew 19:1-12 and Mark 10:1-12 feature Jesus' teachings on divorce and marriage, often interpreted as reinforcing the sanctity of heterosexual matrimony. Jesus states, "What God has joined together, let no one separate" (France, 2007). However, some researchers argue that the underlying message of unconditional love in Jesus' teachings could also be applied to same-sex relationships (Childs, 2003; West, Zwane & Van der Walt, 2020).

The Apostle Paul's writings further contribute to the discussion on gender and sexuality. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul acknowledges both marriage and celibacy as valid options, though his understanding of marriage is firmly heterosexual (Fee, 1987). Conversely, Galatians 3:28 asserts radical equality in Christ: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983). While this statement suggests a spiritual equality that transcends gender distinctions, its implications for gender roles remain contentious among scholars (Harris, 2021).

2.3.2 Texts Traditionally Interpreted as Relating to 'Homosexuality'

As it has been mentioned above, biblical texts have long been employed to justify the condemnation of same-sex relationships, though interpretations vary considerably. Genesis 19:1-11, which narrates the attempted sexual assault by the men of Sodom on Lot's angelic visitors, is frequently cited to demonstrate divine disapproval of homosexuality. Traditional interpretations hold that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was a punishment for homosexual behavior: "Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the LORD out of the heavens" (Genesis 19:24, NIV) (Gagnon, 2001). However, contemporary scholars challenge this view, arguing that the primary sin of Sodom was not homosexuality but rather the violation of hospitality norms and the abuse of strangers. Morschauer asserts, "The sin of Sodom was primarily the sin of inhospitality... the biblical condemnation was directed at their lack of kindness toward strangers" (2003:54).

Levitical texts, specifically Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, also contribute to traditional arguments against same-sex relationships. Leviticus 18:22 states, "Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable" (NIV), while Leviticus 20:13 prescribes severe penalties: "If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable; they are to be put to death" (NIV) (Gagnon, 2001). Traditional readings often treat these laws as universal moral edicts. However, Walsh (2001) argues, "these prohibitions were part of a broader purity code meant to distinguish the Israelites from surrounding nations" and should not be applied universally. Brownson (2013) further emphasizes that "Other practices, such as wearing mixed fabrics or eating shellfish, are no longer considered relevant today," highlighting the need for contextual understanding rather than imposing these ancient codes as timeless moral mandates.

New Testament passages, particularly Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, and 1 Timothy 1:10, are frequently cited in discussions of same-sex relationships. Romans 1:26-27 states, "Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way, the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another" (NIV) (Hays, 1996). Similarly, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 lists homosexual behavior among sins: "Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men" (NIV) (Gagnon, 2001). Yet, scholars like Martin (1996) argue that terms such as "arsenokoitai" and "malakoi" refer to specific exploitative practices rather than consensual same-sex relationships: "The term

‘arsenokoitai’ most likely refers to male prostitution and exploitation rather than same-sex affection." Brooten suggests that Paul's concerns were more about preserving traditional gender roles than about homosexuality itself, arguing that “Paul’s emphasis was on maintaining the patriarchal structure rather than addressing same-sex relationships per se” (1996). This view is supported by West, Zwane, and Van der Walt's research, which emphasizes the importance of historical and cultural context in scriptural interpretation: "Scriptural interpretations must be understood within their sociopolitical and historical frameworks to grasp their implications fully" (West et al., 2020).

2.3.3 Ministers' Use of Biblical Texts to Discriminate Against the Queer Community in Pietermaritzburg

Some Christian pastors, like the Methodist Church in Pietermaritzburg, use biblical verses to keep LGBTIQ+ people apart. These pastors use selective and literal interpretations of the above texts to condemn same-sex relationships as against Christianity and prove that they deviate from God's teachings (Naidu & van Klinken, 2018). The Genesis 1-2 creation tales are sometimes used to argue that God intended human sexuality to be experienced only in heterosexual marriage (West, 2003). Ministers who take this approach say homosexuality is an immoral act because it disobeys God (Moyo, 2019). Jesus' comments on marriage and separation in Matthew 19 and Mark 10 may also encourage heterosexuality (Matebeni, 2011). Another option is to focus on Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13's same-sex sexual restrictions. Ministers who use this strategy claim this legislation is moral law binding all Christians (Ngesi, 2018). Also, Genesis 19's Sodom and Gomorrah account illustrates God's indignation about homosexuality (Sibanda, 2020). Many scholars disagree, arguing that the Levitical laws must be read within specific cultural and historical contexts to show that Sodom was hostile and violent rather than driven by sodomy (Nkabinde & Morgan, 2006).

Ministers quote Pauline passages like Romans 1 Corinthians 6, Timothy 1 Corinthians 6, and 1 Timothy III in the New Testament. Melito of Sardes condemns homosexuality (Zwane, 2019). They argue that these scriptures portray same-sex behavior as unnatural, shameful, and sinful against God (Nkosi & Masson, 2017). However, many academics say that Paul employed his words based on his culture and sought to disrupt patriarchy by violating established gender roles (Chitando & Mapuranga, 2016). LGBTIQ+ Pietermaritzburg residents suffer greatly from biased interpretations. When taught that their sexual orientation or gender identity is a sin before God, many gay Christians have spoken out about feeling humiliated, self-reproach, and

self-hatred (Robertson 2020). Some have undergone harmful conversion therapy/exorcism to change/repress their sexuality/gender identity (Stobie, 2011). Some are prohibited from church leadership and full membership due to their sexuality or sleeping partner (McLachlan, 2019).

Biblical quotes used to discriminate against LGBTIQ+ people can contribute to more widespread stigma and violence in Pietermaritzburg and elsewhere (Shearing, 2017). Religious leaders who condemn homosexuality as evil and unnatural may unknowingly condone LGBTIQ+ discrimination, harassment, and victimization (Msibi, 2011). Stigma and violence foster a climate of terror and hate that makes it impossible for LGBTIQ+ people to live openly and honestly, which may increase LGBTIQ+ community rates of mental illness, drug abuse, and suicide (Wells & Polders, 2006). West argues that biblical discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people is problematic and based on selective and literal interpretations of scripture. It ignores the Bible's fundamental values of love, justice, and inclusivity and ignores its many historical, cultural, and linguistic contexts (2022). Van der Walt adds that “a queer theological approach to biblical interpretation challenges us to move beyond binary and heteronormative readings of scripture” (2019; p.23) since “God loves everyone regardless of their sexual orientation or gender.”

2.4 Progressive Strategies for Affirming Bible Interpretation

2.4.1 Present Controversies and Positions within the MCSA

LGBTIQ+ inclusion has been a significant challenge for the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in the recent past, and there have been many significant changes and debates that have happened in the church. One of the changes took place at the Annual Conference in 2018, where a resolution affirming the dignity and worth of all people, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, was passed. The Conference called on the Church to “create spaces of dialogue, healing, and transformation” about these (issues) (Methodist Church of Southern Africa, 2018). However, the church’s standpoint on marriage being between one man and one woman was confirmed, as well as prohibiting the ordination of LGBTIQ+ clergy or the blessing of same-sex unions (Mpofu, 2020). The resolution from 2018 got mixed reactions within and outside MCSA, with some praising it as very inclusive while others viewed it as half-heartedness because they felt it did not fully recognize same-sex relationships (Mkhize et al., 2020). For instance, there were many LGBTIQ+ Methodists and their supporters who were disheartened by this fact since they wanted people who identify as LGBTIQ+ to be

welcomed as members of the clergy and for the church to officiate holy unions for the LGBTIQA+ community (Robertson, 2021).

One prominent voice in current debates over LGBTIQA+ inclusion in MCSA is that of Rev. Ecclesia de Lange, who lost her ministerial job after announcing her plan to wed another woman in 2010 (Moyo, 2021). Rev de Lange has been a spokesperson for LGBTIQA+ Methodists and supporters owing to her explanation of human rights violations and how they veered away from fair theology, perpetuating injustice (Dlamini, 2020). After lengthy litigation, Rev De Lange was restored in the MCSA, but the church has yet to approve same-sex weddings or appoint LGBTIQA+ priests (Palm, 2019). Rev. Phidian Matsepe's powerful lecture at the 2019 Eudy Simelane Memorial Lecture Series, named after the South African LGBTIQA+ activist and football player who was brutally murdered in 2008, has also contributed to MCSA LGBTIQA+ inclusion debates (Robertson, 2020). Rev. Matsepe claimed in his speech that not fully respecting the dignity of these folks opposed Jesus' teaching on love and inclusion and urged for repentance from all those guilty (Matsepe, 2019). He also urged churches to rethink traditional gender roles and sexual orientation stereotypes and instead embrace inclusive theology, which emphasizes God's love for everybody regardless of their sexual preference or how they identify themselves with differences from other men or women (Mpuru, 2019).

2.4.2 The Role of MCSA Ministers in Shaping Attitudes Towards LGBTIQA+ Inclusion

The influence of the MCSA pastors in shaping attitudes toward LGBTIQA+ inclusion within the church and broader society is profound and crucial. As spiritual leaders as well as moral authorities in their communities, ministers have significant influence on their congregants' beliefs and actions, hence can either foster or hinder full incorporation and acceptance of LGBTIQA+ individuals (Rakoczy, 2007). Unfortunately, many MCSA ministers have taken advantage of their positions to perpetuate prejudice and discrimination against LGBTIQA+ people through selective citation and literal interpretation of biblical texts to condemn homosexuality as well as gender non-conformity (Phiri, 2016). Pietermaritzburg has been one such place where certain ministers have openly spoken out against homosexuals and what they call transgenderism, emphasizing that they are unnatural abominations (Ngesi, 2018). One of the worst forms of this kind of discrimination was witnessed in Pietermaritzburg in 2016 when a Methodist minister declined to preside over a funeral ceremony for a gay man, alleging that being homosexual is not right with God (Zondi, 2016).

According to Khan, this event received condemnation from supporters who believe it clashes with the spirit of love that should be practiced by church members (2017). Nonetheless, some within the church defended his actions, saying he only followed the teachings from the Bible regarding homosexuality (Chitando & Manyonganise, 2016; Harris, 2021). This case shows how some MCSA ministers may contribute to the marginalization and exclusion LGBTIQ+ individuals face within society at large and even in churches. When these clergy use their authority to condemn same-sex relationships or gender nonconformity, they create an atmosphere of fright, thus making it hard for LGBTIQ+ individuals to feel secure enough within the sanctuary (Sibanda, 2018). They also perpetuate harmful stereotypes and prejudices, which may result in hate crimes against LGBTIQ+ people in society (Moyo, 2019). Sometimes, non-responsive MCSA ministers are as dangerous as those who actively encourage discrimination or prejudice against LGBTIQ+ individuals. The silence of these pastors paves the way for the continued marginalization and exclusion of LGBTIQ+ people, thereby defying the church's prophetic role (Dlamini, 2021).

Furthermore, silence contributes to secrecy and shame surrounding issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, making it hard for members of the LGBTIQ+ community to find support within the church (Robertson, 2020). It is essential also to note that literature shows that there are MCSA ministers who strive to foster more inclusive societies and churches where members can affirm LGBTIQ+ individuals. These leaders often refer to other types of supportive interpretations of some scriptures in the bible or cite social justice principles to make arguments that promote inclusion and equality among church-going Christians and homosexuals equally (Matebeni, 2011). They also create safe spaces in their churches where LGBTIQ+ individuals can feel welcome while providing pastoral care for survivors of discrimination (Hadebe, 2015). The first openly lesbian minister to be ordained in the MCSA at Pietermaritzburg is Rev. Ntombekhaya Mugabi, and her work is a good example of such an inclusive and affirming ministry (Gould, 2020).

Rev. Ntombekhaya Mugabi has been a vocal advocate for LGBTIQ+ inclusion within the church and has worked towards creating safe spaces for queer people within her congregation (Ndelu, 2018). Besides, she has urged the church to go beyond a binary and heteronormative understanding of gender and sexuality and embrace God's love which is all-encompassing (Kumalo, 2019). The role played by MCSA ministers in shaping attitudes toward LGBTIQ+ inclusion into the church community and society at large is, however, complexly contested.

Even though some leaders have used their positions to propagate discrimination against LGBTIQ+ individuals or, more importantly, perpetuate prejudice against this community, others have spent sleepless nights advocating for acceptance of queers in churches as well as societies. In its journey towards full inclusion on matters of LGBTIQ+, the MCSA will require pastors who can engage each other fearlessly through dialogue by being ready to hear from those who are LGBTIQ+ or queer among us.

2.5 Actions Ministers Should Take to Prevent Discrimination Using Sex, Sexuality, and Gender Biblical Texts

2.5.1 Affirming Approaches to Biblical Interpretation

LGBTIQ+ discrimination can be prevented by challenging outdated and hazardous biblical interpretations of gender and sexuality. This study recognizes that the Bible is a complex collection of books produced in different historical and cultural contexts; hence, its interpretations are always social (West, 2022). Accordingly, affirming biblical interpretations highlights the book's emancipatory and inclusive messages while examining its use as a foundation for oppression throughout history (Gunda, 2010). In addition, affirming biblical interpretation questions why scripture is used to promote discrimination and focuses on love and justice while emphasizing the Bible's radical acceptance and inclusiveness. This section explores affirming approaches to biblical interpretations. I argue that reading the Bible with compassion, justice, and inclusivity is essential to affirmative biblical interpretation (Ackermann, 1998). Verses such as 1 John 4:7-8, which state that "Love comes from God" and "...whoever loves has been born of God and knows God" are prioritized. Such verses promote justice and equity, as in Amos 5:24, "Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream?" (Nadar, 2006).

According to Brownson, affirmative biblical interpretation is a critical contextual examination of passages that condemn same-sex couples and other sexual stereotypes against genders who do not conform to standard sex norms (2013). Affirmative biblical interpretation acknowledges both the context in which the bible was written and the current context (Rogers, 2009). Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13's ban on same-sex sexual conduct must be interpreted in the context of ancient Israelite purity standards that sought to distinguish Israelites from their neighbors (Nissinen, 1998). Greco-Roman sexual mores and rhetorical uses should be considered when reading New Testament condemnations of same-sex sexual conduct like Romans 1:26-27

(Martin, 2006). With critical contextual analysis, affirmative biblical interpretation can question texts that historically sanctioned LGBTIQ+ bigotry (Thatcher, 2011).

Alternative readings that free and affirm the dignity and worth independent of sexual orientation or gender identity are also possible (Cheng, 2011). Some academics argue that Ruth's affair with Naomi constitutes a homosexual Hebrew Bible relationship (Kooled, 2006). Some say the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 challenges binary gender standards and celebrates gender diversity (Cornwall, 2013). All these affirming biblical interpretation approaches will fail without acknowledging the Holy Spirit's involvement in scripture interpretation and ongoing discussion and discernment (Matebeni & Msibi, 2015). Gerald West states, "Affirming biblical interpretation is not about giving one definitive reading of the Bible but creating spaces where multiple voices can be heard and valued" (West, 2022: p.23). Ministers should foster an open and supportive environment to safeguard LGBTIQ+ individuals and make church and society more equitable.

2.5.2 Strategies for Inclusive Engagement and Preventing Discrimination

In addition to adopting affirming biblical interpretation strategies, ministers in Pietermaritzburg can take practical measures toward promoting inclusive engagement that prevents discrimination against the LGBTIQ+ community. A listening ear for the voices of LGBTIQ+ persons, challenging stereotypes on gender orientation preferences that are harmful or biased attitudes, and safe havens within both the church and society make up some strategies that help to achieve this goal (Kumalo & Muller, 2022). According to Sibanda, an essential strategy in fostering inclusive engagement is for churches to create opportunities for dialogue and education around issues of gender and sexuality (2022). Such events may include facilitating workshops, running seminars, or even panel discussions that provide accurate information concerning sexual orientations involving LGBTIQ+. The church can also invite members of the LGBTIQ+ community to tell their stories. This can guide the church in building a more inclusive community (Hadebe, 2022).

Another option is to promote LGBTIQ+ church participation in all aspects, including decision-making and leadership (Khumalo, 2022). To challenge the church's legislation and practices that marginalize LGBTIQ+ people, such as gay marriage bans and bans on LGBTIQ+ clergy ordination (Robertson, 2020), as well as to create a church culture of inclusion and affirmation where everyone feels loved and cherished (Dlamini, 2021). Ministers

can also engage with LGBTIQ+ organizations outside the church, establish alliances with LGBTIQ+ organizations (Munro, 2022), and include themselves in LGBTIQ+ discrimination awareness efforts like pride marches (Mkasi, 2022). Ministers should also support laws and policies that ensure the rights and dignity of LGBTIQ+, e.g., hate crime legislation or anti-discrimination statutes (Nyeck & Epprecht, 2013).

Furthermore, ministers could try to create safe spaces to accommodate LGBTIQ+ members in their congregations and their families (Msibi, 2022). In addition to this, developing counseling services or even support groups that offer a non-judgmental atmosphere where gay people live without fear of being discriminated against or abused at any point in time while sharing stories about their lives confidentially (Matebeni, 2011). Lastly is creating inclusive liturgies that celebrate diversity in God's world and affirm human dignity for all (Siwila, 2022). Individual actions or initiatives do not create inclusive and affirming church communities, but they require a change in the culture and ethos of the church itself. Nontando Hadebe, the South African theologian, contends that a radical transformation is necessary for the churches to welcome and affirm LGBTIQ+ individuals genuinely. This transformational process involves deep reflection on how our theology has been shaped by patriarchy, heteronormativity, and cisnormativity, as well as examining how these elements have influenced our practices and relationships.

To foster inclusive engagement and prevent discrimination against the queer community in Pietermaritzburg calls for ministers and church leaders at all levels to remain committed to such an effort. It entails being open to listening to LGBTIQ+ voices while also challenging harmful stereotypes/prejudices; in this way, it will lead to a more just or equitable society in which justice is given to everyone. Tinyiko Maluleke, another South African theologian, posits that "inclusive engagement is not one event but a lifetime learning process consuming unlearning relearning. It is a journey that requires humility, courage, and an unwavering commitment toward a gospel message of love coupled with justice" (Maluleke 2022:34). Adoption of such approaches towards inclusive engagements with less prejudiced attitudes against the LGBTIQ+ community can help Pietermaritzburg's clergy become accurate representations of God's divine love for all humanity; they can also play their part in civilizing societies so that they value diversity as well as promoting fairness between people. Desmond Tutu, former Archbishop, at some point, said: "The church is God's when it includes; if any church does not embrace every human being, it is not Christ's body; when anyone feels unsafe,

then the Holy Spirit ceases to exist within such premises. We must be a rainbow nation kind of institution.” (Tutu 2015:45).

2.6 Conclusion

This literature review has examined the intricate interlinkages between LGBTIQA+ identities, biblical exegeses, and ministerial practices within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) in Pietermaritzburg. It seeks to remind us about the different ways that scripture has been used to discriminate against LGBTIQA+ people in South Africa and MCSA, as well as the roles pastors play concerning LGBTIQA+’s inclusion, if any. Consequently, this review strongly argues that there is a rising need for affirmative plus inclusive models of theological reflection cum praxis. Such understanding has prompted the author to develop queer biblical hermeneutics framework as a theoretical basis for the current study with the intent to challenge heteronormative readings of the Bible and bring forward issues faced by LGBTIQA+ individuals. Also, it portrays qualitative research methodology as vital in highlighting experiences from families who are lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual, or queer because it enables ministers’ actions and implications on their lives to be better understood and therefore helps in envisaging a more just society. In the following chapter, I discuss the study methods and theory.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Queer Biblical Hermeneutics (QBH) challenges heteronormative Bible interpretations with Queer Theory and Theology, whereas qualitative research examines complicated human experiences in many social and religious situations. In this study, QBH investigates the Methodist Church of Southern Africa's sexuality, faith, and inclusion. It links theory and technique to the study's conceptual framework and methodology. In addition, this chapter discusses the qualitative research design, data collection, and analysis. It evaluates research ethics, reliability, and validity. LGBTIQ+ Christian ideas and practices are examined to reveal how Methodist pastors treat LGBTIQ+ persons. The chapter includes study validity, reliability, informed consent, and confidentiality. It provides a well-organized theoretical and methodological foundation for understanding and interpreting research findings.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

3.2.1 Queer Biblical Hermeneutics (QBH)

Queer Biblical Hermeneutics (QBH) uses feminist hermeneutics, liberation theology, and postcolonial bible studies to promote inclusive and affirming biblical readings; and, to challenge heteronormative biblical readings. In contrast to discriminatory Bible readings, QBH emphasizes that sexual and gender identities are socially created, fluid, and culturally affected (Cheng, 2011; Butler, 1990). This method critiques traditional readings that perpetuate discrimination against the LGBTIQ+ community and encourages various reinterpretations of the Bible. As previously mentioned, this study employs Queer Biblical Hermeneutics to examine how biblical interpretation affects Pietermaritzburg Methodist Church's LGBTIQ+ community and investigate religious inclusivity strategies. Biblical hermeneutics (BH) underpins QBH. BH uses historical-critical methods to determine the original contexts of Bible texts. Traditional interpretations saw scripture as a universal authority, limiting interpretive freedom and inclusivity (Thiselton, 2009).

Today, different hermeneutics challenge this rigidity. Feminist hermeneutics has shown patriarchal biases in scripture through women's perspectives and experiences (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983). Liberation theology used the Bible to raise awareness of social injustice, especially for the poor (Gutiérrez, 1971). Postcolonial hermeneutics studied how colonial

history shaped biblical interpretations and produced decolonized readings that validated colonized peoples' identities and experiences (Sumitharajah, 2002). Similarly, QBH applies transformative frameworks to gender and sexuality, filling a gap in hermeneutical studies. QBH recognizes that patriarchal, heteronormative, and androcentric standards shaped many Bible passages, which marginalize queer identities when interpreted blindly. Boswell notes that historical context shapes scriptural interpretation and that early Christian communities were more accepting of same-sex partnerships than later theological interpretations (1980). Burrus, on the other hand, claims that when critically studied, biblical writings can challenge power systems (2007).

QBH finds LGBTIQ+ affirming scripture meanings through literary and rhetorical study. QBH allows Bible readings that challenge exclusionary practices and highlight love, justice, and equity by interrogating cultural and historical assumptions. Along with its critical approach, QBH reinterprets scripture to affirm LGBTIQ+ identities by challenging binary and heteronormative standards. Cornwall argues that the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 symbolizes the church's excessive acceptance of gender and sexual transgressors (2013). David and Jonathan's friendship has also been re-examined as a powerful example of male friendship, defying heteronormativity (Brooten, 1996). These queer-affirming readings demonstrate how justice and inclusivity can change how the scripture is understood or interpreted. QBH rejects repressive interpretations and uses the Bible to liberate oppressed bodies by embracing their inherent worth and dignity in God. The study's QBH application and the participatory interpretation approaches for LGBTIQ+ are influenced by contextual Bible studies pioneer Ujamaa Centre. This strategy questions prevailing readings that have excluded or harmed marginalized people by grounding biblical interpretations in their experiences (West, 2022).

Ujamaa Centre teaches queer individuals to read Leviticus 18:22 and Romans 1:26-27 in a manner that stresses their cultural and historical contexts rather than their weaponization against LGBTIQ+ identities. This study uses Ujamaa Centre methodologies to join a movement towards participatory and justice-oriented biblical hermeneutics, showing how community-driven interpretation transforms. The study's focus on Pietermaritzburg's Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) and biblical interpretation of LGBTIQ+ inclusiveness makes QBH relevant. Van de Walt states that QBH seeks to radicalize scripture to highlight queer experiences by challenging patriarchal and heteronormative assumptions that underpin many orthodox interpretations (2021). This study examines Methodist pastors' gender

and sexuality readings of biblical texts using QBH to uncover restricted and inclusive behaviors. One study found that LGBTIQ+ churchgoers feel more accepted when scripture is interpreted affirmatively.

Queer Biblical Hermeneutics provides a robust theoretical framework for critically examining biblical interpretation's impact on LGBTIQ+ marginalization and inclusion. QBH in biblical Hermeneutics and Ujamaa Centre research demonstrate the transformative impact of affirming scripture. The research encourages ministerial practices that embody biblical love, justice, and equality to make the Methodist Church in Pietermaritzburg more inclusive and affirming.

3.2.2 Intersection with Biblical Studies

3.2.2.1 Historical Context Analysis

Queer Biblical Hermeneutics uses several approaches to study scripture and its relevance to present concerns; these include exploring the historical and social context of biblical texts and practices. This vital step contextualizes the works, revealing cultural, social, and political influences on their development and interpretation. According to Thiselton, understanding the historical context helps us appreciate the works' original meanings and messages (2009). Porter and Stovell maintain that Historical, archaeological, and socio-political sources are investigated to place the Bible in perspective (2012). Biblical gender and sexuality ideas and regulations were influenced by ancient Near Eastern patriarchy and heteronormativity (Frymer-Kensky, 1992).

3.2.2.2 Literary Analysis

Literary analysis investigates how stories, parables, and discourses teach religion and morality via narrative and language. Literary forms influence readers' thoughts and perceptions (Barton, 1996). While the conviction that Sodom and Gomorrah condemn homosexuality may be widespread and used in the MCSA, a literary examination reveals complexity in hospitality, authority, and divine justice, suggesting the text's primary concern is not sexual orientation (Countryman, 2001). This interpretation challenges accepted interpretations and promotes inclusivity.

3.2.2.3 Contemporary Application

In contemporary application, QBH reinterprets the Bible scriptures and reads in current socio-cultural and religious disputes. It examines how current readers, especially religious

organizations, understand and apply biblical texts to their beliefs and actions. QBH promotes religious inclusiveness and acceptance today, where LGBTIQ+ individuals may find supportive aspects in neglected literature by reinterpreting the Bible queerly (Goss, 2018; Althaus-Reid, 2000). Historical backdrop, literary output, and current significance are interconnected in QBH and Biblical Studies. This multimodal approach increases our understanding of the texts and makes us reconsider how ancient scriptures could handle gender and sexuality issues.

3.2.3 Relevance to Methodist Ministers in Pietermaritzburg

Queer Biblical Hermeneutics promotes and advocates for religious inclusivity as well as the lived experiences of faith of LGBTIQ+ individuals (Van de Walt, 2021). Methodist pastors' ethics, theology, and scriptural interpretations substantially impact gender and sexuality issues in their congregations (Cheng, 2011). South African clergy must balance traditional theology and LGBTIQ+ inclusivity (Van Klinken, 2014). Van de Walt evaluates Methodist pastors' Leviticus 18:22 and Romans 1:26-27 sexuality interpretations using QBH (2021). This method challenges conventional interpretations and encourages inclusive and positive readings of these texts (Van de Walt, 2021). This study examines clergy's Bible interpretations and LGBTIQ+ treatment using QBH and Biblical Hermeneutics. This study also explores how pastors' perspectives on LGBTIQ+ spiritual seekers affect pastoral care and community participation.

According to Van de Walt, QBH and diverse hermeneutical approaches can potentially promote inclusiveness or discrimination in church activities (2021). This study examines how QBH affects clergy interpretations and church policy to improve the Methodist Church of Southern Africa's theological and ecclesial communication. It promotes religious tolerance and justice by raising the faith community's understanding and acceptance of LGBTIQ+ persons. In the following section, I shift my attention to a research method that was used to collect data for this study.

3.3 Research Methodology

3.3.1 Research Paradigm

The explored topic is excellent for interpretivism because it explains Methodist preachers' LGBTIQ+ Bible interpretations. Interpretivism promotes context, meaning, and social construction (Bryman, 2016). Unlike interpretivism, positivism employs objective observation and quantitative evidence to find universal rules. Interpretivism acknowledges social diversity

(Schwandt, 1994). Since personal beliefs, cultural situations, and historical experiences influence attitudes and actions, this paradigm helps study religious interpretation and involvement with disadvantaged groups (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This interpretive study evaluated how Pietermaritzburg Methodist pastors interpret biblical texts and how this influences LGBTIQ+ community involvement. Interpretivism illuminated pastors' complex personal, social, and theological views (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Pastors understand biblical sexuality verses differently in interviews based on their theology background, individual perspectives, and pastoral experience.

Pastors may further interpret Leviticus 18:22 as a harsh homosexuality ban or a cultural instruction that should be understood historically. Interpretivism stresses context and meaning differences (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010). Interpretivism allows us to explore how scriptural interpretation affects LGBTIQ+ society. Congregations, denominations, and culture shaped ministers' opinions. Interpretivism's argument that social processes are complex, context-dependent, and influenced by various elements is supported by interconnectedness (Geertz, 1973). Interpretivist qualitative social science research has long sought to understand Methodist pastors and LGBTIQ+ bodies through subjective interpretations and contextual factors that affect biblical interpretation and homosexual community participation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

3.3.2 Research Approach

Natural events and human impact are studied qualitatively (Creswell, 2014). In a qualitative study, researchers may alter methodology based on results and participant reactions. According to Patton, flexible studies are needed to capture religious and social variety and subtlety (2015). This study adopts the qualitative method to reveal participants' biblical interpretations and LGBTIQ+ intolerant views. Methodist clergy's Bible interpretation and LGBT community involvement were well-documented qualitatively. This study employs semi-structured interviews. In-depth participant inquiry and systematic topic coverage are achieved using this approach. Ministers were interviewed on their Bible readings, LGBTIQ+ problems, and congregational ties with homosexuals. Semi-structured sessions enable participants to freely express their opinions and give nuanced comments (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). One clergyman explains their new Sodom and Gomorrah outlook. Initially, they thought the narrative condemned homosexuality. Their study on biblical studies and LGBTIQ+ perspectives revealed hospitality and social justice in the narrative. This interpretation change

shows that biblical hermeneutics is dynamic and requires ongoing debate and review (Guest et al., 2012).

Qualitative approaches simplify theme analysis and findings while analyzing and summarising data patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis enables biblical interpretation and LGBTIQ+ participation in this research. The research will determine repeating themes of tradition vs. inclusion, human experience impacting biblical interpretation, and denominational pastoral restrictions. This qualitative study will record ministers' diverse and significant experiences and viewpoints. The rich qualitative data indicated how biblical interpretation affects LGBTIQ+ community involvement. Denzin and Lincoln stressed the diversity of Methodist Church experiences and interpretations by accepting varied viewpoints (2011). The relational and contextual components of biblical interpretation and LGBTIQ+ involvement necessitate qualitative study. Literature reveals that congregations, coworkers, and society influenced pastors' perspectives. This relational perspective helps pastors and queer churchgoers comprehend (Holloway & Todres, 2003). Qualitative research analyzes the diverse Bible interpretations by the Methodist preachers and LGBTIQ+ community involvement in scripture reading. The qualitative method also assists in exploring religion, sexuality, and social justice via life reflections. This approach enhances study results and promotes inclusive, context-sensitive research (Creswell, 2014).

3.3.3 Research Design

This section presents the case study of Pietermaritzburg Methodist preachers' LGBTIQ+ encounters. Case studies provide contextual insights (Yin, 2018). This method examines the complex, context-dependent links between biblical interpretation and religious LGBTIQ+ treatment. Methodist pastors' lives and biblical ministry may be explored via case studies. Flyvbjerg suggests case studies to explore religion and homosexuality due to its complexity (2006). This study examines Pietermaritzburg Methodist clergy's biblical interpretation and LGBTIQ+ inclusivity in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. This context helps us understand how local cultural, social, and theological elements affect pastors' LGBTIQ+ community participation. Case studies may illuminate links that other research methods miss (Stake, 1995). Case studies provide valuable, culturally grounded data by investigating a specific set of ministers in a particular region. According to Merriam, case studies may help explain complicated educational and social research processes and linkages (2009). This

strategy gives precise, context-specific information for local practices and theological and ecclesiastical LGBTIQA+ inclusion conversations.

3.3.4 Target Population

Pietermaritzburg Methodist pastors with 1-5 years of ministry experience were interviewed. Because of their new ministers' viewpoints on contemporary practices and interpretations, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa chose this group. These pastors are selected to balance experience and proximity in interpreting scriptural texts and the LGBTIQA+ community (Creswell, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Participants were chosen depending on their tenure within 1-5 years to guarantee they had time to develop and apply their interpretive approaches and provide a modern perspective to the study. The Methodist Church of Southern Africa's regional offices will list pastors who fit this qualification for recruitment. Participant screening will occur by phone or email. This guarantees that selected pastors are experienced enough to offer valuable insights and are eager to engage in the study. Semi-structured interviews will be used to provide qualitative data from the selected ministers. Their ministry experiences and challenges, church LGBTIQA+ inclusion policy, and biblical interpretations of LGBTIQA+ issues will be discussed. The timetable will be carefully constructed to allow flexibility in answering all research topics. Participants will be interviewed in person or online, depending on availability and interests.

3.3.5 Sampling Method

The study will purposively sample Pietermaritzburg Methodist pastors with 1-5 years of ministry experience. This method will be used to ensure that participants provide valuable, contextual data. Purposive sampling is good for qualitative research that seeks a deep understanding of phenomena by selecting persons with distinctive features or experiences that match study goals (Patton, 2002). The study selects pastors in this experience range to hear from new ministers who have grown in their biblical and ministry interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants must have 1–5 years of Methodist Church of Southern Africa ministry experience, be engaged in their ministries, and be ready for an in-depth interview. These requirements ensure that discussions on LGBTIQA+ and biblical interpretation are contemporary and relevant (Palinkas et al., 2015). Recent ministry experience allows the study to examine current concepts and practices while ensuring that participants are experienced enough to provide relevant LGBTIQA+ interpretive approaches and interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Southern African Methodist Church regional offices will hire pastors. Potential volunteers will get study details via email or phone. This recruiting method ensures that study participants are relevant and motivated to deliver valuable observations. Purposive sampling brings diverse and in-depth perspectives on biblical readings and pastoral practices to understand how Methodist pastors minister to LGBTIQ+ individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.3.6 Data Collection Instruments

Semi-structured interviews are helpful for ministry studies on complex themes like biblical interpretation and LGBTIQ+ issues (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to ask pre-set questions on significant themes and dig further when new topics arise. This method explores participants' responses to specific questions and spontaneous thoughts (Bernard, 2017). The interviews with the ministers will evaluate participants' scriptural interpretations, LGBTIQ+ congregational experiences, and queer relationships. Pastors' views on Sodom and Gomorrah and LGBTIQ+ ministry will be key questions. Saying, "How do you interpret the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, and how does this interpretation affect your interactions with LGBTIQ+ individuals in your congregation?" "Can you describe any challenges or support you have experienced in addressing LGBTIQ+ issues within your church community?" is a key inquiry. We question, "What strategies do you use to reconcile traditional biblical teachings with the needs and experiences of LGBTIQ+congregants?"

According to Rubin & Rubin, Semi-structured discussions allow participants to share their thoughts and experiences. Building trust and collecting rich, authentic data requires rapport (2012). Data analysis is accurate and complete when interviews are recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcription preserves participants' voices, thoroughly studying their viewpoints and experiences. A thorough transcription will show pastors' and LGBTIQ+ congregation members' experiences as biblical interpretations affect pastoral care and inclusiveness in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa.

3.3.7 Data Analysis

Qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The method requires recognition, analysis, and reporting of schemata or themes in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The authors, therefore, used thematic analysis since this method, compared to other analytical approaches, would allow for a more informed and detailed understanding of

the role of biblical interpretation in LGBTIQ+ discrimination. Thematic analysis - familiarization: I read the interview transcripts to familiarize myself with the data. This process is significant in discovering initial codes and themes (Clarke & Braun, 2013). In this stage, as I listened through each focus group recording, I marked keywords and key phrases that demonstrated what the participants experienced. I understood biblical texts and queer community engagements. Coding was the next step after familiarizing myself with the dataset. I then meticulously coded the data, highlighting relevant excerpts related to particular themes. Both deductive and inductive coding were used for these purposes.

Coding, both deductive and inductive, was used to analyze the data; deductive coding was based on existing literature on Queer Biblical Hermeneutics and known theoretical frameworks relating to this area of research; inductive coding allowed unanticipated new themes to emerge from the data themselves (Sensu Nowell et al., 2017). Some of these themes include things like "voice of the voiceless," "spiritual vs secular," and "conversion and dialogue." The codes were organized into possible themes that I then reviewed and refined to ensure they reflected the key elements of the data. This process included mapping codes and code connections, as well as the establishment of subthemes. Some sub-themes were discarded or integrated with overlapping themes (Boyatzis, 1998). An example of this would be "conflict between tradition and modernity," which was broken into subthemes including "scriptural authority versus personal experience" and "generational differences in biblical interpretation." This is followed by defining and naming themes. Every single theme was thoroughly checked for originality and data backing before being included in the final list.

Thematic descriptions were produced to deliver a coherent story of how each theme connected with the study aims and research questions (King, 2004). One such theme, "inclusivity in interpretation," was operationalized as the strategies ministers use to re-read, re-imagine, and re-author long-standing biblical texts in support of inclusivity for LGBTIQ+ parishioners with a focus on select scriptural passages and theological arguments used by these clergy. Ultimately, I converted it to a thematic map and wrote a report. The thematic map visually represented the relationships between themes and sub-themes and enabled a holistic view of the findings (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Literally every theme was described in the report, embedding phrases from the interview transcripts that highlighted key points and ensured a tethering to the participants' voices. The cover themes speak to the richness and depth of Methodist ministers' interpretations of the Bible with the queer community in Pietermaritzburg. The flexibility and depth of the method provided a way of thoroughly exploring the complex

and contradictory meanings, understandings, and practices within the church (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.3.8 Validity, Reliability, and Rigour

To enhance the study's trustworthiness, various actions centered on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.3.8.1 Credibility

The conclusions were supported by rigorous research design and multi-source data collecting. Participants reviewed preliminary findings to verify that the data and interpretations shaped their experiences (Shenton, 2004). After coding the emergent ideas for the first time, I took the emergent ideas to a few ministers for comment and validation. It validated and boosted outcomes believability.

3.3.8.2 Transferability

The transferability was ensured by providing a thick and rich description of context and findings. This involves using thick descriptions to describe the context, the people who make up the context, and what is occurring in that particular context so other researchers can determine whether those results are generalizable to another population (Geertz, 1973). For instance, Pietermaritzburg's specific cultural and theological context was well documented, ensuring that other similar contexts could understand the study's findings.

3.3.8.3 Dependability

To ensure the credibility of this study, we comprehensively reported our research processes related to collecting data, coding, and analyzing data. An audit trail was preserved, documenting every phase adhered to in the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). This documentation creates a path for replication and consistency in future works, allowing other researchers to see what they did or can evaluate.

3.3.8.4 Confirmability

Relating data to patterns reduced researcher bias and confirmed validity. Reflexivity at every stage, detecting my biases, and ensuring that the findings reflected the participants' viewpoints helped achieve this (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To corroborate study findings, colleagues discussed analysis and interpretations in indexed debriefing sessions.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethics protects study participants' rights and health. In this study, participant rights and well-being were key. From the start, we revealed the study's goals, procedures, and risk management to be ethical. Participants received thorough information sheets and permission papers and could withdraw without penalty (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2001). This technique encouraged informed consent and ensured participants understood their participation and its implications.

Data and study materials were anonymized and secure. Electronic recordings and transcripts were encrypted and pseudonymized. The study team received exclusive data access to ensure participant identity (Wiles et al., 2008). After assessing the design, data collection, and consent procedures, the local ethics committee authorized the study to ensure human subject research ethics (Flick, 2014). This study recognizes researcher-participant power relations, especially in sensitive themes like LGBTIQ+ in religious contexts. The study considers how biases and beliefs affect research and participant relationships. A reflexive method reduces our positionality's impact on the study's outcomes and accurately and politely communicates participants' viewpoints. This reflection raises awareness of power dynamics and encourages ethical and equitable research throughout the project.

3.5 Pilot Study

Three ministers participated in a pilot study of the research subject and interview guide. The pilot study found problems and modified research equipment, enabling a smooth main study and solid results. Pilot participants clarified and relevantised interview questions (Maxwell, 2013). Pilot research involved semi-structured interviews with three Methodist preachers using the same procedure as the study. Pilot interviews were videotaped, transcribed, and theme-analyzed to identify interview guidelines and data-collecting concerns (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001) and replace ambiguous questions. The pilot research advised a more flexible interview method for participants to express their opinions. Pilots improved the interview guide and data collection. The final interview guide reflected participants' diverse and complicated experiences based on question relevance and appropriateness (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2017). The pilot study assessed research logistics, including data storage and recording. This method protected data and worked (Kim, 2011). Pilots improved research design and primary study reliability.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter covered the study's theoretical framework and research methodology on Pietermaritzburg Methodist preachers' Bible interpretation services to the LGBTIQA+ community. The chapter described how Queer Biblical Hermeneutics (QBH) opposes heteronormative Bible interpretations and advocates LGBTIQA+-affirming readings. Using an interpretive paradigm, the study stresses ministers' subjective meanings and circumstances that influence biblical interpretations and pastoral practices. The intricacy and context of religious beliefs and practices make this paradigm excellent for analyzing how Methodist pastors combine theology, sexuality, and community engagement. Qualitative research with rich, contextual data suits our study. Semi-structured interviews indicate ministers' complicated opinions and consequences on LGBTIQA+ community engagement.

Thematic analysis identified and explored important themes in qualitative data to understand the study's core issues. The chapter also outlines the rigorous procedures to ensure the study's validity, reliability, and ethics. Credibility, transferability, reliability, and confirmability validate participant data-based study outcomes. Ethics include informed consent, confidentiality, and participant rights. The pilot study enhanced the research design and equipment, guaranteeing a smooth main study and solid results. Feedback from pilot study participants improved interview question clarity and relevance, enhancing research design. Chapter 3 concludes with this study's theory and methods. The project may reveal how Methodist preachers in Pietermaritzburg relate to LGBTIQA+ people through Bible interpretation by combining LGBTIQA+ biblical Hermeneutics with rigorous qualitative research. This chapter introduces the study's analysis and debate, making its conclusions important in religious inclusion and LGBTIQA+ engagement conversations.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION

4.1 Introduction

The MCSA's Pietermaritzburg LGBTIQA+ outreach has attracted theological and pastoral attention. This chapter continues to examine how queer theology-based biblical interpretation affects ministers and LGBTIQA+ churchgoers. This chapter discusses how Pietermaritzburg Methodist pastors interpret biblical passages on homosexuality and how they affect church policies and practices using qualitative data. The chapter begins with data collecting and analysis, including interviews and themes to identify trends. This strategy ensures chapter methodological rigor and validity. The study is shocking, and diverse interviews highlight ministers' struggles with LGBTIQA+ people. The study reveals approaches using participant demographics, MCSA LGBTIQA+ concerns, and ministerial theology. Conservative biblical interpretations emphasize gender and sexuality, while queer theology-inspired ones are inclusive. Divergent viewpoints and unforeseen consequences show that ministry ties are complicated and conflicting. This chapter covers biblical interpretation and MCSA LGBTIQA+ inclusion. This diversity of views reflects South African society's gender, sexuality, and theological issues and promotes church dialogue and inclusivity.

4.2 Data Collection and Analysis Process

Data was collected to gain detailed insights into Pietermaritzburg Methodist clergy queer community engagement and theological interpretations. This study sampled Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary student ministers using purposive sampling. The Pietermaritzburg Seminary trains Methodist ministers who work in urban, suburban, and semi-rural parishes on weekends while studying theology during the week. This dual involvement allowed us to examine how theological education and service in varied contexts interact. A delicate study required creating rapport and confidence within the institution. Engaging with seminarians in this atmosphere established credibility and fostered open discourse. This preparation was necessary because the study focused on queer theology and biblical interpretation, which required careful handling of theological and cultural concerns.

A group presentation with 36 seminarians in late July 2024 explained the study's goals, ethics, and secrecy. This session helped alleviate participants' concerns about discussing such a delicate topic. To encourage non-judgmental inquiry, the researcher stated that the study was meant to examine, not critique, participants' viewpoints. This early interaction also demystified

“queer theology,” which some participants had mistaken for moral or doctrinal compromise. The lecture set the stage for a meaningful discussion by describing queer theology as a lens for reading scripture with an emphasis on inclusion and justice. Many seminarians were interested in the study, showing a generational shift towards Methodist Church openness.

After the group presentation, attendees were invited to volunteer for one-on-one interviews to pick ten people with different gender, ministry, and congregational backgrounds. Given the sensitive matter, the researcher was surprised that more than ten seminarians responded. This strong response indicated that seminarians were interested in debating gender, sexuality, and inclusivity in the church. Some volunteers exhibited progressive theological beliefs, while others were conservative, creating a diverse sample. The researcher prioritized gender diversity and government experience to ensure fair selection. This diversity gave the study a range of queer theology and biblical interpretation viewpoints.

Private, safe seminary spaces were used for the individual interviews to ensure secrecy and candid discussions. The semi-structured interviews allowed participants to discuss their journeys, theological ideas, and pastoral experiences for 30–45 minutes. This strategy addressed major concepts consistently while allowing participants to discuss personal queer theological experiences. The researcher kept the interviews casual, making participants feel comfortable expressing their opinions. Some participants said they were motivated to engage by the “I AM” organization, which works with SMMS to promote LGBTIQ+ inclusivity in religious communities. This external influence was especially noticeable among organization workshop and seminar attendees.

4.3 Incorporating Diverging and Unexpected Perspectives

While gathering data, the researcher uncovered many unexpected discoveries that complicated the study. Most participants were willing to discuss queer theology, but some were first apprehensive owing to theology. One conservative attendee remarked, “I’m not sure this is something the church should even be addressing—it feels like we’re compromising on scripture.” This interviewee responded, “Even if I don’t agree with it, I can see that people are hurting, and we need to respond with compassion.” Conservative attendees repeatedly emphasized this dilemma between doctrinal consistency and pastoral care, showing the Methodist Church’s continual endeavor to reconcile traditional principles with present social issues. Progressives claimed that meeting LGBTIQ+ persons in their congregations changed

them. A conservative commented, “My interactions with queer congregants have challenged me to rethink my theology. These individuals love God, so I confront discriminatory scripture interpretations.” Participants claimed that witnessing LGBTIQ+ individuals in their congregations affected their theology.

One participant remarked, “I used to preach against homosexuality, but seeing the pain my words caused made me realize that something needed to change.” As seen by personal transformation, discussion and life experiences can alter theological perspectives. The demographics of participants yielded an unexpected insight. Contrary to expectations, senior seminarians discussed queer theology in interviews. I've been in ministry for half a decade, and I've seen how much harm our silence on these matters has done," stated a late-40s person. That's enough.” This admission of past discrimination was shocking and inspiring, showing that all ages can change. According to the study, younger seminarians urged their seniors to be more inclusive. This interaction highlighted how Methodist theological discourse changes and may alter pastoral actions.

4.4 Demographics of the Participants

Participant ID	Gender	Age	Years in Ministry	Educational Qualification	Ministry Context
Participant 1	Male	46	5	Bachelor of Theology	Suburban
Participant 2	Female	39	5	Bachelor of Theology	Semi-rural
Participant 3	Male	37	4	Bachelor of Theology	Urban
Participant 4	Male	45	3	Bachelor of Theology	Urban
Participant 5	Male	42	4	Postgraduate Diploma in Theology	Suburban
Participant 6	Male	37	4	Masters in theology	Urban
Participant 7	Female	34	3	Bachelor of Theology	Semi-rural
Participant 8	Male	40	3	Bachelor of Theology	Urban
Participant 9	Male	32	2	Bachelor of Theology	Suburban
Participant 10	Female	35	5	Masters in theology	Semi-urban

Understanding queer theology and biblical interpretation depends on participant demographics. This study included 10 Methodist ministers from Pietermaritzburg, a city with urban and semi-

urban settings. Most participants were 32–44 and 45–46. These ministers are young, committed, and pastoral. Two-year and five-year ministers were present. This diverse experience helped us understand how ministry growth influences LGBTIQ+ inclusion attitudes. Participant 5 said, "I used to be more conservative, but as I engaged with more queer individuals, my approach has become more open and compassionate." This phrase emphasizes how pastoral experience develops inclusiveness. Most participants had a Bachelor of Theology, and few had postgraduate degrees. Participant 6, aged 37, had a Masters in Theology from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, which shaped their biblical interpretation.

Progressive theologians argue for more inclusive biblical interpretations, which affects how ministers approach gender and sexuality problems. The study also revealed that other ministers with similar educational backgrounds had conservative beliefs, demonstrating that formal education does not automatically change viewpoints. The ministers served in urban, suburban, and semi-rural congregations. Participant 8 noted the variety of an urban church, noting that while some attendees were progressive, many retained conventional gender and sexuality attitudes. These urban and suburban ministry contexts shaped ministers' pastoral issues, notably in managing congregational acceptance. Urban minister 4 said, "The congregation is quite diverse culturally and socio-economically, which makes ministry both challenging and rewarding."

Participant gender was also important. Most were male, but a few female clergy gave a unique perspective on biblical interpretation and sexuality. Participant 10, a female minister, underlined the need for safe discourse spaces in patriarchal religious institutions that marginalize women and LGBTIQ+ people. She states, "We need to create more spaces for open conversation, where people can talk about their experiences without fear of judgment." The participants' different experiences, educational backgrounds, and communal contexts influence their involvement with queer theology and biblical interpretation. The research reveals that ministers' LGBTIQ+ perspectives are shaped by pastoral reality in varied populations, ages, and theological training. This intricacy emphasizes the need to evaluate personal and environmental elements when assessing ministers' Bible interpretation within the gay community.

4.5 Summary of Major Themes and Sub-themes

The interview data indicated significant themes and sub-themes on Methodist clergy' LGBT community engagement and biblical interpretation. Major topics include Biblical Interpretation

and Theological Education, Pastoral Care and Inclusion, and Resistance to Change and Traditionalism. Under the theme of Biblical Interpretation and Theological Education, Contextual interpretation, formal theological education, and queer theology arose as subthemes. Ministers who practiced queer theology and inclusive biblical interpretation were more likely to support LGBTIQ+ inclusion. The theme of Pastoral Care and Inclusion identified sub-themes, including empathy, safe environments, and pastoral connections in inclusion. Many clergy stressed that the church should listen more to LGBTIQ+ people.

Table 1: Summary of Major Themes and Sub Themes

Research Question	Major Theme	Sub Themes
1. What are the experiences or lived realities of queer individuals within the MCSA?	Lived Realities of Queer Individuals within the MCSA.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Experiences of Marginalization and Isolation. ▪ Psychological and Emotional Impact of Exclusion. ▪ Coping Mechanisms within the Church Community. ▪ Role of Support Networks in Navigating Church Participation.
2. What are the biblical texts related to sex, sexuality, and gender used by Ministers in the Methodist Church to discriminate against the queer community in Pietermaritzburg?	biblical Texts Used in Discrimination Against Queer Individuals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Traditional Interpretations of Leviticus and Romans. ▪ Ministers’ Struggles with Scriptural Literalism. ▪ Conflicting Use of Galatians 3:28 and Other Inclusive Texts. ▪ Evolution of Scriptural Engagement in Ministry Practices.

<p>3. How have the Ministers in the Methodist Church contributed to discrimination against the queer community in Pietermaritzburg?</p>	<p>Contribution of Methodist Ministers to Discrimination.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Influence of Conservative Congregational Pressure. ▪ Silence and Avoidance in Addressing Queer Issues. ▪ Subtle Exclusion from Leadership Roles. ▪ Role of Theological Education in Perpetuating Discriminatory Practices.
<p>4. What are the actions Ministers in the Methodist Church should take to prevent the discrimination of the queer community in Pietermaritzburg using sex, sexuality, and gender biblical texts?</p>	<p>Actions Ministers Should Take to Prevent Discrimination.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promoting Open Dialogue and Listening to Queer Voices. ▪ Reinterpreting Biblical Texts Through an Inclusive Lens. ▪ Creating Safe and Affirming Spaces within the Church. ▪ Providing Ministerial Training on Queer Theology and Pastoral Care.

The theme analysis highlights the complicated dynamics of Pietermaritzburg Methodist clergy's LGBTIQ+ community participation, notably with biblical interpretation. These themes show theological difficulties and how social expectations affect pastoral duties.

4.6 Major Theme 1: Lived Realities of Queer Individuals within the MCSA

Southern African Methodist clergy address LGBTIQ+ experiences. The ministers' theological training, pastoral experiences, and observations of queer parishioners affected their views. Research on queer lived experiences is used to evaluate these leaders' opinions on LGBTIQ+ marginalization, psychological issues, and coping strategies. This is important

because ministers, not LGBTIQ+ individuals, interpreted the findings. Queer religious community academic writings contextualize these ministerial views.

4.6.1 Sub Theme 1: Experiences of Marginalization and Isolation

The interviews showed that Methodist clergy sees queer congregants as marginalized and isolated in the MCSA, despite its inclusivity policies. Ministers said cultural, religious, and societal biases hinder the church's inclusiveness. Although the MCSA promotes inclusiveness, conventional gender norms and heteronormative interpretations of scripture often shape congregational attitudes. Participant 2 states, “There’s an underlying sense that queer people don’t quite belong here,” demonstrating how exclusion is maintained without outright rejection. Beagan found that conservative religious contexts are full of passive exclusion (2020). Ministers maintained that this marginalization affects church leadership and social participation. “It's not that we're openly hostile, but there's an unspoken rule that queer people don't have a place in leadership roles,” participant 8 said. This statement supports Chitando and Manyonganise’s claim that LGBTIQ+ people confront persistent impediments to religious leadership (2016). The ministers' accounts show congregational hostility to progressive leadership and hesitation to confront conventions, which typically causes this exclusion.

Some preachers complained that the church's silence on LGBTIQ+ topics makes queer people feel invisible. Participant 10 notes, “People are afraid to talk about these issues, so they get brushed under the rug, and queer individuals feel like they don’t matter.” Campbell argues that religious institutions' culture of silence typically increases marginalized populations' estrangement (2019). Despite preachers' desire to address these concerns, congregations, and church leadership usually resisted reform. Participant 2 argues that “There’s an underlying sense that queer people don’t quite belong here. Even if no one says it out loud, you can feel it in the way they treat you differently.” Similarly, Participant 7 states, “I’ve seen people just stop coming to church because they didn’t feel like they could be themselves without being judged.” While Participant 8 argues that “It’s not that we’re openly hostile, but there’s an unspoken rule that queer people don’t have a place in leadership roles.”

These views were also shared by Participant 9, who stated that they have seen “queer members of the congregation feel so isolated. They’re not rejected outright, but they’re never really included either,” and Participant 10, who maintained that “People are afraid to talk about these issues, so they get brushed under the rug, and queer individuals feel like they don’t matter.” Interviews show discreet but ongoing marginalization. Participants' experiences reveal that

while the MCSA may not publicly reject LGBTIQA+ people, the congregation internalizes a culture of rejection. Queer people feel unwanted by omission, not confrontation. Having no church community to turn to further isolates LGBTIQA+ people. These experiences point to a broader issue within the church's leadership, which is reluctant to publicly discuss queer life, leaving members without the means to create an inclusive atmosphere.

4.6.2 Sub Theme 2: Psychological and Emotional Impact of Exclusion

Queer Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) members are excluded, causing psychological and emotional harm. Methodist preachers said LGBTIQA+ congregants face rejection, humiliation, and isolation while balancing faith and identity. Participant 6 notes, "I've seen people struggle emotionally because they can't reconcile who they are with what the church teaches." The church's silence on LGBTIQA+ matters and failure to provide pastoral care that affirms diverse sexual and gender identities often exacerbate this mental turmoil. Ministers explained how LGBTIQA+ marginalization produces depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Participant 8 commented, "I've seen the psychological damage exclusion can cause. A lack of self-confidence can cause depression." Barnes and Meyer linked LGBTIQA+ religion rejection to mental health difficulties. Ministers argued that the church's inaction leaves LGBTIQA+ people to cope emotionally (2019). Ministers considered exclusion's spiritual cost. Queer people quit the church because they cannot reconcile their beliefs with an unwelcoming environment, interviewees said.

For instance, participant 3 said, "Some queer individuals have left the church altogether because the emotional toll of feeling like they don't belong was too much." Chaves and Anderson discovered that church exclusionary policies reduce homosexual membership. These experiences show that the church must address institutional LGBTIQA+ psychological and emotional marginalization (2020). Participant 6 confessed that they have "Seen people struggle emotionally because they can't reconcile who they are with what the church teaches." Additionally, Participant 3 argues that "Some queer individuals have left the church altogether because the emotional toll of feeling like they don't belong was too much." Participant 10 shared similar sentiments: "It's heartbreaking to watch someone who loves their faith be torn apart emotionally because they feel like the church doesn't love them back." Participant 5 argues that "The church's silence on these issues only makes things worse. Queer people are left to deal with the emotional fallout on their own."

Participant 8 shared that they have “Seen the psychological damage that this exclusion can cause. People start to question their self-worth, and it can lead to depression.” Exclusion has profound psychological and emotional impacts, and the church's inaction on LGBTIQA+ issues worsens it, according to a study. Church discrimination drives LGBTIQA+ individuals away spiritually and estranges them. LGBTIQA+ persons may face depression, anxiety, and loss of faith when they try to fit into an unaccepting religion. Church pastoral care is lacking. Therefore, many queer MCSA members struggle emotionally.

4.6.3 Sub Theme 3: Coping Mechanisms within the Church Community

In response to marginalization, queer MCSA members have developed religious coping mechanisms. The clergy contacted indicated that many LGBTIQA+ churchgoers come but don't engage. Participant 9 remarked, “I've seen some people keep coming to church but not get involved. It holds them to their beliefs without rejection.” LGBTIQA+ persons can maintain their spiritual connection without rejection through this method. Ministers emphasized informal church and non-church support networks. Participant 10 said, “Queer individuals often find comfort in small groups of supportive members, but it's not enough to make up for the exclusion they feel from the larger church.” Queer people can talk and feel safe in these groups of like-minded persons or relatives. These findings corroborate Beagan's claim that conservative religious micro-communities strengthen marginalized populations (2020). Queer people seek acceptance in informal religious groups or interfaith meetings. Ministers say disillusioned churchgoers need these settings. They stated that these techniques do not address church-wide marginalization.

Participant 9 commented, “The fact that people need these coping strategies highlights how much work the church still needs to do... I've seen some people keep coming to church but not get involved. It's their way of staying connected to their faith without risking rejection.” Participant 10 adds that “Queer individuals often find comfort in small groups of supportive members, but it's not enough to make up for the exclusion they feel from the larger church.” These findings suggest that LGBTIQA+ Christians can keep connected without marginalization through partial engagement and smaller church support groups. This strategy protects mental health and self-preservation in hostile environments. The fact that LGBTIQA+ persons need these coping methods demonstrates their loneliness. Many employ limited engagement to reconcile their desire for spiritual membership with the church's harsh reality of exclusion.

4.6.4 Sub Theme 4: Role of Support Networks in Navigating Church Participation

Queer MCSA members need church and non-church aid. Ministers suggested that family, friends, and affirming congregants reduce marginalization. Participant 2 notes, “One or two supportive church members make all the difference for many queer people. It reduces isolation.” LGBTIQ+ religious members need relational assistance, according to Cornwall (2015). Ministers also recognized the benefits of affirming clergy and churchgoers. Participant 9 said, “When there's an affirming minister or congregant, it creates a safe space for queer individuals to stay connected to their faith.” Though rare, positive voices help gay congregants feel included. Ministers admitted these pockets of support are often insufficient to fight the church's marginalization mentality. Queer people keep their faith through support networks despite these challenges. However, informal contacts suggest that the MCSA needs systemic adjustments to include and help all members, regardless of sexual or gender identity. Participant 2 is of the view that “For many queer people, having just one or two supportive people in the church makes all the difference. It helps them feel less alone.” Participant 8 shared that they have “Seen queer individuals lean on their friends and family for support, especially when the church isn't there for them.”

For Participant 9, “When there's an affirming minister or congregant, it creates a safe space for queer individuals to stay connected to their faith.” Support networks assist LGBTIQ+ MCSA residents in overcoming their issues, according to statistics. These networks offer emotional support and community that the church frequently lacks. Affirming clergy and congregants makes LGBTIQ+ churchgoers feel less excluded by providing spiritual affirmation. However, personal support networks show the church's institutional weakness in LGBTIQ+ concerns. Queer people must rely on relationships rather than the church, highlighting the need for MCSA structural change.

4.7 Major Theme 2: Contribution of Methodist Ministers to Discrimination

This section examines how Pietermaritzburg Methodist pastors view their responsibilities in LGBTIQ+ discrimination in their congregations. Ministers discussed their systemic and cultural issues in semi-structured interviews, often contrasting their theological ideas with parishioners, church leadership, and theological education. The four sub-themes show how ministers' acts, inactions, or institutional ties promote exclusion. Conservative congregational pressure, quiet and avoidance of queer concerns, covert leadership exclusion, and theological

education perpetuating discrimination are examples. These sub-themes highlight the Methodist Church of Southern Africa's structural and personal hurdles to inclusion and equality.

4.7.1 Sub Theme 1: Influence of Conservative Congregational Pressure

The semi-structured interviews demonstrated that conservative congregational pressure affects Methodist ministers' LGBTIQ+ views. Many participants failed to fulfill conservative churches' standard scriptural readings. Ministers struggled to combine their theological training, personal beliefs, and congregational pressure to maintain gender and sexuality norms. This pressure kept progressive ministers from discussing LGBTIQ+ issues. To avoid congregant backlash, many ministers chose a cautious, conservative approach to leadership, staying silent on LGBTIQ+ issues. Several ministers reported influential church members blocking inclusivity talks. Resistance often prevented free discussion of LGBTIQ+ problems, perpetuating discriminatory behaviors. Many ministers felt conservative pressure to maintain their church position and avoid disagreement with major members who had conventional sexual attitudes. Participant 7 shared that they have “Had congregants come up to me after sermons and express concern that I’m not being firm enough on issues of ‘sin.’ They want a clear stance, and they make it known.”

Another participant, Participant 3, shared, “The older church members have been very vocal about their discomfort with anything that challenges the traditional views of family and marriage. It’s difficult to balance their concerns with my personal beliefs.” Participant 5 shared, “I’ve noticed a real divide in the congregation. The younger people are more open, but the older generation still holds much power, and they expect ministers to reflect their values.” Participant 9 also shared, “There have been times when I’ve wanted to discuss issues of inclusion more openly, but the reaction from the congregation has been overwhelmingly negative. It’s like walking on eggshells.” This conflict between congregational expectations and pastoral desires for inclusion forces clergy to balance their theological and moral beliefs with conservative perspectives. To maintain religious cohesion, some self-censor by avoiding LGBTIQ+ problems. The interviewees repeatedly stressed the concern of alienating congregants, especially financially supporting or powerful ones.

4.7.2 Sub Theme 2: Silence and Avoidance in Addressing Queer Issues

The data shows Methodist ministers' quiet and avoidance of LGBT concerns. Many participants avoided gender and sexuality themes in sermons and pastoral care. Avoidance often prevented

congregational discord or polarised a divided religious group. Ministers believed they maintained congregational cohesion by ignoring these issues, even if it prolonged exclusionary conduct. The interviews demonstrated that ministers' silence was due to church LGBT contentiousness, not their viewpoints. Ministers with more liberal gender and sexuality attitudes feared congregation and church leadership reactions. This prompted preachers to sidestep LGBTIQA+ issues in sermons and pastoral care and focus on less controversial themes. Participant 2 said, "It's easier to just not talk about it. The moment you bring up anything to do with sexuality, people get defensive, and it creates division."

Participant 6 shared that they have "seen ministers lose support from their congregations because they spoke up about inclusivity. It's safer just to avoid the topic altogether." Participant 4 shared, "We don't have the tools to address these issues in a way that won't alienate parts of the congregation. So, many of us just choose to stay silent." Participant 9 shared, "Sometimes silence is the only way to keep the peace. The church is already divided on so many issues; I don't want to add fuel to the fire." Silence and avoidance marginalize LGBTIQA+ Methodists by erasing their issues from church discourse. Ministers perpetuate a culture of exclusion by avoiding gender and sexuality topics, leaving queer congregants without instruction, acceptance, or pastoral care. Though typically portrayed as neutral, this silence fosters harm by neglecting to address LGBTIQA+ churchgoers' genuine concerns.

4.7.3 Sub Theme 3: Subtle Exclusion from Leadership Roles

The results showed that LGBTIQA+ people were subtly excluded from church leadership. Insidious types of exclusion included the unstated belief that LGBTIQA+ people were unqualified for leadership or the discreet sidelining of those who publicly revealed their sexual or gender identities. Ministers said LGBTIQA+ congregants were welcome to worship, but they were seldom considered for elder, deacon, or youth leadership roles. According to the study participants, this exclusion was typically explained by church unity or "biblical standards" for leadership. Ministers cited cases when competent LGBTIQA+ church members were overlooked for leadership posts despite their dedication. Some ministers said they were pressured by congregations or church leadership not to hire openly LGBTIQA+ leaders for fear of division or scandal. Participant 8 argues, "There are people in our church who would make excellent leaders, but because of their sexuality, they're never even considered. It's not spoken aloud, but it's understood."

One participant shared that when it comes to queer people serving in the church, “The message is clear: you can serve, but only up to a point. Leadership is off-limits if you’re openly queer” (Participant 6). Similarly, Participant 10 shared that “It’s subtle, but there’s a glass ceiling for queer individuals in the church. They can be active members, but leadership? That’s a different story.” Participant 3 shared that they had to “Turn down people for leadership roles because of pressure from the congregation. It’s not something I’m proud of, but it’s the reality.” The opposition of queer individuals in participating in leadership positions in the church is fostered by this indirect exclusion from leadership posts. It limits queer contributions and sends the message that church leadership is incompatible with their identities. This exclusion marginalizes queer attendees and indicates that religious acceptance depends on hiding their identities.

4.7.4 Sub Theme 4: Role of Theological Education in Perpetuating Discriminatory Practices

The evidence suggests that Methodist Church theology education encourages bigotry. Many clergy members indicated that their theological training prioritized gender and sexuality and customary scripture readings. Ministers reported receiving minimal training on how to compassionately and inclusively assist LGBTIQ+ congregants. LGBTIQ+ identities were generally portrayed as awful or evil. Many said theology did not educate them on gender and sexuality—instead, “biblical authority” justified discrimination without reinterpreting scripture. Lack of critical engagement with current sexuality and gender problems led to a dogmatic, biased church response to LGBTIQ+ people. Participant 2 shared, “My theological training was very traditional. We were taught that homosexuality is a sin, and that’s the end of the discussion.” Participant 5 shared, “There wasn’t any space for discussing queer issues in my theological education. It was all very black and white: male and female, husband and wife.” Similarly, Participant 1 shared, “I think a lot of the discriminatory practices we see in the church come from a lack of education. Ministers just aren’t given the tools to engage with these issues in a nuanced way.”

Another participant, Participant 4, shared, “The way we were taught to interpret the Bible was very rigid. There was no room for thinking about gender and sexuality in a way that includes queer people.” These experiences by ministers demonstrate that poor theological education promotes intolerance and hampers ministers-LGBTIQ+ contact. Ministers who wished to be more inclusive were unprepared for LGBTIQ+ inclusion owing to training. This

unpreparedness leads ministers to marginalize LGBTIQQA+ individuals with orthodox views, furthering church exclusion.

4.8 Major Theme 3: Actions Ministers Should Take to Prevent Discrimination

Methodist clergy discussed reducing LGBTIQQA+ discrimination in their churches. Interviews show that ministers understand their responsibilities in preventing queer marginalization amid a challenging socio-religious environment. Open discourse and listening to queer voices, reinterpreting biblical texts through inclusive lenses, safe and supportive church environments, and targeted ministerial training on queer theology and pastoral care were the key sub-themes. These tactics demonstrate preachers' willingness to change despite traditional congregations' opposition. Beagan (2020) and Campbell (2019) note that changing discrimination requires individual and institutional effort. This section covers each sub-theme and pastors' complicated Methodist Church equality and inclusion practices.

4.8.1 Sub Theme 1: Promoting Open Dialogue and Listening to Queer Voices

Open dialogue and LGBTIQQA+ perspectives were recommended for decreasing prejudice in Pietermaritzburg Methodist clergy semi-structured interviews. Many participants said the church had failed to engage with LGBTIQQA+ people's daily experiences, marginalizing them. Ministers advocated for intentional church settings where LGBTIQQA+ individuals can speak without judgment. Conservative churchgoers opposed such talks, posing significant challenges. The findings showed that ministers who conducted these talks believed they had expanded their understanding and created more inclusive cultures. One participant shared that there is “a real need for open conversations. I’ve seen firsthand that when people talk—talk—they start to understand each other better” (Participant 5). Another participant shared that “We can’t keep silent on this. We need to listen to the stories of queer people; it’s the only way to break down barriers” (Participant 9). Participant 6 shared that they have held “small group discussions, and what’s clear is that dialogue helps. It creates a space where people feel safe enough to share without being judged”.

Participants confirmed that ministers supported conversation but faced substantial pushback. One issue was ministers' concern of offending conservative congregations by participating in these talks—tradition and inclusivity clash. Participants who led discussions reported increased empathy and understanding in their congregations. The church's lack of organizational

frameworks and norms hindered their efforts. Ministers felt powerless because the Methodist Church had not set clear guidelines for these challenging discussions.

4.8.2 Sub Theme 2: Reinterpreting Biblical Texts Through an Inclusive Lens

The majority of clergy interviewed said inclusive biblical interpretation eliminated discrimination. Many believed that traditional scripture readings excluded LGBTIQ+ persons from church. Participants discussed contextualizing scripture by analyzing its history and culture. The ministers who initiated this process believed it altered congregational conversation, developing a more inclusive and compassionate theology. The participants shared the following sentiments regarding reinterpreting biblical texts through an inclusive lens:

“We need to move away from literal interpretations of texts like Leviticus. The Bible was written in a specific time, and we need to interpret it in a way that reflects the values of today—especially love and acceptance” (Participant 1).

“Galatians 3:28 is a text that guides me. It says we’re all one in Christ, no matter who we are. That should be the foundation for how we engage with the queer community” (Participant 6).

“When I look at the teachings of Jesus, it’s clear to me that love is central, not exclusion. We need to reinterpret those passages that have been used to harm” (Participant 2).

“I try to focus on the broader message of the Bible—love, grace, and inclusion. We can’t be stuck in old interpretations that don’t serve the needs of today’s world” (Participant 6).

“I’ve seen how a more inclusive interpretation of scripture has helped members of my congregation rethink their stance on these issues” (Participant 5).

According to interviews, ministers advocate for inclusion using biblical passages. Some participants noted traditional gender and sexuality views. Theological reflection and LGBTIQ+ sensitivity increased for ministers who studied more inclusive scripture. Reinterpreting biblical passages shapes congregational inclusiveness attitudes.

4.8.3 Sub Theme 3: Creating Safe and Affirming Spaces Within the Church

Several participants said ministers can avoid prejudice by promoting LGBTIQ+-friendly environments. Ministers who supported these locations believed they improved queer congregants' lives. LGBTIQ+ persons may express themselves freely in these safe venues.

The numbers also indicated that some attendees disliked these venues because they contradicted Christian principles. The study participants shared different approaches that they have tried in order to create safe and affirming spaces for queer people within the church:

“We’ve tried to create a small group specifically for LGBTIQ+ members, where they can share their experiences openly. It’s been life-changing for some, but not without pushback” (Participant 10).

“There’s a need for spaces where queer individuals feel they can belong—belong, not just tolerate. It’s about making them feel that they are valued members of the church” (Participant 9).

“When people feel safe, they are more likely to engage and be open about their identity. That’s what we’ve seen with the youth group we started for queer youth” (Participant 5).

The findings also show that while safe spaces are supported, many ministers face criticism from congregants who think they violate church doctrines. Ministers who had built these places stressed patience and communication, noting that they generally started with small, informal gatherings rather than church-wide policy. The evidence reveals that safe spaces are more than physical locations and that a cultural transformation in the church is needed to embrace diversity.

4.8.4 Sub Theme 4: Providing Ministerial Training on Queer Theology and Pastoral Care

The lack of specialized queer theology and pastoral care training for LGBTIQ+ people hinders prejudice prevention. Many clergy desired more significant gender and sexuality training since their theology training was inadequate. Participants believed untrained clergy could not give LGBTIQ+ congregants appropriate pastoral care. Most pastors felt the church required additional training in this area; however, others used informal resources or attended seminars. The participants shared the following sentiments regarding providing ministerial training on queer theology and pastoral care.

“I didn’t receive any formal training on how to provide pastoral care to queer individuals. Everything I’ve learned has been through my own research” (Participant 8).

“We need training—real, structured training on how to engage with queer theology and how to care for LGBTIQ+ individuals. It’s not something we can figure out on our own” (Participant 9).

“There’s a gap in our theological education when it comes to issues of sexuality. If we want to be inclusive, we need to be equipped” (Participant 7).

Interview results showed ministers knew their queer theology and pastoral care training gaps. While some sought resources, most agreed that the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) needed to formalize ministerial training on these issues. Many thought they could not connect with LGBTIQ+ congregants without this essential knowledge, missing opportunities to promote inclusivity and prevent bigotry. Ministry and congregational ignorance and intolerance were also blamed on lacking structured training.

4.9 Conclusion

This research shows the MCSA's complicated and frequently conflicting relationship with Pietermaritzburg's LGBTIQ+ population. Ministers approach gender and sexuality problems differently based on scripture. Orthodox ministers can exclude, but progressive or contextual ministers give more inclusive spiritual care. Ministers struggle to integrate traditional beliefs with LGBTIQ+ inclusiveness because of cultural restrictions and a lack of theological resources. However, ministers, especially younger ones, want improved theological education and open discussion on these problems. This late shift shows the MCSA can integrate its theology with congregants' pastoral concerns. The MCSA's queer community participation hinges on accepting inclusive theology and creating appropriate conversation venues. Without these efforts, the church risks alienating a large segment of its population and failing to provide compassionate pastoral care to all genders and sexual orientations.

5: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

The research on Pietermaritzburg Methodist ministers' LGBTIQA+ Bible interpretation is discussed in Chapter 5. This chapter examines the study sub-questions and their implications for the Methodist Church in Southern Africa. Subquestions included LGBTIQA+ people's lives—ministers' use of Scripture to justify discrimination, their duty, and how to end marginalization. The statistics demonstrate LGBTIQA+ MCSA members' slight but considerable exclusion. The church claims inclusivity, but queer members are silenced, avoided, and neglected. Biblical exegesis defends and opposes this exclusion. The paper claims Methodist Ministers overlook LGBTIQA+ issues under conservative congregational pressure, perpetuating prejudice. The psychological and emotional effects of exclusion on LGBTIQA+ people, their coping methods, and the significance of informal support networks in church involvement are also examined in this chapter. The chapter concludes that the MCSA must promote discourse, read biblical texts through an inclusive lens, and improve theology education to handle gender and sexuality concerns constructively.

5.2 Discussion on Lived Realities of Queer Individuals within the MCSA

5.2.1 Experiences of Marginalization and Isolation

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA)'s LGBTIQA+ people's marginalization and isolation juxtapose institutional inclusiveness claims with congregational attitudes. Though the MCSA promotes diversity, policy, and practice, differ, excluding LGBTIQA+ people. Participants emphasized that non-confrontation is not acquiescence. LGBTIQA+ inclusion discussions are avoided by leadership to avoid controversy and marginalizing gay congregants. Religious organizations exclude through passive indifference, not rejection, Yip says (2018). These trends demonstrate the necessity for intentional policy-practice interaction. Church leadership's silence and lack of queer inclusion advocacy show a systemic failure to handle these issues holistically, alienating parishioners socially and spiritually. The research demonstrates that the congregation's internalized culture of exclusion, which includes passive-aggressive behavior and unconscious biases against queer individuals, is damaging.

Wilcox says congregational silence makes gay people feel invisible and unsupported. Participants saw church leaders avoid gender and sexuality topics in sermons and group

discussions, increasing isolation (2019). Inaction fosters negative cultural and religious views of LGBTIQA+ identities, generating conditional and superficial acceptance. Browne advises religious institutions to host sexuality discussions to create more inclusive spaces (2020). The lack of discourse in MCSA leaves queer individuals without a faith community. The research stresses marginalization's psychological consequences. Queer people feel humiliated, rejected, and isolated since the church does not recognize multiple sexual identities. Participants said LGBTIQA+ churchgoers left due to exclusionary policies. Barnes and Meyer say religious contexts promote detrimental internalized homophobia (2019).

LGBTIQA+ people's isolation from church leadership intensifies this mental health crisis. Many LGBTIQA+ persons internalize rejection, creating emotional and spiritual agony. We need pastoral care that addresses faith, identity, and mental health to alleviate exclusionary suffering. The findings conclude that MCSA structural and religious issues marginalize LGBTIQA+ persons. Since there are no LGBTIQA+ norms or structures, congregations can discriminate. Chitando and van Klinken suggest reinterpreting theology and biblical texts via inclusive perspectives to address these systemic issues (2016). LGBTIQA+ individuals are marginalized in their spiritual and community lives since the MCSA has not entirely adopted such reforms. This systemic failure demonstrates a reluctance to challenge norms and make the church inclusive. The MCSA must reflect on its faith and execute its policies to prove its commitment to inclusiveness.

5.2.2 Psychological and Emotional Impact of Exclusion

Exclusion hurts LGBTIQA+ MCSA members mentally and emotionally. This study found that queer congregants' rejection typically leads to spiritual alienation since the church implicitly alienates them. Depressed and anxious persons navigate identity-denying places due to exclusion. Beagan says inclusive religious settings can reduce psychological discomfort for LGBTIQA+ people by welcoming and validating them (2020). Participants' experiences show a general lack of pastoral care, leaving them without the emotional and spiritual support they need to thrive in church. This exclusion normalizes mental illness due to religious neglect. Exclusion from religion hurts mental health. LGBTIQA+ faith-marginalized people have mental health issues and suicidal thoughts, Rodriguez and Ouellette discovered (2018). Barnes and Meyer found that religious rejection increases internalized homophobia and identity conflict, worsening mental health (2019). These studies show that MCSA LGBTIQA+ members struggle emotionally to reconcile their sexuality or gender identity with their faith.

This tension causes many to forsake religion, isolating them. Althaus-Reid proposes a fundamental religious reform that welcomes LGBTIQ+ identities by eliminating heteronormative myths (2000). These difficulties have hope with new queer pastoral care frameworks. Kumalo and Muller suggest that theological hospitality can create safe, respected LGBTIQ+ churches (2022). This study's participants desired open conversation and validation of their lived experiences to reduce exclusion-related psychological stress. Jagessar and De Jong say religious communities help lessen alienation by building empathy and understanding (2020). This approach requires clergy queer theology training and affirming pastoral care. These methods may help MCSA stop disregarding LGBTIQ+ individuals.

Exclusion's psychological impact shows MCSA's cultural and structural change. According to Campbell, LGBTIQ+ exclusion policies reinforce harmful practices; hence, leadership is needed to alter institutions (2019). Participants regularly said church leadership didn't encourage inclusive pastoral care. Queer theology, according to Chitando and van Klinken, could help the church better serve marginalized groups (2016). LGBTIQ+ congregants' mental health and pastoral care would increase well-being and demonstrate the church's fairness and equity. To be inclusive and respect members' dignity and humanity, the MCSA must make these changes.

5.2.3 Coping Mechanisms within the Church Community

LGBTIQ+ Christians in orthodox churches like the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) face marginalization. Many queer churchgoers attend only when safe. This restricted touch lets them maintain a spiritual connection without risking harm or rejection. Olson and Cadge suggest that LGBTIQ+ people in conservative religious environments flourish and navigate complex faith communities through selective involvement (2019). Additionally, local church support groups foster belonging and unity. The church lacks connection, but these informal networks reduce loneliness. Though temporary, these tactics highlight queer people's systemic exclusion. Queer Christians create inclusive communal worship places outside the church to express themselves. Such settings allow LGBTIQ+ people to practice accepting spirituality, according to Wilcox (2018). These places exist because traditional religious settings lack pastoral care. LGBTIQ+ Bible studies and prayer circles provide spiritual growth and a nonjudgmental community. These activities build resilience but show how the church has neglected marginalized people. Jagessar and De Jong argue that these coping

techniques are temporary responses to the church's incapacity to embrace diversity, not systemic bigotry (2020).

Some practical coping methods have drawbacks. Church isolation is not solved by selective engagement and informal assistance. Adjustment falls on marginalized individuals, not institutions, according to Beagan (2020). LGBTIQA+ MCSA members must balance faith and identity without an inclusive policy. Reconciliation is emotionally and spiritually challenging for many. Ackermann suggests that religious organizations promote inclusive communities through a relational ethic that values difference and otherness (1998). Without institutional change, gay congregants suffer psychologically.

Queer MCSA members demonstrate institutional change. This survey found that many participants wanted structural improvements to participate in church life without discrimination. Chitando and van Klinken recommend churches adopt a liberation theology that honors everyone's humanity, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity (2016). Theological frameworks could assist the MCSA in creating an inclusive workplace beyond coping techniques. Rewriting discriminatory laws, teaching clergy queer theology, and pastorally supporting LGBTIQA+ congregants are needed. These steps are needed to give LGBTIQA+ Christians spiritual and emotional sanctuary in the church.

5.2.4 Role of Support Networks in Navigating Church Participation

To overcome marginalization, LGBTIQA+ Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) members require support networks. These networks of affirming clergy, inclusive congregations, and LGBTIQA+ members fill the official church's queer support gap. These networks provide emotional and spiritual support to LGBTIQA+ people to prevent rejection and isolation. Lee and Hicks (2020) suggest that strong social networks assist disadvantaged persons in preserving their religion despite prejudice by providing emotional support and resilience. LGBTIQA+ persons can freely share their beliefs on social networks. Since the MCSA relies on informal networks rather than institutional improvements to serve LGBTIQA+ congregants, such networks reflect a systemic issue. Selected families provide relational support that often substitutes biological family and church acceptance in these networks. Chosen families give excluded persons emotional, social, and spiritual support, making them feel included. Goss (2007) says selected families assist people in coping with rejection and legitimize them in hostile situations.

LGBTIQA+ MCSA members can traverse the church as spiritual partners with chosen families. Pro-church inclusion families demonstrate togetherness and radical love. These families show that LGBTIQA+ people can form lasting connections in hostile environments. Support networks and chosen families reduce isolation but cannot change the MCSA structure. Church fringe networks solve institutional problems. Personal networks without institutional exclusion intensify marginalization, say Chaves and Anderson (2020). MCSA's failure to provide LGBTIQA+ parishioners with pastoral care reinforces their second-class status. The fact that LGBTIQA+ individuals need chosen families and support networks to feel spiritually connected reveals a lack of purposeful church inclusivity. To foster inclusivity, the MCSA must actively address these systemic barriers.

The church must move beyond tolerance to actively accept LGBTIQA+ issues and be inclusive. Jagessar and De Jong emphasize that churches must repeal discriminatory laws, train clergy on LGBTIQA+ issues, and create inclusive liturgical practices (2020). The MCSA must incorporate support networks and chosen families into pastoral care. This requires formalizing opportunities for queer churchgoers to participate. Such an approach would honor LGBTIQA+ congregants' lives and place in Christ. The MCSA may restructure to eliminate the need for informal spiritual and emotional support by embracing diversity.

5.3 Contribution of Methodist Ministers to Discrimination

5.3.1 Influence of Conservative Congregational Pressure

Conservative congregational pressure greatly influences Methodist pastors' LGBTIQA+ inclusion beliefs and behaviors, contrasting with pastoral obligations and congregants' expectations. According to interviews, preachers must balance their theology with their flock's conservatism. Many interviewees were cautious or indifferent on LGBTIQA+ topics to avoid alienating affluent church members. Many conservative churchgoers avoid discussing LGBTIQA+ problems because diversity deviates from biblical teachings. This silence and apathy marginalize LGBTIQA+ churchgoers. Browne claims that conservative congregations force clergy to acquiesce passively to maintain peace by preventing creative theological interpretations (2020).

Due to pressure, ministers avoid LGBTIQA+ themes in sermons, Bible studies, and other public venues. When advocating for diversity, ministers fear congregational and church leadership backlash. Wilcox says conservative clerics employ calm to handle conflicting

demands without taking sides (2018). This survey indicated that some clergy privately support LGBTIQ+ equality but do not speak out for fear of congregational disapproval. Self-censorship inhibits church theological discourse and minimizes LGBTIQ+ concerns in spiritual growth and community.

Ministers' beliefs and congregational expectations indicate the Methodist Church of Southern Africa's structural boundaries. Church leadership didn't help ministers manage these difficulties since church rules often reflect conservative congregational attitudes. The institutional agreement with orthodox, scriptural interpretations makes inclusivity-promoting preachers' tasks harder. According to Chaves and Anderson (2020), religious organizations resist change due to power dynamics and cultural traditions. Vague MCSA policies leave LGBTIQ+ members vulnerable to bigotry, leaving pastors to handle these issues. This institutional indifference hinders growth and excludes LGBTIQ+ Christians.

Though difficult, clergy advocacy and congregational dialogue can help. According to Jagessar and De Jong (2020), preachers who regularly discuss diversity with their congregations might shift attitudes and promote acceptance. Such projects require courage and resilience since they challenge deeply held beliefs and risk personal and professional consequences. This study indicated that some ministers are prepared to take these risks, but most are afraid and lack institutional support. The MCSA must clarify and assist pastors campaigning for LGBTIQ+ inclusivity to avoid congregational pressure on their pastoral duties for genuine advancement. Addressing these systemic barriers can equip clergy to fight discrimination and build an inclusive church.

5.3.2 Silence and Avoidance in Addressing Queer Issues

Methodist preachers' silence and avoidance of gay themes deny LGBTIQ+ congregants pastoral care and church inclusion. Removing LGBT experiences from religious discourse promotes marginalization and alienation. The interviews indicated that silence, sometimes disguised as neutrality, has far-reaching repercussions. When ministers ignore gender and sexuality, they unintentionally transmit the idea that the church does not care. According to Campbell (2019), silence in religious settings marginalizes LGBTIQ+ congregants and encourages systemic exclusion. Silence supports heteronormative majority dominance over disadvantaged voices.

Institutional, theological, and social forces keep ministers from discussing LGBTIQ+ issues. Many conservative churchgoers have financial and social influence, so clergy worry about alienating them. Lack of training and theological tools for contentious gender and sexuality discussions increases these pressures. Ministers felt unprepared to address these issues without inciting congregational strife. This intellectual and theological mismatch shows the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA)'s ongoing failure to teach its leaders to meet modern social issues. Beagan (2020) emphasizes the need for inclusive religious institutions where clergy can protect underprivileged groups without penalties. Without institutional support, ministers prioritize stability over justice and inclusivity.

Silence often promotes congregational unity but diminishes pastoral care. Ministers ignore LGBTIQ+ congregants' spiritual and emotional needs, reinforcing harmful stereotypes. Hodge (2021) claims that silence in faith-based environments denies marginalized individuals affirmation and respect. This silence drives LGBTIQ+ individuals away from the MCSA, eroding trust and relevance to modern society. Campbell (2019) adds that neglecting controversial topics limits genuine understanding and healing, which may aggravate church tensions.

Some scholars say silence may protect conservative clergy. McDonald (2020) suggests that preachers may avoid LGBTIQ+ problems to maintain religious authority. They may gradually push progressive ideals, encouraging discourse and inclusion. This highlights the complexity of ministerial decision-making and silence's long-term implications. Silence normalizes exclusion and supports the status quo, hindering the church's inclusiveness and justice. To break this pattern, the MCSA must promote theology education and institutional reforms that prepare clergy to boldly and compassionately address homosexual issues and create a church culture of love and inclusivity.

5.3.3 Subtle Exclusion from Leadership Roles

LGBTIQ+ exclusion from Methodist Church leadership is subtle but profound. Subtle biases, attitudes, and structural impediments restrict LGBTIQ+ persons from leadership. Queer members are excluded from church policy and decision-making, perpetuating heteronormativity. Ackermann (1998) explains how institutional exclusion fosters power dynamics over inclusivity. This worldview marginalizes LGBTIQ+ persons and produces a

society that denies their full personhood, undermining the Methodist Church's equality and justice mission.

This exclusion is usually justified as church integrity or theology. Johnson (2021) believes many religious institutions reject nonconformists using implicit hierarchies. LGBTIQ+ Methodists are indirectly excluded from leadership due to their sexuality or gender identity. LGBTIQ+ people cannot lead but can attend church events, suggesting that their identities are incompatible with authority. This appearance of inclusion hides actual acceptance, says Patel (2019). LGBTIQ+ leadership is excluded, and heteronormative values are reinforced by church exclusion.

The study indicated that congregational pressure maintains these barriers. Religious leaders who promote LGBTIQ+ leadership may be shunned. Changing conventional standards may reduce church attendance and finances, compounding this concern. Ministers avoid addressing fundamental prejudices to maintain institutional stability. Beagan (2020) stresses the necessity for inclusive religious spaces where underprivileged people lead. The church risks keeping LGBTIQ+ members out of leadership and decision-making unless it aggressively removes these barriers.

Individual biases and institutional barriers must be addressed to end LGBTIQ+ leadership exclusion. This involves changing church rules to promote equality and openly discussing LGBTIQ+ church contributions. Althaus-Reid (2000) suggests radical theological reflection that challenges scriptural readings for a more inclusive church. Without these measures, the church's inclusivity will be superficial, weakening its moral and spiritual authority. Transforming these institutions will allow LGBTIQ+ persons to fully engage and improve the church by incorporating diverse perspectives into its leadership, creating a love and justice community.

5.3.4 Role of Theological Education in Perpetuating Discriminatory Practices

In Methodist theology education, traditional scriptural interpretations over inclusive theological frameworks perpetuate inequality. These training programs essentially exploit Orthodox LGBTIQ+ -stigmatizing views, excluding clergy. Althaus-Reid says that heteronormative theological education fails to engage biblical interpretation's power structures, leaving ministers unprepared to face gender and sexuality issues in their congregations (2000). Lack of critical involvement promotes exclusionary standards and prohibits clergy from

developing LGBTIQ+ -inclusive churches. Theological education perpetuates religious inequality.

Reformed theology education can change, say Ujamaa Centre and IAM. The Pietermaritzburg-based Ujamaa Centre encourages LGBTIQ+ voices via contextual Bible study. Through critical engagement, Ujamaa equips clergy and laypeople to challenge discriminatory biblical readings (Gunda, 2020). We support inclusive theological courses and safe spaces for gender and sexuality discourse in seminaries. Their research suggests that rethinking theology education can stop church discrimination and encourage diversity. These projects demonstrate that theology education must move from tradition to justice and equality.

Though progress has been made, inclusive theological education is unequal. Many schools value doctrinal purity and religious heritage more than social issues. Yip (2019) claims that this technique leaves ministers unable to address LGBTIQ+ inclusion due to a mismatch between diverse congregations' demands and training. Discrimination in theological education hampers the church's ability to serve all congregations and alienates seekers of spiritual guidance in affirming locations. Without inclusive theology in ministerial training, the church risks isolation.

Fixing these difficulties requires inclusive and socially just theological education. Althaus-Reid advocates critical engagement with feminist, liberation, and queer theologies in curricula (2000). Tools and training from Ujamaa and IAM can strengthen these efforts by challenging biblical interpretations. Seminary faculty, church leaders, and grassroots groups must support inclusive theological education. Only by working together can the Methodist Church achieve its goal of equality and justice, ensuring that no one is excluded from spiritual and communal life.

5.4 Actions Ministers Should Take to Prevent Discrimination

5.4.1 Promoting Open Dialogue and Listening to Queer Voices

To create inclusive Methodist Churches, especially in Pietermaritzburg, ministers must talk. Participants in this study said LGBTIQ+-centered speeches can combat discrimination and foster congregational tolerance. Ministers dread conservative congregations' fury and avoid disagreements. Jagessar and De Jong (2020) discovered conservative churches avoid sexuality talks, marginalizing LGBTIQ+ persons. These presentations improve ministers' empathy and

congregational attitudes. Preachers struggle with these nuanced debates in the Methodist Church due to a lack of institutional support and norms.

Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM) addresses this. The IAM provides initiatives to assist clergy and congregations in talking and being inclusive. They promote LGBTIQ+ voice-hearing for spiritual and communal growth (Beagan, 2020). IAM amplifies under-represented voices to humanize LGBTIQ+ experiences and oppose church-rooted heteronormativity. Patel (2019) suggests centering LGBTIQ+ narratives in religion to alleviate structural marginalization. According to IAM seminars, systematic discourse can transform congregational dynamics and minimize stigma towards non-normative identities. Discussing tradition-inclusion conflict is another step to open discourse. Many clergy struggle to reconcile their theology with LGBTIQ+ parishioners. McDonald (2020) discovered that institutional pressures prohibit religious leaders from supporting questionable causes. These conflicts cause ministers to avoid LGBTIQ+ inclusion to maintain institutional stability. Silence promotes exclusion and opposes the church's unconditional love and acceptance. Thus, ministers must balance conservatism with change. Inclusion preachers often feel isolated. Progressive clergy can build support networks.

Open dialogue and inclusivity require the Methodist church's institutional backing. The lack of ministerial guidelines on LGBTIQ+ matters causes confusion and delays development. This study highlights the need for church leadership to provide comprehensive guidelines that encourage discourse and provide practical tools for sensitive topics. IAM collaboration can provide theological and practical training to close this gap. Ministers can learn to work with diverse congregations through open theological debate. Gunda (2020) claims that LGBTIQ+ inclusion in churches would remain fragmented and ineffective without structural and educational adjustments. Institutionalize open discourse to make the Methodist Church more inclusive.

5.4.2 Reinterpreting Biblical Texts Through an Inclusive Lens

Methodist preachers must modify scripture to fight bigotry and encourage LGBTIQ+ tolerance. Contextual Bible study combats racism at the Pietermaritzburg Ujamaa Centre. These studies help pastors and congregations discover liberating biblical interpretations through critical socio-historical analysis (Gunda, 2020). The Bible can improve social inequity, says liberation theology. Ujamaa highlights marginalized voices, especially LGBTIQ+ ones,

to fulfill the theological mandate to identify all people as God's image bearers (Ackermann, 1998). Theological reinterpretations empower religious community empathy and tolerance. Methodist Church conservatism and bureaucratic slowness prevent widespread acceptance of such innovative practices.

IAM courses and resources help clergy and congregations reconsider biblical stories. Reshaping scripture to honor LGBTIQ+ individuals and engaging religious communities promotes compassion and justice (Beagan, 2020). Leviticus and Romans are controversial, but IAM workshops offer LGBTIQ+-inclusive interpretations. IAM helps pastors face delicate congregational concerns by connecting scripture and practical experience via inclusive theological study. Queer theology shows how scripture affirms multiple sexual and gender identities. Pastors and congregations may refuse to address deep-rooted religious prejudices, hindering such initiatives.

Despite Ujamaa and IAM's promise, inclusive biblical hermeneutics struggles. Critics of established doctrine might incite institutional and congregational animosity. According to Hodge, institutional hierarchy pushes ministers to embrace conventional interpretations to reduce conflict and foster unity (2021). These forces may prevent conservative preachers from completely embracing inclusive theology. Clergy may be leery about inclusive hermeneutics to avoid alienating or splitting congregations. Addressing persistent religious inclusion barriers requires lobbying and education. Few progressive clergy and congregations can propose inclusive interpretations without addressing institutional limits.

Future theology education must integrate inclusive biblical interpretation for lasting change. To equip clergy to question limited narratives, seminaries and theological institutions must teach contextual Bible studies and queer theology. Theological educators, advocacy groups like Ujamaa and IAM, and church leadership must unite to institutionalize inclusive theology. Church-advocacy alliances can promote LGBTIQ+ inclusiveness. Church acceptance can be increased by training clergy, lay leaders, and congregations on inclusive biblical readings (Chitando & van Klinken, 2016). Reinterpreting scripture from an inclusive perspective is morally essential to apply biblical justice, equality, and unconditional love to all Christians.

5.4.3 Creating Safe and Affirming Spaces within the Church

To combat intolerance and encourage LGBTIQ+ inclusiveness, churches must be welcoming. According to the study's ministers, such locations inspire churches to accept diversity. These

venues redress LGBTIQ+ marginalization by valuing and supporting them. Conservative churchgoers say these settings violate church doctrine. This tension demands ministers to have patience and preparedness. Jagessar and De Jong say religious venues should welcome marginalized individuals (2020).

The church must undergo a doctrinal and social renovation to build these venues. Ministers who created safe zones in their congregations emphasized informal gatherings. Open dialogue and cultural reform without alienating traditionalists are possible at these events. Beagan (2020) highlights that inclusive religious environments foster LGBTIQ+ spiritual growth and connection. These venues challenge religious discourse's heteronormativity. Celebrating diversity can help the church battle LGBTIQ+ marginalization.

Changing long-held beliefs and practices is necessary to create safe churches. Gunda (2020) says ministers must reconcile progressive openness and traditionalist reluctance to develop these venues. LGBTIQ+ identities' theological conflicts with Christian dogma sometimes cause this reaction. Ministers must maintain theological reflection and discourse using inclusive and affirming scriptures. Althaus-Reid advises the church to adopt “indecent theology” that challenges patriarchal and heteronormative norms and celebrates human dignity and worth. Theological interventions are necessary for church acceptance and cultural change (2000).

Safe and tolerant churches need institutional support. The data suggest that a lack of Methodist Church standards alienates many preachers. IAM (2021) observed that institutional frameworks offer ministers the tools and courage to start transformational actions. IAM and local churches can offer clergy training and theology workshops to navigate inclusive environments. The Methodist Church's commitment to inclusiveness can be shown by including safe and affirming spaces in church activity.

5.4.4 Providing Ministerial Training on Queer Theology and Pastoral Care

Ministers need queer theology and pastoral care training to fight LGBTIQ+ discrimination. A poll indicated that most Pietermaritzburg Methodist clergy lack the means and training to provide inclusive pastoral care, perpetuating bias and exclusion. Some participants say the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) lacks LGBTIQ+ congregation engagement activities. Poor theological training misinterprets scripture, resulting in the institutional

exclusion of marginalized groups, according to Hodge (2021). Thus, ministerial training must include queer theology to foster understanding, acceptance, and pastoral care.

Queer theology helps ministers challenge discriminatory scriptural readings. Queer theology can deconstruct heteronormative and discriminatory religious practices, according to Althaus-Reid (2000). Ministers could reinterpret biblical passages to honor LGBTIQ+ individuals. This knowledge could help ministers address conservative congregants' concerns and encourage theological inclusion. Wilcox says LGBTIQ+ -inclusive theological education improves religious leaders' perspectives and fosters church community empathy (2018).

However, MCSA institutional barriers prohibit such training. Church leadership's resistance to discussing sexuality and gender identity hinders ministers' efforts to change. Beagan (2020) says institutional reluctance to challenge old norms produces systemic inclusion resistance. The survey found ministers wanting to learn gay theology with institutional assistance. Gunda (2020) underlined that clergy require institutional support to confront complex theological and pastoral LGBTIQ+ inclusion challenges.

Beyond theology, training should highlight LGBTIQ+ pastoral care. Yip (2019) says LGBTIQ+-specific pastoral care training helps pastors address gay congregants' discrimination, mental health, and spiritual estrangement. These ministerial training components would enhance pastoral care and foster LGBTIQ+ acceptance in churches. Collaboration with Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM) could provide MCSA complete training programs with resources and experience. These measures would encourage church diversity and equality by being inclusive.

5.5 Discussion of the Findings

5.5.1 Discussion of research question 1: What are the experiences or lived realities of queer individuals within the MCSA?

LGBTIQ+ individuals in Pietermaritzburg's Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) are marginalized, and the church does not discuss sex, sexuality, and gender. Many queer churchgoers are excluded by subtle but entrenched rejection. According to the studies, the church's tacit response to LGBTIQ+ concerns makes them feel unwelcome. Yip (2018) claims religious institutions silently reject LGBTIQ+ people, which is damaging. Religion makes LGBTIQ+ people feel invisible through passive exclusion. Church leadership's

inaction on LGBTIQ+ issues intensifies this. Conservative churchgoers, especially decision-makers, may object to explaining this hesitation. Wilcox (2019) claims religious leaders ignore LGBTIQ+ issues, marginalizing them. Queer MCSA members lack formal backing and resources to challenge the status quo because of leaders' reticence on sexuality. Browne (2020) thinks open debates about sex and sexuality in religious spaces promote inclusivity, but the MCSA excludes queer worshippers.

Church disagreement on their welcome hurts queer MCSA members psychologically and emotionally. Informal support networks cannot repair spiritual alienation caused by isolation. Barnes and Meyer (2019) discovered religious marginalization induces anxiety, despair, and hopelessness. LGBTIQ+ pastoral care is missing in MCSA, worsening emotional issues. According to research, queer parishioners often struggle with faith-sexual identity conflicts, causing spiritual crises that church leadership fails to handle. Queer MCSA members face religious persecution. Some selectively participate in the church to escape isolation. Olson and Cadge (2019) suggest limited participation helps LGBT persons maintain their spirituality without rejection. However, these coping mechanisms don't address the causes of exclusion. These transitional solutions allow LGBTIQ+ churchgoers to stay without full acceptance.

Queer people use informal support networks outside the MCSA for LGBTIQ+ activities. These networks provide emotional and spiritual support to LGBTIQ+ congregants facing religious marginalization. Lee and Hicks (2020) say strong support networks can help LGBTIQ+ persons preserve their religion despite institutional rejection. These personal networks reveal the church's resistance to LGBTIQ+ persons. External support shows MCSA's institutional shortcomings in serving LGBTIQ+ congregants. Queer MCSA inhabitants face passive marginalization, mental suffering, and informal assistance. LGBTIQ+ people face significant hardships in religious communities where sexuality and gender issues are rarely acknowledged. The results reveal that queer churchgoers will remain alienated and disenfranchised unless the MCSA aggressively addresses LGBTIQ+ problems.

5.5.2 Discussion of research question 2: What are the Biblical texts related to sex, sexuality, and gender used by Ministers in the Methodist Church to discriminate against the queer community in Pietermaritzburg?

This study explores how the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) supports LGBTIQ+ discrimination with biblical scriptures. Traditional and literalist interpretations of

several Bible scriptures explain LGBTIQ+ church exclusion. Leviticus and Romans are used to oppose homosexuality and gender nonconformity. Conservative MCSA ministers repeatedly promote heteronormativity with these poems. Same-sex partnerships are condemned in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. Conservative clerics say these verses prove God hates LGBTIQ+ persons. Literalist pastors argue against LGBTIQ+ inclusion by arguing that these scriptures are timeless moral injunctions that should not be reinterpreted in light of modern society, according to Mhlongo (2020). This literal understanding of scripture limits nuanced or inclusive interpretations that challenge these discriminatory views.

Romans 1:26-27 is another MCSA passage justifying LGBTIQ+ oppression. Many believe this scripture condemns same-sex partnerships as immoral and unnatural since it leaves natural connections for the unnatural. Conservative MCSA pastors say LGBTIQ+ persons violate God's creation. Wilcox (2019) notes that employing Romans this way supports gender stereotypes and heteronormativity, limiting LGBTIQ+ affirmations. Some MCSA preachers consider Scripture in its historical and cultural context rather than applying it to current issues. This interpretation recognizes that the Bible was written in a distinct socio-historical context with diverse gender and sexuality (Jones & Sullivan, 2019). Ministers oppose the traditional use of Biblical texts to exclude LGBTIQ+ individuals and stress the Bible's message of love and inclusiveness, as found in Galatians 3:28, which calls for unity in Christ regardless of gender or social class.

Conservatives rule the MCSA despite inclusive interpretations. Ministers' theology education prioritizes biblical readings without critical engagement with gender and sexuality issues, contributing to this dominance. Many theological institutes emphasize orthodox biblical interpretations, leaving pastors unable to address LGBTIQ+ inclusivity in their congregations (Yip, 2019). Ministers marginalize LGBT individuals with outdated Bible readings. Conservative Christian theology uses Scripture to justify prejudice. Browne claims that conservative churches globally use scripture to support heteronormativity (2020). The MCSA follows the global trend of utilizing Leviticus and Romans to impose gender standards while ignoring love, inclusion, and social justice scriptures.

MCSA clerics who are prejudiced against LGBTIQ+ persons use literalist Bible chapters. MCSA religious discussion favors traditional Leviticus and Romans readings over more liberal Bible interpretations. Exclusionary biblical passages foster the church's LGBTIQ+ discriminatory culture.

5.5.3 Discussion of research question 3: How have the Ministers in the Methodist Church contributed to discrimination against the queer community in Pietermaritzburg?

MCSA ministers in Pietermaritzburg have promoted LGBT bigotry. This contribution is theological conservatism, congregational pressure, and institutional silence on LGBTIQA+ problems. According to the study, ministers are often caught between their theological beliefs and their congregations' expectations, which fosters discrimination directly and indirectly. Ministers' silence and LGBTIQA+ avoidance cause prejudice. For fear of traditional churchgoers, ministers often ignore queer parishioners' concerns. LGBTIQA+ individuals are marginalized by religious silenced and often portrayed as neutral. According to Hodge (2021), Christian silence on social issues fosters injustice by denying marginalized populations a voice and addressing their concerns. Ministers' avoidance of LGBTIQA+ issues further marginalizes queer MCSA members.

Conservative congregations expect preachers to endorse gender and sexuality theology. Social conservatism is essential to religion in Pietermaritzburg; therefore, this pressure is intense. To maintain authority, religious leaders may feel bound to follow their congregations' beliefs, according to Wilcox (2018). Many MCSA clerics fear upsetting powerful or financially supporting church members by advocating LGBTIQA+ inclusion. They promote discrimination by taking a passive approach to LGBTIQA+ issues. The statistics demonstrate pastors' theological training affects prejudice. Many MCSA clergy were taught traditional scriptural readings on sex, sexuality, and gender. Gunda stated that orthodox Bible readings in theological seminaries prevent clergy from engaging with progressive or inclusive theologies (2020). Ministers without queer theology or LGBTIQA+ pastoral care training cannot challenge their congregations' discrimination or help queer members. Instead, they marginalize LGBTIQA+ churchgoers with conservative scriptural interpretations.

Pastors' silence, ideological conservatism, and inaction on LGBT church leadership exclusion contribute to prejudice. LGBTIQA+ people can attend religious activities but are excluded from leadership, studies show. LGBTIQA+ leaders are often impliedly excluded. Johnson (2021) claims that many religious institutions have implicit hierarchies that exclude specific identities from power, typically claiming religious purity or tradition. By not questioning hierarchy, ministers marginalize queer MCSA members who cannot lead. Some MCSA preachers face congregational discrimination despite these restrictions, according to statistics. According to Jagessar and De Jong (2020), religious leaders can promote LGBTIQA+

inclusivity by discussing theology and pastoral care with their congregations. A few MCSA clerics are reinterpreting Scripture to promote love, justice, and equality. These ministers are developing conversation and inclusion spaces in their congregations to address LGBTIQ+ church marginalization.

The MCSA's LGBTIQ+ narrative is conservative despite these modest efforts. Data shows that LGBT persons will remain excluded until preachers address congregational bigotry. Priests who favor LGBTIQ+ inclusivity need more theological and pastoral support from MCSA institutions to avoid discrimination.

5.5.4 Discussion of research question 4: What are the actions Ministers in the Methodist Church should take to prevent the discrimination of the queer community in Pietermaritzburg using sex, sexuality, and gender Biblical texts?

Ministers in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) must reinterpret biblical passages, foster open discussion, and create inclusive environments to combat LGBT intolerance. These efforts must remove theological and institutional impediments to LGBTIQ+ churchgoers. According to the research, ministers may combat prejudice in several ways. Ministers must first make Scripture inclusive. Traditional biblical interpretations of sex, sexuality, and gender justify LGBTIQ+ church exclusion. Yip suggests understanding the Bible socio-historically (2019). Ministers who want to eradicate prejudice must confront Leviticus and Roman's literalist interpretations that exclude homosexuality. Instead, preach Christian love, justice, and equality. Ministers can value LGBTIQ+ people rather than marginalize them theologically.

Reinterpreting the Bible inclusively is hard. Institutional pressures may hinder ministers' promotion of progressive biblical readings, according to Hodge (2021). The statistics demonstrate that inclusive Bible readings benefit preachers and congregations. These preachers say reinterpreting scripture through a love and inclusive lens has increased congregant empathy and understanding, breaking LGBT exclusion. Ministers may reduce bias and make congregations more welcome by supporting inclusive Bible interpretations. Reinterpreting scripture and encouraging congregational discussion about sex, sexuality, and gender is ministers' responsibility. Studies demonstrate that the MCSA's lack of LGBTIQ+ discussion inhibits inclusivity. Ministers fear alienating conservative churchgoers by discussing LGBTIQ+ problems. Jagessar and De Jong (2020) believe communication is necessary to

reduce exclusion and create an inclusive church community. Ministers must let LGBTIQ+ people tell their stories and converse nicely with churchgoers. Doing so may erase church prejudice, misconceptions, and preconceptions.

Churches must establish safe dialogue spaces. Patel (2019) argues that religious institutions must provide safe spaces for the underprivileged to feel accepted and respected. Pastors must give LGBTIQ+ congregants safe venues to express themselves to end intolerance. Established support groups or spontaneous meetups may help LGBTIQ+ churchgoers feel included. Several ministries are building such facilities, but the MCSA must expand them to be inclusive. Ministers must promote LGBTIQ+ pastoral care and queer theology in theology schools. Research shows MCSA pastors lack sex, sexuality, and gender theological instruction. Pastors without professional training feel unprepared to address LGBTIQ+ concerns. Theology shapes preachers' views on gender and sexuality, says Wilcox (2018). Without proper training, clergy may use outdated and exclusive scriptural interpretations, marginalizing LGBT people.

To close this gap, the MCSA needs robust queer theology and LGBTIQ+ pastoral care training. Pastors should explain sex, sexuality, and gender and help LGBTIQ+ members via this program. Gunda (2020) supports church diversity and social justice through inclusive theology. Ministers can support such education to eliminate prejudice and make the church more inclusive. Finally, ministries must combat MCSA institutional LGBTIQ+ prejudice. The research shows that some ministers support LGBTIQ+ inclusion but confront institutional impediments. Conservative clergy reject this. Ministers must support LGBTIQ+ inclusive sex, sexuality, and gender discourse policies in MCSA institutional transformation. According to Chaves and Anderson, religious groupings need institutional reorganization for genuine inclusivity. Ministry efforts may be restricted without reform (2020).

MCSA clergy must use theological reinterpretation, open discourse, safe spaces, intense theological education, and institutional activism to combat LGBT intolerance. These acts allow clergy to oppose LGBTIQ+ discrimination and create a more inclusive church.

5.5.5 What are the implications of these findings for the future of the MCSA's engagement with the queer community?

The findings show that MCSA LGBTIQ+ community membership is at a critical moment. Youthful ministers are progressive, but the church is mainly conservative on gender and

sexuality. Conservatism may alienate young congregants who embrace LGBTIQ+ rights and inclusivity (Nkabinde, 2022). Education in theology will impact the church's LGBTIQ+ outreach. The MCSA must provide theological resources to younger clergy like Participant 6, who want a more inclusive scripture reading. Not doing so may widen the gap between church theology and members' lifestyles (Vilakazi & Ndlovu, 2023). The data also reveal that the MCSA must aggressively foster congregational discourse and inclusivity. The church risks marginalizing LGBTIQ+ persons without such measures, which might impair its pastoral care and social justice mission (Jones & Sullivan, 2019).

5.6 Conclusion

This study shows a complicated relationship between biblical interpretation, church leadership, and LGBT people in Pietermaritzburg Methodist Church. Some ministers try to be inclusive, but the story indicates that aligning church doctrines with queer acceptance is difficult. The study found that conservative congregational expectations lead ministers to quiet and avoid perpetuating discrimination. Queer congregants are marginalized, denied leadership and pastoral care. This marginalization leaves many LGBTIQ+ people feeling spiritually disconnected and emotionally unsupported. Personal support networks help, but institutional reform is needed. To confront long-standing discrimination, the MCSA should promote gay theology and pastoral care in theological education. The MCSA must engage in open conversation about sexuality and gender, listen to LGBT perspectives, and reinterpret biblical scriptures to create a more inclusive and compassionate community. Without these structural and cultural changes, the church risks alienating a large segment of its flock and failing to fulfill its social justice purpose. The survey emphasizes the need for institutional change to make all churchgoers, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, feel welcome and respected.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

A lot of academic and practical talk has been going on about how some of the Methodist ministers in Pietermaritzburg understand the Bible and how it affects their relationships with the LGBTIQA+ community. Like many other Christian groups worldwide, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) struggles to find a balance between what it teaches about the past and how it deals with issues like sexuality, gender, and inclusion today. The main points of this study were summed up and analyzed in this chapter. The study looked into how Methodist ministers understand gender and sexuality issues in the Bible and how that affects their relationships with the LGBTIQA+ community. The study looks at how religion, interpretation of the Bible, and social justice relate to LGBTIQA+ inclusion by using many different types of writing and real-life examples.

This study used a literature review and qualitative interviews to show how complicated the link is between religious teaching and spiritual care for LGBTIQA+ people. The results show that biblical texts are often read in ways that support heteronormative ideas and keep the queer community from being included in society. However, ministers also sometimes question standard readings of the Bible to promote more open-minded religious views. This chapter mostly sums up the main points of the literature review and the empirical study. It focuses on how the interpretation of the Bible affects both the continuation of discrimination and the possibility of change in the church.

This chapter has two major parts: a review of the research that has already been done and a thorough study of the data from conversations with Methodist ministers. Both sources gave me new ways to think about the problems ministers are having within the church and the more considerable religious discussion about sexuality in the Methodist Church. These findings are critical in understanding the challenges and opportunities for fostering an inclusive environment within the MCSA for queer individuals, especially in Pietermaritzburg, where conservative and progressive views on sexuality often collide.

6.2 Summary of the Findings

6.2.1 Findings from the Literature Review

This study's literature review included theological, historical, and social aspects of Bible interpretation relating to sexuality and gender. The literature focuses on how the Bible, a holy scripture, has been used to exclude and include, depending on its interpretation. There are three key literature review findings: conventional biblical readings, queer theology, and how theological education affects ministers' LGBTIQ+ inclusivity.

6.2.2 Traditional Interpretations of Biblical Texts

There is much evidence that many churches, including the MCSA, use strict readings of the Bible, especially parts of Leviticus and Romans, to excuse being prejudiced against LGBTIQ+ people (Mhlongo, 2020). People often quote Leviticus 18:22 and Romans 1:26-27 as clear examples of how queer acts are wrong. Some conservative theologians, like Gagnon, say that these verses show a divine moral code that must be followed and that any deviation from it is sinful (2001). These standard readings support the idea that gender and sexuality are either right or wrong. They often make heterosexuality seem normal and homosexuality seem strange. As studies by Brownson (2013) and Barton (1996) show, the problem is made even more complicated by the way the Bible is used to uphold gender roles in the church. These scholars note that clergy who interpret the Bible traditionally believe that same-sex relationships and gender nonconformity are incompatible with Christian values. These interpretations make LGBTIQ+ people feel uncomfortable, making church engagement difficult (Scholtz & Vorster, 2020).

6.2.3 The Rise of Queer Theology

The rise of queer religion challenges these long-held beliefs. Queer academics like Althaus-Reid (2000) and Cheng (2011) want the Bible to be more inclusive. Queer theology challenges heteronormative Bible interpretations and presents LGBTIQ+ religious perspectives. A fresh reading of Galatians 3:28 states that everyone is one in Christ, regardless of gender, sexuality, or social class (Goss, 2007). When interpreted in its historical and cultural context, queer scholars believe the Bible promotes love, justice, and acceptance for all genders and sexualities. Butler claims that social biases, not divine instructions, shape Biblical sexuality beliefs (1990). To encourage LGBTIQ+ people's worth and respect, scholars like Nadar and van Klinken advise the church to scrutinize the Bible (2018).

6.2.4 Impact of Theological Education

Theological education shapes ministers' LGBTIQ+ inclusion perspectives. According to the research, conservative ministers are more likely to defend traditional interpretations of scripture, whereas progressive ministers are more receptive to reinterpreting biblical texts to affirm LGBTIQ+ identities (Yip, 2019). This theological education gap divides Pietermaritzburg Methodist preachers on queer inclusion. Robertson observed that many South African seminaries emphasize orthodox biblical hermeneutics, which hampers ministers' gender and sexuality discussions (2020). Ministers trained in such contexts are unprepared to minister to LGBTIQ+ congregations, prolonging church isolation. Queer and inclusive hermeneutics supporters promote LGBTIQ+ church membership more.

6.2.5 The Role of Church Leadership and Policy

Church leadership and structural rules also affect how ministers interact with the LGBTIQ+ community. The MCSA, like many other churches, has been sluggish to accept LGBTIQ+ church regulations. Vilakazi and Ndlovu (2023) found that church leaders emphasize unity above complex topics like LGBT marriage and inclusion. This reluctance to engage with LGBTIQ+ issues at the institutional level creates an environment where ministers may feel unsupported in their efforts to challenge discriminatory practices. The literature shows that the MCSA and Christian society disagree on gender and sexuality interpretations of biblical scriptures. Traditional interpretations still dominate, but theological study and pastoral practice are shifting toward a more inclusive and justice-oriented LGBTIQ+ inclusion debate. Theological education and church leadership are key factors in determining how much ministers can engage constructively with these issues in their congregation.

6.2.6 Findings from the Empirical Study

Interviews with Pietermaritzburg Methodist preachers showed how biblical interpretations affect LGBTIQ+ ministry. The study found that theological education, congregational dynamics, personal beliefs, pastoral experiences, and church leadership shape views. These factors demonstrate the complex interplay between individual convictions and institutional standards, showing the Methodist Church of Southern Africa's inclusion challenges and opportunities.

6.2.7 Theological Education and Its Influence

Theological education shapes ministers' LGBTIQ+ acceptance and scriptural interpretations. Conservative theological ministers often interpreted the Bible exclusively. Participant 3

replied, “My theological training emphasized scripture and taught homosexuality is a sin. Managing this in ministry is hard.” Gunda criticizes religious structures for promoting isolation. Progressive preachers were more inclusive in biblical interpretation (2020). According to Participant 6, “The Bible must be interpreted in its historical context, emphasizing love and inclusion.” Beagan says progressive theology education helps clergy examine restricted ideas (2020). Despite these advances, conservative theology shapes the MCSA, restricting inclusive readings. This contradiction highlights the need for critical engagement and inclusivity in theological teaching to enable pastors to serve different populations.

6.2.8 Congregational Pressures and Ministerial Responses

Ministers struggled to promote LGBTIQ+ inclusivity due to congregational expectations. Many pastors struggled to promote diversity due to conservative congregations. Participant 5 replied, “My congregation pressures traditional teachings. I value inclusivity, but I must not alienate members.” Wilcox (2018) claims conservative preachers create congregational solidarity through purposeful silence, which promotes discrimination. Participant 4 remarked, “It's easier to avoid discussing sexuality altogether to prevent division.” Campbell (2019) claims that silence perpetuates marginalization and denies marginalized voices recognition and validation. Personal views and pastoral duties to maintain unity collide for ministers. This underlines the need for institutional regulations and resources to help clergy approach LGBTIQ+ issues with congregational sensitivity.

6.2.9 Personal Beliefs and Pastoral Experiences

Personal convictions and actual interactions with LGBTIQ+ people shaped ministers' inclusiveness policies. Participating in LGBT ministry typically led to more compassionate and inclusive theology. Participant 7, who worked with LGBTIQ+ people, said, “My views have evolved through personal interactions, showing me the importance of creating a church that embraces everyone.” Barnes and Meyer claim that relational encounters challenge stereotypes and deepen knowledge of marginalized identities (2019). Traditional scriptural interpretations were common among preachers with limited engagement. Participant 2 said, “I have not had much experience with queer individuals, and my understanding of the Bible has always been conservative.” Beagan endorses this contradiction, arguing that different lived experiences transform inclusive approaches (2020). Although the MCSA's inadequate institutional channels for allowing such meetings reinforce the gap between progressive and conservative

ministers, systematic programs that encourage communication and mutual understanding are needed.

6.2.10 The Role of Church Leadership

Several ministers criticized MCSA leadership's inaction. LGBTIQ+ inclusion policies and resources were unclear, say many. Participant 8 remarked, "The church leadership has been largely silent on these issues, leaving ministers in difficult positions." Chaves and Anderson (2020) say institutional leadership must foster inclusion. Kumalo and Muller (2022) argue that clergy lack the theological and pastoral tools to address LGBTIQ+ issues without leadership, sustaining systemic exclusion. Without formal assistance, ministers may feel alone juggling personal beliefs, congregational dynamics, and institutional commitments. The findings show that MCSA leadership must develop comprehensive policies, inclusive theology training, and open dialogue spaces. Ministers will feel empowered and more inclusive, making LGBTIQ+ congregants feel welcome.

6.3 Conclusions of the Study

The study discovered a strong link between conservative biblical interpretation and the Methodist Church of Southern Africa LGBTIQ+ marginalization. Gunda's religious paradigm supports institutional marginalization, and ministers justified discrimination with Leviticus 18:22 and Romans 1:26-27 (2020). According to Kumalo and Muller, conservative Bible readings that denounce homosexuality maintain a heteronormative narrative in religious organizations (2022). Participant 3 indicated that their theology training taught them such readings. Progressive clergy are increasingly demanding scripture reinterpretation for justice and inclusion. Rereading biblical passages to promote love and acceptance may change, says Participant 6. Inclusive theologies can confront long-held biases, says Robertson (2020). These activities progress, but conservative views still rule, showing the MCSA's complex theology.

Isolation harmed LGBTIQ+ MCSA members psychologically and emotionally. Participant 7 felt rejected and isolated due to pastoral neglect, as did many LGBTIQ+ attendees. Barnes and Meyer (2019) discovered that exclusionary religious practices harm LGBTIQ+ internalized homophobia and mental health. Beagan (2020) advocates inclusive religious venues that foster resilience and spiritual well-being to prevent such damages. Many MCSA pastoral methods overlook queer members' needs, putting them vulnerable to social marginalization and emotional distress. The findings indicate that the church faces further harm

and estrangement without action. Thus, church communities require intentional pastoral care frameworks that respect LGBTIQ+ identities and encourage spiritual inclusion.

Ministers struggled to promote LGBTIQ+ inclusivity owing to congregational demands. Participant 4 said many clergy feared losing congregational support or fracturing their communities by alienating conservatives. Wilcox (2018) claims conservative ministers employ stillness to unite their congregations. Campbell (2019) says this strategy maintains systemic exclusion and stifles gender and sexuality debate. Participant 5 agreed that closed dialogue marginalizes LGBTIQ+ problems. This contradiction between personal ideas and congregational expectations shows preachers' effort to balance pastoral obligations and convictions. The results reveal that MCSA leadership must actively provide ministers with theological and institutional resources to navigate complex dynamics and promote diversity.

The report calls for an MCSA paradigm shift to address systematic LGBTIQ+ inclusion issues. To combat exclusionary conventions, ministers must rethink theology education to embrace new scriptural readings. Participant 8 sought additional institutional guidance and assistance from church leadership, echoing Kumalo and Muller (2022), who called for just and equal hospitality theology. To overcome conservative change resistance, congregational communication is essential. Without revisiting conventional ideas and helping clergy meet other congregational expectations, the MCSA will struggle to create an inclusive and affirming spiritual environment. Theological and pastoral love, justice, and fairness can help the church develop a community where all members, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, thrive.

6.4 Recommendations of the Study

6.4.1 Reinterpreting Biblical Texts for Inclusivity

According to a study, Methodist preachers in Pietermaritzburg and overseas should reinterpret biblical passages inclusively. Ministers must critically evaluate LGBTIQ+ -stigmatizing Leviticus and Romans interpretations. Instead, they should apply Galatians 3:28's emphasis on love, acceptance, and justice to the Bible. This follows the demand for oneness in Christ regardless of culture or personal marks. Biblical hermeneutics in religious schools is crucial for this process. Ministers should learn to read the Bible in its historical and cultural context and apply it to gender and sexuality concerns. By reading the Bible openly, the church may eliminate religious systems that exclude LGBTIQ+ individuals.

6.4.2 Promoting Open Dialogue Within Congregations

Organizations should freely discuss LGBTIQ+ concerns, which is another essential suggestion. Many ministers avoid LGBTIQ+ topics for fear of hurting their close following, according to the survey. These interactions extend marginalization if ignored. Ministers should promote gender, sexuality, and LGBTIQ+ life discussions. These sessions should promote empathy rather than hatred. Ministers may reduce LGBTIQ+ abuse by hosting conversations. Church officials should equip and train preachers for these sessions. This could involve creating materials for ministers to address LGBTIQ+ inclusivity and pastoral care with their congregations and hosting conferences or seminars on these topics.

6.4.3 Creating Safe and Affirming Spaces Within the Church

“The Methodist Church should also build LGBTIQ+ friendly environments,” the study states. LGBTIQ+ Christians may benefit from organizations where they can share their stories and get spiritual care. Along with creating facilities, the church must promote inclusion. Managing tiny exclusions like LGBTIQ+ leadership absence that no one reports. Church guidelines should allow LGBTIQ+ people to lead and participate in church life. Ministers should learn to provide LGBTIQ+ pastoral care, including exclusion's psychological impacts. The church hierarchy must prioritize LGBTIQ+ inclusivity in pastoral ministry.

6.4.4 Institutional Support for LGBTIQ+ Inclusion

Because of these changes, the church as a whole needs to firmly back LGBTIQ+ acceptance for them to work. It was found in the study that many ministers feel limited by the demands of strict congregations and a lack of clear direction from church leaders on how to deal with LGBTIQ+ problems. Without formal support, it may be hard for an individual minister to fight for equality in their groups. The Methodist Church of Southern Africa should make official rules supporting LGBTIQ+ equality and give ministers the religious and social tools they need to practice these rules in their churches. This could mean creating a task team whose only job is to make sure that LGBTIQ+ people are welcome. This group can then help and support ministers as they work to make churches more welcoming. In addition, the church's leadership should do more to openly support the rights of LGBTIQ+ people to be fully involved in the church's life. This could mean putting out comments against discrimination based on sexuality and gender and telling churches that welcoming everyone is a core Christian value.

6.5 Limitations of the Study

6.5.1 Limited Geographical Scope

Geography is a major constraint of this research. The study focuses on Pietermaritzburg Methodist clergy' LGBTIQA+ outreach. This illuminates the dynamics of this area, but it may not completely convey the Methodist Church in Southern Africa's range of experiences and views. Due to cultural and theological factors, ministers' LGBTIQA+ activism may differ by area. Future studies should investigate spreading to additional South African areas or Southern African Methodist nations. This would clarify how Bible interpretation and LGBTIQA+ participation vary among cultures and theologies.

6.5.2 Focus on Ministerial Perspectives

One more problem with this study is that it only looks at the points of view of Methodist ministers. The study gives us helpful information about how ministers understand the Bible and interact with the LGBTIQA+ community, but it does not fully show what LGBTIQA+ people go through. The opinions of queer churchgoers are talked about through ministry notes, but they are not directly shown in the data. Including LGBTIQA+ people's points of view in the MCSA would help us understand how their understanding of the Bible affects their feelings of being included or left out. Researchers should talk to queer churchgoers directly in the future to learn more about their lives and how they practice their faith in a place of worship that might be hostile to them.

6.5.3 Limited Focus on Intersectionality

The research examined how Bible interpretation affects ministers' participation with the LGBTIQA+ community but did not examine the intersectionality of LGBTIQA+ identity. Race, class, and gender identity may also affect LGBTIQA+ churchgoers. Queer people of color and low-income people may be marginalized further in the church. To understand how many identities create queer MCSA experiences, future studies should take an intersectional perspective. This would help clarify church inclusion issues and possibilities.

6.6 Suggestions for Future Studies

6.6.1 Expanding the Geographical and Theological Scope

In the future, researchers should broaden their studies in geography and theology. As was already said, this study only looked at ministers in Pietermaritzburg. However, it would be interesting to see how ministers in other parts of South Africa, and even in Southern Africa as

a whole, understand the Bible when it comes to LGBTIQA+ problems. Different religious systems and cultural settings may have different ways of including or excluding LGBTIQA+ people. Knowing these differences would help you better understand how the MCSA deals with LGBTIQA+ problems.

6.6.2 Exploring the Experiences of LGBTIQA+ Congregants

In the future, researchers should broaden their studies in geography and theology. As was already said, this study only looked at ministers in Pietermaritzburg. However, it would be interesting to see how ministers in other parts of South Africa, and even in Southern Africa as a whole, understand the Bible when it comes to LGBTIQA+ problems. Different religious systems and cultural settings may have different ways of including or excluding LGBTIQA+ people. Knowing these differences would help you better understand how the MCSA deals with LGBTIQA+ problems.

6.6.3 Investigating the Role of Intersectionality

Future research should also explore the role of intersectionality in shaping the experiences of queer individuals within the church. Race, gender identity, and socioeconomic position might affect LGBTIQA+ church inclusivity. By adopting an intersectional approach, future studies could provide a more nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by queer individuals with multiple marginalized identities.

6.6.4 The Role of Theological Education in Promoting Inclusion

Because ministers' theological education has a significant impact on how they feel about LGBTIQA+ problems, more study should be done on how theological schools can encourage more open-minded ways of reading the Bible. There could be research into how seminary courses are set up now and what changes could be made to make them better at preparing ministers to work with queer theology and offer spiritual care to LGBTIQA+ members of the congregation. Institutions that want to make their programs more welcoming would benefit from learning about the gaps in religious education.

6.7 Final Remarks

This study revealed the complex relationship between traditional scriptural interpretations and LGBTIQA+ marginalization in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. Based on strict Leviticus 18:22 and Romans 1:26–27 readings, conservative church leaders maintain

heteronormativity (Mtshiselwa, 2010; Kumalo & Muller, 2022). Participant 3 said orthodox ministerial training discourages innovative hermeneutics. Beagan (2020) and Robertson (2020) suggest re-examining these texts from inclusive theological perspectives that highlight compassion, justice, and marginalized people's full humanity. The MCSA risks alienating LGBTIQ+ congregants and preserving spiritual inequality without such interpretation revisions.

The report says the MCSA's silence on LGBTIQ+ issues inhibits inclusive ecclesial culture. Participant 7 claimed the church's silence on queer issues stigmatizes and isolates. Campbell (2019) criticizes religious organizations for strategic silences to maintain congregational unity, and Browne (2020) pushes churches to create safe gender and sexuality discourse spaces. Barnes and Meyer (2019) reveal that muted exclusionary religious ideas affect LGBTIQ+ mental health. To address these silences, the MCSA must encourage open debate and pastoral care that affirms multiple identities and rejects bigotry.

The findings show that MCSA systemic changes are needed to reduce LGBTIQ+ exclusion. Participant 6 and other ministers were open to reinterpreting scripture inclusively, but institutional support was lacking. Kumalo and Muller (2022) propose a hospitality theology that empowers clergy to renounce orthodoxy and practice justice. Wilcox (2018) advises denominational leaders to prepare clergy for congregational opposition. The MCSA may promote justice and acceptance for all genders and sexual orientations by fostering inclusive theological education and debate.

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