

Fear and the Missionary Mandate: A Missiological Analysis of Barriers to Christian Witness Among Somali Muslims in Eastleigh, Nairobi

Author

Philemon Kipruto Tanui 

Author's email: philemontanui1@gmail.com

Kabarak University, Kenya.

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Abstract

This paper investigates the relationship between fear and the gap between missionary mandate and missional practice among the African Inland Church (A.I.C.) The church's missionary mandate to proclaim the gospel to all peoples faces significant barriers in contexts where Christians live in proximity to Muslim communities. Christians in Nairobi Central Region, Kenya, focus on evangelistic work among Somali Muslims in Eastleigh. Employing qualitative ethnographic research methods, including semi-structured interviews with fifteen church leaders and members across three A.I.C. congregations (A.I.C. Ziواني, A.I.C. Ngara, and A.I.C. Eastleigh Section III), the paper addresses fears that hinder Christian witness to Somali Muslims in Eastleigh, the gap between the church's missionary mandate and actual evangelistic practice, and missiological frameworks for overcoming these barriers and enabling faithful Christian witness. Drawing on missiological theories of power encounter, risk-taking witness, and contextualized discipleship, the paper argues that fear operates as a systemic barrier at individual, communal, and institutional levels, creating a disconnect between the church's theological affirmations about mission and its practical engagement with neighboring Muslim communities. The paper proposes an integrated missiological response that addresses spiritual formation, contextualised training, ecclesial support structures, and power encounters, enabling Christians to move from fear to faithful witness. Addressing fear will foster more contextually informed, relationally sensitive, and responsible Christian witness.

Key terms: Christian witness, fear, missionary mandate, missional practice, Somali Muslims.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Evangelism is a mandate and commission the church received when Jesus ascended into heaven (Acts 1:8). But even before Jesus' commissioning, God gave the nation of Israel in the Old Testament the great task of reaching out to other nations. Christians know that they have a clear mandate to proclaim Christ to the world. The mission to the unreached is a mandate that many churches have incorporated into their mission statements, and the Africa Inland Church (A.I.C.) Kenya is not an exception. This church places strong emphasis on evangelism, discipleship, and missions. The guiding verse for their evangelism and discipleship ministries is Colossians 1:28: "He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ." For missions and evangelism, the church is also guided by the Great Commission passage in Matthew 28:18-20.

Just as the church has a clear mandate to do evangelism, Muslims around the world are engaged in their own propagation efforts, winning people to accept Islam and believe in their prophet Muhammad and Allah. This paper investigates the church's missionary mandate and its limited evangelistic engagement with Somali Muslims in Eastleigh, with fear emerging as a significant barrier. This study examines the limited empirical understanding of how fear operates at individual, communal, and institutional levels, the lack of studies documenting the mandate gap in African contexts, and the lack of missiological responses that address fear and the disconnect among the A.I.C. Nairobi Central Region Christians regarding evangelistic work among Somali Muslims in Eastleigh, Nairobi. Eastleigh is a town on the outskirts of Nairobi city, densely populated with Somali Muslims in Kenya. The A.I.C. churches studied (A.I.C. Ziwani, A.I.C. Ngara, and A.I.C. Eastleigh Section III) are based in the same geographical location.

The researcher served as a pastor in one of the A.I.C.-Kenya churches in the A.I.C. Nairobi East Region, which is in the same geographical area where this study was conducted. He served the Lord in this region through pastoral ministry for about two years. However, he has not seen churches in the A.I.C. Nairobi East Region and Nairobi Central Region seriously engage their members in evangelistic work among the neighbouring Somali Muslim community. The outreach ministries and initiatives in these regions have been minimal. For this reason, this study investigates the factors affecting evangelistic work, with particular attention to fear and the gap between mandate and practice.

Notably, A.I.C.-Kenya churches collect finances to support mission work to unreached communities twice a year, on the first Sundays of May and October. However, even in churches located adjacent to Muslim communities like Eastleigh, little or nearly no attempt is made to reach out to Muslims with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Under the A.I.C.-Kenya Nairobi Central Region, three local churches exist: A.I.C. Ziwani, A.I.C. Ngara, and A.I.C. Eastleigh Section III, with memberships of about 7,000, 150, and 100, respectively. The average distance from each of these three local churches to where the Somali Muslim community lives and conducts business is approximately 5.5 kilometres. Undeniably, the church has been present in this area for decades; A.I.C. Ziwani, A.I.C. Eastleigh Section III, and A.I.C. Ngara churches were started in 1958, 2015, and 2016, respectively. The massive arrival of the Somali Muslim community occurred around 1991 following the outbreak of civil war in Somalia.

This paper addresses three research questions. First, what fears inhibit Christian witness to Somali Muslims in Eastleigh? Second, how does the gap between the church's stated missionary mandate and actual

evangelistic practice manifest? Third, what missiological frameworks can address fear-based barriers and enable faithful witness?

The paper proceeds as follows. Section two establishes the methodological framework. Section three reviews missiological theories of fear, power encounter, and contextualised witness. Section four presents findings on fear as a barrier to witness. Section five examines the gap between missionary mandate and missional practice. Section six develops an integrated missiological response. Section seven concludes with implications for practice and further research.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Missiological Theories of Fear and Risk in Cross-Cultural Witness

The relationship between fear and Christian witness has received significant attention in missiological literature. Nehls (1988) notes that "traditionally a Christian's witness to his Muslim neighbor has been frustrated by fear of aggressiveness or militant reaction" (p. 75). This observation, written decades ago, remains acutely relevant in contexts like Eastleigh, where Christians live adjacent to Muslim communities in the shadow of terrorist attacks.

The psychology of fear in missiological contexts involves multiple dimensions. Fear can be rational (based on actual threats of violence), perceived (based on inaccurate information or stereotypes), or theological (fear of compromising faith or facing divine judgment for ineffective witness). Each dimension requires different missiological responses. Rational fear requires strategies for safety and protection; perceived fear requires education and exposure; theological fear requires spiritual formation and confidence in the gospel's power.

Power Encounter as a Missiological Framework

The concept of "power encounter" has influenced missiological approaches in Muslim contexts. Power encounter refers to demonstrating God's superior power over alternative spiritual powers as a means of witness. In Muslim contexts, where supernatural power is often associated with saints, jinn, or magical practices, demonstrations of healing, deliverance, and answered prayer in Jesus' name can challenge assumptions about where true power resides.

Kraft (1989) argues that Western Christianity has marginalised the supernatural and that effective witness in non-Western contexts requires recovering the power encounter (pp. 37-50). Wimber's (1986) "power evangelism" approach emphasises that Jesus' ministry combined proclamation with demonstrations of God's power, and that evangelism today should follow the same pattern (p. 35). Tennent (2007) offers a more nuanced approach, arguing that power encounters must be integrated with theological reflection and contextualization, drawing on African and Asian theologies to develop frameworks for understanding spiritual powers that take both biblical teaching and local experience seriously (p. 195).

Critics of power encounter approaches warn against sensationalism, reducing the gospel to power demonstration, and the danger of syncretism. However, in contexts where fear of spiritual and physical harm is a primary barrier to witness, power encounter that is conducted with discernment and integrity can address the underlying worldview assumptions that generate fear.

Contextualised Discipleship and Missionary Formation

The gap between missionary mandate and missional practice often reflects gaps in discipleship and formation. Dretke observes that "the deeper our awareness of the consequences of our beliefs and actions for life and for eternity, the more zealous we may be in propagation to others of our own patterns of life and actions" (Dretke, 1979). Formation for missional witness requires not only information about other religions but also spiritual formation that produces courage, love, and resilience.

Gilchrist (1999) acknowledges that "Muslim evangelism is one of the toughest fields of Christian witness" because of the ideologies and doctrines that Muslims have been taught. However, he outlines five important approaches for Christian-Muslim engagement, emphasising that "be sure that all you do and say is done in a spirit of genuine love for them" (pp. 12-16). Similarly, Ajith Fernando provides comprehensive approaches for reaching people of other faiths, emphasising that love is the foundation of all effective witnesses.

Church leadership plays a critical role in missional formation. As Nehls (1988) argues, "a burden is no burden, as long as it is on the ground. Only when it is on our shoulders, when a thing is lifted, it is a load" (p. 4). Church leaders are responsible for lifting the burden of Muslim evangelism onto the congregation's shoulders through teaching, modelling, and creating opportunities for witness.

The Missional Church and Local Witness

The "missional church" movement emphasises that the church is not merely a sending agency for missionaries but God's missionary people in every location. Roxburgh (2006) and others argue that congregations must discern what God is doing in their particular context and join that mission (pp. 25-30). For churches adjacent to Muslim communities, this means that witness to Muslim neighbours is not an optional add-on but central to the congregation's identity and purpose.

The missional church framework challenges the distinction between "foreign missions" (requiring specialised missionaries) and "local evangelism" (the responsibility of all Christians). When churches treat witness to Muslims as something requiring specialised training and sending, they may inadvertently communicate that ordinary Christians are not equipped or expected to engage their Muslim neighbours. A missional framework calls all Christians to be witnesses in their daily contexts, with specialised training enhancing rather than replacing that witness.

The Socio-Political Context of Christian-Muslim Relations in Kenya

The socio-political context of Kenya provides essential background for understanding fear as a barrier to Christian witness among Somali Muslims. Kenya has experienced a series of high-profile terrorist attacks since the 1998 US Embassy bombing in Nairobi, which claimed over 200 lives. The 2013 Westgate Mall attack (67 deaths), the 2015 Garissa University College attack (148 deaths), and the 2019 DusitD2 complex attack (21 deaths) have all been attributed to Al-Shabaab, the Somali-based militant group. (United States Department of State, 2019).

These attacks have significantly shaped Christian perceptions of Somali Muslims, creating an association in the public imagination between Somali ethnicity, Islamic faith, and terrorism. As Carrier documents, Eastleigh has been particularly stigmatised as "Little Mogadishu" and suspected as a hub for terrorist recruitment. This stigmatisation affects both communities: Somali Muslims face profiling and

discrimination, while Christians living adjacent to Somali communities experience heightened anxiety about potential attacks. The securitisation of Christian-Muslim relations in Kenya has created an environment where religious outreach is easily misinterpreted as political provocation or espionage, further inhibiting evangelistic engagement. Understanding this socio-political context is essential for developing missiological responses that address both real security concerns and perceived threats that may be disproportionate to actual risk (Peter et al., 2019).

Gaps in Literature

Several gaps in the literature warrant mention. First, while fear is acknowledged as a barrier to Muslim evangelism, the specific mechanisms through which fear operates at individual, communal, and institutional levels have received limited empirical study. Second, the gap between missionary mandate and missional practice has been theorised but rarely documented through ethnographic research in African contexts. Third, integrated missiological responses that address both fear (the barrier) and mandate-practice disconnect (the institutional gap) are underdeveloped. This paper contributes to filling these gaps through empirical research in the Eastleigh context.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study employed qualitative ethnographic research methods to investigate fear and the mandate-practice gap in evangelistic work among Somali Muslims in Eastleigh. Ethnography, defined as "the work of describing a culture," enables the researcher to understand phenomena from the perspective of the people being studied. The ethnographic design also used open-ended interviews and participant observation, in which the researcher noted expressions from respondents not captured in the interview responses, along with other inquiry tools, yielding rich, context-bound information that led to patterns or theories explaining a phenomenon. The study drew participants from diverse leadership categories, thus enhancing its credibility. The data collection and analysis process ensured the research's dependability, leading to the interpretation of categorised themes. The researcher's grounding in the participants' interview responses and the transcription of the recorded interviews strengthened the research's confirmability. The research's ethnographic and contextual information provided about the three churches in Eastleigh supports the transferability of the findings.

A.I.C. Nairobi Central Region comprises three churches (A.I.C. Ziwani, A.I.C. Ngara, and A.I.C. Eastleigh Section III) with approximately 8,000 congregants. Using purposive sampling, the study selected fifteen informants from different leadership groups under the church's Christian Education Department (C.E.D.). One person was interviewed using interview questions from each of the following leadership categories: Local Church Council (aged 35-70 years), Christian Men Fellowship (aged 35-65 years), Christian Women Fellowship (aged 25-55 years), Youth (aged 18-34 years), and Choir (aged 18-34 years) from each of the three churches.

Ethnographic interviews used semi-structured questions and participant observation to explore informants' knowledge of Somali Muslims, their evangelistic practices, and factors affecting their witnessing. Interviews were conducted by appointment, one-on-one, recorded with the informant's consent, and transcribed. Data analysis followed a four-step process: editing and cleaning transcribed material, creating distinct categories and themes, establishing relationships among themes, and interpreting information to answer research questions, which later formed the research outcomes.

The researcher protected informants' rights, interests, and sensitivities by clearly explaining the research's purpose and nature, obtaining informed consent, and concealing respondents' names. Informants also signed a consent form indicating their willingness to participate and their right to withdraw from the interviews. The researcher provided a letter from the university requesting permission from church leadership and respondents to conduct the research and to record the interviews, using codes to conceal their identities.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Fear as a Barrier to Christian Witness Among Somali Muslims

Fear of Terrorism and Physical Violence

The most significant fear expressed by informants was fear of terrorism and physical violence. This fear is not abstract but grounded in Kenya's recent history of terrorist attacks. In 2013, the Westgate Mall attack in Nairobi claimed 67 lives. In 2015, the Garissa University College attack claimed 148 lives. In 2019, the DusitD2 complex attack in Nairobi claimed 21 lives. Eastleigh has been particularly associated with terrorism concerns; as Carrier notes, "Eastleigh has long been seen as a hub for such recruitment, especially through the Abubakar Mosque on the sixth street, whose clerics had some initial sympathy with the Al-Shabaab-supported simple implementation of the Sharia."

The fear of terrorism manifests in several ways. Some Christians have moved away from residential areas with majority Somali populations. One informant, when asked about living next to Somali Muslims, showed facial expressions indicating fear. The researcher noted that "most of the Christians living within the environs of Eastleigh moved to other, further apartments for fear of meeting or interacting with the Somali Muslims." This geographic separation reduces opportunities for natural relationships through which witness might occur.

The fear of terrorism also creates a generalised climate of suspicion that inhibits evangelistic initiative. Informant "Mwanzia" cited "the fear of terrorism as the cause that made members of the church abandon attending classes that taught how to reach out to Muslims." The connection is significant: fear of terrorism did not merely reduce evangelistic effort but led to the cessation of preparatory training. When Christians believe that learning to witness to Muslims makes them targets, the entire enterprise of Muslim evangelism becomes framed as dangerous.

Fear of Heated Arguments and Embarrassment

Beyond physical danger, informants feared engaging in heated arguments that could become embarrassing. "Suzy" admitted that after her first discussion with a Muslim, she "vowed not to talk to any Muslim in her lifetime." When pressed further, she said, "I realized that at the end of the day, you end up with lengthy arguments." This fear of unproductive, emotionally draining encounters inhibits further attempts to witness.

The perception that Somali Muslims are argumentative and aggressive when challenged religiously is widespread among informants. Mutunga's research in the same context found that "Somali Muslims like arguing and at times when you seriously challenge some of their religious teachings they become angry and can turn to be aggressive." This perception, whether entirely accurate or not, functions as a barrier.

Christians anticipate negative reactions and therefore avoid initiating conversations that might lead to conflict.

The fear of embarrassment is connected to perceived inadequacy. Informants expressed concern that they lack the knowledge and skill to engage Muslims effectively. As Strohbach notes, "some interviewees confessed they had never come into contact with a Muslim until they were adults." Without prior experience or training, the prospect of engaging a Muslim who knows the Qur'an well and may have practised apologetics is intimidating. Christians fear being outmatched in argument and experiencing public embarrassment.

Fear of Conversion and Influence

Some informants noted that Somali Muslims also experience fear specifically, fear of being influenced by Christians. This mutual fear creates a relational barrier. Christians fear for their security; Muslims fear for their faith. The researcher found that Somali Muslims "have been discouraged to associate with Christians at all costs. They have even made sure that their children do not mingle with the children from Christian families because they know the kind of influence that their children will get from them."

The fear of conversion is not unfounded from a Muslim perspective. Muslims who convert to Christianity face severe consequences in many contexts, including family rejection, social ostracism, economic loss, and even death. This fear on the Muslim side is communicated to Christians through behaviour: avoidance of prolonged interaction, refusal to discuss religious topics, and in some cases, aggressive rejection of Christian overtures. Christians interpret this behaviour as resistance to the gospel, reinforcing their own reluctance to initiate witness.

Fear of Ineffectiveness and "Hardness"

A significant finding was the fear that Somali Muslims "cannot be converted easily" to Christianity. Informant "Mwanzia" said, "you try to reach them, but you hardly win them over." Informant "Janet" similarly noted that Christians "believe that the Somali Muslims cannot be converted easily to Christianity." "Dave" stated that "the Somali Muslims are very resistant to the Gospel message." "Elly" claimed that one Somali Muslim vowed, "not to hold the Bible and if he holds, he will tear it down or burn it."

This perception of Muslim "hardness" functions as a self-fulfilling prophecy. If Christians believe that witness to Somali Muslims is unlikely to produce conversions, they invest less effort, pray less fervently, and give up more quickly when faced with resistance. The absence of conversions then confirms the original belief, creating a cycle that is difficult to break. The perception of hardness may be more about Christian discouragement than about actual Muslim resistance to the gospel.

Fear of the Unknown and Lack of Preparedness

Finally, informants expressed fear rooted in lack of knowledge and preparedness. Many informants did not know the basics of Islamic beliefs. When asked about other religions, one informant said Hindus "have put their faith in cows," while another said Hindus "have their own god." This lack of basic knowledge about Islam extends to a lack of knowledge about effective approaches for witnessing.

Informant "Cameroon" admitted, "I do not know of any particular step that can be used in reaching people of other faiths." Informant "Sally" confessed, "I am blank; I do not know how to approach them." Without

knowledge or strategy, the prospect of witness is intimidating. Fear of the unknown combines with fear of negative outcomes to produce paralysis.

The Gap Between Missionary Mandate and Missional Practice

Theological Affirmations of Mission

A.I.C.-Kenya has strong theological affirmations of mission. The church's guiding verse for evangelism and discipleship is Colossians 1:28: "He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ." The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 is central to the church's self-understanding. The church collects finances to support mission work to unreached communities twice a year on the first Sundays of May and October.

Despite these affirmations, the researcher found that "even in churches located adjacent to Muslim communities like in Eastleigh, little or nearly no attempt is made concerning reaching out to Muslims with the gospel of Jesus Christ." The gap between theological affirmation and practical engagement is stark. Churches that pray for missionaries serving in distant lands do not witness to their next-door neighbours.

Historical Presence Without Missional Engagement

A.I.C. Ziwani was established in 1958, more than sixty years before this study. The massive arrival of Somali Muslims in Eastleigh occurred around 1991. For over thirty years, the church has had a physical presence adjacent to a growing Somali Muslim population. Yet the researcher found that "the church has not fully set out to reach their Somali Muslim community neighbors."

This historical presence without missional engagement raises significant questions. How can a church exist for sixty years in a location without developing intentional outreach to the dominant population group that arrived thirty years ago? The answer likely involves multiple factors: the church's original ethnic identity (predominantly non-Somali), the perception of Somalis as "foreigners" despite their presence in Kenya, fear as discussed above, and lack of missional vision that connects geographic proximity to evangelistic responsibility.

The Disconnect Between Mission Offerings and Local Witness

The A.I.C.-Kenya's biannual mission offerings present a curious phenomenon. Churches collect significant funds for "mission work to the unreached communities." Yet, these funds are typically directed to distant mission fields rather than to the Somali Muslims living adjacent to the church buildings. The theological assumption seems to be that "mission" happens elsewhere, not in one's own neighbourhood.

This assumption is not unique to A.I.C. but reflects a broader pattern in evangelical mission theology. The missional church movement has challenged this assumption, arguing that every congregation is called to be God's missionary people in its particular location. However, this theological shift has not yet fully penetrated the practice of A.I.C. Nairobi Central Region churches.

The Absence of Teaching and Training

The most significant finding regarding the mandate-practice gap was the absence of consistent teaching on Muslim evangelism. The researcher found that "the majority of the interviewees have not heard any teaching that is geared towards reaching the Somali Muslims with the gospel." Informant "Janet" said, "We

are rarely given teachings on how to reach the Somali Muslims." Informant "Dave" gave a similar answer: "It has been rare to find such teachings; I need to be trained because of their many questions."

Informant "Sally" commented, "The church has not done so much on teaching the church on how to reach the Somali Muslims." Informant "Josephina" said that "the church rarely gets the teachings" and suggested that "the church should consider teaching the Sunday School children on how to reach the Somali Muslims because she thinks that they often interact with many Somali Muslim children."

The absence of teaching on Muslim evangelism is not merely a curriculum gap; it is a theological statement. What a church teaches signals what it considers important. When a church teaches extensively about personal holiness, family life, financial stewardship, and other topics but never teaches about witness to Muslims, it communicates that Muslim evangelism is not a priority. The absence of teaching reinforces the perception that witness to Muslims is optional, specialised, or even impossible.

The Perception of Difficulty as a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

The perception that Somali Muslims are "hard to reach" or "cannot be converted easily" is widespread among informants. The absence of visible conversions reinforces this perception. The researcher noted that "the spirit of reaching out to the Somali Muslims for Jesus seems to be fading away in the church today. It is reflected in the difficulty of winning them over to Christ. From the researcher's viewpoint, Christians are not willing to go to reach the Somali Muslims with the gospel of Jesus Christ because they are anticipating a possibility of not having a harvest of souls to the Lord."

The circular logic is clear: Christians believe Somali Muslims are hard to reach, so they do not attempt to reach them; because they do not attempt, there are no conversions; because there are no conversions, the belief that Somali Muslims are hard to reach is confirmed. Breaking this cycle requires intervention at the level of belief and practice.

The Role of Leadership in the Mandate-Practice Gap

The researcher found that "the question of preparedness solely lies with the pastorate or leadership of the church." Church leaders are responsible for teaching, modelling, and creating structures for witness. The absence of Muslim evangelism teaching reflects leadership priorities. The absence of organised outreach opportunities reflects leadership decisions. The absence of visible conversions reflects, at least in part, the absence of intentional effort.

The researcher noted that "the church leadership is responsible for educating the church about the need to share what it enjoys to the world of Muslims." When leadership does not prioritise this education, the congregation receives the implicit message that Muslim evangelism is not important. Conversely, when leadership prioritises Muslim evangelism through teaching, modelling, prayer, and resource allocation, the congregation receives permission and encouragement to engage.

An Integrated Missiological Response

Spiritual Formation for Courage and Love

Addressing fear requires more than information; it requires spiritual formation that produces courage and love. The biblical response to fear is not the absence of threats but the presence of God. As John writes,

"perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). Spiritual formation practices that deepen awareness of God's presence, love, and power can enable Christians to face fear without being paralysed by it.

Formation for courage includes teaching on the nature of spiritual warfare and the believer's authority in Christ. The New Testament portrays missions as a confrontation with spiritual forces (Ephesians 6:10-20). Still, it also assures believers that Christ has disarmed the powers and authorities (Colossians 2:15). When Christians understand that they operate from a position of victory, not vulnerability, fear decreases.

Formation for love includes developing genuine affection for Muslim neighbours. Love is not merely a strategy for witness but the motivation for witness. When Christians love their Muslim neighbours, they are willing to risk comfort, reputation, and even safety for their neighbours' eternal good. Love does not eliminate fear but overcomes it through prioritising the beloved's welfare.

Contextualised Training for Muslim Evangelism

The absence of training is a primary factor in the mandate-practice gap. Effective training for Muslim evangelism must address several dimensions. First, training must provide basic knowledge of Islamic beliefs and practices, including points of contact and points of contrast with Christianity—informants who do not know what Muslims believe cannot effectively engage them.

Second, training must provide practical skills for initiating and sustaining conversations. Gilchrist's five approaches and Nehls's step-by-step methods provide resources that can be adapted to the Eastleigh context. Training should include role-playing, supervised practice, and debriefing to build confidence.

Third, training must address specific fears: how to respond to aggressive arguments, how to stay safe while witnessing, how to know when to continue and when to withdraw. Realistic training that acknowledges risks while providing practical strategies is more effective than training that ignores fear or dismisses it as unspiritual.

Fourth, training should be ongoing, not one-time. Regular workshops, study groups, and accountability structures reinforce learning and maintain momentum. The researcher found that "consistency in doing something can create an impact on both the subject and the object." Regular teaching on Muslim evangelism signals its importance and keeps it before the congregation.

Ecclesial Support Structures for Witness

Individual Christians witnessing to Muslims need the support of the church community. Ecclesial support structures include prayer networks that intercede for specific witness efforts, accountability partnerships that provide encouragement and debriefing, and pastoral care for those who experience resistance or rejection.

The researcher found that many informants participate in small groups (Bible study, home cells, prayer groups) that could be mobilised for witness. These existing structures could support Muslim evangelism through intentional prayer, training, and coordinated outreach. As the researcher noted, "the entire church of the A.I.C. Nairobi Central Region has the opportunity to reach the Somali Muslims through her members. Reaching out can be done by strengthening the existing groups so that they can be involved in mission work."

Ecclesial support also includes providing safety protocols and emergency response plans. When Christians know the church has thought through how to respond to threats and will support them if they face consequences for witness, fear decreases. The church should not ask its members to take risks that it is unwilling to support.

Power Encounter and Contextualised Apologetics

In contexts where fear of spiritual powers is significant, power encounter can demonstrate Christ's superior authority. The researcher's earlier work on jinn possession and oppression in African contexts documents how Muslims seek healing and protection from spiritual forces through Islamic and traditional means. When Christians demonstrate healing, deliverance, and protection in Jesus' name, they challenge assumptions about where true power resides.

Power encounters require discernment and integrity. Not every illness is demonic; not every spiritual experience requires exorcism. However, in contexts where Muslims seek power from saints, amulets, or rituals, Christians can point to Christ as the one who has "disarmed the powers and authorities" (Colossians 2:15). Demonstrations of Christ's power should flow from compassion, not a desire to prove superiority.

Contextualised apologetics addresses intellectual barriers to faith. Muslims have questions about the Bible (its preservation, its relationship to the Qur'an), about Christian doctrines (Trinity, incarnation, atonement), and about Christian practices (worship, prayer). Christians who can answer these questions respectfully and knowledgeably can remove intellectual obstacles to faith. However, apologetics without love is ineffective; as Gilchrist emphasises, "be sure that all you do and say is done in a spirit of genuine love for them."

Leadership Commitment and Missional Restructuring

Closing the mandate-practice gap requires leadership commitment. Pastors and church leaders must prioritise Muslim evangelism in their teaching, prayer, and resource allocation. The researcher noted that "someone should cause the church to have that burden of reaching the Muslims with the gospel." That someone is the leadership.

Leadership commitment includes modelling witness. When pastors and leaders personally engage in Muslim evangelism, they give the congregation permission and encouragement to do the same. Leadership commitment includes allocating budget resources for Muslim evangelism training and outreach. Leadership commitment includes praying publicly for Muslim neighbours by name. Leadership commitment includes celebrating and sharing testimonies of witness encounters and conversions.

Missional restructuring may be necessary to close the mandate-practice gap. The researcher recommended that "the church should plant a local church right at the heart of Eastleigh shopping Centre. It can be in the form of house churches where Muslim background believers can be and receive more teachings of the word of God." New missional structures, including house churches and fellowship groups for Muslim background believers, may be more effective than existing congregations in reaching the Somali Muslim community.

From Fear to Faith: A Theological Framework

Ultimately, the missiological response to fear is theological. Fear is overcome not by the absence of threats but by the presence of a greater reality. The biblical narrative repeatedly calls God's people to "fear not"

because God is with them. God's presence, power, and promises provide the foundation for courageous witness.

The theological framework for moving from fear to faith includes several affirmations. First, God's mission is unstoppable. The gospel will reach every nation, tribe, people, and language (Revelation 7:9). Christians are privileged to participate in what God is already doing, not responsible for accomplishing the mission through their own efforts.

Second, God promises His presence. Jesus said, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). The promise of divine presence applies specifically to the context of mission. Christians who witness to Muslims do not go alone.

Third, God's power is sufficient. Paul wrote, "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7). The power to witness does not come from human ability but from the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).

Fourth, God's love casts out fear. When Christians truly love their Muslim neighbours, that love overcomes fear. Love prioritises the beloved's good over one's own comfort and safety.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: Several findings emerge. First, fear operates at multiple levels: fear of terrorism and physical violence, fear of heated arguments and embarrassment, fear of conversion and influence (on both sides), fear of ineffectiveness, and fear rooted in lack of preparedness. These fears are not merely psychological but systemic, shaped by Kenya's recent history of terrorist attacks, the social dynamics of Christian-Muslim relations, and the church's failure to provide adequate training and support.

Second, the gap between missionary mandate and missional practice is evident in several manifestations: theological affirmations of mission without practical engagement, decades of historical presence without missional outreach to neighbouring Muslims, the disconnect between mission offerings (sent elsewhere) and local witness, the absence of consistent teaching on Muslim evangelism, the perception of difficulty as a self-fulfilling prophecy, and leadership failure to prioritise Muslim evangelism.

Third, an integrated missiological response addresses both fear and the mandate-practice gap through spiritual formation for courage and love, contextualised training for Muslim evangelism, ecclesial support structures, power encounter and contextualised apologetics, leadership commitment and missional restructuring, and a theological framework that moves from fear to faith.

Recommendations: Future research should include Muslim perspectives, comparative studies across denominations, and longitudinal studies tracking changes in evangelistic practice following intervention.

Limitations of the Study

The research focused on three A.I.C. congregations in the Nairobi Central Region and may not represent other denominations or regions. The sample size of twelve informants, while appropriate for qualitative research, limits generalizability. The study did not include interviews with Somali Muslims about their perceptions of attempts at Christian witness.

The missiological challenge is significant but not insurmountable. Fear is real, and the threats that generate fear are real. But the church is called to witness not because witness is safe but because witness is faithful. The God who said "Do not be afraid" throughout Scripture is the same God who accompanies his people as they proclaim the gospel to all nations, including their Somali Muslim neighbours in Eastleigh.

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