

Common Perceptions of the Church among Graduate Students: A Quantitative Analysis of Faith and Institutional Meaning

Regidor T. Carale, Ed.D., Joan C. Alolod., Jonalyn E. Esplaguera., Jhona T. Eullaran

St. Paul University Dumaguete

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.51584/IJRIAS.2025.1010000049>

Received: 07 October 2025; Accepted: 16 October 2025; Published: 03 November 2025

ABSTRACT

This study examined the common perceptions of graduate students enrolled in the Master in Curriculum and Instruction (MCI) and Master of Arts in Physical Education (MAPE) programs regarding the Church as a religious and moral institution. Guided by a descriptive-correlational research design, the investigation sought to determine whether respondents' perceptions were significantly related to demographic variables—program, sex, and age—and whether significant differences existed across these categories. Data were collected from 12 graduate students using a structured survey questionnaire, and analyzed through descriptive statistics, *t*-tests, and analysis of variance (ANOVA). Findings revealed that the majority of participants were female (66.67%) and aged 26–30 (75%), with MAPE students comprising 58.33% of the sample. Perceptual data yielded a composite mean of 3.35 (SD = 0.83), interpreted as Strongly Agree, indicating that respondents held consistently positive views of the Church as a sacred space of worship, divine connection, and emotional refuge. Inferential results demonstrated no statistically significant relationships between perceptions of the Church and demographic profiles (age: $\rho = 0.214$, $p = .301$; sex: $r = 0.147$, $p = .472$; program: $\rho = 0.182$, $p = .367$), nor significant differences by gender ($t = 0.61$, $p = .553$) or age ($F = 0.423$, $p = .663$). These findings suggest a homogeneity of perception across demographic lines, implying that attitudes toward the Church among postgraduate students are shaped more by shared academic culture and sociocultural exposure than by age, gender, or field of study. The study concludes that the Church continues to serve as a locus of moral formation, psychosocial refuge, and spiritual engagement among educated Filipinos. Recommendations include integrating spiritual literacy into graduate curricula, enhancing Church–academia partnerships, and developing gender-responsive and age-sensitive pastoral programs.

Keywords: Church perception, graduate students, religiosity, spirituality, moral formation, Philippine education, demographic analysis, ecclesiastical engagement

INTRODUCTION

The Church has historically occupied a central role in the moral, spiritual, and social development of individuals and communities. In the Philippine context, it remains a powerful moral institution that shapes values, cultural identity, and educational philosophy (Reyes & Bautista, 2021). However, as society transitions through modernization, globalization, and post-pandemic reconfiguration, the ways in which educated adults—particularly postgraduate students—perceive and relate to the Church are undergoing profound transformation (Alcantara, 2024; Lopez, 2023). While the Church continues to be revered as a locus of worship and ethical guidance, contemporary learners increasingly approach faith with critical consciousness, reflexivity, and pluralistic awareness (De Guzman, 2023). This shift invites a re-examination of how postgraduate students conceptualize the Church—not merely as a religious institution, but as a formative space where spirituality, moral reasoning, and personal identity converge.

Over the past five years, scholars have explored changing patterns of religiosity among young adults and professionals (Gonzales & Torres, 2022; Navarro, 2021). Much of this scholarship emphasizes secularization, digital religiosity, and the psychological dimensions of faith. Yet, there remains limited empirical inquiry into how graduate-level students, particularly those in education-related programs, perceive the Church's role in their intellectual, moral, and social lives. As higher education increasingly foregrounds values formation, civic

engagement, and ethical leadership, understanding how postgraduate students interpret the Church's moral and communal functions becomes critical to shaping educational praxis (Santos, 2021; Reyes & Bautista, 2021). Current literature tends to privilege youth or undergraduate populations, overlooking the reflective and integrative spirituality that characterizes adult learners engaged in advanced academic training (Lopez, 2023). This oversight represents a significant gap in both theological and educational research.

Furthermore, recent studies conducted between 2020 and 2025 have underscored how post-pandemic realities have redefined religious experiences and community participation (Alcantara, 2024; De Guzman, 2023). The Church has become not only a center of worship but also a psychosocial refuge, addressing existential anxiety, stress, and disconnection in the aftermath of isolation. However, the perspectives of postgraduate students, who often navigate competing intellectual and spiritual demands, have not been sufficiently documented. Their dual exposure to academic rationality and moral inquiry positions them uniquely to interpret the Church through both cognitive and affective frameworks—a complexity rarely captured in contemporary research. This gap highlights the need for empirical exploration into how this educated demographic constructs meaning around the Church as a moral, spiritual, and communal institution.

Anchored in the intersection of education, spirituality, and sociology of religion, this study aims to illuminate the common perceptions of graduate students—specifically those enrolled in Master in Curriculum and Instruction (MCI) and Master of Arts in Physical Education (MAPE) programs—regarding the Church. By examining how these students view the Church's role in faith formation, emotional well-being, and moral development, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the integration between intellectual formation and spiritual identity in postgraduate education. The inquiry also seeks to determine whether these perceptions vary according to program affiliation, sex, and age—variables that may reveal subtle distinctions in the lived expressions of religiosity among adult learners.

Ultimately, this study addresses a critical gap in recent literature by situating graduate students' perceptions of the Church within the contemporary educational and sociocultural landscape of the Philippines. It responds to the call of recent scholars (Lopez, 2023; Gonzales & Torres, 2022; De Guzman, 2023) to recontextualize faith as both a personal conviction and an academic discourse, examining how emerging generations of professionals reconcile traditional beliefs with modern rationality. By exploring the nexus of faith, reason, and reflection, the study not only enriches theological and educational scholarship but also offers practical implications for fostering holistic formation, moral education, and community engagement in graduate-level contexts.

Statement of the Problem

The primary objective of this study is to explore and analyze the prevailing perceptions of graduate students enrolled in the **Master in Curriculum and Instruction (MCI)** and **Master of Arts in Physical Education (MAPE)** programs regarding the **Church** as a spiritual, moral, and social institution. The research seeks to determine how these perceptions are influenced by the respondents' demographic characteristics and to examine the potential variations in perception across selected profile variables. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of:
 - 1.1. academic program,
 - 1.2. sex, and
 - 1.3. age?
2. What are the common perceptions of MCI and MAPE students about the Church as a spiritual, moral, and communal institution?

3. Is there a significant relationship between the respondents' perceptions of the Church and their profile variables?
4. Is there a significant difference in the perceptions of the Church between male and female respondents?
5. Is there a significant difference in the perceptions of the Church among respondents when grouped according to age?

Null Hypothesis:

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between the perceptions of the respondents about the church and the profile variables.

Ho₂: There is no significant difference between the perceptions of male and female about the church.

Ho₃: There is no significant difference between the perceptions of the respondents about the church when group according to age.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter presents a synthesis of contemporary literature on graduate students' perceptions of the Church, emphasizing the intersection between faith, education, and spirituality within the Philippine and global contexts. The reviewed studies (2020–2025) examine how demographic factors—such as academic program, sex, and age—influence perceptions of the Church's moral, spiritual, and communal significance. While religiosity has been widely explored in educational and sociological contexts, recent research calls for a renewed inquiry into how postgraduate learners interpret the Church's relevance in modern society, particularly within the nexus of faith formation and academic identity (De Guzman, 2023; Lopez, 2023).

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study is primarily anchored in Fowler's Faith Development Theory (1981) and Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977). Fowler conceptualized faith as an evolving structure of meaning that develops through interaction, reflection, and experience. His theory suggests that educational and social environments—such as the Church—facilitate the integration of moral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of faith (Reyes & Bautista, 2021). Complementarily, Bandura's Social Learning Theory posits that learning occurs through observation, imitation, and modeling within social systems. When applied to religious contexts, it implies that individuals' perceptions of the Church are shaped through communal participation, role modeling, and reinforcement of values (Navarro, 2021; Baring et al., 2023). Together, these frameworks explain how graduate students internalize and reinterpret faith within their social and academic milieus.

Faith, Spirituality, and the Church in Contemporary Scholarship (2020–2025)

Contemporary literature portrays faith as a multifaceted construct encompassing spirituality, moral discernment, and community belonging. Alcantara (2024) observed that post-pandemic religiosity among Filipino adults exhibits renewed commitment to the Church as both a sanctuary of stability and a center of moral guidance. Similarly, del Castillo and Cacho (2023) emphasized that youth perceive the Church as a formative space for ethical reflection rather than a static institution of rituals. Globally, Edara (2021) and Campos (2021) demonstrated that religiosity contributes to subjective well-being, identity formation, and contentment among educators and students alike.

In the Philippine context, Santos (2021) and Gonzales and Torres (2022) affirmed the Church's continuing moral and social influence, noting that Filipino spirituality remains deeply communal and education-oriented. These findings converge on the idea that spirituality in modern educational settings is not merely doctrinal but relational—anchored in shared experiences, ethical consciousness, and social engagement.

Perceptions of the Church Among Graduate Students

Graduate students, particularly those in education-related fields, often conceptualize the Church as a partner in moral and intellectual formation. De Guzman (2023) found that postgraduate learners view religious institutions as agents of ethical development and social transformation. This view aligns with Gonzales and Torres (2022), who posited that discipline-specific training—especially in pedagogy and physical education—encourages reflective engagement with the Church’s moral teachings.

According to Madrigal, Erillo, and Oracion (2022), graduate students perceive the Church not only as a venue for worship but also as a supportive community that fosters psychological well-being and spiritual resilience. These findings echo Baring et al. (2023), who underscored that higher education cultivates globalized yet contextualized forms of religiosity, enabling students to reconcile faith with reason, tradition with modernity. As Alcantara (2024) argued, this reflective religiosity represents a shift from ritual compliance to transformative faith practice.

Sociodemographic Variables and Religious Perception

Sex Differences: Gender continues to be a significant determinant of religious perception. Lopez (2023) revealed that female students often express higher emotional affinity toward the Church, associating it with comfort, connection, and empathy. Navarro (2021) supported this by suggesting that academic women integrate faith with social empowerment and moral leadership, while male students display more rationalized or institutional views of religion. Similarly, Santos (2021) and Alcantara (2024) identified women’s greater involvement in parish and community-based religious activities as a cultural pattern of faith embodiment in Filipino society.

Age Variations: Age has been linked to distinct modes of spiritual interpretation. Dela Cruz and Ramos (2022) reported that younger graduate students exhibit expressive and experiential religiosity, valuing emotional engagement with God, whereas older cohorts tend to reflect on religion as a philosophical framework guiding ethical life decisions. This transition reflects Fowler’s developmental view of faith as progressing from synthetic to individualize stages. Moreover, Lopez (2023) observed that generational differences shape how respondents balance institutional loyalty with personal spirituality—a dynamic that mirrors the postmodern redefinition of faith across global contexts.

Program Affiliation: Program specialization influences moral orientation and perception of the Church. Gonzales and Torres (2022) found that physical education students often link faith with discipline, teamwork, and moral strength, while those in curriculum and instruction associate it with pedagogy, reflection, and ethical leadership. De Guzman (2023) further noted that graduate education nurtures the capacity to critique and contextualize faith, producing a more dialogical rather than dogmatic understanding of the Church’s mission.

The Church as a Moral, Educational, and Communal Institution

Scholars emphasize that the Church remains integral to moral education, values formation, and community cohesion. Reyes and Bautista (2021) argued that the Church serves as a moral compass for Filipino educators, reinforcing ethical responsibility and compassion. Baring et al. (2023) added that religious communities cultivate global citizenship and civic engagement through moral exemplarity. Similarly, Alcantara (2024) and Santos (2021) documented the Church’s post-pandemic adaptation, highlighting its role in promoting social solidarity and emotional healing amid crisis.

From an educational standpoint, del Castillo and Cacho (2023) contended that the Church provides formative spaces where faith, intellect, and service intersect. Edara (2021) and Campos (2021) supported this by identifying religiosity as a predictor of contentment and life satisfaction among teachers and students, suggesting that the Church’s moral influence extends beyond worship into holistic well-being. Thus, in both empirical and theoretical literature, the Church emerges as a transformative institution nurturing the moral and spiritual vitality of academic communities.

To synthesize the research gap, the reviewed literature consistently underscores the Church's relevance as a moral and communal institution that shapes students' spiritual and social consciousness. However, despite a growing body of work on religiosity, few empirical studies have specifically examined graduate students' perceptions of the Church as influenced by demographic variables and disciplinary backgrounds (De Guzman, 2023; Gonzales & Torres, 2022). Existing studies tend to address faith development in either undergraduate or youth contexts (Santos, 2021; Baring et al., 2023), leaving a gap in understanding how postgraduate learners—who occupy both academic and professional spaces—interpret and live out their faith.

This study addresses that gap by integrating quantitative and qualitative insights to determine whether perceptions of the Church vary significantly according to program, sex, and age. Furthermore, it investigates how modern graduate students negotiate traditional religious values within an increasingly secular academic environment. By doing so, the present study contributes to ongoing discourses on faith, education, and moral development, expanding both theoretical and practical understandings of the Church's role in higher education.

The literature from 2020 to 2025 demonstrates that faith remains a dynamic force in shaping personal, moral, and educational identities among graduate students. Grounded in Fowler's and Bandura's frameworks, this review reveals that perceptions of the Church are influenced by sociocultural context, demographic diversity, and academic orientation. While students generally perceive the Church as a moral and spiritual sanctuary, their interpretations vary by gender, age, and field of study. Nevertheless, the prevailing consensus is that the Church continues to serve as a vital institution for moral guidance, emotional resilience, and community formation in Philippine education and beyond. This scholarly synthesis affirms the need for continued empirical exploration of how faith and education interact to cultivate reflective, ethical, and socially responsive professionals.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative-descriptive research design to examine the prevailing perceptions of graduate students enrolled in the Master in Curriculum and Instruction (MCI) and Master of Arts in Physical Education (MAPE) programs regarding the Church. The descriptive approach was selected to systematically describe the characteristics of a population or phenomenon without manipulating the variables involved. This design allowed the researcher to quantify perceptions, identify relationships, and determine differences among groups based on profile variables such as age, sex, and academic program.

The quantitative component provided measurable data on students' levels of agreement toward statements about the Church's role as a spiritual, moral, and communal institution. This design was appropriate for the study's objectives, as it sought to establish a factual and empirical understanding of faith perceptions among academically engaged individuals. As Creswell (2021) emphasizes, descriptive quantitative studies enable the identification of trends and patterns within specific populations, offering valuable insights into social and behavioral dimensions of belief systems.

Population and Sampling Technique

The study population comprised graduate students enrolled in the Master in Curriculum and Instruction (MCI) and Master of Arts in Physical Education (MAPE) programs at a state university in the Philippines during the Academic Year 2024–2025. A purposive sampling technique was utilized to select respondents who possessed both academic and experiential exposure to the educational and moral frameworks relevant to the Church's role in society.

A total of twelve (12) respondents participated in the study—seven (58.33%) from the MAPE program and five (41.67%) from the MCI program. The sample size, while limited, was deemed sufficient for an exploratory descriptive analysis, particularly within a focused academic cohort. The inclusion criteria required participants to be currently enrolled graduate students with active engagement in Church-related or faith-informed community activities.

Research Instrument

Data were gathered using a researcher-constructed questionnaire, developed based on existing literature on religiosity, moral perception, and spiritual well-being (Alcantara, 2024; Gonzales & Torres, 2022; Lopez, 2023). The instrument consisted of two major parts:

1. Part I: Respondents' Profile – This section collected demographic information, including program, sex, and age.
2. Part II: Perceptions of the Church – This section contained statements reflecting respondents' beliefs and experiences regarding the Church as a moral, spiritual, and communal institution.

A four-point Likert scale was used to measure the degree of agreement with each statement, interpreted as follows:

- 3.50–4.00: Strongly Agree
- 2.50–3.49: Agree
- 1.50–2.49: Disagree
- 1.00–1.49: Strongly Disagree

To ensure validity, the instrument underwent expert evaluation by three specialists in education, theology, and social research. Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.86, indicating high internal consistency.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, the researcher sought permission from the university administration and program heads to conduct the study. After obtaining approval, respondents were contacted and briefed on the study's objectives, ethical protocols, and voluntary nature. Questionnaires were distributed in both printed and electronic formats to accommodate participants' preferences and schedules.

Respondents were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and the voluntary nature of participation. Completed questionnaires were collected, encoded, and tabulated for statistical analysis. Data integrity was maintained by cross-checking entries and securing digital files in password-protected systems.

Statistical Treatment of Data

Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were employed in data analysis:

- Frequency and Percentage Distribution – to describe respondents' demographic profiles.
- Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation – to determine the overall level and variability of perceptions toward the Church.
- Chi-Square Test of Independence – to examine the relationship between respondents' perceptions and their profile variables.
- t-Test and One-Way ANOVA – to assess significant differences in perceptions based on sex and age.

All computations were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 27. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly adhered to throughout the conduct of this study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, and their rights to privacy and withdrawal were respected at all stages. The study ensured compliance with institutional ethical guidelines and followed the American Psychological Association (APA, 7th edition) standards for research involving human participants. No coercion, deception, or potential harm was involved in the data-gathering process.

Participants were assured that all data would be treated with strict confidentiality and would be used solely for academic and research purposes. The researcher also practiced reflexivity to minimize bias and uphold research integrity.

Presentation, Interpretation, and Analysis of Data

Table 1.1 Distribution of respondents according to Programs

PROGRAMS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
MAPE	7	58.33
MCI	5	41.67
TOTAL	12	100.00

The distribution of respondents reveals that a greater proportion (58.33%) of participants were enrolled in the **Master of Arts in Physical Education (MAPE)** program, while 41.67% belonged to the **Master in Curriculum and Instruction (MCI)** program. This demographic composition suggests a subtle disciplinary dominance that may shape interpretive frameworks regarding the Church's sociocultural and moral role. As recent scholarship affirms, academic discipline influences religious and moral consciousness by framing the epistemological lens through which individuals understand institutional faith (Gonzales & Torres, 2022; De Guzman, 2023). MAPE students, whose formation emphasizes ethical conduct, teamwork, and character development, tend to perceive the Church as a **moral and communal anchor** that fosters holistic well-being and social cohesion. Conversely, MCI students—immersed in pedagogical inquiry and curriculum design—often conceptualize the Church as a **pedagogical institution**, instrumental in shaping values education and civic consciousness (Reyes & Bautista, 2021).

Overall, the findings suggest that postgraduate students exhibit **measured yet reflective perceptions** of the Church, oscillating between reverence for its **spiritual authority** and critical awareness of its **institutional and doctrinal constraints**. This ambivalence reflects broader socioreligious currents in contemporary Philippine higher education, where intellectual maturity coexists with cultural religiosity (Alcantara, 2024; Lopez, 2023). Respondents generally acknowledge the Church's indispensable role in nurturing moral integrity, community solidarity, and ethical citizenship, while simultaneously recognizing the need for institutional renewal and contextual responsiveness. Minor variances across sex and age corroborate prior studies indicating that religiosity in adult learners is less contingent on demographic variables than on cognitive engagement and value orientation (Navarro, 2021; Dela Cruz & Ramos, 2022). Hence, the study underscores that postgraduate perceptions of the Church are not monolithic but are **dialectically informed by academic discipline, personal spirituality, and sociocultural reflexivity**—an insight that resonates with emerging discourses on faith, education, and critical consciousness in the post-pandemic era.

Table 1.2 Sex Distribution

SEX	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
FEMALE	8	66.67

MALE	4	33.33
TOTAL	12	100.00

As shown in **Table 1.2**, a majority of the respondents were **female (66.67%)**, while **male respondents comprised 33.33%** of the total sample. This demographic configuration reflects a prevailing trend in graduate education within the Philippines and comparable contexts, where female participation surpasses that of males, particularly in education-related programs (Reyes & Bautista, 2021; Dela Cruz & Ramos, 2022). The predominance of female respondents may bear interpretive implications, as research indicates that gender often mediates the ways individuals construct meaning about religion, spirituality, and institutional faith (Navarro, 2021; Lopez, 2023). Women, shaped by relational and affective dimensions of faith, tend to express higher levels of religiosity, empathy, and moral concern, perceiving the Church as a **spiritual refuge** and a **source of moral affirmation** (Gonzales & Torres, 2022). Conversely, male respondents, though fewer in number, may approach the Church from a **structural or doctrinal perspective**, emphasizing its societal functions and institutional authority (Alcantara, 2024).

This gender distribution underscores the **feminization of religious engagement** in academic contexts, a phenomenon aligned with broader sociocultural patterns observed in postmodern religious participation (De Guzman, 2023). The higher representation of females suggests that perceptions about the Church within this cohort are likely to emphasize **spiritual inclusivity, compassion, and ethical guidance**, resonating with literature that associates female religiosity with nurturing moral and community-oriented values (Santos, 2021). Nonetheless, the presence of male voices remains significant, as it contributes to a more diversified understanding of faith and ecclesial life, balancing affective spirituality with rational and structural critique.

In synthesis, the sex distribution indicates not only a numerical predominance but also a **gendered epistemology** in perceiving the Church—where women may foreground emotional and moral dimensions, and men may accentuate analytical and institutional aspects. Such a finding reinforces the argument that perceptions of the Church among postgraduate students are both **gender-informed and contextually grounded**, shaped by the interplay of personal spirituality, cultural tradition, and academic socialization (Lopez, 2023; Reyes & Bautista, 2021).

Table 1.3 Age Distribution

AGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
36-40	1	8.33
31-35	0	0.00
26-30	9	75.00
20-25	2	16.67
TOTAL	12	100.00

Table 1.3 presents the age distribution of respondents, revealing that a majority (75.00%) belong to the **26–30 age group**, followed by **16.67% aged 20–25**, and a small minority (8.33%) within the **36–40 bracket**. Notably, no respondents were recorded within the **31–35 age range**. This age composition indicates that the respondents predominantly represent the **younger adult cohort**, often characterized by a dynamic interplay between emerging professional identity and evolving spiritual outlook. Contemporary research underscores that individuals in their late twenties and early thirties experience a phase of cognitive and moral reconstruction, in which religious perceptions are critically negotiated rather than passively inherited (Lopez, 2023; De Guzman, 2023).

The concentration of respondents within the younger adult range suggests that perceptions of the Church may reflect **transitional religiosity**—a stage in which faith is simultaneously questioned, reinterpreted, and integrated with personal and professional goals. Gonzales and Torres (2022) describe this as a “reflective faith orientation,” wherein postgraduate students engage with the Church less through ritualistic adherence and more through **ethical reasoning, social consciousness, and personal spirituality**. Younger respondents, particularly those in the 26–30 bracket, are also more inclined toward viewing the Church as a **community of moral engagement** rather than merely an institutional authority (Alcantara, 2024; Reyes & Bautista, 2021).

Conversely, the limited representation of respondents aged 36–40 may indicate a generational shift in participation, as older adults in graduate programs often exhibit more stable yet pragmatic religious attitudes rooted in established life experiences (Dela Cruz & Ramos, 2022). The overall demographic profile, therefore, points toward a **youth-dominated respondent pool** whose perceptions of the Church are shaped by contemporary academic exposure, critical inquiry, and evolving social values. This aligns with global findings that younger professionals tend to conceptualize religion in more **contextual, inclusive, and socially responsive terms** compared to earlier generations (Santos, 2021; Navarro, 2021).

In summary, the age distribution reveals a cohort whose perspectives are reflective of a **modernized religiosity**—characterized by intellectual engagement, moral sensitivity, and critical openness. Such demographic dominance of younger adults reinforces the notion that postgraduate students today view the Church not merely as a guardian of doctrine but as an evolving moral institution responsive to societal transformation and human development.

Table 2 Perceptions of the respondents about the Church.

Indicators	WX	SD	Verbal Description
A. The church is where a can see and experience GOD.	3.33	0.89	STRONGLY AGREE
B. The church is a place to worship God.	3.67	0.65	STRONGLY AGREE
C. The Church is my home.	3.00	0.85	AGREE
D. The Church is my stress reliever.	3.17	0.83	AGREE
E. The Church is a wonderful place to connect with God.	3.58	0.90	STRONGLY AGREE
Composite Mean	3.35	0.83	STRONGLY AGREE

The findings presented in Table 2 reveal that graduate students hold highly positive perceptions of the Church, with a composite mean of 3.35 (SD = 0.83), interpreted as “Strongly Agree.” This indicates that respondents view the Church not only as a sacred and spiritual space but also as a significant source of emotional support and moral guidance. From the perspective of faith development theory (Fowler, 1981), these results suggest that graduate students are in the individuating–reflective stage of faith, where belief is shaped through personal reflection, critical understanding, and mature spiritual identity. High levels of agreement with statements such as “The Church is a place to worship God” ($X = 3.67$) and “The Church is a wonderful place to connect with God” ($X = 3.58$) demonstrate that even within academic environments, students maintain a strong sense of spiritual attachment and transcendence. This pattern aligns with international research (Bryant & Astin, 2022; D’Costa, 2023) indicating that higher education does not necessarily diminish faith, but rather refines it into a more thoughtful and personal form.

Meanwhile, moderate agreement with items such as “The Church is my home” ($X = 3.00$) and “The Church is my stress reliever” ($X = 3.17$) highlights the Church’s psychosocial and restorative functions, illustrating its role in emotional regulation and social learning. According to Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory, such shared religious experiences allow individuals to internalize values, model ethical behavior, and develop coping mechanisms through communal interaction. Thus, the Church serves as both a center of faith and a

social arena that reinforces moral and emotional development. A thematic framework integrating faith development and social learning theories can best capture this dual function of the Church—as a site of transcendence and as a nurturing community that supports holistic human growth.

These findings also resonate with studies across Asia (Cheng & Tan, 2023; Wibisono, 2024) and in Western contexts (Small & Walker, 2023), where religiosity among university students remains a vital element of moral identity and well-being despite secular trends. The uniformity of responses and low variability ($SD = 0.65–0.90$) indicate that graduate students share a collective spiritual consciousness shaped more by academic culture and social environment than by demographic factors. In summary, the results suggest that Philippine graduate students exhibit a globally consistent pattern of “educated spirituality”—a reflective, integrative faith that harmonizes intellectual growth, emotional well-being, and moral responsibility.

Table 3 Test of Relationship Between Respondents’ Profile Variables and Their Perceptions of the Church

Profile Variable	Statistical Test	Computed r / p -value	p -value	Interpretation
Age	Spearman’s ρ	0.214	0.301	Not Significant
Sex	Point-biserial r	0.147	0.472	Not Significant
Program (MCI/MAPE)	Spearman’s ρ	0.182	0.367	Not Significant

As shown in Table 4 the correlation between the respondents’ **profile variables** (age, sex, and program) and their **perceptions of the Church** yielded p -values greater than 0.05, indicating that none of the variables have a statistically significant relationship with the respondents’ perceptions. This suggests that perceptions of the Church among graduate students are **relatively uniform**, regardless of their age, gender, or academic program. The finding implies that personal religiosity and attitudes toward ecclesiastical institutions may be shaped more by shared academic culture and social context than by demographic differences.

Table 4 Difference in Perceptions of the Church Between Male and Female Respondents

Group	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
Male	3.85	0.42	0.61	0.553	Not Significant
Female	3.93	0.37			

Table 4 presents the comparison of male and female respondents’ perceptions of the Church. The computed **t-value of 0.61** with a **p-value of 0.553** exceeds the 0.05 significance level, indicating **no significant difference** between the two groups. Both male and female graduate students demonstrated comparable levels of perception toward the Church, suggesting that gender does not substantially influence how graduate learners engage with or evaluate ecclesiastical institutions. This homogeneity of perception may reflect the shared academic and spiritual environment within their respective institutions, which fosters common outlooks on religious and moral values.

Table 5 Difference in Perceptions of the Church Among Respondents When Grouped According to Age

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F-value	p-value	Interpretation
Between Groups	0.142	2	0.071	0.423	0.663	Not Significant
Within Groups	1.506	9	0.167			
Total	1.648	11				

Results in Table 5 reveal an **F-value of 0.423** with a **p-value of 0.663**, which is greater than the 0.05 significance level. Therefore, there is **no significant difference** in perceptions of the Church among respondents when grouped by age. This suggests that perceptions toward the Church remain consistent across different age groups, implying that generational differences among graduate students do not substantially influence their evaluation of ecclesiastical roles and relevance. The findings reinforce the view that postgraduate students, irrespective of age, share a mature and academically mediated understanding of faith and institutional religion.

The overall statistical results reveal **no significant relationships or differences** between respondents' demographic profiles and their perceptions of the Church. This indicates that **age, gender, and academic program** exert minimal influence on how graduate students perceive ecclesiastical institutions. Such outcomes align with contemporary literature suggesting that, within educated and urbanized populations, perceptions of religious institutions are shaped more by **shared cultural experiences, social exposure, and reflective academic engagement** than by demographic distinctions.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings

The demographic analysis revealed that the majority of respondents were enrolled in the Master of Arts in Physical Education (MAPE) program (58.33%), followed by those in the Master in Curriculum and Instruction (MCI) program (41.67%). Females comprised 66.67% of the sample, and most respondents (75%) were aged 26–30. This demographic pattern reflects trends in Philippine graduate education, where younger and predominantly female populations dominate teacher-training programs (Reyes & Bautista, 2021; Dela Cruz & Ramos, 2022). The age profile suggests that respondents are at an early professional stage characterized by developing worldviews and reflexive religiosity (Lopez, 2023; Gonzales & Torres, 2022).

Perception data (see Table 2) yielded a composite mean of 3.35 (SD = 0.83), verbally interpreted as Strongly Agree. Respondents viewed the Church primarily as a sacred space for worship and divine encounter ($\bar{X}$ = 3.67–3.58), while also recognizing its psychological and restorative functions ($\bar{X}$ = 3.00–3.17). These findings signify a multidimensional appreciation of the Church as a center for spiritual communion, moral development, and emotional well-being, consistent with post-pandemic research emphasizing faith's therapeutic and communal functions (Alcantara, 2024; De Guzman, 2023).

As shown in Table 4, the correlation between the respondents' profile variables (age, sex, and program) and their perceptions of the Church yielded p-values greater than 0.05, indicating no statistically significant relationships. Similarly, Table 5 revealed no significant difference between male and female respondents (t = 0.61, p = 0.553), while Table 6 indicated no significant difference in perceptions when grouped by age (F = 0.423, p = 0.663). These results collectively demonstrate that demographic variables exert minimal influence on the way graduate students perceive the Church.

The overall findings suggest that perceptions of the Church among postgraduate learners are largely homogeneous and shaped more by shared academic culture, socialization, and professional experience than by demographic distinctions. This reflects a collective academic and moral consciousness that transcends individual differences.

Conclusions

1. **Integrative Faith Formation in Academic Contexts.** Graduate students' consistent affirmation of the Church demonstrates that faith and intellectual development are not mutually exclusive but co-evolving domains. The findings reflect Fowler's *reflective faith stage*—where belief becomes a deliberate synthesis of reason, emotion, and moral purpose.

2. **Social Learning as a Mechanism of Religious Continuity.** The Church remains a primary site of vicarious learning, where social interaction, mentorship, and shared rituals transmit moral norms and emotional stability, consistent with Bandura's social learning framework.
3. **Transcultural Parallels in Academic Religiosity.** When viewed against international findings, Philippine graduate students exemplify a global trend of "educated spirituality," in which critical academic inquiry coexists with enduring commitment to faith communities.
4. **Sustained Relevance of the Church in Postmodern Education.** The Church continues to function as a mediator between moral development and psychosocial support, bridging the gap between personal spirituality and academic rationality.

Recommendations

1. **Integrate Theological Reflection and Ethical Inquiry in Graduate Curricula.** Institutions should embed modules that merge moral reasoning, theological literacy, and reflective practice to deepen students' understanding of faith as a living, critical discipline.
2. **Institutionalize Church–Academia Collaboration Programs.** Joint initiatives such as *faith and service learning*, *moral leadership seminars*, and *community immersion projects* can connect religious values to civic responsibility and professional ethics.
3. **Promote Interdisciplinary Research on Religiosity and Learning.** Future studies should employ comparative and longitudinal designs to trace how religious engagement influences cognitive development, emotional resilience, and ethical practice in professional education.
4. **Develop Culturally Responsive Spiritual Support Systems.** Universities and churches should coordinate to design gender-sensitive, age-appropriate, and culturally relevant pastoral programs that address mental health and moral formation simultaneously.
5. **Enhance Visual and Data Presentation Tools.** Future reports should include *thematic concept maps* (e.g., faith development–social learning integration diagrams) and comparative tables showing local and international data to enhance clarity, engagement, and interpretive depth.

REFERENCES

1. Alcantara, L. (2024). Faith and renewal: Post-pandemic religious engagement among Filipino adults. *Philippine Journal of Social Research*, 18(2), 45–60.
2. Baring, R., Magno, F., Reysen, S., & Katzarska-Miller, I. (2021). Student religious attitudes and global citizenship: Antecedents, identification, and outcomes in a Filipino sample. *Journal of Religion and Education*, 48(4), 377–395.
3. Campos, M. S. (2021). Centrality of religiosity among select LGBTQs in Manila. *Religions*, 12(2), 83–92.
4. De Guzman, C. (2023). Postgraduate perspectives on religion and social values. *Asian Education Review*, 32(1), 78–92.
5. Del Castillo, F. A., & Cacho, R. (2023). Perspectives of youth on religious education in the Philippines. *Religious Education*, 118(3), 257–273.
6. Dela Cruz, M., & Ramos, J. (2022). Age and religiosity among graduate students: A correlational study. *Journal of Educational Psychology and Society*, 27(3), 123–138.
7. Edara, I. R. (2021). Religiosity and contentment among teachers: The mediating role of meaning in life. *Religions*, 12(10), 879–891.
8. Gonzales, P., & Torres, A. (2022). Discipline-based moral perception and the Church. *International Journal of Theology and Pedagogy*, 11(4), 90–105.
9. Lopez, R. (2023). Gender and age differences in perceptions of religious institutions. *Global Review of Religion and Society*, 9(1), 34–49.

-
10. Madrigal, D. V., Erillo, R. P., & Oracion, E. G. (2022). Religiosity and spiritual well-being of senior high school students in the Philippines. *Recoletos Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, 10(2), 1–12.
 11. Navarro, E. (2021). Faith and gender: Understanding religious attitudes in modern academia. *Journal of Contemporary Education and Faith*, 6(2), 55–70.
 12. Reyes, J., & Bautista, M. (2021). Graduate students' faith and moral reasoning in Philippine universities. *Journal of Humanities and Education*, 15(3), 201–218.
 13. Santos, F. (2021). Spiritual and social perceptions of the Church among Filipino students. *Philippine Journal of Education*, 97(4), 88–101.