

The Role of Catholic Religious Education Teachers in Developing Students' Spirit of Diakonia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the role of Catholic Religious Education (CRE) teachers in developing students spirit of diakonia, the implementation of diakonia values in learning, and its supporting and inhibiting factors at the elementary and junior high school levels of the Siswarta Foundation, Palangka Raya Representative. The study employed a qualitative descriptive-interpretive approach. Data were collected through non-participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation involving seven informants consisting of the principal, CRE teachers, and students selected purposively. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, along with triangulation. The results show that the role of CRE teachers is carried out through three channels, namely the integration of learning materials, everyday exemplary conduct, and persuasive guidance. Diakonia values are implemented explicitly in lesson plans and teaching modules using contextual methods, Problem-Based Learning, and experiential learning adjusted to each level, reinforced by routine service activities and post-activity reflection. Supporting factors include school policies, collaboration among teachers, and the personal vocation of educators, whereas the inhibiting factors are limited time, families academic orientation, and gadget dependence. The study concludes that diakonia has become a distinctive feature of Catholic schools, yet the consistency of teacher exemplarity and the equal distribution of reflection still need to be strengthened.

Keywords: *Catholic Religious Education Teacher, Spirit Of Diakonia, Students, Catholic Education*

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a conscious and planned process that aims to shape the human personality as a whole, encompassing the intellectual, moral, social, and spiritual dimensions (Undang-Undang Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional). Within this framework, Catholic Religious Education (CRE) carries a strategic role in shaping the character of students grounded in Gospel values, namely honesty, responsibility, respect for others, and the spirit of diakonia. The Catholic Religious Education curriculum established by the Indonesian Bishops Conference (Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia [KWI],

2006) affirms that CRE aims to help students know, internalize, and embody the Catholic faith in daily life, so that they grow into believers who are able to live in the spirit of love and service to others as exemplified by Jesus Christ (Sihotang, 2019).

In the life of the Catholic Church there are three interconnected core tasks, namely kerygma (proclamation), koinonia (fellowship), and diakonia (service) (Supriyadi & Anggraheni, 2015; Tarigan et al., 2024). Diakonia becomes the concrete manifestation of a living faith, because through service to others believers demonstrate the love and care taught by Jesus. The values of diakonia are highly relevant to be instilled in the educational process, especially in CRE (Haru, 2020). In this regard, CRE teachers hold a key role as facilitators who bridge the values of faith with the real lives of students (Linda & Intansakti, 2023), while at the same time serving as faith educators who guide students to experience genuine faith growth (Sembiring et al., 2022).

The diakonia spirituality of CRE teachers is realized through an awareness of their duty as servants of the Word of God and the Church, by emulating the spirit of Jesus who came to serve and not to be served (Tarigan et al., 2024; Haru, 2020). Thus, diakonia spirituality is not merely a matter of personal pastoral concern, but an important component in shaping the character of students through the teacher exemplary conduct. Catholic educational institutions such as the Siswarta Foundation accept students from various faith backgrounds without distinction of religion, ethnicity, physical condition, or economic capacity, so that they are expected to become inclusive educational spaces where the spirit of diakonia is instilled as a shared value.

Based on preliminary observations, the Siswarta Foundation, Palangka Raya Representative, organizes various diakonia activities such as the Lenten Development Campaign (APP), charitable visits to orphanages, and social service. However, the active involvement of students is not yet evenly distributed; some are enthusiastic, while others participate merely out of obligation without a deep internalization of the values. An exclusive attitude in interacting with peers of different faiths also remains a concern for teachers. This condition indicates a gap between the diakonia education goals borne by the foundation and the reality of value internalization in the daily lives of students.

In the era of globalization, students face exposure to diverse values and cultures that can both enrich and weaken the foundation of their faith. Differences in the level of understanding and internalization of faith among students are influenced by various external factors such as the family, school, and community environments. The family, as the first socialization space, often determines the foundation of a child faith, while the pressures of a demanding school environment and an increasingly secular society pose particular challenges in nurturing the spirit of diakonia (Tarigan et al., 2024). In this context, the quality of the relationship between teachers, students, and the surrounding environment becomes a determining factor no less important than the formal curriculum. CRE teachers are required not only to deliver material theoretically, but also to live out the value of service so that it can be emulated by students.

Several previous studies have addressed the role of CRE teachers in character formation. Kana et al. (2022) showed that the success of forming students religious

character depends heavily on the synergy between school and family, while Tibo et al. (2023) highlighted the teacher role in enhancing the character of discipline. Sembiring et al. (2022) emphasized the contribution of CRE teachers to students social skills, and Haru (2020) highlighted the diakonia spirituality of CRE teachers amid systemic limitations. Nevertheless, these studies generally focused on religious character or discipline in general and were conducted in institutions outside Central Kalimantan, so that the specific aspect of developing the spirit of diakonia in the context of Catholic education in Palangka Raya has not been reached.

To the extent of the search conducted, there is as yet no empirical study that specifically describes the role of CRE teachers in developing students spirit of diakonia at the Siswarta Foundation, Palangka Raya Representative. This scholarly gap, combined with the empirical gap identified in the preliminary study, forms the basis and urgency of this research. The objectives of this study are to describe the role of CRE teachers in developing students spirit of diakonia, the implementation of diakonia values in the CRE learning process, and the supporting and inhibiting factors of its implementation. The contribution of this research lies in providing the first empirical portrait of CRE diakonia practice in the context of Catholic education in Palangka Raya as a basis for developing faith education that is more contextual and exemplarity-based.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive-interpretive type of research. The qualitative approach was chosen because the study aims to understand in depth the social and educational phenomena, particularly the role of CRE teachers in developing students spirit of diakonia (Creswell, 2014; Moleong, 2017). The descriptive-interpretive type was used because the study not only describes phenomena factually, but also interprets them based on the grand-middle-applied theory framework that was constructed, in line with the interpretive description approach (Thorne, 2016).

The study was conducted from May to July 2026 within the Siswarta Foundation, Palangka Raya Representative, which comprises Santo Don Bosco Catholic Elementary School and Santo Paulus Catholic Junior High School. Informants were determined through purposive sampling (Patton, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), consisting of the principal as the key informant, active CRE teachers, and students selected using the maximum variation sampling technique based on their varying involvement in diakonia activities. The primary data analyzed in this study were drawn from seven interview transcripts consisting of one principal, three CRE teachers from two levels, and three elementary school students.

Data collection techniques used non-participatory observation of the CRE learning process and diakonia activities, semi-structured interviews with guidelines developed from the indicators and research questions, and documentation in the form of lesson plans, activity photographs, and school programs. The interview guidelines were arranged based on three research foci, namely the role of CRE teachers in nurturing the spirit of diakonia, the implementation of diakonia values in learning, and the supporting and inhibiting factors, with indicators derived from the theories of Groome (1991), Bandura (1977), and Biddle

and Thomas (1979). In qualitative research, the researcher is the main instrument, supported by interview guidelines, field notes, and recording devices.

Data were analyzed using the model of Miles et al. (2014), which comprises three stages. Data reduction was carried out by selecting, focusing, and simplifying field data so that irrelevant data were set aside. Data display was presented in the form of descriptive narratives and matrices to clarify the relationships among data. Conclusion drawing was carried out gradually as a result of interpreting the data that had been analyzed. The validity of the data was maintained through source, technique, and time triangulation, as well as member checking with key informants to ensure the accuracy of the researcher interpretation.

Table 1. Research Informant Data

No	Code/Initial	Position	Level
1	PR	Principal	Junior High
2	CT-1	CRE Teacher, Grade VII	Junior High
3	CT-2	CRE Teacher, Grades VIII-IX	Junior High
4	CT-3	CRE Teacher, Grade I	Elementary
5	ST-1	Student	Elementary
6	ST-2	Student	Elementary
7	ST-3	Student	Elementary
8	ST-4	Student	Junior High School
9	ST-5	Student	Junior High School
10	ST-6	Student	Junior High School

Source: Primary research data, 2026

RESULT

The Role of CRE Teachers in Developing Students Spirit of Diakonia

The results show that the role of CRE teachers in developing the spirit of diakonia is carried out through three main channels, namely the integration of learning materials, everyday exemplary conduct, and persuasive guidance for students who have not yet shown concern. The principal affirmed that the role of CRE teachers is very important as a pillar of basic faith formation that is provided comprehensively to all students without exception, while the school supports the instilling of diakonia through routine spiritual programs such as retreats, recollections, morning prayer, the Angelus, group worship, communal Mass, and the Rosary.

CRE teachers instill the spirit of service through concrete social action connected with Scripture, for example distributing leftover food to residents in need, as well as through materials such as "The Calling of Jesus Disciples" and "The Way of Life of the Early Church." The involvement of Catholic students in church liturgical duties, such as choir, altar server, lector, and psalmist, becomes a concrete form of service. The approach used is adjusted to the level: elementary CRE teachers emphasize a narrative approach and simple

practices such as training students who read fluently to accompany their peers, whereas junior high CRE teachers emphasize involvement in formal church service structures.

Toward students who show less concern, CRE teachers do not immediately place blame, but rather provide guidance and involve them directly in the school social actions. Elementary CRE teachers, for instance, give concrete examples such as inviting students to clean up litter together, while junior high CRE teachers encourage student's involvement in liturgical duties. Teachers also serve as models of service in various sectors of life, not only as teachers but also as parish community coordinators, parish pastoral workers, and choir trainers, so that the exemplary conduct displayed is comprehensive and consistent in daily life.

The Implementation of Diakonia Values in the CRE Learning Process

The implementation of diakonia values in CRE learning has been carried out explicitly through lesson plans and teaching modules. CRE teachers incorporate diakonia values into the learning objectives, the flow of group discussion activities, and the instruments for assessing social attitudes. The methods applied vary according to level, including contextual learning, Problem-Based Learning that invites students to explore social problems and formulate concrete service actions, and experiential learning that is considered most effective for elementary-aged children because they more easily remember direct practice than theory.

Routine diakonia activities also reinforce learning, including the collection of funds for the Lenten Development Campaign during Lent, Christmas outreach, social service, distribution of staple food packages, and interfaith initiatives such as the distribution of Ramadan iftar meals through the "Catholic Sharing Action" program initiated by the students themselves. These activities are reinforced by post-activity reflection, usually through group discussion, so that students not only understand the value of service theoretically but also internalize and practice it.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of Diakonia Tasks

The supporting factors for implementing diakonia tasks stem from school policies and facilities, solid collaboration among teachers, awareness of the educators personal vocation, and the support of parents and the active participation of students. Communication through digital chat groups between teachers and parents shows the school adaptation to the need for efficient coordination in the digital era. Consistent parental support, even the emergence of disappointment when a child is not involved in service duties, indicates that families view the Catholic school as an important partner in shaping the child religious character.

Meanwhile, the inhibiting factors stem from three interrelated layers. First, the structural factor in the form of limited time allocation for religious learning. Second, the family factor in the form of an orientation toward academic values that is more dominant than the value of service. Third, the individual student factor in the form of dependence on gadgets that leads to a decline in social sensitivity. These three layers reinforce one another:

limited time at school cannot be optimally compensated without the reinforcement of the same values at home, while gadget dependence narrows the social interaction space needed to nurture empathy. This finding is consistent with Haru (2020), who highlighted the structural challenges of CRE teachers, and Kana et al. (2022), who affirmed the importance of school-family synergy.

Table 2. Summary of Research Findings

Focus	Main Findings
Role of CRE teachers	Integration of learning materials, everyday exemplary conduct, and persuasive guidance; narrative approach at elementary level and formal service structures at junior high level.
Implementation of diakonia values	Explicit integration in lesson plans/teaching modules; contextual methods, Problem-Based Learning, and experiential learning; routine service activities (Lenten campaign, Christmas outreach, social service) reinforced by post-activity reflection.
Supporting factors	School policies and facilities, collaboration among teachers, educators personal vocation, parental support, active participation of students.
Inhibiting factors	Limited learning time, families academic orientation, gadget dependence; student obstacles are situational (noisy classroom, lack of practice).

Source: Data analysis results, 2026

DISCUSSION

The Role of CRE Teachers in Developing Students Spirit of Diakonia

This finding affirms that the role of CRE teachers cannot be separated from the function of modelling, in line with social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) which states that students learn through observing and imitating respected figures, rather than through verbal instruction alone. The acknowledgment of elementary students who actually remember the teachers exemplary conduct through simple things, such as friendly greetings and prayer habits, reinforces this argument. However, the principal note that the teacher's exemplary conduct is "still relative" in the aspect of discipline indicates a gap between role expectation and role performance as conceptualized by Biddle and Thomas (Biddle and Thomas, 1979), an honest portrait that enriches the discussion because it does not present a wholly ideal picture. The difference in pedagogical approaches across levels is also consistent with the stages of cognitive development (Piaget, 1972), in which elementary children are at the concrete operational stage that requires real experiences and stories, while junior high adolescents have entered the formal operational stage that enables more abstract and systematic social problem solving.

The Implementation of Diakonia Values in the CRE Learning Process

This finding shows an alignment between the written curriculum and the experienced curriculum of the students. The use of experience-based and contextual methods is consistent with the principle of reflective pedagogy that places students' real experiences as the starting point of learning, then connects them with the teaching of faith, and concludes with reflection and follow-up action (Groome, 1991). The consistency of programs such as the Lenten Development Campaign, weekly social service, and visits to orphanages reflects continuous habituation that makes diakonia a distinctive feature of Catholic schools, rather than merely an additional activity.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of Diakonia Tasks

The difference in perceptions of obstacles among teachers shows that these perceptions are contextual to the age level of the students, rather than merely a difference in individual competence. The obstacles conveyed by students are more situational, such as a noisy classroom atmosphere and a lack of practice before serving, so they are relatively easier to overcome through strengthened classroom management and technical guidance. Another important finding is that post-activity reflection has not been applied consistently in all classes, which risks causing some students to carry out service duties mechanically without internalizing the religious and social meaning behind them. This affirms the importance of standardizing reflection as a mandatory part of every diakonia activity, rather than a practice that depends on the initiative of individual teachers. Students' motivation is also strongly influenced by self-confidence and technical readiness, so that improving the quality of guidance and technical training, for example practice in leading prayer, is as important as instilling values cognitively.

Overall, the findings across the three research foci show that the success of diakonia implementation is determined by the tripartite synergy between the school, the family, and the foundation. The school provides policies, facilities, and structured programs; the family provides value reinforcement in the domestic sphere; while the foundation ensures the alignment of the Catholic education vision. However, this synergy needs to be examined carefully because a tension was found between the expectation of religious involvement and the demand for academic achievement from some parents. The practical implication of this research is the need to strengthen three aspects simultaneously, namely the consistency of teacher exemplarity and discipline, the equal distribution of reflection practice across all classes, and the balancing of family orientation between academic values and the value of service. As a methodological note, these results and discussion were compiled based on seven available interview transcripts that were analyzed in depth; the limited coverage of informants, particularly the absence of junior high students and the elementary school principal, provides room for further research.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results, it can be concluded that Catholic Religious Education teachers play a very important role in instilling diakonia values in students, both through classroom

learning and through direct exemplary conduct in daily life. This role is carried out through the integration of learning materials, exemplary living, and persuasive guidance, with an approach adjusted to each level. Nevertheless, the teachers exemplary conduct remains relative and needs to be improved, particularly in the aspect of discipline.

The implementation of diakonia values has been carried out explicitly through lesson plans and teaching modules using experience-based and contextual methods, reinforced by routine service activities and post-activity reflection, so that diakonia has become a distinctive feature of education in Catholic schools. The supporting factors stem from school policies, collaboration among teachers, the educator's personal vocation, and family support, whereas the inhibiting factors include limited learning time, families academic orientation, and students dependence on gadgets. This study recommends strengthening the consistency of teacher exemplarity, the equal distribution of reflection practice across all classes, and the enhancement of family synergy toward the value of service alongside academic values. Future research is advised to expand the subjects and to use a mixed-methods approach in order to measure the success of instilling diakonia values in a more quantifiable way.

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