

Spiritual Calling: A Qualitative Study in The Context of Christian Ministry

(Spiritual: Sebuah Studi Kualitatif dalam Konteks Pelayanan Kristen)

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Abstract: Spirituality is increasingly recognised as a vital dimension of mental health, offering individuals a sense of purpose, resilience, and emotional grounding. However, little research has examined how spiritual calling contributes to mental health in contexts where Christians represent a minority faith, such as Indonesia. This qualitative study explores how spirituality, expressed through a sense of divine calling, shapes the well-being of church ministers. Data were collected through a qualitative phenomenological approach using Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with three active ministers from IES PIK Church Jakarta: a Sunday school teacher, a worship leader, and a pastor, supplemented by participant observation in a multinational congregation in Jakarta. The data was analysed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and central themes within the participants' responses. Findings indicate that ministers interpret their vocational journeys as evidence of a spiritual calling, viewing pivotal life experiences as divine guidance that anchors both their identity and service. This sense of calling provides meaning, strengthens resilience, and enables coping with the emotional burdens of ministry. Spiritual practices such as prayer, worship, and teaching cultivate patience, forgiveness, and hope, reinforcing well-being amidst stress and fatigue. At the same time, the minority position of Christianity in Indonesia underscores how calling functions not only as a personal resource but also as a communal anchor, fostering belonging and collective strength. In conclusion, this study highlights calling as both a protective factor and a developmental process that sustains flourishing by situating spiritual calling within the intersection of mental health and minority religious identity.

Keywords: church ministry; faith development; religious identity; spiritual calling

Abstrak: Spiritualitas kini semakin diakui sebagai bagian penting dari kesehatan mental karena membantu seseorang menemukan makna dan arah hidup, membangun ketangguhan, serta menjaga kestabilan emosi. Namun, masih sedikit penelitian yang menelaah tentang bagaimana panggilan spiritual berperan terhadap kesehatan mental dalam konteks umat Kristen yang merupakan minoritas, seperti di Indonesia. Studi kualitatif ini meneliti bagaimana spiritualitas, yang diekspresikan melalui panggilan ilahi, membentuk kesejahteraan pelayan-pelayan gereja. Data dikumpulkan melalui metode fenomenologi kualitatif dengan melaksanakan Focus Group Discussion (FGD) dengan tiga orang pelayan aktif di IES PIK Church Jakarta: guru sekolah Minggu, pemimpin pujian, pendeta, serta dilengkapi dengan observasi lapangan di ibadah jemaat multinasional di Jakarta. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik untuk mengidentifikasi pola dan tema sentral dalam tanggapan para partisipan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa para pelayan menginterpretasikan perjalanan pekerjaan mereka sebagai bukti dari panggilan spiritual, dengan memandang pengalaman hidup sebagai bimbingan dari Tuhan yang menjadi dasar identitas dan pelayanan mereka. Kesadaran akan panggilan ini memberikan makna, memperkuat ketahanan, dan membantu mengatasi beban emosional dalam

pelayanan. Kegiatan kerohanian seperti berdoa, beribadah, dan pemuridan menumbuhkan kesabaran, pengampunan, dan pengharapan, yang memperkuat kesejahteraan di tengah stres dan kelelahan. Pada saat yang sama, posisi minoritas agama Kristen di Indonesia menegaskan bahwa panggilan spiritual berfungsi tidak hanya sebagai sumber daya pribadi, tetapi juga sebagai jangkar komunitas yang menumbuhkan rasa memiliki dan kekuatan kolektif. Sebagai kesimpulan, penelitian ini menyoroti bahwa panggilan spiritual berperan sebagai faktor pelindung sekaligus proses perkembangan yang menopang pertumbuhan dan kesejahteraan, dengan menempatkan panggilan spiritual pada persimpangan antara kesehatan mental dan identitas keagamaan minoritas.

Kata kunci: *identitas religius; panggilan spiritual; pelayanan gereja; perkembangan iman*

INTRODUCTION

Across cultures and religious traditions, spiritual leadership plays a vital role in guiding communities, fostering faith, and providing support during life's challenges. In Christianity, church ministers serve as the cornerstone of religious practice, dedicating their lives to pastoral care, worship, and service. Their responsibilities extend beyond leading congregations in prayer; they offer counsel, perform sacred rites, and engage in community outreach, shaping the spiritual well-being of their followers (Hreyenga, 2024). However, the journey of ministry is not merely a profession but a calling, one that comes with profound personal and spiritual experiences. According to Houston Christian University (2025), at its heart, Christian ministry is dedicated to serving others and sharing the teachings of Jesus Christ. It is expressed through acts of love, compassion, and service, reflecting one's faith in daily life.

Christian ministry encompasses various roles, each with distinct responsibilities that contribute to the church's function and the spiritual growth of its members. Pastors or priests serve as the primary spiritual leaders

of a congregation, delivering sermons, leading worship services, and providing pastoral care to individuals in need (Ministry brands, 2024). Deacons assist in church administration and community service, often focusing on charitable works and supporting those in need (Smethurst, 2025). Elders take on leadership responsibilities, offering guidance and ensuring the spiritual integrity of the church (Griffiths, 2025). Sunday School Teachers play a crucial role in educating children and new believers, helping them understand biblical teachings and Christian values (ST. George's Episcopal Church, 2022). Worship Leaders guide the congregation in music and praise, enhancing the spiritual atmosphere of the church (Grand Canyon University, 2023) and many more.

Each of these roles contributes uniquely to the church's mission, reflecting the diverse ways in which individuals embody their spiritual calling. The phenomenon under research, **The Ministerial Practices and Experiences of Church Ministers**, seeks to explore how these individuals navigate their roles, embody their faith, and fulfill their spiritual vocation in a constantly evolving world.

Christianity remains the world's largest

religion, with around 2.3 billion followers, which makes up nearly a third of the world's population (World Population Review, 2024; Population Education, 2024). It has been rooted in various cultures, from thriving Western cities to isolated villages in Africa and Asia. Christianity has proven its global reach through its diversity within the faith, with over 45,000 denominations that differ in traditions, beliefs, and services (The Wesleyan University, 2024). This diversity in faith shows how Christianity is deeply personal, and it molds itself in the hearts and lives of its followers. It shows that Christianity has evolved, adapted, and remained relevant to people from all over the world.

Even in Indonesia, where Christianity is a minority of the population, with about 10% of its people identifying as Christians (Pew Research Center, 2024), it remains deeply significant. Although this number may seem small, it still represents millions of devoted believers in Indonesia. Across the country, there are over 70,000 churches that serve as places of worship and praying, places to find support and community as well as seek comfort from a greater being (GoodStats Indonesia, 2023). Despite the challenges of living in a predominantly Muslim society, Christians in Indonesia still held on to their faith with resilience. They have proven how churches are more than just buildings, it has become their second home.

Behind every church are ministers who pour their hearts out and dedicate their lives to serving their fellow believers and the

church. Ministers are not just Pastors who lead the Sunday services, they are those who console grieving families, celebrate weddings, and act as counselors and even mentors (The Gospel Coalition, 2024). With thousands of churches around the world, there are tens and even hundreds of thousands of ministers, all of whom have chosen a life of service and commitment. For them, this is not just a job, but rather a calling of encouraging others and preserving faith.

Given the significance of religion and religious leadership both globally and in Indonesia, it is essential to examine the contemporary challenges they face. For decades, secularization theory has dominated scholarly discussions on religion, positing that as societies advance in terms of economic prosperity, education, and scientific progress, religious belief and practice will naturally decline (Dhima & Golder). The assumption is that modernization fosters rational thought, leading individuals to shift away from religious explanations toward secular worldviews. Empirical studies have often supported this idea, particularly in Western nations where institutional religion has witnessed a decline in influence. A 2018 Pew Research Center survey conducted across 27 countries found that in many parts of the world, including the United States and much of Europe, people perceive religion's role in public life as diminishing. In addition, according to Stolz et al. (2025), it is well established that religion has declined across Western countries. Their work highlights that

secular modernization gradually reduces the social and symbolic roles of religion. However, this trend is far from universal. Countries such as Indonesia, Kenya, Brazil, and Israel reported the opposite: religion has maintained or even expanded its influence in recent decades (Pew Research Center, 2022). It is also observed by scholars that not all countries have witnessed secularization and in fact, religion has been very strong or even increased in many countries that are not Western (Carvalho et al., 2024). This discrepancy challenges the notion that secularization is a universal trajectory, instead suggesting that religion continues to be a central force in shaping individual and collective identities, particularly in non-Western societies.

A growing body of research now recognizes the limitations of secularization theory and instead proposes a “post-secular” perspective. Scholars argue that while certain societies may experience a decline in formal religious affiliation, religion itself does not necessarily disappear. Instead, it often transforms, adapts, or re-emerges in new forms. This shift is particularly evident in democratic societies where religious communities continue to thrive and exert influence in both private and public life (Kettell, 2019). The persistence of religious engagement, despite predictions of its decline, suggests that religion remains deeply ingrained in human social structures, cultural traditions, and ethical frameworks.

Indonesia serves as a compelling case study in this discussion, not only because of

its strong religious presence but also due to its rich diversity in faith traditions. According to Statista (2023), Indonesia's religious composition consists of approximately 87.1% Islam, 7.4% Christianity, 3.1% Catholicism, 1.7% Hinduism, 0.2% Buddhism, and 0.03% Confucianism. These figures reflect a society where religion plays a deeply significant role across various faiths. While Islam constitutes the majority, the presence of other religious communities is equally important in shaping Indonesia's social and cultural landscape. Seeing this, it is evident that Indonesia is a religiously diverse nation, and we would like to highlight how religious minorities, such as Christianity, hold just as strong a belief in faith as other religious groups. By focusing on the ministerial experiences within Christianity, this research seeks to provide a broader understanding of how religious devotion persists across different communities, reinforcing the idea that faith remains a central aspect of life for many, regardless of religious affiliation.

This research is guided by the question: *How do church ministers experience and embody their spiritual calling through their ministerial practices?* Through this inquiry, we aim to explore not only the services conducted within the church but also the personal experiences of the ministers themselves. By examining their journeys, motivations, and the ways they navigate their roles, this research seeks to understand how their sense of purpose is shaped and expressed through their ministerial practices,

shedding light on the deeper significance of their calling.

The research objectives include:

- Explore the ministerial practices and duties of church ministers, seeking to understand the lived experiences that define their roles and responsibilities.
- To understand the experiences that shape a minister's decision to follow their spiritual calling and dedicate themselves to the church.
- Examine how church ministers integrate their spiritual calling into their services.

METHODOLOGY

Research Participant. This study will involve three well-experienced ministers from IES PIK Church, each representing a different ministerial role:

- A Sunday school teacher named TJ (age: 27)
- A pastor named SM (age: 53)
- A worship leader named AM (age: 32)

These roles were intentionally selected to explore the diverse perspectives on how spiritual calling is experienced across various areas of ministry. Each role offers a unique function within the church:

- The pastor serves as the spiritual leader of the congregation, responsible for guiding worship services, sermons, and leading prayer.

- The Sunday school teacher plays a critical role in shaping the spiritual growth of younger members through religious teachings, interactive activities, and Bible stories.
- The worship leader facilitates spiritual engagement through music and worship, helping members of the church connect more deeply with their faith.

Including these three ministerial roles ensures a broader and more comprehensive understanding of ministerial experiences and perceptions of spiritual calling. Participants will be selected from the early to late adulthood age group (20-65 years old), as individuals within this age range are likely to have considerable experience in the ministry and the ability to share heartfelt and reflective accounts of their spiritual journey. The study will include both male and female participants to allow for an exploration of potential gender-based similarities or differences in the experience of spiritual calling and ministerial service.

All participants must be:

- Currently active ministers at IES PIK Church
- Well-experienced, with a documented background or history in church ministry

These criteria ensure that participants can provide meaningful, experience-rich insights into their ministerial roles and the nature of their spiritual calling.

Research Design. This study will use qualitative phenomenology as the main approach to study and analyze the phenomenology of how the church ministry members navigate their roles, embody their

faith, and fulfill their spiritual vocation in a constantly evolving world. Phenomenology as a research method is a form of qualitative research that focuses on the study of an individual's lived experiences within the world (Neubauer, et al., 2019). Reflecting on it, the goal of this study will benefit a lot from the qualitative method of phenomenology as it provides a theoretical tool for educational research as it allows researchers to engage in flexible activities that can describe and help to understand complex phenomena, such as various aspects of human social experience (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). Overall, this study utilizes the qualitative phenomenological approach to gain deep insights into the many aspects of the church ministry members' lives. By centering on lived experiences, phenomenology offers a rich and detailed understanding of the complexities of faith-based service, providing valuable perspectives that contribute to both academic discourse and practical ministry, helping this research to shed light on the dynamic interplay between faith, identity, and vocation, fostering a deeper appreciation of the spiritual and social dimensions of religious service.

Research Tool. This study will explore the topic by utilizing primary data sources gathered through direct interviews and observations of the research participants. Using primary sources for this research is crucial as it provides the ministers' first-hand experiences, capturing their feelings, thoughts, and life experiences in ways that secondary sources are unable to capture. Interviews will give insights about their personal motivations, challenges, and

faith-driven practices. Meanwhile, live observations can capture how ministers perform their roles and offer valuable insights on how they convert their spiritual convictions into actions.

Interview questions have been established encompassing three segments as follow:

1. Background

- Could you please introduce yourself: your name and where you are from?
- Can you share your educational background with us? What did you study, where, and why?
- What is your family like? Do you have any siblings, or perhaps a family of your own now?
- What is your current role in the ministry, and could you describe your main responsibilities
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2. Their experience

- Can you share your journey to becoming a minister? How did it all begin for you?
- Was there a specific experience or turning point like a calling that strengthened your decision?
- How did the people around you like family, friends, or mentors respond to your decision?
- Did you ever feel unsure or consider a different path before fully committing to ministry?
- What made you certain that this was the right path for you?

3. Reflection

- Now that you are a minister, how do you see your calling influencing your daily work?
- If you could share one piece of wisdom with someone who is searching for their calling, what would it be?

Research Procedure. This study employed qualitative methods for data collection, including semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The interviews focused on exploring ministers' spiritual journeys, their sense of calling, responsibilities, challenges, and personal reflections on faith. All interviews were conducted in person, lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes, and were audio recorded with participants' consent to ensure accuracy and reliability of data.

The interviews were conducted using a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) format with the duration of around 1 hour, in which three participants were interviewed simultaneously by three interviewers. This method was chosen for its time efficiency, allowing the team to collect rich data within a limited timeframe. Despite the group setting, the FGD format enabled in-depth dialogue, as participants were encouraged to express their experiences and perspectives openly. The presence of multiple participants created a shared learning environment, where individuals could reflect on and respond to each other's narratives. This interactive dynamic enhanced the richness of the data and allowed for deeper exploration of themes related to their spiritual callings.

In addition to the interviews, participant observation was carried out to gain a contextual understanding of how church ministers fulfill

their roles. Observations took place during church services and ministry activities, focusing on interactions between ministers and their congregations. Field notes were used to document ministers' body language, gestures, facial expressions, and expressions of faith, offering insight into aspects of experience that may not be fully captured through verbal accounts. This method helped address the limitations of interviews by capturing the non-verbal and environmental elements of ministry practice.

To ensure methodological rigor and alignment with the study's objectives, the research team collaboratively developed and refined the interview questions to elicit open, meaningful, and relevant responses. Ethical considerations were carefully upheld throughout the process. Informed consent was obtained from each participant after clearly explaining the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and the right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained, with all data securely stored and used exclusively for research purposes.

Data Analysis. The study employs thematic analysis as a qualitative research method to extract patterns and dominant themes from the gathered data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Multiple readings of all transcripts and field notes form the initial step of analysis. Researchers gain complete understanding of the content through this process before they identify crucial details. After understanding the data, researchers perform the coding stage by marking down recurring keywords and expressions along with significant ideas. The researchers collect

various codes from the data before organizing them into general themes which describe the main subjects in participant experiences. The research focuses on four main areas involving ministers' perspectives of their spiritual mission alongside their role challenges and their interactions with church members and their faith-based decision-making. Thematic analysis proves effective because it reveals data patterns and turns complex personal experiences into important themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The research team reviewed all identified themes to confirm they accurately captured the information participants contributed. The researchers then modify themes which appear too redundant or ambiguous to achieve better precision. The researchers explain the final themes by including direct participant quotes that demonstrate actual experiences. The research findings were then organized into a structured format which narrates the experiences that church ministers have with their spiritual calling during work activities. Thematic analysis serves as a popular qualitative research method because it enables systematic flexibility when analyzing intricate human experiences (Nowell et al., 2017).

RESULT

Research Question and Data Set

This research is guided by the central research question: How do church ministers experience and embody their spiritual calling through their ministerial practices? This question serves as the cornerstone of the

research, shaping the framework for exploring how spiritual calling is experienced, interpreted, and manifested by those in ministry. The primary goal is to understand the deeply personal and transformative nature of this calling, both in terms of the ministers' internal experiences and how these experiences are externalized in their ministry.

By focusing on the lived experiences of church ministers, the research aims to examine whether and how they perceive and connect with a spiritual calling, the pivotal moments or journeys that led them to embrace this path of devotion to God, and how this sense of purpose influences their roles and actions. This calling, while deeply rooted in profound spiritual experiences, is not limited to abstract beliefs or personal convictions; rather, it is manifested through their daily actions, interactions with congregants, and the various ways they engage in their broader ministerial practices.

To delve deeper into this phenomenon, the research utilized in-depth Focus Group Discussion (FGD) interviews with three participants. Each participant brought a unique and valuable perspective, offering rich, nuanced stories about their personal journeys into ministry, their spiritual calling. For TJ, what began as a lighthearted crush on a peer gently blossomed into a deeper love for nurturing children, eventually leading him to serve as a Sunday school teacher with the support of his family. AM, on the other hand, found his way into Christianity through a ministerial choir, a space that soothed his early wounds and helped him navigate complex family dynamics, teaching him to trust in God's

timing. Meanwhile, AM's journey was marked by a powerful spiritual encounter in his youth and a sharp devotion to scriptural reasoning, both of which shaped his conviction and drew him into ministry, encouraged by the steadfast support of his father.

Data Management Process and Findings

The data management process for this study was carried out using a combination of traditional thematization techniques and digital tools to balance both rigor and adaptability. After conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews in a focus group discussion (FGD) format, the audio recordings were securely stored in a designated digital folder as part of our initial data management efforts. These recordings were then carefully transcribed into a designated digital file created specifically for the data management process. Each response was meticulously marked based on the participant, allowing for clarity and traceability. Once transcriptions were complete, we performed multiple rounds of proofreading to eliminate any typographical errors, ensuring that the printed transcripts were clean, accurate, and ready for further analysis.

With printed verbatim transcripts in hand, we gathered in person to initiate the traditional thematization process. We brought our handicrafts: scissors, double tape, markers, and 4 asturo papers. Since our interviews were conducted in a group setting, we had to carefully separate the responses by participant. Fortunately, each response had already been labeled during transcription, making this sorting phase much smoother. We began cutting the printed responses and affixing them

onto three large asturo papers, each dedicated to a specific participant. This visual method allowed us to physically interact with the data, making the identification of emerging codes and patterns a more intuitive and collaborative process. Tasks were naturally delegated among team members, we assisted one another in taping the responses, discussing initial impressions, and annotating early codes directly on the sheets.

However, due to overlapping schedules and time limitations, we were unable to sustain the face-to-face data management process. Despite this, fortunately, we had already created a dedicated digital file for the data management process, allowing us to begin transferring the segmented data into four organized tables for each data set: one for the responses, one for the coding, one for the categories, and one for the themes. To improve the clarity and efficiency of the data management process, we implemented an effective technique that proved invaluable: color-coded highlighting based on thematic association. This method provided an immediate visual guide for categorization. Specifically, yellow was used to highlight responses related to Christianity and spiritual themes such as spiritual calling, divine duty, and revelation. Green was assigned to social influences, including family, friendships, and opposition. Orange indicated the use of analogies or metaphorical language, while toska marked insights about the participant's personal traits or habits.

By highlighting the data in this manner, we were able to efficiently group similar responses

and observe thematic clusters emerging naturally. This technique not only streamlined the coding process but also facilitated a more structured and coherent transition into the development of categories and themes. The color distinctions provided a clear framework, allowing us to visually track recurring ideas across participants and identify connections to broader patterns of spiritual development, social dynamics, and personal identity.

Through this hybrid approach, merging traditional data management with strategic digital ones, we successfully produced a total of 463 codes, which were refined into 32 categories and ultimately synthesized into 5 major themes. These themes formed the core findings of this study and offer a comprehensive lens into how church ministers experience and embody their spiritual calling within both personal and communal dimensions.

Preliminary Observation

Our preliminary research is conducted within a multinational and multilingual church in North Jakarta, Indonesia. This setting allows us to examine religious commitment beyond national identity, encompassing a diverse congregation with members from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The choice of this church is not solely based on Indonesia's well-known religious nature but rather on its unique position as a hub for multiple nationalities. By doing so, we ensure that our study does not limit itself to a single nation's religious experience but rather captures a more global perspective on how religion

continues to shape individuals' lives in an interconnected world.

On Sunday, two of our researchers conducted a preliminary study for observation and interviews at the church through thorough planning with a gatekeeper. Due to one researcher embracing a different belief, she asked the other researcher to forward a message to the gatekeeper, requesting formal permission to conduct the preliminary study during the service. This was done out of respect, ensuring the comfort of both the ministers and the congregation. The church itself was located inside a mall in North Jakarta, an intriguing setting as the Sunday service was held inside a theatre, within a cinema. The service was scheduled to begin around 10 A.M., and both researchers arrived earlier to make necessary preparations for the preliminary study.

As they entered the church, the gatekeeper welcomed them and introduced them to a possible subject for the preliminary interview. The researchers took this opportunity to introduce themselves, express their gratitude for her time and assistance, and acknowledge the opportunity given to them. With the service about to commence, the ministers dispersed around the area to prepare, while the congregation started to gather, gradually filling the theatre. The two researchers then settled down, reviewing the agenda of the day. They assisted each other in cross-checking the interview questions, making sure they were prepared for the upcoming tasks. They also reviewed their role division: one researcher was to conduct

the observation while the other was responsible for the interview later. The division was necessary as the other researcher had to conduct his own service. A mutual understanding of their responsibilities was evident.

As the service was about to start, the researchers parted ways, one entered the teen section for the Sunday service, while the other proceeded to the Sunday school room to begin the observation. The Sunday school session commenced around 10 A.M. as students aged 3-9 entered the room and settled into their seats. There were approximately 20+ students and more than eight teachers present. Before the session started, the teachers coordinated and briefed one another, ensuring a smooth flow of the lesson. A teacher then enthusiastically opened the class, aiming to motivate and engage the students. She began with a fun review, asking the students, "Who can remember the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ?" Several students eagerly raised their hands, their eyes gleaming with excitement.

As the teacher approached the students, extending the microphone towards them, nearly all of them hesitated, stuttering and forgetting some names midway. Observing this, the teacher smiled warmly, patiently guiding them with subtle hints. "Eh, you already mentioned Peter. Start with J... Start with S," she encouraged, helping the students recall the names they had forgotten. One student, eager to impress, attempted to cheat, prompting the teacher to laugh lightheartedly. "Ehh, no cheating, no

cheating. Come on, you got this," she teased. To further incentivize participation, she announced, "Whoever can mention all twelve apostles correctly will get 30 points!" More hands shot up at this challenge, and a particularly enthusiastic student confidently stepped forward to recite the names. Seeing the student's energy, the teacher matched it with the same level of enthusiasm, embracing the student gently while holding the microphone for him. Her approach was filled with warmth and encouragement. "Yeahhh, you did well! Correct! 30 points for you!" she cheered as the student successfully listed the names.

However, midway through the lesson, the teachers encountered an unforeseen challenge. They gathered in front of the desk, engaging in a calm and organized discussion to resolve the issue. Their collective composure was notable, demonstrating an ability to handle problems efficiently. Suddenly, the teacher who had initiated the class stepped out, grabbed her bag, and hurriedly ran down the corridor. Meanwhile, another male teacher seamlessly took over, ensuring continuity in the lesson. He immediately engaged with the class, redirecting the attention of the students who had begun to get distracted.

Raising his voice just enough to command attention yet maintaining a gentle tone, he asked, "Who here brought their water bottle?" A chorus of "Yes!" erupted from the students. "Okay, take your water bottle and hold it in your hand for just one minute," he instructed. As some students didn't have their

water bottles with them, he and the other teachers swiftly handed them marker compartments to use instead. The classroom buzzed with chatter and movement as students prepared for the activity. The male teacher, patient and composed, encouraged them further. "Alright, now extend your arms forward and hold your water bottle like this, just for one minute."

One student, adding to the commotion, mischievously asked, "What if I have a plastic mineral bottle instead?" The teacher shook his head playfully before responding, "It Is still your water bottle! Hold it up." The classroom erupted in laughter as students lifted their water bottles with enthusiasm. However, as the minute dragged on, some began to complain. "Why is it so long?!" a student whined, lowering his hand prematurely. The teacher, seeing this, gently corrected him. "Ehh, don't put your water bottle down just yet!"

To keep the students engaged, the teacher revealed his 'secret weapon.' "If you follow my instructions and hold your water bottle for just one minute, we can play a game afterward," he announced. The energy in the room shifted instantly, students excitedly screamed in agreement, their hands quickly shooting up to hold their bottles again. The teacher, amused, shook his head as he pulled out his phone to set a stopwatch, ensuring the challenge lasted exactly one minute.

As the seconds ticked by, some students sulked, complaining why one minute felt so long. The teacher laughed at the diverse reactions but remained firm in his

instructions. Finally, as the stopwatch beeped, signaling the end of the challenge, all the students let out a collective scream of relief, dropping their bottles and marker compartments instantly. The room once again filled with chatter and movement.

The male teacher then posed a crucial question, "Do you know why I asked you to hold your water bottle?" Some students shouted yes, while others said no. The teacher chuckled at their uncertainty and asked them to explain. When no one could give a clear answer, he revealed, "It is to teach you about patience." The students murmured amongst themselves as the teacher continued, "Now imagine if you had to hold your hand out like that for an entire day. How would that feel?"

"Hurts!" one student shouted.

"Nah, I wouldn't feel anything," another responded confidently.

Various chaotic answers filled the room, prompting the teacher to smile before concluding, "Pain! Of course, you would feel pain. But this exercise teaches you patience."

As the teachers were preparing to transition to the next activity, a student suddenly stood on the couch with his shoes on. The moment did not go unnoticed, and a female teacher quickly intervened. However, rather than reprimanding the student harshly, she chose a different approach, one of reasoning and guidance. Her voice carried authority but was devoid of anger. She began by explaining the problem logically, telling the student that shoes are dirty and should not be placed on the couch.

She continued, emphasizing the

consequences of such an action. If the couch became dirty, it would lead to trouble, not just for the student but for everyone. The church was renting the theater space for their Sunday service, meaning it was not their personal property. It was a shared environment that required care and responsibility. Some students still joked around, one of them playfully saying, "What a big house!" Their lightheartedness did not deter the teacher. Instead of dismissing them, she used the opportunity to reinforce the importance of respect and discipline.

She shifted the discussion to a more profound lesson, reminding the students why they were gathered there in the first place. She explained that they were there to learn, not just about the teachings of Jesus Christ but to align their lives with those teachings. She stressed the ultimate goal of their faith: to live an eternal life with God in heaven. She posed a question to the students, asking them whether they would prefer to go to heaven or to a place of suffering. The room, once filled with chatter, began to quiet down.

The teacher painted a vivid picture of what awaited beyond this world. She spoke of heaven as a beautiful place, a reward for those who lived according to God's will. Then, in contrast, she described the pain and suffering of the alternative. The reality of death was inevitable, this world would not last forever, and neither would their time on it. The idea of burning eternally, of feeling endless pain and suffering, made the students reflect deeply. The tone in the room shifted from playful to contemplative as they

processed her words.

She then connected this lesson back to the life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. His suffering, she explained, was not without purpose, it was for them. She asked them to imagine the weight of carrying a heavy cross while being beaten and mocked, to visualize the immense pain and sacrifice he endured for their sake.

The teacher then shared a personal anecdote from her childhood. She recalled a time when she had misbehaved at a meal, standing on a table or chair, and how her father had reacted sternly. He would have scolded her immediately, ensuring she understood the gravity of her actions. With this story, she hoped to instill in the students a sense of responsibility and discipline.

As she concluded, her words seemed to resonate. The class fell into a hush, the weight of her message settling upon them. The playful energy had dissipated, replaced by quiet contemplation. Her ability to blend guidance with discipline, reasoning with faith, had left a lasting impression on the students.

The female teacher shifted the atmosphere by guiding the students into a collective prayer in the name of Jesus Christ before the worship session began. She instructed all the students to join their hands together in reverence. With a composed yet uplifting voice, she led the prayer, encouraging the students to repeat after her in unison. The room filled with synchronized voices as they prayed for a smooth and blessed class.

While the prayer took place, the other

teachers diligently prepared for the worship session. A large screen was set up, displaying a music video intended to engage the students through song and movement. One of the male teachers, with a bright and encouraging tone, instructed all the students to stand up and get ready to dance and sing together. Some students hesitated at first, glancing at their peers, but as the melody began, their initial reluctance faded. Slowly, they rose to their feet, their energy ignited by the enthusiasm of their teachers.

The first song was an upbeat and lively worship song. The teachers immersed themselves entirely in the moment, their devotion evident in how they lifted their arms, reaching out towards the sky as they sang with full hearts. They swayed from left to right, their voices harmonizing as they guided the students through the lyrics. Encouraged by their teachers' enthusiasm, the students began following along, some still reserved, while others eagerly danced and sang. Laughter and joyous expressions filled the room as the collective energy grew stronger.

As the song reached its climax, the atmosphere radiated warmth and gratitude. The students and teachers moved together in a synchronized rhythm, their love and devotion to God expressed through their voices and movements. The first song concluded, transitioning smoothly into a second song, one that carried a softer, more ballad-like tone. The change in pace evoked a shift in emotion among the teachers and students alike. The teachers, still swaying

gently, continued singing with eyes closed, their voices unwavering. Some teachers even teared up, overcome with emotion, but they did not let it hinder their praise. Instead, they used this moment to encourage the students further, emphasizing the importance of worship and gratitude.

As the second song ended, the students instinctively began to sit down, assuming the worship session was over. However, another song unexpectedly started playing, catching some of them off guard. Confusion flickered across their faces as they exchanged glances with one another. The teachers, unfazed by the students' reactions, quickly reassured them with warm smiles and guiding gestures. They cheerfully instructed the students to stand back up for one more song, a brand-new worship song that they were about to learn together.

Excitement mixed with fatigue as some students hesitated while others eagerly embraced the challenge. The teachers took the lead once more, demonstrating the movements and lyrics with the same boundless enthusiasm they had maintained throughout the session. They danced with unwavering energy, clapping their hands and singing loudly to uplift the students. Some students, already tired from the previous songs, slowed their movements or stopped dancing entirely. Observing this, some teachers responded with laughter while others shook their heads playfully. They refused to give up on the students, continuously motivating them to engage in the worship, emphasizing the importance of

expressing their love for God through song and movement.

As the worship ended, the female teacher engaged the students by posing a question, asking whether today marked the beginning of a new month. Some students responded with a hesitant "no," while others enthusiastically said "yes." With a playful yet confused expression, she exclaimed, "Hey! Of course, this is the new month! It is March. A new month means a new song, and that is why we had another one, the last one."

It turned out that each new month brought a fresh song for worship, highlighting the teachers' dedication to continuously teaching and encouraging the students to express their love for God. This tradition of introducing new songs every month served as a way to keep the students engaged and deepen their connection to their faith through worship.

Transitioning into the next activity, the focus shifted to teaching the principles of Jesus Christ, particularly the importance of working together. This activity aimed to shape the students' identities while aligning them with the teachings of Jesus Christ. The screen displayed a verse from Ecclesiastes 4:9-12: "Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help."

The male teacher took the lead in this activity, grabbing the students' attention with a rolled-up piece of paper resembling a stick in his hand. With a warm and engaging tone, he encouraged the students to read the verse

together, guiding them as they repeated the words after him. Afterward, he posed a question, "Now, why is two better than one, hm?" while twirling the rolled paper in his hand, playfully pointing it at the students.

The students responded with various answers, some humorous and random, such as "Bigger is better!" The male teacher laughed but continued prompting them for a deeper response. Eventually, one student provided the correct answer: "To help each other." Nodding in approval, the male teacher confirmed the response, emphasizing that helping each other was a fundamental lesson from the verse.

To demonstrate this concept, he called three male students to the front. As expected, the three most boisterous students confidently stepped forward. The teacher then instructed two of them to extend one arm while bending the other, holding onto their elbows to form an 'L' shape. Though playful and slightly distracted, the two students followed the instructions as the male teacher guided them to connect their arms, creating a square shape in the middle.

Next, the male teacher directed them to squat down. However, their constant joking and movement made it difficult for one of them to maintain a proper squatting position. Rather than reprimanding them, the male teacher maintained a patient and lighthearted approach. He then instructed the third student to sit in the middle of the connected arms. As the third student settled into position, the teacher asked the two standing students to lift him. Due to their improper stance, they

struggled to do so. Instead of expressing frustration, the male teacher calmly told them to sit back down.

The male teacher then asked the students, "Now, why did they not succeed?" Almost immediately, some students responded, "Because they were messing around!" The male teacher nodded in agreement and confirmed, "Yes! Because they were messing around." The three boys involved in the demonstration erupted in protest, exclaiming, "Hey! That's not fair, that's not true!" Their playful riot brought laughter to the class as they tried to defend themselves. The male teacher chuckled and explained, "If you weren't messing around, you could have squatted perfectly and successfully lifted your friend."

At this point, the female teacher stepped in and called out three girls to take on the same challenge. With patience and guidance from both teachers, the girls followed the instructions carefully. In no time, they managed to complete the task successfully, lifting their teammate without any difficulty. The male teacher then turned to the boys and said, "See! If you boys weren't messing around, you could have succeeded just like the girls did." The three boys, unwilling to concede, immediately protested, "That's not fair! They are all small!" attempting to justify their earlier failure.

The female teacher, defending the girls, responded, "Ei, all of them are the same height. That is why you do not mess around." Her statement was met with laughter from the students, as the boys tried to come up with

another excuse. One of the boys then turned to the male teacher and argued, "No wait, you were supporting the girls so she would not fall when she was lifted up in the air!" The male teacher playfully raised his hands in surrender and said, "Ah ah ah, that is where you are wrong. I only supported them just before they were lifted, not when they were in the air. That's why you need to work together in order to succeed, everyone." The boys pouted in response, still reluctant to accept their defeat, while the rest of the class burst into laughter, enjoying the lighthearted moment.

As the last activity began, the screen changed to an illustration of Moses and Joshua battling the Amalekites. The male teacher, still holding his rolled paper stick, grabbed the students' attention by announcing, "Today, we will be learning about Moses!" A chorus of excited voices filled the room as the students eagerly shouted, "Yay, Moses!" Their enthusiasm was evident as they sat up straighter, their curiosity piqued.

The male teacher began narrating the story of Moses and Joshua versus the Amalekites, explaining how Moses was already old when the Amalekites decided to challenge the Israelites to battle. "Why?" he asked, pausing for dramatic effect. "Because they were jealous. They saw how God blessed every step of Moses' journey, and that made them angry." He then turned to the students and posed a question: "Have you ever felt jealous before?" Some students eagerly shouted "Yes!" while others shook their heads and

said "No." The teacher nodded and continued, illustrating the feeling of jealousy in a relatable way. "Imagine thinking, 'I want it to be me. Why is it always them?' Have you ever felt like that?" Some students murmured in agreement, while others thoughtfully considered the question.

He then went on to explain that, due to his old age, Moses could no longer fight in battles himself. However, the Amalekites were persistent in their desire for battle. This led to one of the most iconic moments in Moses' story when he lifted his staff in the air.

Quoting from the Bible, the teacher recited:

Then Amalek came and fought with Israel. So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." So Joshua did as Moses told him and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword.

As he told the story, the male teacher playfully demonstrated Moses' actions using his rolled paper stick, dramatically lifting it into the air. "AHHH, I SHALL PREVAIL!" he declared in a theatrical voice, making the

students laugh. Then, he slumped slightly, pretending to be tired. "Oh no, my arms... I have to keep them up!" He dramatically wobbled before lifting them again, emphasizing the struggle Moses faced.

The students laughed at his exaggerated movements but listened intently, fully engaged in the story. Through his lively retelling, they not only enjoyed the lesson but also grasped its significance. The male teacher then clapped his hands together, signaling to the students as he announced, "Let's bring this story to life!" With enthusiasm in his voice, he explained the next activity: each student would receive a small, pentagon-shaped yellow paper to draw the face of Moses. He held up an example of his own drawing, which made some students laugh and others more eager to begin.

"After you finish drawing," he continued, "we'll stick the faces onto this cut board, which will serve as Moses' body. Then, one by one, you'll come forward, and we'll help you glue a cut straw onto the arms of the board to represent Moses' staff." Excitement filled the room as some students rushed forward to grab markers themselves, while others waited patiently as the teachers handed out markers and paper. The male teacher reminded them, "You can draw on the table or your chair, but not on the sofa!" The female teacher added, "Yes, let's be careful. And you can draw Moses however you like! You can even give him purple hair if you want, who knows?" The male teacher laughed and agreed, "That's true! But one thing's for certain, he was a man!"

As the students immersed themselves in their drawings, an unfortunate accident occurred, a student left a stain on the couch from the marker. The two teachers immediately rushed over, working together to clean the stain with wet wipes. Thankfully, the stain was removable, and they kindly reminded the students to stick to drawing on the table. Meanwhile, the other teachers assisted the students in gluing the cut straws to Moses' arms on the cut board. Bit by bit, the collaborative artwork of Moses came to life, and the students took pride in their contributions.

Not long after, the partner of the researcher entered the classroom, reuniting with the researcher who had been in charge of the observation. Time had flown by, and before they knew it, the lesson was coming to an end. However, the teachers ensured that the students tidied up before leaving. The students proudly displayed their finished artwork before preparing to go home.

As the final part of the class, the teachers led a closing prayer, thanking Jesus Christ for the lesson they had learned and the blessings they had received. The prayer concluded the session, but the teachers' care extended beyond the lesson itself. One of the teachers noticed a sick student and kindly assisted them, ensuring they safely made their way to their parents waiting outside.

Experiencing this ministerial practice firsthand, the Sunday school lesson left a lasting impression on us. It was not only a place for educating children but also a space for laying the foundation of faith and guiding

them to navigate life in accordance with the teachings of Jesus Christ. Inspired by the dedication and impact of the teachers, we made up our minds to interview one of them, hoping to gain deeper insight into their profound experience as minister and the reason that led them to take up this path.

The participant for our preliminary research is a very welcoming and enthusiastic Sunday school teacher who works in the church, asking whether we've already eaten some of the snacks outside. Before we began the interview, we asked to record the interview process through audio, and she was more than happy to allow us to do so. As the interview began, she introduced herself to us as Mary Serlene Joy Gonzales-Hermo, however she is better known as Teacher 'Apple' in the church community. Mary mentioned that this nickname originated from when she was born as her family members thought that she looked like an apple with no hair as a baby. She is currently 37 years old, coming from the Philippines, and is currently working as a teacher here in Indonesia for about 14 years now.

In the church ministry, her role and responsibilities involve being part of the teacher volunteers for the kids' church, specifically teaching children who are aged six to nine. However, she occasionally teaches preteens who are aged nine to thirteen as well. Another occupation that Mary has outside of the church ministry is working as a teacher in Springfield school, particularly teaching grade 7 science. She often guides her students in school during assembly for

chapel time, a moment of daily devotion before the subjects begin.

Mary began her ministry at a remarkably young age at 10, when she first attended Sunday school or a kids' church. It was during her participation in Sunday school that she felt a deep connection, perhaps a calling, to the children's ministry. After doing so for two years, her own Sunday school teachers recognized the potential in her to teach those who were younger than her in church. This was the moment in which Mary felt that it was a spiritual calling, a sense of purpose for her to join the ministry. This became a passion for her, and she fell in love with the act of teaching and volunteering in church. So by the age of 12, she began teaching the kids in Sunday school about religious stories, and this passion persisted up to adulthood.

Her participation in the church ministry continued up until Mary got into college. After she graduated college, she moved to Indonesia to follow her family in 2010. As she is in a new country, the first thing that she tries to do is find a job so that she can support herself and her family. Mary decided to try to become a teacher due to her passion for teaching children, however, she didn't have any teaching qualifications. Instead, she graduated with a medical degree as a registered nurse. However, Mary managed to get hired as a teacher due to her experience in teaching kids in the church ministry for quite a long time. She believed and felt that being a part of the ministry has always been a part of her identity. She also

mentioned that being around kids always felt like a blessing to her.

The reason why Mary chose this specific teaching role in her church ministry is because she felt that she had a spiritual calling that made her fall in love with the idea of teaching. However, at first, the reason why she kept coming and volunteering at the kids' church was because she loved the snacks and games provided for them. But the longer she was a teacher there, the more she started to notice the small things such as the smiles of the kids as they were playing the games, and she could imagine how their future would turn out. These tiny details made her happy, and they gave her a sense of purpose as well. One thing that always occurred to her was that she knew that she was teaching the future of our generation and that she and the other teachers were instilling faith in them. Mary knew and believed that what she was doing and teaching the kids would impact and change the world.

Although Mary was initially influenced by the people around her, such as her Sunday school teachers to join the ministry, eventually she grew to enjoy it, believing it to be a spiritual calling. When she first came to Indonesia, she went to a new church that required teachers for the Sunday school service. Nobody other than her was willing to step up and volunteer for the role, so she decided to volunteer believing that God would help her and guide her through these responsibilities. According to Mary's beliefs, God will always be there to equip you and provide you with everything that you

need to do the things that you love, and in her case, that would be for teaching. This choice to join the ministry was also heavily encouraged by her whole family, who were also volunteers in the church ministry with different roles and responsibilities. For instance, her father works as a pastor, and her mother also leads the church. Mary's husband also assists her in teaching children in Sunday school. Overall, they were extremely supportive of her decision to be a part of the ministry.

When asked about her experience in the church ministry so far, Mary mentioned that her journey felt like a roller coaster. Over the years of teaching, she encountered different sorts of kids that may require special attention. Some of the kids were really excited and eager to learn, however, there were also kids who were only there because their parents forced them to be. Some of the kids often mess around during the service as well, which made it difficult to teach them. So despite having a passion for being in the ministry, Mary does acknowledge that it is quite challenging to teach and provide love to the kids who are quite challenging to love. Despite these obstacles, she tries her best to be extremely gracious to the children as they might need it. She talks about how there are different factors that could influence a child's behavior, such as their home environment. Therefore, she notices that sometimes, a reason why these kids come to church is because they might be wounded and are in need of help from others. Overall, Mary tries her best to guide and support them through

faith and devotional teachings in the Sunday school service.

For Mary, being a part of the ministry is her entire life. She believes that she couldn't be without it as she had attempted to not go to church for a short while to take a break, but it instead left her feeling drained. Mary mentioned that she will always need to be a part of the ministry as to her it is a source of inspiration, giving her a sense of accomplishment and purpose. She said that it really seemed like a spiritual calling as she felt that God was always 'knocking on her door' to volunteer and be a part of the ministry. As Mary believed that God had always been good to her, guiding her along her life, she felt that being a part of the ministry and becoming a Sunday school teacher would be the least that she could do to repay him.

Our preliminary interview findings indicate that spiritual calling is a central force influencing individuals' decisions to enter ministry. The interviewee described their choice to become a minister as deeply rooted in a sense of higher purpose, suggesting that spiritual calling serves as a guiding framework for their vocational journey. Given this recurring theme, we position spiritual calling as the primary construct of this study, shaping our exploration of how church ministers experience and embody their roles.

Field Observation

On Sunday, April 20, 2025, coinciding with Easter Day, three interviewees attended IES PIK church's Easter Sunday service as part

of a field observation. One participant joined the teen service while the other two attended the adult service, which commenced at 10:00 AM. The adult service began with a time of worship led by a choir of ten members. The opening song carried a low, melancholic tune, setting a reflective and solemn tone for the congregation. Several attendees were observed raising their hands and gently swaying to the music, fully engaged in the worship experience. One of the worship leaders became visibly emotional, shedding tears while singing. The music ensemble consisted of six singers, a drummer, a keyboardist, a bassist, and a guitarist, with the congregation actively singing along throughout the worship segment.

Following the musical worship, the second agenda involved a collective prayer focused on Easter and the theme of spiritual victory. This portion of the service proved to be deeply moving for many, as some members of the congregation were seen crying during the prayer. Afterwards, announcements were made regarding offerings designated for charity and upcoming baptisms. These announcements were visually supported by information displayed on a large screen.

The church also highlighted its “life group” program, small community groups designed to strengthen faith through discussion and fellowship. A testimonial video, particularly involving children, was shown to illustrate the impact of these groups. A special musical performance followed, featuring a song titled *worthy*, which echoed the earlier melancholic tone and further deepened the atmosphere of spiritual reflection.

The next part of the service transitioned into gospel reading, with messages focusing on dedicating one's heart to the Lord. The pastor, described as engaging and lively, led the congregation into the Holy Communion. Scripture passages related to the resurrection of Jesus were read aloud, specifically referencing Mark 16:1–13, which emphasizes the power of resurrection. The congregation was then guided through the traditional act of partaking in the Holy Communion, involving the symbolic eating and drinking in remembrance of Christ.

In his sermon, the pastor connected the Easter message to everyday evangelism by sharing his own experiences of holding Bible study sessions in a coffee shop with friends. He encouraged visitors to join in such discussions and emphasized the broader mission of reconciliation with God and making disciples. The service concluded with another segment of worship and prayer, during which many congregants once again raised their hands in devotion. The final song was upbeat and celebratory, titled *Because He Lives*, marked the joyful conclusion of the Easter service, welcoming the resurrection of Christ.

After the service ended, the three researchers regrouped in the main hall. Working collaboratively, they began searching for and successfully located the three intended interview participants: TJ, AM, and SM. Once identified, the researchers approached each individual, introduced themselves, and secured their agreement to participate in the post-service interviews.

The field observation of the Sunday service provided valuable insights into the lived

experiences of ministry in action. We were able to witness firsthand the structure and flow of the service, which typically followed a well-organized agenda consisting of praise and worship, prayer, sermon delivery, and communal reflection. The ambience was reverent yet warm, fostering a sense of spiritual intimacy and collective participation. Ministers played a crucial role not only in delivering theological messages but also in navigating the emotional and spiritual tone of the congregation. Their leadership was marked by a balance of authority and empathy, as they engaged the congregation through both scripted liturgy and spontaneous encouragement. Congregants responded with attentiveness, vocal affirmation, and active participation, suggesting a deep sense of connection and shared belief. This immersive observation enriched our understanding of how ministers embody their calling in real-time and how their presence, tone, and relational skills contribute to shaping a spiritually resonant worship experience.

Social Influences and Challenges

The journey of church ministers usually are shaped by social influences that extend beyond the spiritual realm which affects their roles, decision-making processes, and overall ministerial experiences. These influences often emerge from family, community expectations, cultural norms, and societal pressures, creating both support and challenges that ministers must navigate in their spiritual journey. Reflecting on the fact that each individual has their own experience and interaction with their social surroundings, it is expected that each individual

has their own unique outcome that differs from others, even if they still end up sharing some similarities by the end of the day.

One of the most significant social influences on ministers is family upbringing and early socialization. Being raised in religious households where faith practices, church attendance, and spiritual discussions were integral parts of daily life not only shapes their spiritual beliefs but also plants the seeds for ministerial calling. This foundational exposure to faith by family members often serve as early role models, demonstrating acts of service, community involvement, and spiritual commitment that inspire young individuals to pursue ministry. In some cases, family expectations could also play a critical role, where children of pastors or deacons may feel a natural pull towards continuing the legacy of service within the church community.

For example, TJ, one of our participant, is a ministry member who's journey in ministry starts with early exposure to religious things by his dad who is a pastor and mom who is a sunday school teacher which not only made him exposed to the idea of it but also inspired or motivated him to devote himself to God. He stated that:

My dad's the pastor, my mom is a sunday school teacher, but she teaches here in one of the local schools and then yeah we're a very tightly-knit family. [...] I think like all of us are involved in ministry we were just inspired by the zeal and the like the outflow the overflow of faith from my mother and father, and we saw how the lord just really rewarded them in their

ministry and because of that we grew in our faith to the point that we also wanted to express our love through ministry as well (TJ, 27).

This statement highlights that the foundational experiences within a family environment not only expose individuals to faith practices but also inspire them to actively participate in ministry work. TJ's journey underscores how early exposure to ministry roles through family members can plant seeds of devotion that blossom into a lifelong commitment to church service. His narrative illustrates that the spiritual passion or devotion demonstrated by his parents was not just a mere display of faith, but a continuous influence that shaped his perspective and passion for ministry. TJ's parents also shaped his passion for the ministry by not only exposing him to it but also supporting him on his journey as a ministry member. This is mentioned by TJ in one of his answers as he said, "My parents were very happy. Because my mom's a Sunday school teacher. [...] My dad's very supportive of our decision to be in ministry. In fact, he really encourages us" which highlights that his parents are very supportive of his decisions, ultimately influencing him to continue his journey in the ministry.

Similarly, one of our subjects with the name SM shares a bit of similarity to TJ as he grew up exposed to Christianity. His father was a pastor as he directly confessed that, "My father was a pastor, but I didn't follow his footsteps. I didn't believe in his teachings. I was like carefree person so until one day probably around 11." His answer not only outlines the

shared similarity, it also shows how the 'family' factor does not affect his journey that much, offering another perspective that is unique. The case of SM here proves that each individual has their own unique outcome that differs from others despite sharing some similarities or factors.

AM, another subject in this research, also had family influence as his starting point, although his experience differs from TJ's and SM's. First of all, he stated that he did not come from a good family background as he stated, "my family isn't rich you know the typical story you know of growing up like that. [...] my family got separated" regarding his background growing up. His family also does not adhere to Christianity as he mentioned that "Because I grew up in a family who loves to sing. Yeah, every Saturday, Sunday, karaoke like that. But then the family wasn't Christian." Instead, the way he got exposed and grew fond of the church and ministry works is by finding a 'family' in the church community, feeling accepted and loved by them. AM stated that:

I found family through my other families and then to the life of my friend and of course to the church. So back then in the Philippines I was always excited to be weekend Saturday Sunday because I will be my... with my spiritual family (AM, 32).

This answer from AM illuminates the transformative power of the church as a spiritual family, particularly for individuals facing instability and separation in their biological families. Unlike TJ or SM, whose ministerial path was nurtured through family

influence, AM's connection to ministry was cultivated through the emotional support and acceptance he found within his church community. For him, the church embodied a sense of belonging and a sanctuary of unconditional love. It became a place where he could escape the hardships of his upbringing and embrace a new form of family through shared faith. His anticipation for weekends spent with his "spiritual family" in the Philippines reflects the depth of this connection. In this sacred space, AM discovered the whisper of the divine calling him not just into faith, but into a community that embraced him fully as the church not only offered him a place to grow spiritually but also a network of relationships that filled the void left by familial separation.

Another significant social influence regarding the journey to spiritual calling or devotion to God is peer influence. Peer influence itself is defined as instances where one person affects, or is affected by, one other or multiple others who are similar in age (Laursen & Veenstra, 2021). In the context of a spiritual calling, peer influence often acts as both a catalyst and a sustaining force. Being surrounded by faith-driven individuals provides affirmation and encouragement, reinforcing one's commitment to spiritual growth and ministry. This factor is projected in TJ's experience as he stated that:

Another reason, when I was 14 years old, all the pretty girls were inside Sunday school. So for me, because we were in teens and then my crush was serving in Sunday school, I was also like, Gabby's

over there. What if I ask, can I also help out in Sunday school? And then they said, yeah, sure, we have an opening (TJ, 27).

This statement from TJ signifies that he first joined ministry works at first due to his past crush or love interest during his teenage years. To him, peer influence acts as a catalyst that started his journey in ministry works. Thus, peer influence not only supports but sometimes initiates the sacred path to answering God's call.

Similarly, to AM, our other subject, peer influence is a catalyst to him that kick started his journey. He stated that:

When I got invited to a youth service by our very persistent, you know, classmate named Elijah Marie, a girl. [...] And then when I saw at first the praise and worship, it's like everything that has breath, praise the Lord forever. The pastor was singing. [...] and then I felt a different happiness with this joy. Like, oh, so I do not feel this one weekly. But now I'm feeling a different sense of happiness and joy. But then I said, I would love to be part of the praise and worship. And I think that was, why am I being emotional? So I said, yeah, I think this kind of joy that I find in singing, I can do it there for the Lord. So that's the story (AM, 32).

AM's experience illustrates how peer influence can act as a powerful catalyst in igniting one's spiritual calling. His journey began with a simple invitation to a youth service by a persistent classmate named Elijah Marie. What seemed like an ordinary invitation transformed into a profound encounter with

faith. AM vividly recalls his first experience of praise and worship, where the collective act of singing praises to God stirred a unique sense of joy within him. He described it as a feeling of happiness unlike anything he experienced on a regular basis, a joy that felt deeply fulfilling and spiritually significant. That single event, initiated through the encouragement of a peer, awakened a desire within AM to participate in praise and worship, marking the beginning of his spiritual journey.

While social aspects in life could act as something that ignites an individual's journey in divine calling and devotion to God or expose the idea of it and nurture them with it, it could also be something that invites challenges to the individuals in their spiritual journey. Things such as societal pressure and hardships are prime examples on how society could invite challenges to an individual as hardships and societal pressures push one to seek solace, meaning, and overcome these challenges. Each individual has their own unique challenges that they face with each their own way to deal and overcome them. By overcoming these challenges, one usually gets rewarded with something within oneself.

For example, TJ, one of our subjects, stated the following regarding his experience with challenges and how he dealt with it:

When you are looking for your calling, I myself struggled with it a lot of the time because the world is so noisy. And then there are so many things like busyness from the corporate world, distractions as well, that's trying to take away your attention from Jesus. And then when you

really focus yourself on Jesus, His heart and His love naturally overflows out of you as you nurture your relationship with Him. And you start to find joy in what He finds joy in (TJ, 27).

This signifies that despite the distractions and societal pressures that often cloud one's spiritual path, maintaining a focused relationship with God can bring clarity and purpose. TJ's experience highlights the tension between worldly distractions—such as career demands and societal expectations—and the quiet call of spiritual devotion. His response to these challenges reflects a conscious choice to center his life around his relationship with Jesus, allowing that connection to become a source of strength and joy. This illustrates how, even amidst external noise and pressure, spiritual focus can ground one's sense of calling and provide the resilience needed to overcome social-based challenges. For TJ, the act of redirecting his attention back to Christ not only reaffirmed his purpose but also allowed him to find joy in alignment with divine will, demonstrating that perseverance in faith can transform challenges into growth.

Divine Guidance

Every day, most people experience a range of emotions that could be described as feeling lost, confused, or doubtful about several aspects of their lives. At times, they may find themselves alone, without anyone to talk to or seek guidance from. This raises the question: who can they turn to in such moments? For religious individuals, the answer is often God. In difficult times, they may seek comfort and direction through prayer or by reading sacred

texts. They would often ask what is their purpose in life or what would God want them to do. This act of faith can be described by a theological term known as divine guidance, which will be explored further in this analysis. Divine guidance may be understood in two different ways. Some define it as the doctrine for determining the will of God for your life in general things, specific things, and the believer's mindset. Others may describe it as the communication of God's will through God's means of revelation, which is through scripture. Broadly speaking, in Christian tradition, divine guidance encompasses the influence and direction believed to come from God, which helps individuals apply Christian principles to their daily life and societal issues.

Our participants have multiple unique reasons for why they decided to take part in the church ministry. Take our first participant, TJ, for example. TJ is the youngest participant in our research who was raised by a religious family that was fully involved in the ministry. His decision to join the ministry as a Sunday School teacher was also influenced by his upbringing, however he did develop a passion for teaching kids eventually. He mentioned that:

And then God just put, it's just God putting love in my heart for these kids. And as time went on, like, you know, you don't lose that fire because God continues to fill you each time you go (TJ, 27).

In this statement, TJ believes that God was the one who ignited the passion inside of him to carry out his will. Although his initial motivation to join the ministry was because he

was interested in someone, saying that, "my crush was serving in Sunday school, I was also like, Gabby's over there. What if I ask, can I also help out in Sunday school?", he began to genuinely enjoy being a Sunday School teacher. When he talked about his experiences of teaching, there was a sincere sense of joy and enthusiasm. TJ mentioned that when the kids started talking about Jesus, and he got to act out the bible stories for the kids, it gave him a sense of fulfillment. It's moments like those that made TJ believe that God was guiding him to do his will by expanding his love for his teaching responsibilities in the ministry. In the quote, TJ used the term *fire* to express his never-fading passion that is unlikely to be put out as God is the one who will keep it alive and burning. He trusts in God's divine guidance that he would never lose the passion to continue doing his will.

Despite enjoying his role in the ministry, there were some obstacles that he encountered along his ministerial journey. TJ talked about a time where he experienced burnout due to his Sunday School team leaving him, forcing him to lead the Sunday School activities all on his own. Recalling the experience, he stated:

I will admit there were times where we experienced burnout. Especially when my whole Sunday school team just left me. And then I did it from worship until the end. I led worship. I led the tithes and offerings. And then I led the warm-up. I taught the lesson. I did the arts and crafts. Aduh, after that, I ngambek. Where's my team? Yeah, so after that, you know, there are times that, you know, especially when

life at home or life in church or life in school (TJ, 27).

Although TJ expressed dissatisfaction and annoyance towards these moments as he felt pressured and tired from his responsibilities, he said that he still “loves life”. This shows a great amount of resilience and determination that despite facing these challenges, he still enjoys and has an appreciation for it. This determination may have originated from the divine guidance of God that allows him to continue doing his ministerial responsibilities. But why is TJ so sure that this is God’s will? Before choosing and making a final decision to be a Sunday School teacher, he tried out different roles in the ministry which included being part of the worship team, the multimedia team, and an usher. However, despite trying out these various roles, none of them suits him like being a Sunday School teacher. He truly believed that doing so, is what God guided him to do, which can be seen in his reflection:

But you know, when you really know that God's calling for you and where you really find joy. Like for me, I can teach kids. Like my dad, if you give him a mic, he can preach all day. He will talk all day. For me, I can play with kids all day long. It's the same energy. So there were times that I was asking God, is this really my calling? Is this really where I'm going to commit myself? But God just really equips you with that desire, with that skill as well to do your ministry. So that's when I got the confirmation (TJ, 27).

Ultimately, TJ believes that God made sure that teaching the kids in Sunday School was his true calling, as he found true joy in his role. He compared himself to his dad, saying that both of them would be able to carry out their ministry responsibilities all day long. For his dad it was preaching, for TJ it was teaching and playing with the kids. Although there were times that he was doubtful, questioning if it was truly his calling, eventually he felt that God has confirmed it as he had the desire and skill to do well in his ministry.

Our next participant, AM, discusses with us about his role and responsibility in the church ministry as one of the worship leaders. He described to us about how he often feels in being a worship leader, his experiences, and struggles. He often felt anxious and pressured due to the choices of songs that he had to make, and the amount of people he had to perform into. In times like these, he often looks inward and reflects on how God would be able to guide him through it to successfully lead the worship session. This is how he conveyed his experience:

So here in IES I lead the worship one of the worship leaders but back in the Philippines also I was leading the worship also there so the responsibility of course to equip you know ourselves myself first to dwell in the spirit you know to understand what the song is you know and what the lord wants to imply to me to the people you know because it's not just about me, it's you know at the moment I cannot really explain you know it's really difficult then yea uh there's also pressure you know uh

in doing that like am I worthy you know of leading the congregation that's why repenting just like what was shared earlier repenting is really happening all the time lord and then another pressure is like what song lord it's already wednesday thursday and the message is already yeah and then in the group chat they're waiting for the songs especially in northwest like that song and then yeah that's those are like the responsibilities you know first you know to align myself you know to the word so that I can be people it's not like directly leading the people I need to equip also myself so that's what I can share (AM, 32).

From this reflection, we can see that AM had to understand what the song is about, asking God about what he wanted to imply to the people in church before worship. This shows that he relies on divine guidance to guide him to lead the congregation, to be able to make sure that the people could also understand the song in the God intends to. AM expresses doubt and anxiety due to the pressuring responsibilities of being a worship leader, however he still believes that this is what God wanted him to do as God gave him the skills to do so. Additionally, the reason for why he became a worship leader was due to the influence from his family, as his family loved to sing in karaokes. He was so skillful at singing that his family told him to join a singing competition. However, due to his lack of confidence, he denied the offer and got invited to join the ministry instead. Here AM talks about his journey and background of how he joined the ministry:

The Lord really planned it. You know, it wasn't an accident. It wasn't also an accident that I was not invited to sing in a singing competition. Is I might not be, you know, in the ministry without would be busy. And, you know, actually, no, I do not see myself like a skillful enough in doing that. So but there is really something that I don't know what people see, which I always glorify God to that because I don't know. For me, I'm really unworthy of it. I'm really like, I'm just I'm doing it for the Lord. And then whatever they say, you know, I don't do not actually want to listen, you know, because there's a danger like you're getting the glory. I do not just give it back to the Lord. No, no, no, no. It's not me. No, it's not about me because ever since I do not count myself as a qualified singer. That's why I did not have the confidence and the chance as well. But then, yeah, so that's how it started. Our family loves to sing. And then when I got invited to a youth service by our very persistent, you know, classmate named Elijah Marie, a girl. And then when I saw at first the praise and worship, it's like everything that has breath, praise the Lord forever. The pastor was singing. And then that's the time that, okay, I got this happiness singing at the house, let's say, having fun with my cousin. But when I was singing there, it was my first time listening to the song. And then I felt a different happiness with this joy. Like, oh, so I do not feel this one weekly. But now I'm feeling a different sense of happiness and

joy. But then I said, I would love to be part of the praise and worship. And I think that was, why am I being emotional? (AM, 32).

To AM, all of these happened because of fate, not because of coincidence, but it was what God wanted him to do. Not joining the singing competition allowed him to spare some time to eventually meet the one girl who invited him to a youth service. It led him to experience the praise and worship of the church service for the first time, and in that moment, God's divine guidance developed a sense of curiosity and passion to be a part of it. Despite not having the confidence to sing in front of people, AM trusted in God to be a part of the ministry and lead the worship session, developing a true happiness and joy in doing so.

Moving on to our last participant, SM, who takes the role of a pastor in the ministry. He too experienced challenges and struggles in his upbringing that eventually led to the decision of him being religious and joining the ministry. Initially, SM was an atheist who didn't believe in God, but a series of events strengthened his faith, leading him on a spiritual journey. He shared with us a story from his childhood, where he believed that divine guidance was present, making him believe that God was real:

so suddenly, I felt like there was a hand, you know, pulling my leg up, by the way, before that happened, you know, I screamed out to God, I screamed out at the top of my voice, God, I don't believe in you, but if you exist, this is about the time, this is it, tell me that you are there, and

then suddenly, I felt like a big hand was carrying me from the bottom of my feet, lifted my feet up and put me inside the carriage, and then when I was there, you know, because I saw my shoes torn and scratches on my, on my, both my feet and a little blood here and there, and I was going to say thank you to the person who, because I thought somebody was actually pulling me up and those people around me were looking at me, and they didn't say anything and I said well I want to say thank you guys you saved me and then one of them said what no he's such a strong boy you put yourself up we thought that you would actually die, and I said no really I did not pull myself up I said somebody lived and since that time I started believe it means what my dad told me is right yeah and that after that I started reading the Bible every day you know one thing about the Bible it's very easy to read because it's in bahasa, so I wasn't speaking English, yet you know when I was 11, so I read you know page by page and I got so hooked up with it (SM, 53).

This life-threatening experience was the beginning of a lifelong obsession and passion with God and Christianity. As he screamed to God for help in act of desperation, against all odds, he was somehow saved. To him it seemed like a miracle that came true, a prayer answered by God. This showed him that God was indeed real, and that he should start believing in him by reading through the scriptures. Eventually, because of this spiritual experience, he started

to join the ministry as a pastor as he had read the words of the Bible enough that he memorized most of it. So according to SM, God guided him to join the ministry by giving him that experience:

Oh, wonderful. How did I get into the ministry? Actually, I didn't plan to get into the ministry. Because since the first event, my spiritual event, I call it spiritual experience, saving me from death. Then I got myself into a habit of reading the Bible. I read the Bible from Genesis right up to Revelation, back and forth. And because of that particular habit, I got somehow an understanding of the scriptures. You know, when you read the book, a particular book back and forth many, many times, everything sticks into your mind. You know, even you remember the flow of the story and whatsoever (SM, 53).

So eventually, SM began preaching not just in the ministry, but to other people too which included his friends. As he often preaches, many people tend to ask him a lot of interesting questions, which he was able to answer because he read the Bible enough times to understand it. He enjoyed talking to people as he got the chance to explain theological concepts and how God works to others. However, there were times where people who don't believe in God would probe him with questions, and sometimes SM wasn't able to answer them. But he was determined enough to be able to prove God's existence, reflecting inwards and asking God for guidance on how to answer such questions. He told us about a

specific friend in Hong Kong who asked him about God's existence:

You know, it's a field for those almost genius people. And then he said, don't believe in God, Sam. Why? His name was Evan. Why Evan? Because everything started with the Big Bang. You know, he explained everything, the evolution theory, you know. And then I said, yeah, Sam, your mind is not up there yet. Even you asked me about, you know, to teach you about mathematics. I asked him to teach me a lot of issues in mathematics. And then one day, I remember, one day I was praying. God, help me. I want to talk with this. He's smarter than me. I believe in you, but he doesn't. How can I connect with him? I cannot compete in the area of, you know, knowledge. Because he's, of course, he's smarter (SM, 53).

Despite acknowledging that his friend was smarter than him, SM believed that God's guidance would be able to help him answer his friend's question. Sure enough, he was able to demonstrate an analogy using a pen that he received as a gift, making his friend believe in God's existence. His explanation even got his friend to be interested in going to church, where SM accompanied him through it. So at times where he was struggling to answer questions about God, he believed that God would guide him and give him an answer so that he can preach about his word to others. So as a Christian, he developed a true hobby and passion for preaching. He excitedly preached to us about the Jesus Christ's teachings:

All right. For myself, I like to keep on preaching because I know that the messages that I can deliver out of the Holy Bible will inspire the lives of many others. One of the greatest teachings of Jesus Christ, keep doing good even to those who do evil to you. And I believe that is the highest standard that we can find. And some people might not agree with that, but there is great wisdom. Because he, Jesus, explained to every one of us, we have to keep doing good even to those who do evil. People who are good are those who are able to do good to those who do evil to them. If we do evil to those who do evil to us, that's normal. That is not good. That is normal. If we do evil to those who do good to us, that's evil. And then normal, but there is another level, it's called good. Good is above normal. So, we are able to do good to those who do evil to us. So, I like to keep inspiring people because there are so many teachings from Jesus Christ that the world needs to know. And the world will be in a better place if they can... Unfortunately, there are so many people who call themselves Christians, but they don't read the Bible, they don't actually follow what Jesus Christ teaches. So, it is time for us that we have to keep on preaching the teachings of Jesus Christ (SM, 53).

So SM will continue on preaching the words of the Holy Bible and the teachings of Jesus Christ as a result of God's divine guidance which is all about doing God's will. He hopes to spread wisdom and goodness in

others by doing so. If he faces any obstacles or if he struggles to answer someone's question, he would turn to God and rely on his divine guidance. So he became a pastor, as preaching is what God guided him to do and enjoy.

Devotion to God

What does it truly mean to be devoted to God? What does it mean to live that devotion, to carry it with us, not only in grand gestures, but in daily moments of quiet perseverance, uncertainty, and hard-won joy? This is where our exploration begins. We are not simply interested in defining devotion as a theological term, but in understanding it as a lived reality, a journey that unfolds through time, trials, and trust. Devotion to God is not found overnight, not sparked instantly. It is cultivated, moment by moment, often in unseen places. Perhaps that is what makes it so profound, its quiet, steadily growing. It is within the softness of our surrender that the strength of our love for God is revealed. In this journey, one thing remains clear: those who are truly devoted to God often speak of finding peace not in the absence of struggle, but within it. It stands as a testament to the mutual love between a frail soul and the mighty Creator, He who, in His mercy, showers the soul with unwavering love and gentle guidance to keep walking the path back to Him. This becomes evident in the stories of those who walk with God, especially when we listen closely, not just to their declarations, but to the moments in between.

TJ, offers a powerful entry point into this theme. TJ is the youngest among our three subjects, a Sunday school teacher, and someone whose spiritual journey is rooted deeply in his

upbringing. And yet, even when we asked him only about his family background, his answer was already a testimony of faith. He responded not with a simple list of names or occupations but with a heart full of gratitude toward God. Without needing to be prompted, TJ immediately revealed where his devotion began:

I'm just really glad that the Lord just really blessed us. I think, like, all of us are involved in ministry. We were just inspired by the zeal and the, like, the outflow, the overflow of faith from my mother and father. And we saw how the Lord just really rewarded them in their ministry. And because of that, we grew in our faith to the point that we also wanted to express our love through ministry as well (TJ, 27).

There is so much to draw from this seemingly simple reflection. First, the word *zeal*, a word that means fervor, a passionate and energetic pursuit. It was this energy that TJ witnessed in his family. Their devotion was not passive; it moved, it overflowed, it inspired. And what they received in return was not just recognition or results, but divine reward, God's hand evident in the fruits of their service. TJ did not just learn about God; he experienced God through the example of his parents, his family. That is the beginning of his devotion: to see love in action, to witness the tangible effects of faith lived authentically.

The repeated use of the word *overflow* is also significant. For TJ, overflow is not just a poetic term, it is a spiritual reality. Overflow suggests something so full, so abundant, that it cannot be contained. It is as if a cup is his heart,

his life, being filled beyond capacity by God's grace, and from that abundance, ministry becomes not a task, but a response. TJ and his family did not enter ministry out of pressure or obligation, but out of desire. That desire is the echo of God's love in their souls.

However, TJ's journey is not one paved only with inspiration and ease. As he began to share about the actual experience of serving in ministry, his story took on more complexity, more weight, and more vulnerability. He recalled a particularly difficult moment in his role:

I will admit there were times where we experienced burnout. Especially when my whole Sunday school team just left me. And then I did it from worship until the end. I led worship. I led the tithes and offerings. And then I led the warm-up. I taught the lesson. I did the arts and crafts. Aduh, after that, I ngambek. Where's my team? Yeah, so after that, you know, there are times that, you know especially when life at home or life in church or life in school, love life hahaha it's not going well. That's why, yeah, every time you come to the ministry, you really need to see overflow of you, not overflow of myself (TJ, 27).

This moment, how he does not shy away from admitting burnout. He does not try to sound spiritually invincible. Instead, he shares what it is actually like when the weight of responsibility feels too much, when the team disappears, and when he is left to carry everything on his own. His recounting is raw and real, from leading worship to teaching the

lesson, all the way down to arts and crafts. The emotional peak is when he admits that he sulked, *ngambek*, afterwards, wondering where his team had gone. There was humor in his tone, yes, but also fatigue. Yet even in this state of weariness, TJ returns to the word overflow. He emphasizes that what sustains ministry is not our own overflow, but God's. Overflow of you, not overflow of myself. This is a profound insight. It is an acknowledgment that true ministry must be fueled by God's abundance, not only human strength. TJ recognizes that without God's constant pouring into him, he will eventually run dry. His devotion is not built on self-sufficiency, but also on surrender, surrender on a God who continues to fill him when he is empty.

And perhaps the most moving part of TJ's testimony is not just what he did, or how he endured, but how he asked. He did not blindly charge forward in his role. He paused. He questioned. He (April 20, 2025) turned toward God and asked, "Is this really where I'm going to commit myself? But God just really equips you with that desire, with that skill as well to do your ministry." Here we see the sacred moment of surrender, when TJ laid his uncertainty before God and asked where he belonged. There is no greater sign of devotion than that quiet moment of asking. Devotion is not only about serving when we are sure; it is also about kneeling when we are not. And when TJ asked, God did not answer with a grand revelation. Instead, He responded by planting within TJ both the desire and the skill to keep going. God equipped him not only externally but internally,

shaping both his heart and his hands for ministry.

TJ's words serve as a powerful reflection of his deep devotion to God, and they offer heartfelt guidance to those walking the path of strengthening their faith. As he shared with sincerity:

One piece of advice, I think the most important for me, would be to focus on Jesus. Because it's so easy. When you are looking for your calling, I myself struggled with it a lot of the time because the world is so noisy. And then there are so many things like busyness from the corporate world, distractions as well, that's trying to take away your attention from Jesus. And then when you really focus yourself on Jesus, His heart and His love naturally overflows out of you as you nurture your relationship with Him. And you start to find joy in what He finds joy in. And for me, that translates into ministry for kids. So, that's one thing for me, just to focus on Jesus (TJ, 27).

In this, we witness the essence of TJ's devotion, his unwavering belief that to truly grow in faith, one must first center their life on Jesus. He speaks of the distractions of the world, the overwhelming busyness, and the noise that pulls our attention away from the divine. Yet, despite these challenges, TJ encourages us to return to the simplicity of focusing on Jesus. In his experience, it is in that focus, amidst the chaos, that God's love fills us, and from that overflow, we are transformed. When we grow closer to God, as TJ points out, we start to find joy in the same things that bring

Him joy. This is the very foundation of TJ's devotion, and it is what has led him to fully embrace his calling in the ministry, as a Sunday school teacher. By focusing on God and nurturing that relationship, he has found purpose and joy in serving others, particularly the children entrusted to his care.

Similarly, AM revealed how his devotion to God is expressed through the responsibilities entrusted to him as a worship leader. It is a beautiful thing, to find a sacred channel of devotion within one's very own responsibilities. For AM, this position is not merely a function or a performance, but a deeply spiritual offering. In his own words, he described the weight and calling of this role:

The responsibility of course to equip you know ourselves myself first to dwell in the Spirit, you know, to understand what the song is, you know, and what the Lord wants to imply to me, to the people. Because it's not just about me. It's, you know at the moment I cannot really explain you know, it's really difficult (AM, 32).

Here, we witness a powerful truth: being a worship leader is far more than singing melodies or leading harmonies. It is a process of immersion, of dwelling in the Spirit, of surrendering oneself to the meaning of the songs, to the heart of worship itself. AM does not just sing; he prepares himself, spiritually and emotionally, to understand what God is trying to communicate through each lyric. There is a sacred responsibility in leading others in worship, and AM knows that he cannot guide a congregation unless he himself

has already walked that path of reflection and intimacy with God. His struggle to articulate the depth of this experience, saying how cannot explain it, speaks volumes. It reveals that true devotion often transcends words. It is not something that can always be wrapped in explanation, because it is something felt, something lived, something divine.

One of the most touching revelations in AM's story lies in the way he sees himself. Despite the position he holds, he carries with him a spirit of humility that is both rare and radiant. He shared honestly:

And, you know, actually, no, I do not see myself like a skillful enough in doing that. So, but there is really something that I don't know what people see, which I always glorify God to that because I don't know. For me, I'm really unworthy of it. I'm really like, I'm just I'm doing it for the Lord (AM, 32).

AM's words reflect a humble heart, one that does not seek validation or applause. He does not see himself as a skillful singer, and he questions what others see in him, not out of false modesty, but from a place of genuine awe that God would grant him such an opportunity, to bring his message, his love, to the people, the congregation. For AM, the recognition he receives is not a reflection of his own greatness, but a reminder of God's grace. This humility becomes the very soil in which his devotion grows. To him, the only reason he continues to lead worship is because he is doing it for the Lord. It is pure devotion, shaped only by love.

His devotion was once more affirmed as AM spoke about the joy he found in using his

voice, a gift given by God, to serve in worship. He (April 20, 2025) reflected, "So I said, yeah, I think this kind of joy that I find in singing, I can do it there for the Lord. So that's the story." This joy, a joy rooted not in recognition but in spiritual alignment, is what drives AM. The voice that he has, the joy that flows from it, is poured back to its Source. In his singing, he finds a way to return love to the One who gave him life, who gave him song. His ministry, therefore, becomes more than an act, it becomes a testimony. Every time he steps forward to sing, he is not only performing; he is offering. Offering himself. Offering his gift. Offering his heart to God.

SM, a pastor, brings a deeply transformative and enriching narrative to this study. His spiritual journey stands out as one marked by a dramatic turn from disbelief to unwavering devotion to God. Unlike those who were raised with early convictions, SM's path toward faith began from a place of skepticism, even resistance. But everything changed when he experienced an intense, life-threatening moment as a child, an experience that he now considers the catalyst for his lifelong devotion. With vivid recollection, he shared:

The problem with Indonesian trains during my time, the doors wouldn't open eh it wouldn't close, the doors stayed open, you know, because I think something wrong with the train unit. So suddenly, I felt like there was a hand, you know, pulling my leg up. By the way, before that happened, you know, I screamed out to God—I screamed out at the top of my voice, "God, I don't believe in you, but if

you exist, this is about the time. This is it. Tell me that you are there!" And then suddenly, I felt like a big hand was carrying me from the bottom of my feet, lifted my feet up and put me inside the carriage. I want to say, "Thank you, guys, you saved me," and then one of them said, "What? No, he's such a strong boy, you put yourself up! We thought that you would actually die." And I said, "No, really. I did not pull myself up." After that, I started reading the Bible every day (SM, 53).

As he recounted this event, SM brought us into the texture of his childhood, the daily challenges of growing up in Indonesia, including technical problems in trains and the urgency of school. In a moment of desperate resolve not to be late, he found himself clinging to the side of a moving train, having run back home to retrieve his books. It was then, dangling between life and death, that he cried out to God, not in reverence, but in defiance. Yet it was in that raw, honest cry that he encountered grace. A mysterious force lifted him into safety, sparing his life. That moment became his personal revelation: an unexplainable rescue that planted the seed of belief in his heart. From disbelief, a boy began to seek, and from seeking, grew a deep and enduring faith.

The miraculous moment on the train did not end with a single prayer. Rather, it marked the beginning of an enduring practice that would shape the core of SM's spiritual life, reading Scripture with such dedication. He shared:

I got myself into a habit of reading the Bible. I read the Bible from Genesis right up to Revelation, back and forth. And because of that particular habit, I got somehow an understanding of the scriptures. You know, when you read the book, a particular book back and forth many, many times, everything sticks into your mind. You know, even you remember the flow of the story and whatsoever (SM, 53).

Here, we witness how devotion takes root, not just in moments of divine intervention but through the discipline of daily engagement. SM's habit of reading the Bible repeatedly not only grounded him in the faith but cultivated a deep intimacy with the scriptures. The more he read, the more the narrative of God became a part of his internal world. It was not merely an act of ritual; it was transformation through repetition, learning, and spiritual reflection.

Over time, SM's devotion matured beyond personal practice. It became expressed through conversations, through engaging others who had questions, doubts, and misunderstandings about Christianity. He became a vessel through which God's message could be shared using reason, clarity, and conviction. In one such conversation, someone asked SM how he could be sure that the Bible hadn't been changed. He responded with thoughtful reasoning:

We have textbooks at school and then our textbooks, there's first edition, second edition, third edition, fourth edition. So the mistakes there in the first edition is no longer in the second edition. But my Holy Bible, although it's been translated into

many different languages, those discrepancies are still there. You can read it in all languages in the world. It doesn't matter whether those Bibles were printed in 1960s, 1970s, 1980s. All those discrepancies are still there. How can you say that it's been changed? (SM, 53).

His answer was grounded in a deep familiarity with the sacred text and a desire to uphold its integrity. By comparing the Bible to school textbooks that undergo edits and revisions, SM illustrated that the Bible's consistency over time and across translations serves not as evidence of tampering, but of its sacred preservation. His passion for defending his faith revealed not just intellectual commitment but heartfelt devotion to the truth he holds dear.

Personal Growth and Ministry Expression

As ministers continuously devote themselves into serving others, they often find that ministry has shaped the way they live their lives. From the way they view things, their mindset, to how they treat others in their daily lives. Ministry is not just about fulfilling the spiritual calling and a one-way offering, it is a mutual exchange where one also develops and grows on the inside as they pour their hearts to give on the outside. Not only did their faith mature and strengthen, but their personal skills also grew as they learned throughout the journey of becoming a minister. What they are getting from such experiences goes further than theology. They were able to learn deeply about personal aspects such as patience, grace, and resilience. Thus, over time, those ideas become more clear; they are not only expressed but also

put to the test in real-world situations and reinforced by God's grace. While leaving some room for improvements, their ministry evolves from being just a role to a necessarily intimate expression of their faith.

This theme is found in the answers of our participants as they share their personal journey as a minister at church. One of our participants, named TJ, who is a Sunday school teacher, revealed how his ministry journey started with his family. TJ came from a Christian household where his dad is the Pastor at IES Church PIK. Therefore, his personal growth in ministry is deeply rooted in his family's legacy of faith. Initially, TJ was inspired by how his parent's ministry has brought a positive impact to his family and eventually felt like it was his calling also to serve as a minister. He stated in the interview:

I'm just really glad that the lord just really blessed us I think like all of us are involved in ministry we were just inspired by the zeal and the like the outflow the overflow of faith from my mother and father, and we saw how the lord just really rewarded them in their ministry and because of that we grew in our faith to the point that we also wanted to express our love through ministry as well (TJ, 27).

From his answer, it can be seen how TJ's commitment to ministry was built from watching his parents. What started as a motivation that came up upon seeing his parents has now turned into a passionate desire to serve as a minister, showing how big an influence TJ's parents are to him in terms of forming his spiritual direction and identity.

Throughout his journey as a minister, serving as a Sunday school teacher, TJ has also experienced burnouts and reflects on what he has done so far. There are times when he felt like he was alone in this journey, as his motives were questioned and faith were tested. He shared (April 20, 2025), "You really need to see overflow of you, not overflow of myself." Turns out, this moment of exhaustion has made TJ better understand about spirituality and dependence. He became aware that a meaningful ministry comes from the filling of God and not from their own skill and strength. This became a turning point for him as a proof of his faith and service humility.

In addition to that, TJ mentioned how the teachings that he received has taught him about ministry as not just something that is done to bring positive impacts and blessings to others, but also a tool for personal growth. He shared in one of his answers (April 20, 2025), "Each of us need to be in ministry because it's required for your growth as well." This means that ministry features both giving and receiving. It was through committing to serve that TJ discovered how his spiritual growth and personal character are being developed, making it more valuable knowing that he is growing more by giving.

Over time, what started as just a weekend routine began to influence his daily life, from the way he views relationships, how he approaches his work and how he spends his rest. What was once a simple role at church community has turned into a central point through which he views everything about his life decisions. Ministry has now become

something inseparable from his identity and lifestyle. He mentioned this in the interview by saying (April 20, 2025), “So, yeah, it really, it becomes a very core part of, like, your life.” This quote from TJ reflects a change in perspective of ministry from an activity to part of his identity. In TJ’s view, ministry has gone beyond a role, and it has become a way of life that teaches him what to say, do and how to express his faith to God. It illustrates a perfect fusion of spiritual and daily life, where one reinforces the other.

Unlike TJ who begins his growth journey from his family, AM joined the ministry after much struggle and developing a commitment to his spirituality. His reflections shown in his answers revealed a deep understanding of the essence of serving wholeheartedly. He shared:

So the responsibility of course to equip you know ourselves myself first to dwell in the spirit you know to understand what the song is you know and what the lord wants to imply to me to the people you know because it's not just about me (AM, 32).

AM’s statement shows that he is aware that inner preparation is the basis of successful ministry leadership. Before conducting his ministry, he would make sure that his heart is aligned with God’s will before he is leading others in worship as a worship leader, showing how self-development and spiritual awareness are important in creating a genuine service.

In another answer, AM stated that for him, faith in a ministry lies on a strong commitment instead of a momentary burst of emotions. By focusing on the consistency, he demonstrates that any spiritual growth is a conscious

approach, inspired by persistent love, not outbursts of hopes and intoxication of love. He shared (April 20, 2025) “So, you have to commit yourself first to the work, to the ministry, and consistency. You have to be doing it as part of your lifestyle, really your life.” From this quote, it can be seen that AM is aware that spiritual growth is only maintained by consistent dedication and perseverance. By being true to ministry during hard times, he builds resilience and faithfulness which are the key to personal changes.

On top of that, AM also reflects on his past as someone who grows in instability. He found that ministry is also a source of restoration and place that he can always go back to find comfort, just like a home. While recalling his past experience, he shared:

When I became a Christian I finally discovered okay, so the lord was working behind he did not let me you know be family less, but I found family to through my other families and then to the life of my friend and of course to the church so back then in the Philippines I was always excited to be weekend Saturday Sunday because I will be my with my spiritual family so that's my family (AM, 32).

Despite his early emotional struggles, AM is now able to see that this is God’s way of building a stronger inner strength. Through the church community, AM found a spiritual family that gave him love, stability, and helped him grow as an individual as well as restore and strengthen his faith.

Lastly, SM, our third participant, presents us with a transformational testimony of how he

changed from a non-believer to a strong believer of Christ. SM's personal growth story is filled with a compilation of life-changing events where he encountered God's grace in-person, inspiring him to dedicate his life as a minister who spread the word of God to others. He tells a story of how an accident made him believe that God do exist (April 20, 2025) saying, "I screamed out to God, I screamed out at the top of my voice, God, I don't believe in you, but if you exist, this is about the time, this is it, tell me that you are there," This desperate appeal was made when death was just around the corner, leading SM to experience a great spiritual change. It marks the beginning of SM's deep spiritual rebirth whereas his fears made way for faith and showed the way of commitment and devotion.

Following that event, SM's faith has only increased because of what he believed took place, that is that God intervened, which creates a lasting belief in God. He mentioned (April 20, 2025), "...so that's that's how I became a firm believer in the faith." This statement from him highlights a move from skepticism to trust, an essential spiritual development. For SM, service in ministry ceased to be a usual obligation and became a mark of major spiritual changes taking place in his life and his attitudes towards God.

A part of his start of commitment to become a faithful believer is consistently reading the bible. His continued habit to read the scripture was a key to SM's development, and it became his sermon foundation. He shared during the interview (April 20, 2025) that, "I got myself into a habit of reading the Bible. I

read the Bible from Genesis right up to Revelation, back and forth. And because of that particular habit, I got somehow an understanding of the scriptures." SM's perpetual dedication to spiritual practices nourished his theological perception, as well as his spiritual life. This journey shows how inner devotion determines the effectiveness of ministry and explains the relation of spiritual discipline and public service.

Finally, SM elaborates the fundamental key of a ministry, which is all for Jesus. In his answers, SM expresses how all of the ministry and service he did is all centered around Jesus. One point he mentioned was (April 20, 2025), "We are ministering to people on behalf of Jesus Christ. So, if we do not set our eyes on Him, how can we do it," This statement captures SM's heart in doing ministry after all these years. For him, ministry is not about showing who he is as a minister or pastor, but it is about representing Christ and spreading His goodness to others. His clarity in explaining this reflects on years of faith formation and inner-struggles, emphasizing how personal maturity reinforces ministry expressions.

Spiritual Calling From Past Experience

Sometimes, the turning points that shape our lives do not arrive with grand announcements. They unfold quietly—through pain, joy, or reflection—until one day, everything starts to make sense. What if the moments we once overlooked were actually divine nudges, gently steering us toward something greater? Spiritual calling is not always an instantaneous revelation. Sometimes, it emerges from past experiences that shape

one's faith, guiding an individual toward a path of ministry. These experiences, whether dramatic or seemingly ordinary, become pivotal moments that inspire a deeper connection with God. They may come from hardship, unexpected encounters, or gradual realizations. What makes spiritual calling from past experiences unique is its power to reshape a person's perception, transforming challenges into purpose. It is the process of making sense of life's turning points, leading to a profound commitment to serve. In this study, our participants share their journeys, revealing how past events played a significant role in shaping their spiritual calling.

First, we were genuinely intrigued when TJ began sharing his journey. At first, it didn't seem like his ministry involvement was intentional—more like a spontaneous decision. Yet, as he kept talking, it became clear that something deeper was happening. Initially drawn to Sunday School for personal reasons, his perspective shifted as he witnessed the pure faith of the children. He shares:

And then when I started helping out, you know, although for the wrong reasons, as I watched Gabby play with the kids, I just also developed a really sincere love for the kids. And you know, when they talk about Jesus and when they discover about God's love, oh, really? And then when you talk to kids like, oh, Jesus walks on water, they just immediately believe. Unlike when you talk to adults or to the same age group as you, like, oh, really, how is it possible that someone would walk on water? Like that. So anything you say, they will take it in

face value. Because you're the teacher. And for me, it was very fulfilling journeying with them through those stories. Especially acting out all of them (TJ, 27).

It was surprising to see how TJ's casual involvement turned into something meaningful. The way he described the children's simple yet profound faith made us feel the same sense of wonder. TJ's realization wasn't sudden, but developed as he immersed himself in the kids' world, where stories of faith became alive and real.

As TJ continued reflecting, we could sense a moment of vulnerability when he admitted to questioning his path. He shared:

So there were times that I was asking God, is this really my calling? Is this really where I'm going to commit myself? But God just really equips you with that desire, with that skill as well to do your ministry. So that's when I got the confirmation (TJ, 27).

It was clear that TJ's journey was not without doubt. Yet, this uncertainty didn't weaken his faith; instead, it became a turning point where he found the assurance he needed. Hearing him describe that sense of divine confirmation gave us insight into how personal struggles can lead to clarity.

When TJ spoke about his upbringing, his tone softened, almost nostalgic, as he recounted how his parents' dedication to ministry shaped his own path:

There are times that I just want to be a listener, I just want to be part of the congregation, not really part of the

ministry. But there is something that calls for your dedication, for your heart to serve. Because it's in your heart that God calls you to serve and minister to His people (TJ, 27).

It was touching to see how TJ's sense of duty was not just learned but inherited—a natural extension of his family's commitment. His story shows that spiritual calling can be passed down through generations, intertwining personal choice with familial devotion.

TJ also reflected on how ministry shaped his everyday life, mentioning:

Saturdays, there have been times from 8 to 6 p.m., I'm in church the whole day. And then, on Sundays, from 9 until 6, I would meet Pak SM, I think, three or four times a week... It really becomes a very core part of, like, your life (TJ, 27).

This insight revealed how ministry wasn't just an activity for TJ—it was woven into the fabric of his routine. His life wasn't compartmentalized; instead, faith and service intertwined seamlessly, guiding his daily choices and commitments.

Next, we couldn't help but be moved by AM's story. There was a quiet strength in the way he spoke about his past—how he faced feelings of loneliness and found comfort in unexpected places. Raised in a broken family, AM discovered a new sense of belonging through the church. He reflects:

When I became a Christian, I finally discovered okay, so the Lord was working behind. He did not let me be family-less, but I found family through my other

families and then to the life of my friend and of course to the church (AM, 32).

Listening to AM, it was evident that his faith journey wasn't just about discovering God, but also about finding family where he never expected. His words carried a sense of relief, as if realizing he wasn't truly alone gave him a renewed purpose.

As he talked about discovering joy in singing, his voice brightened, almost as if recalling that happiness made it present again:

I think that was, why am I being emotional? I felt a different happiness with this joy... a different sense of happiness and joy. But then I said, I would love to be part of the praise and worship (AM, 32).

Lastly, we couldn't help but feel drawn into SM's story. As he spoke, his words carried a blend of gratitude and awe, as if he was reliving each moment with us. There was something captivating in the way he shared—both humble and profound. It made us lean in, wanting to grasp the full depth of his experiences. SM's near-death experience left us curious and deeply moved, as he recalls:

I screamed out at the top of my voice, God, I don't believe in you, but if you exist, this is about the time... Suddenly, I felt like a big hand was carrying me from the bottom of my feet, lifted my feet up and put me inside the carriage (SM, 53).

As we continued to listen, SM shared yet another incredible experience—one that seemed almost surreal, yet his conviction made it feel so real. It was a moment that, once again, tested his faith but left him feeling undeniably protected as he mentioned:

I knew it was the angel. God sent an angel because that's in the Bible. Those who believe in Jesus, they are protected (SM, 53).

Reflecting on these life-changing moments, SM shared how they shaped his faith and sparked a new habit in his life:

Since the first event, my spiritual event, I call it spiritual experience, saving me from death. Then I got myself into a habit of reading the Bible... (SM, 53).

Looking back, SM acknowledged how that profound experience not only changed his belief, but also subtly guided him into ministry. He didn't plan for it—ministry seemed distant from his reality at the time. Yet, the transformation had already begun, leading him toward a new path without him even realizing it. SM explained that:

Actually, I didn't plan to get into the ministry. Because since the first event, my spiritual event, I call it spiritual experience, saving me from death... Then I got myself into a habit of reading the Bible (SM, 53).

It was interesting to hear SM talk about how his journey into ministry wasn't intentional. The experience that initially led him to faith became the foundation for his commitment to ministry, showing how personal transformation can naturally evolve into a desire to serve.

Through these stories, it becomes evident that spiritual calling from past experiences is a journey marked by transformation. Whether through gradual realization or dramatic encounters, these moments shape a person's

faith, leading them to embrace a calling rooted in personal history and spiritual awakening.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, through this qualitative research on The Ministerial Practices and Experiences of Church Ministers, we aim to make an impactful contribution to understanding how spiritual calling is experienced and how it evolves throughout a minister's journey, challenging the assumptions of secularization theory. Using Fowler's Faith Development Theory as our lens, we identified key themes such as social influences and challenges, divine guidance, devotion to God, personal growth and ministry expression, and spiritual calling from past experiences. These findings reveal that spiritual calling is not a singular event, but a continuous journey, growing and deepening as one's faith matures. We hope this research not only illuminates the profound role of spiritual calling in shaping religious identity and practice but also contributes to a broader discourse on faith, purpose, and commitment in an increasingly modern world.

DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of the qualitative data collected from the three participants (TJ, AM, and SM), five major themes emerged that capture the essence of their spiritual journeys and ministerial practices. These themes are grounded in personal experiences and reflect

the nuanced ways in which each individual perceives and lives out their spiritual calling.

Social Influences and Challenges

Social influences played a major role in influencing the ministerial journeys of the participants, both as a support system and as an obstacle to overcome. Family background was very important, as it was in TJ's case, where he grew up in a ministry-oriented home, which was a great start for his own faith journey. However, social dynamics also presented challenges such as doubts from family or community on their ministerial choice. In spite of these barriers, the participants showed resilience in that they continued to adhere to their spiritual roles. AM's experience is an example of how various social contexts influenced his understanding of worship, since his sense of community in the church became a crucial part of his ministerial identity.

Divine Guidance

Divine guidance became a vital theme highlighting the role of how the perception of God's will informs ministerial practice. The participants were always reporting that their sense of purpose was directed by divine influence, through prayer, spiritual encounters or slow realizations. For example, TJ indicated that his dedication to ministry was strengthened during moments of clarity in prayer. Likewise, AM was concerned with his worship leadership being in line with God's will, and his role as an extension of his faith journey. This theme emphasizes the need to consider ministry not as a personal pursuit, but as a response to perceived divine calling that is confirmed through continued spiritual discernment.

Devotion to God

The theme of devotion to God sums up the participants' unwavering determination to perform their ministerial duties as acts of faith. Their commitment is clear in their constant attempt to incorporate their spiritual beliefs in their daily activities. AM exhibited this by being disciplined in worship, considering every service as a way of expressing his faith. SM's dedication was evident in his desire to help others in their spiritual development, as mentorship was one of the main aspects of his pastoral responsibilities. This devotion extends beyond the normal duties, which is an inner desire to serve God with all one's heart and to inspire others by personal example.

Personal Growth and Ministry Expression

Personal growth became an underlying theme, where ministry became a catalyst and a platform for spiritual and personal growth. The tasks of leadership, teaching, and pastoral care did not only strengthen the faith of the participants but also developed their skills to deal with intricate social dynamics. SM's transformation into a more open-minded ministry leader is an indication of this growth because he adopted a considerate and caring attitude towards his congregation. This theme highlights the fact that ministerial involvement promotes continuous self-improvement, which strengthens the link between faith, personal development, and ministry expression.

Spiritual Calling from Past Experiences

The theme of spiritual calling from past experiences shows how personal life experiences are used as triggers to get into ministerial positions. The participants' sense of

calling usually arose from defining moments that informed their perception of faith and purpose. For instance, AM's experience of living in a fragmented family background made him seek spiritual solace and emotional restoration in the church. This was a turning point in his life, which became the determining factor in his choice to dedicate himself to worship ministry. On the contrary, SM's transformation was deeply shaped by a life-threatening incident that he believed to be a divine intervention that led him to spiritual disciplines and finally to pastoral ministry. These experiences show that spiritual calling is usually born out of personal struggles or transformation that then becomes the basis of a lifetime of ministry.

The five themes describe the intricate dynamics between individual experience, divine direction, social forces, and ministerial behavior. Collectively, the themes describe the internalization of a religious calling as a theological consciousness and a determined commitment to serving others. The findings of this research suggest that the concept of spiritual calling is one that changes, one that adaptively changes as individuals experience new challenges, deepen faith, and work diligently to conform to what each believes to be his or her divine purpose. This dynamic nature of faith-based service highlights how ministers navigate their roles through both personal transformation and sustained devotion, demonstrating that ministry is a lifelong journey of faith, reflection, and community engagement.

Interpretation Based on Theory

We chose James Fowler's Faith Development Theory as the foundation for our research because we adopted religious faith as the key concept to explain the construct of spiritual calling. Fowler's framework allows us to understand how faith evolves through life experiences, a progression that became evident in our findings. By viewing spiritual calling through the lens of religious faith, we were able to trace how each participant chose to walk a path within Christianity, guided by moments of reflection, transformation, and divine encounter. Their stories reveal that spiritual calling does not emerge in isolation, but rather unfolds and deepens alongside their faith development. In pivotal moments marked by clarity, surrender, or conviction, a spark of calling appears, as if God's guidance met them within their growth. These callings eventually led them into ministry, not merely as a continuation of religious commitment, but as a lived response to a divine summons. The themes identified in our analysis serve as living evidence of how spiritual calling is intertwined with and shaped by one's evolving faith journey.

The theme Social Influences and Challenges reveals how the participants' spiritual callings emerged through a developmental journey that reflects Fowler's Faith Development Theory, particularly the transition from Stage 3 (Synthetic-Conventional Faith) to Stage 4 (Individuative-Reflective Faith). In Stage 3, individuals are strongly shaped by external influences such as family, peers, and community, as they form their beliefs based on trusted authority figures

rather than personal examination. However, as they begin to question, reflect, and take ownership of their beliefs, they enter Stage 4, where faith becomes more internalized and consciously chosen rather than passively inherited. This stage is clearly seen in TJ, who was raised in a ministry-driven household with a pastor father and a Sunday school teacher mother. Initially, his entry into ministry was influenced by peer motivation, a crush in Sunday school, but it was supported and encouraged by his family. However, as TJ began serving, especially teaching children, his motivation deepened into genuine love and care for ministry work, indicating a shift into Stage 4, where he personally embraced the calling. AM's journey similarly began in Stage 3 through the influence of a persistent classmate who invited him to a youth service. Despite not coming from a Christian household, that social nudge introduced him to faith. During a worship session, he experienced an overwhelming sense of joy and purpose that moved him into Stage 4, where he felt personally called to serve as a worship leader. SM also began in Stage 3, growing up under the influence of his pastor father's teachings, which he initially rejected. However, after experiencing a near-death moment that profoundly awakened him spiritually, he began to reflect and embrace faith from within, marking his own transition into Stage 4. These narratives demonstrate that spiritual calling often begins in the presence of others but becomes real and transformative when individuals reflect upon it personally. It is at this point, where they no longer follow faith

because they were told to, but because they have encountered it for themselves, that their journey toward God truly begins.

The theme of Divine Guidance further develops the participants' journeys into Stage 4 (Individuative-Reflective Faith) of Fowler's Faith Development Theory. At this stage, faith becomes more internalized, deliberate, and reflective, yet it is not an endpoint. It is part of an ongoing journey where individuals begin to discern their spiritual calling with greater personal conviction. For TJ, this is seen in how he felt that God ignited within him a genuine passion to serve as a Sunday school teacher. Even when he faced burnout, such as the moment when his entire team left him, it led him into deep reflection, yet it was God's sustaining presence that kept the spark alive. This marks the hallmark of Stage 4: a personally chosen faith that endures not because of external validation, but because of an inner connection to the Divine. AM also demonstrates this stage. Despite his humility and belief that he is not a skillful singer, he chose to become a worship leader out of a sincere desire to praise God and spread His love through music. His decision reflects a faith that is no longer centered on personal ability or peer affirmation, but one that is grounded in a sense of divine purpose. Similarly, SM's journey into ministry began after a profound spiritual encounter that saved his life. Following this moment, he committed to reading the Bible and immersing himself in Scripture, ultimately feeling called to become a pastor and share God's message with others. Though all three participants remain within Stage 4, this does not

imply stagnation; rather, it reflects the depth and complexity of their journeys. They are actively engaging with their faith, not just emotionally or intellectually, but spiritually, by discerning their callings under the ongoing guidance of God. Their experiences illustrate that spiritual development is not linear, but a lived journey where divine guidance strengthens and sustains the calling from within.

The theme of Devotion to God captures the inner spiritual lives of the participants, showcasing their evolving relationships with God through service, reflection, and surrender. This theme aligns strongly with Stage 4 (Individuative-Reflective Faith) of Fowler's theory, as it illustrates how each individual moves beyond externally inherited faith into one that is personally chosen, refined by both trials and spiritual intimacy. TJ's devotion began within a family steeped in ministry, where faith was modeled by parents and supported by a culture of religious activity. However, his own devotion grew not merely by osmosis, but through active engagement and internal questioning. As he encountered burnout and wrestled with moments of doubt in his ministry role, his faith matured. Rather than relying solely on familial legacy, he began to recognize his need for divine sustenance, distinguishing between his own strength and God's sustaining overflow. His devotion, then, became not just an act of obedience or tradition, but an expression of spiritual dependence and identity, a signature trait of Stage 4, where individuals reflect deeply and accept personal responsibility for their beliefs. AM likewise

operates from Stage 4, but from a different starting point. His path did not begin in a religious household but was shaped by emotional gaps and eventual discovery of spiritual family in church. His devotion manifests through worship, a sacred act that he does not treat as performance, but as an intimate offering to God. This inward posture reflects a deeply personal form of faith, one that is not seeking applause but is grounded in gratitude and humility. He prepares himself spiritually before leading others, emphasizing relationship with God over recognition. His self-view as "unworthy" is not rooted in shame, but in awe, a faith that is increasingly reflective and owned. These qualities suggest an active, engaged faith journey consistent with Stage 4, as he seeks to align his actions with a heartfelt connection to the Divine. SM's journey differs in both origin and outcome. Initially skeptical and disbelieving, his devotion emerged from a pivotal, life-altering experience that reoriented his worldview entirely. What began as a desperate cry in a moment of danger became the foundation for a lifelong pursuit of spiritual truth. Unlike TJ and AM, who matured into faith from early exposure, SM's devotion was sparked by direct experience and deepened through years of disciplined study and reflection. His commitment to defending the integrity of Scripture and his capacity to engage with theological complexity without losing conviction places him squarely in Stage 5 (Conjunctive Faith). Here, he demonstrates the ability to hold paradox and plurality, respecting other worldviews while remaining deeply rooted in his own. SM's faith is no longer

centered only on personal experience or reflection, it extends outward in compassion, evangelism, and intellectual integration, as is typical in Fowler's most mature and rare stage of faith development.

The theme of Personal Growth and Ministry Expression reflects how participants' spiritual maturity is expressed through ministry roles that not only serve others but also catalyze personal transformation. The theme aligns primarily with Stage 4, where faith is reflected through internalized conviction, sustained service, and a willingness to endure hardship with spiritual intentionality. TJ's development is emblematic of this. Initially motivated by admiration for his parents, he entered ministry as a form of familial continuation. However, as he took on more responsibility and faced the real emotional weight of leadership, his ministry stopped being an inherited role and became a personally significant expression of faith. In moments of challenge, such as feeling alone or burned out, TJ confronted the limits of his own energy and recognized the necessity of divine strength. This self-awareness and surrender, paired with his continued service, reflect a Stage 4 faith, one that engages in critical reflection, moves beyond idealized faith models, and accepts the cost of personal responsibility in spiritual work. The transformation of ministry from activity to identity further emphasizes this stage: his service became not just something he did, but who he was becoming. AM also exemplifies Stage 4 through a quieter but no less significant trajectory. His growth in ministry developed as a response to personal spiritual need and a

deepening relationship with God. With no prior exposure to formal faith structures, AM found in ministry both a home and a mission. His sense of responsibility in worship leadership is grounded in self-preparation and alignment with God's will. His emphasis on consistency and discipline demonstrates a faith that is reasoned, steady, and mature. He actively chooses ministry as part of his lifestyle, not for status, but for inner alignment. His reflections on belonging and stability in the church further reinforce how ministry became both a personal refuge and a platform for expressing his renewed identity. SM's journey, however, reflects a transition into Stage 5, where ministry becomes a conduit for reconciling complex truths and engaging with others beyond mere duty. His transformation from non-believer to pastor was not linear but marked by deep spiritual experiences and theological insight. He now views ministry not just as an obligation or identity, but as a sacred responsibility done in representation of Jesus. His perspective moves beyond individual growth and into a broader mission—spreading the Gospel while respecting and reasoning with those who differ in belief. He recognizes ministry as an outflow of divine love, not personal merit. This ability to integrate head, heart, and hands across diverse situations without reducing his faith to certainties marks his emergence into Stage 5, a faith characterized by inclusivity, grace, and reconciled complexity.

The theme of Spiritual Calling from Past Experiences, derived from the concept of spiritual calling by Dik and Duffy (2009), reveals the participants' journey across multiple

stages of faith development. Each individual moved from an externally influenced understanding of spirituality in Stage 3 (Synthetic-Conventional Faith) to an internally grounded conviction in Stage 4, with SM progressing into Stage 5. TJ's calling emerged gradually through experiences that began as social motivations but developed into genuine encounters with God. Initially drawn to Sunday school by emotional and social factors, he began to notice the beauty of simple faith in children and found personal meaning in teaching them about God. These experiences prompted him to question, reflect, and ultimately affirm his path. His journey is marked by introspection, debating whether ministry was truly his calling, and discovering that God was equipping him from within. This process of moving from conformity to clarity signifies a clear transition from Stage 3 to Stage 4. His calling, once an inherited possibility, became a chosen and deeply lived commitment. AM's sense of calling is rooted in emotional pain and longing for family. Coming from a fragmented background, he found not only spiritual refuge but also emotional restoration in the church. His realization that he was not truly "family-less" but divinely led to new spiritual relationships illustrates how hardship became the soil from which his faith grew. His calling into worship ministry was not instantaneous but evolved from a sense of joy in using his voice for God. These insights reflect a reflective, personal faith journey that aligns with Stage 4. He no longer views worship as a task but as a mission, one that connects his past pain with his present purpose. His growth is inwardly

motivated and anchored in a spiritual identity forged through past adversity. SM's calling is the most distinct, both in origin and depth. His faith journey was sparked by a life-threatening event that he interpreted as divine intervention. This moment reoriented his worldview and led him into spiritual disciplines that sustained him for years. What sets SM apart is not just his movement from disbelief to faith, but how he processed and integrated those experiences over time. His spiritual calling did not come with a formal commission, it emerged through continuous reflection, scripture engagement, and service. Eventually, his ministry became the expression of that calling. Unlike TJ and AM, SM's calling matured into theological reasoning, spiritual mentorship, and evangelism. His ability to understand doubt, communicate across differences, and ground his calling in both experience and theology reflect Stage 5, where faith becomes a means to connect the personal with the universal, and ministry becomes a way to unite rather than divide.

Limitation

There are indeed some restrictions that might have limited the true depth and usefulness of the study's results. First, the study was conducted at a church in North Jakarta with the data taken from only three participants, meaning there are only three different roles of ministry. The research only includes perspective and insights from a pastor, a worship leader, and a Sunday school teacher. While the data collected from the three participants offers valuable insights, the study still lacked representation from different

church, ministry roles, and other backgrounds. Therefore, the experiences captured in this study may not fully represent the various and broad range of church ministries in Indonesia.

Secondly, the fact that the data were collected through a focus group discussion (FGD) format might have affected the participants when answering the interview questions. With others present in the room during the interview, participants could have been influenced to change the way they answered after hearing other's answers. Sharing answers in a group discussion may have encouraged the participants to change what they wanted to express initially. The way the interviews were conducted may have reduced the authenticity or level of detail in some replies.

Furthermore, the setting of the church gives another contextual challenge. Since this church is located inside a cinema in a shopping mall and is also a modern and international church, its experience might be different from most of the traditional churches in Indonesia. The style and format of the service is also quite different in comparison to some local churches, which may not reflect the typical atmosphere and structure of Christian ministry in Indonesia. These variations of the church chosen for this study could uniquely shape the ministerial experiences of the participants, meaning that it might be difficult to generalize the findings to a broader context of the Indonesian Christian community.

Lastly, as the topic of spiritual calling is close to religious beliefs and is very sensitive, not every member of the research team was able

to directly be involved in the observation and interviews. Since the data collection process was done in the church area, participation from the non-Christian members was respectfully limited out of respect for their individual beliefs. Due to this, not all members were able to see and heard in-person about the ministerial experiences of the participants.

Future Research

The current research presented insightful findings on the sacred journey to spiritual calling; however, several areas for improvement and suggestions for future research have been identified. One of the primary challenges faced during this study was the reliance on outdated journal articles. This limitation emerged due to the scarcity of contemporary literature that directly addresses spiritual calling from a phenomenological perspective. Future research should prioritize the exploration of emerging studies and interdisciplinary works that examine spiritual calling through modern lenses, integrating perspectives from psychology, theology, and cultural studies. Accessing global research databases and including grey literature such as theses, conference papers, and working papers may provide more comprehensive insights.

Moreover, it is important to note that the idea of spiritual calling is not confined to a particular methodology. The concept of calling discussed by Dik and Duffy (2009), have been used in numerous qualitative and quantitative research studies and indicate the commonality of different applications in the analysis of both subjective meaning and outcomes that are quantifiable in terms of psychology. A recent study by Lemke (2020) also highlights the fact

that calling is a continuous and lifelong process, shaped by spiritual formation, discernment, and contextual factors, which are aspects that the phenomenological approach can easily address. Thus, the calling theory application in the present study is methodologically relevant and compatible with modern literature that places calling in the context of spirituality, identity, and vocation.

Another area for improvement is the diversity of the data set. The current study employed three datasets, all of which were male participants. This lack of gender diversity limits the generalizability of the findings and may not fully capture the varied experiences of spiritual calling across different demographics. Future research should aim to include participants of different genders, as well as consider factors such as age, cultural background, and socio-economic status to enrich the understanding of spiritual calling as a universal phenomenon.

Additionally, the collaborative process among the five writers, under significant time constraints, presented challenges in maintaining structural and stylistic consistency. For future studies, it is recommended to adopt a unified framework for collaborative writing. Regular alignment meetings, clear role definitions, and the use of collaborative platforms for real-time synchronization can significantly improve the quality and cohesion of group writing projects. This recommendation is particularly valuable for early-career researchers who may encounter similar challenges in collective academic work.

While the phenomenological method provided deep insights into the lived

experiences of participants, future research could benefit from a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative analysis alongside qualitative narratives may enhance the depth and quality of the findings and offer more measurable insights into spiritual calling. This would allow for triangulation of data and validation of themes identified through phenomenological inquiry.

Finally, the current study captures participants' experiences at a single point in time, a focused group discussion. Future research might consider longitudinal studies that observe changes and developments in individuals' spiritual calling over extended periods. Such research could reveal shifts in perception, deepening beliefs, or transformative experiences that evolve with life events. By addressing these areas, future research on spiritual calling can achieve greater inclusivity, better data quality with various data to draw conclusions from, and collaborative strength which would contribute positively to the understanding of this sacred journey.

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