



## **COMMUNAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN A MULTICULTURAL INDONESIAN CHURCH**

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### **Abstract**

The reality of diversity is an integral part of Gereja Protestan di Indonesia bagian Barat (The Protestant Church in Western Indonesia, abbreviated as GPIB). This contextual plurality is the church's wealth, which should make an essential contribution to its ministry. However, a singular challenge that arises in light of that diversity relates to the strong emphasis on "church unity"—which should be a supportive element—thus contributing to problems with the church's ministry and pedagogy. How is this so? Given that centralized efforts to promote unity correlate closely with the imposition of rules that dominate and determine Christian religious education in the church, this article asserts the necessity of communal identity for an ongoingly diverse reality; communal identity, in other words, must not be destroyed in the name of promoting unity. The argument unfolds in three stages, entailing (1) a summary of the current context of the GPIB and problems it faces, (2) an academic study of the objectives of Christian religious education, to be considered in the context of the GPIB, and (3) a rationale for setting these objectives. Through these three stages, the communal vision is expected to contribute to the church's ministry and education in the midst of the congregation and the whole Indonesian society with its multicultural context.

**Keywords:** communal, religious education, Gereja Protestan di Indonesia bagian Barat (GPIB), unity, diversity.

### **Abstrak**

Realita kemajemukan menjadi bagian yang tidak terpisahkan dalam pelayanan Gereja Protestan di Indonesia bagian Barat (disingkat GPIB). Kemajemukan ini adalah kekayaan gereja yang semestinya dapat memberi kontribusi penting dalam pelayanan. Namun, pada kenyataannya, persoalan justru muncul dalam konteks

kemajemukan tersebut. Tekanan pada aspek “kesatuan gereja” yang semestinya menjadi penunjang dalam pelayanan justru menjadi tantangan tersendiri. Hal ini terjadi karena upaya untuk mengusung persatuan ternyata memiliki korelasi yang erat dengan dominasi aturan yang turut berdampak dalam pelaksanaan pendidikan agama Kristen. Artikel ini menekankan bahwa identitas komunal amat penting dalam realitas kemajemukan dan tidak dapat diabaikan ketika gereja sedang berupaya untuk memelihara kesatuan. Tiga bagian dibahas untuk mengokohkan argumen ini, konteks GPIB pada masa kini beserta persoalan yang dihadapi, kajian akademis tentang tujuan pendidikan agama yang dapat dipertimbangkan dalam konteks GPIB, serta landasan pemikiran bagi tujuan tersebut. Melalui ketiga tahapan itu, visi komunal dalam pelayanan dan pendidikan gereja diharapkan dapat berkontribusi dalam pelayanan di tengah jemaat dan bagi masyarakat Indonesia yang juga dibingkai dalam konteks kemajemukan.

**Kata-kata Kunci:** komunal, pendidikan agama, GPIB, kesatuan, kemajemukan.

### Introduction

*Gereja Protestan di Indonesia bagian Barat* (The Protestant Church in Western Indonesia, abbreviated GPIB) is one of Indonesia’s largest Protestant churches. It is a diverse church in terms of membership, like Indonesia itself, because of its multicultural context. It acknowledges the theological principle of the *Tri Dharma Gereja* (the three functions of the church): living in community (*koinonia*), caring for those in need (*diakonia*), and offering Christian witness in the world (*martyria*).<sup>1</sup> *Tri Dharma Gereja* is an integral principle, wherein each function should not be separated from the other two, or it risks losing its whole meaning.

As its diversity is realized, the GPIB has begun to lose the internal integration of the *Tri Dharma Gereja* as its central institutional-theological principle. Significantly diminished among congregation members is the integral notion of *koinonia* (community). A double-barreled challenge emphasizing uniformity in the areas of church liturgy and religious education has been on the rise, leading to a waning—even disappearing—appreciation of the diversity of GPIB congregations as well as their members. Instead of true community, this condition of conformity creates a fellowship that rarely answers the needs of the local congregation. An emphasis on “church unity” (while ignoring diversity) only

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<sup>1</sup> S. W. Lontoh dan Hallie Jonathans, *Bahtera Guna Dharma: Gereja Protestan di Indonesia bagian Barat* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1982), 185-192.

exacerbates current problems in the church's worship and pedagogy.

What are the roots of this condition? Perhaps these efforts by church rules to promote unity may be seen as closely correlating with the imposition of rules that dominate and determine Christian religious education in the church. As such, manifestations of domineering are perpetuated and reified. Might there be resources in other traditions and contexts to buttress local expressions of communal identity for GPIB? Boyung Lee states that

the Body of Christ upholds humankind's communal nature and each person's individuality simultaneously. Neither diversity without unity nor unity without diversity is healthy. Likewise, neither the person separated from the community nor the community ignoring its member's individuality is an authentic existence. Only community that respects each member's individuality is equipped to protect itself from the danger of conformity and individualism.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, this article asserts that communal identity is necessary for the diverse reality of the GPIB to continue, and instantiations of difference must not be destroyed in the name of unity. The theory of communal religious education for the GPIB as presented in this essay is grounded in three assumptions— theological, pedagogical, social.

This article has three parts. The first part explores the current context of the GPIB and the problems it faces. It includes some analysis of the church's historical and pedagogical aspects. The second part reviews an academic study of communal ministry, communal pedagogy, and communal faith formation as objectives of religious education to answer fundamental problems in the church community. The third part presents the grounding assumptions for the concept of community that is related to Boyung Lee's exploration into transforming congregations through community.

### **The Context of the GPIB: "Unity" in the Multicultural Church**

I have served several GPIB congregations, and I have seen many conflicts arise due to the dominant rules imposed by the church seeking to maintain its "unity." An overreliance upon regulations to problem-solve, it seems, effectively breaks apart

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<sup>2</sup> Boyung Lee, *Transforming Congregations through Community: Faith Formation from the Seminary to the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), chapter 3, Kindle e-book.

relationships of trust between leaders and members of the congregation. Many church members complain that the worship and educational ministries feel monotonous, because the topics appear to be irrelevant to the struggles of a given congregation's context. Each topic just follows a theme that is uniformly prescribed to all GPIB congregations, which emphasizes rules and power in the ministerial approach of GPIB to the diminishment of the quality of the church's worship and education.

There are historical and pedagogical aspects to this problem. Historically, the GPIB was part of the colonial church (*een echte koloniale Kerk*).<sup>3</sup> H. Kraemer argues that one characteristic of the colonial church was the diversity of the origins of its members. Until 1958, the GPIB's members were people of European descent and people of Eurasian and Indo-Europeans descent. They included Indonesian people from Maluku, Minahasa, Timor, and other regions, as well as Chinese.<sup>4</sup> However, historical records show that the GPIB was not a church for everyone, being better known as a church for those who were Dutch and for people who were ascribed the rights of the Dutch. As such, the GPIB followed a politics of unity envisioned by the Dutch government.<sup>5</sup> After the GPIB became an independent church in 1948, this sense of unity was maintained and considered to be in harmony with Indonesia's national independence values.<sup>6</sup>

During its development until 1960, GPIB became very parochial, as it was busy arranging inventory and exercising administrative matters. In the process, congregations became very dependent on pastors. The church at that time was called the "Pastor's Church"<sup>7</sup> (in the context of patriarchy community, "male pastor's church"). To overcome the domination of pastors, GPIB developed the idea of "building a missionary congregation." Then, in 1970, church members were invited to take responsibility and participate in carrying out the church's mandate in unity. The church's missionary character, namely the implementation of *diakonia* (service) and *martyria* (witness), was emphasized.<sup>8</sup> The GPIB came to understand itself as a missionary church that accomplishes its mandate through activities that integrate the congregation structurally and functionally, to serve society in various contextual ways.<sup>9</sup> However, it seems that dominance by its church leaders (a patriarchal circle) has not entirely disappeared

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<sup>3</sup> Lontoh and Jonathans, *Bahtera Guna Dharma*, 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

from the church's climate. Even now, there are congregations that expect to be served only by male pastors.

On the other hand, the very strong emphasis on both *diakonia* and *martyria* overlooks the importance of *koinonia* (community). As a consequence, the unity of the GPIB relies heavily on rules and power, which in turn affects its educational ministries. For instance, elsewhere I show that the educational format most prevalent in the GPIB is based on one-way communication, otherwise known as the *schooling-instruction model*.<sup>10</sup> In this approach, the curriculum rarely connects with the needs of congregation members; all distributed content, including weekly themes for worship, is designed to be uniform for all GPIB congregations across Indonesia. Furthermore, in this educational model, instruction is often done through one-way explanations that do not give students an opportunity to express their ideas or to ask questions. This leads to serious problems, such as a separation between knowing and doing, teacher and learner, and the congregation's members and their environments.

If the domineering power relations and insistence upon rigid uniformity in the church's educational ministry result in an unpleasant community, holding to these values may also lead to passivity and dependency in the congregation members. Moreover, an irrelevant ministry can also prompt people to withdraw themselves from that faith community—a condition that breeds individualism. Since individualism creates individualistic Christians, any communal ministry in the GPIB will eventually dissipate.<sup>11</sup>

This outlook leads to some essential questions: What are the core/grounding assumptions of Christian religious education in the GPIB? How else should the GPIB understand unity, if it is a fundamental value in its ministerial formation? Is the centralization of the congregational curriculum the best way to maintain the unity of the GPIB?

### **Communal Ministry, Communal Pedagogy, and Communal Faith Formation in Intercultural Relationship**

The purpose of Christian religious education in a multicultural church like GPIB should address issues that are theological, pedagogical, and social; these interventions must be based on the context and problems of the GPIB itself, in every location. These three fronts may be articulated, as follows. First,

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<sup>10</sup> See Jeniffer Fresy Porielly Wowor, "The Relevance of Paulo Freire's Problem Posing Education to the Implementation of Christian Education in the Protestant Church in Western Part of Indonesia (GPIB)," thesis (Duta Wacana Christian University, 2006), 8-52.

<sup>11</sup> According to Lee, individualism is the fundamental problem that hampers communal ministry. Lee, *Transforming Congregations through Community*, chapter 1, Kindle e-book.

concerning the theological, the GPIB's undue emphases on *diakonia* and on *martyria* are insufficient to change an organizational structure built on dominant rules and prevailing power, which are the GPIB's heritage as a colonial-era church. As a result, a structuration of domination through power remains ubiquitous, all the while the communal aspect (*koinonia*) of the church's life is diminishing. Second, regarding its pedagogy, the obsession with church unity throughout the history of the GPIB impacts its educational ministries substantially and substantively. Uniformity of curricular content, along with any implementation thereof, continue to undermine the relevancy of the Christian education process vis-à-vis the needs of the local congregation insofar as the focus on uniformity neglects sensitivity to the diversity and uniqueness of each region (let alone each GPIB congregation) in Indonesia. Third, with respect to social concerns, the bane of the GPIB's communal relationships can be found in the growing ethos of individualism and/or passivity among many of its congregants. True community is on the decline.

Likewise, three objectives can be formulated with respect to these three planes of concern, which lead to the following interventions. First, religious education must embrace webs of relationships, thereby encouraging a holistic approach to ministry throughout the GPIB that takes its educational mandate seriously. By inquiring theologically, *What is the nature of communal ministry in the GPIB?*, the church recognizes *koinonia* as a gift to be appreciated, studied, and developed more deeply in relation to *diakonia* and *martyria*; moreover, the *Tri Dharma Gereja* deserves to be studied critically to test the relevance of this triadic principle in light of the local contexts where GPIB finds itself. Second, the GPIB must foster a community of mutual enrichment, specifically by means of a more dialogical approach to education, which is crucial for formation and ministry. This understanding is closely related to the concept of communal faith pedagogy that acknowledges ministry as pedagogy. This concept understands that all church life is the curriculum and specific steps for the church's ministry. Such pedagogical interventions ask, *What are the characteristics of hermeneutical engagement in the curriculum and approach of the GPIB's communal faith pedagogy?* Third, the ministerial and educational mission of the GPIB cannot afford to neglect the relational dynamics between oneself and one's community. Personal and communal stories serve as primary sources for theological and educational discourse in a community of faith.<sup>12</sup> Building true community would help congregants overcome the urge toward individualism, which stands apart from the vibrant faith community. Given its colonial heritage, GPIB must struggle both

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., chapter 7, Kindle e-book.

against domination through rules and against the withdrawal of individualism. Its social critique, therefore, must call into question, *What kind of space can we make, so that personal voices interweave within the broader faith community—thereby connecting Christian teachings and practices with everyday life?*

These three aspects of reflective inquiry, according to Lee, characterize the values of *communal ministry*, *communal pedagogy*, and *communal faith formation* that are available to the church community, that is the GPIB. Relational aspects of communal ministry must embrace a worldview of group interrelatedness.<sup>13</sup> Communal pedagogy ought to acknowledge all of church life as the curriculum of and steps for the church's ministry.<sup>14</sup> Together, communal ministry and communal pedagogy should promote communal faith formation—that is, an intercultural engagement that honors different perspectives and backgrounds, building interconnectedness through mutual enrichment.<sup>15</sup>

That said, the *Tri Dharma Gereja* needs to be re-examined in terms of its ongoing relevance to the ministry of GPIB today. These notes of the triad we take in turn. First, the communal ministry must incorporate the demands of ministry as these exist today—and not just uncritically accept what practices or stratagems are passed down from generation to generation. These transformative insights must be lived out *as* communal ministry. When the church's ministry can embrace all parties in mutually enriching relationships, then the notion of unity in diversity can truly be seen in the body of Christ.

Second, communal pedagogy manifests through the church's dialogical nature. After all, as Maria Harris puts it, "The church does not have an educational program; it is an educational program."<sup>16</sup> Suppose all of church life serves as the faith community's curriculum. In that case, it will be these communal relationships that eventually point the way to whatever specific steps the church's ministry should take—and even "those who felt forgotten [will have] found ways back to active involvement," as Lee puts it.<sup>17</sup> These interventions are made by interrogating the explicit, implicit, and null curricula of the GPIB.<sup>18</sup> Suppose that the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., chapter 1, Kindle e-book.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., chapter 10, Kindle e-book.

<sup>16</sup> Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 47, quoted in Lee, *Transforming Congregations through Community*, chapter 5, Kindle e-book.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., chapter 6, Kindle e-book.

<sup>18</sup> Explicit curriculum refers to what is actually presented in the teaching-learning process. It is framed by the implicit curriculum (for example: class atmosphere or organization patterns). The null curriculum is "a paradox... it exists because it does not exist; it is what is left out." In Harris, *Fashion Me a*

GPIB had only relied on an explicit curriculum designed in a top-down approach and that it had enforced this uniformity throughout all the GPIB congregations in Indonesia. In such a case, it would behoove church leadership to pay attention to the implicit and the null curricular aspects too, thereby seeing worship, fellowship, service, and other church activities as essential parts of the overall curriculum.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the GPIB should adopt a hermeneutical method that criticizes *colonial* and *patriarchal* patterns of interpretation. As part of its communal faith formation, these liberative efforts on the part of GPIB would demonstrate how the church strives to be authentic for themselves in light of the world around it—that is, beyond it. For instance, Lee states that a pedagogical benefit of deploying postcolonial biblical interpretations would be to challenge biblical teachers and readers “to see the world beyond their own communities, asking them to reflect critically on whether biblical interpretations that one community finds just and liberating are liberating for other communities.”<sup>20</sup> This set of commitments aligns with the project of decolonizing Christian religious education in Indonesia. Mariska Lauterboom explains that fostering a decolonial imagination is crucial for reading and interpreting the Bible and understanding local culture, and integrating the experiences of body and mind.<sup>21</sup> As a result, a holistic learning process will emphasize the importance of context—as well as every person involved in that learning community.

Third, as mentioned earlier, the communal faith formation of the GPIB should draw upon the communal ministry and communal pedagogy for the promotion of transformative intercultural engagement. Throughout this process, personal and communal stories serve as primary sources for theological, educational discourse in the multicultural context of the GPIB. By not merely relying on the inheritance of dominant rules and traditions, the GPIB opens itself to a communal faith formation that balances self and community. Through intercultural relationality, the GPIB can then realize a communal identity that is essential for a diverse present and future reality, when differences are not destroyed in the effort to promote unity.

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*People*, 68-69. Later in this article, I describe the null curriculum in a positive sense.

<sup>19</sup> Lee, *Transforming Congregations through Community*, chapter 6, Kindle e-book.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 7, Kindle e-book.

<sup>21</sup> Mariska Lauterboom, “Dekolonialisasi Pendidikan Agama Kristen di Indonesia,” *Indonesian Journal of Theology* Vol. 7, No. 1 (2019): 104-105, <https://doi.org/10.46567/ijt.v7i1.8>.

### Grounding Assumptions for Communal Religious Education in the GPIB

A theory of communal religious education is hitherto unfolding, in the case of the GPIB. Again, such a theory has been grounded in three assumptions—namely, theological, pedagogical, and social. The explanatory power of this theory must be able to answer the following basic questions, which were raised earlier in the analysis of the GPIB: What is the nature of the communal ministry in the GPIB? What are the characteristics of communal engagement in the curriculum and approach of the GPIB's communal faith pedagogy? What kind of space should be created so that the personal voices of each member of the congregation can correlate with the broader community context to connect faith and life?

#### *What is the nature of the communal ministry in the GPIB?*

The communal ministry embraces the relational character of the faith community. This concept is explained in the social doctrine of Trinity. Jürgen Moltmann emphasizes the inseparable relationship between “person” and “relation.” Moltmann says, “person and relation therefore have to be understood in a reciprocal relationship. Here there are no persons without relations; but there are no relations without persons either.”<sup>22</sup> Thereby, living things that isolate themselves lose their flexibility and become calcified—that is, they die.<sup>23</sup> Reciprocity is important to maintain uniqueness, unity and to avoid discrimination among the people as the body of Christ. The community which is filled with different energies of Christ's liberating power is, therefore, not the exclusive community of the saved.<sup>24</sup> The divine Trinitarian fellowship is a mirror of Christian life, embodying the principle of relationality. Moltmann explains the interdependence of the identity and relationality of the Trinity without reducing the threeness to the unity, or dissolving the unity in the threeness.<sup>25</sup> This explanation not only answers the questions about what is the ultimate meaning and purpose of relationship but also receives legitimacy, validity, and justification from the divine *koinonia* as the fellowship of Trinitarian Persons. Thus, it is essential to put *koinonia* in balance with other aspects of the GPIB's *Tri Dharma*

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<sup>22</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row Publishers, 1981), 172.

<sup>23</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 227.

<sup>24</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), 293.

<sup>25</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 175.

*Gereja*. This communal identity is necessary for diverse reality, which must not be destroyed when promoting unity.

Furthermore, the Trinity communion in Moltmann's idea has a lot in common with feminist theology. Ally Moder states that the social doctrine of Trinity is "preserving the unity of the Trinity while maintaining its diversity is inherent to the feminist cause of affirming women's full personhood as unique beings in relationship with different but unified others."<sup>26</sup> In cosmic Trinity understanding, Heup Young Kim observes:

In the both-and paradigm of *yin-yang*, God is not only both female and male, but also both personal and non-personal, and ultimately transcends those categories. The cosmic Trinity rooted in the ontocosmology of *T'ai-chi* definitely includes a feminine personhood and encourages the view of the Holy Spirit as God Mother. Like Sophia, the *Tao* refers to Wisdom primarily in feminine metaphors. The *Tao-te ching* notes how the seemingly weak feminine (*yin*) exerts power over the apparently strong masculine (*yang*).<sup>27</sup>

This understanding correlates with the idea of the mother of communion. Weldemina Yudit Tiwery, a theologian from Indonesia, explains that the mother of communion builds common values because the universe is God's creation, and she encapsulates in her womb all the elements of life, both natural and human, as communion.<sup>28</sup> This view unites all people in the community.

In line with Tiwery, Kim says that "primordially, the ultimate reality (the *Tao*) lies in the *yin* rather than in the *yang*. The *Tao* is also depicted as the Mysterious Female or Mother, who is the root of Heaven and Earth."<sup>29</sup> This emphasizes that human relations provide mutual support and enrichment. Communal ministry at the GPIB should see that the radiance of God's glory is not aimed at the dominant group (including the patriarchal context), but at women, marginal groups, interfaith relations, and all the inhabitants of the universe.

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<sup>26</sup> Ally Moder, "Women, Personhood, and the Male God: A Feminist Critique of Patriarchal Concepts of God in View of Domestic Abuse," *Feminist Theology Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2019): 85, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0966735019859471>.

<sup>27</sup> Heup Young Kim, "The Tao in Confucianism and Taoism: The Trinity in East Asian Perspective," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity*, ed., Peter Phan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 304.

<sup>28</sup> Weldemina Yudit Tiwery, *Teologi Ina: Terlahir dari Rahim Maluku* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2015), 268-271.

<sup>29</sup> Heup Young Kim, "The Tao in Confucianism and Taoism," 304.

***What are the characteristics of communal engagement in the curriculum and approach of the GPIB's communal faith pedagogy?***

Communal pedagogy embraces all of church life as the curriculum.<sup>30</sup> I immerse this understanding in my own story as a pastor in some ministry experiences. After I was ordained a pastor, my first placement was in the hinterland of West Kalimantan. There was no electricity and no telephone signal. The house where I lived was only the size of a private room. I could not determine my daily food menu because there was no market. It felt so foreign to me, and I doubted if I could survive when I first went there. I repeatedly glanced at my suitcase and thought about leaving. Shortly afterward, some pastors came, and they admitted that they really missed that place because it was the first place where they served. I was confused; why was a place like this missed? One pastor even said that it was where he learned a lot about the importance of faith—beyond what he learned in college and at affluent congregations in big cities.

Several years later, when I was placed as a lecturer in Yogyakarta city, I found myself doing the same thing with other pastors. In my limited time off, I came back to visit the place. I felt a powerful attachment to the congregation there. When I was bleeding in my first pregnancy, the whole congregation came to pray and comfort me with repeated hymn singing. The tone was different from the original song, but strangely it sounded very beautiful to my ears and it deeply touched my heart. In a different moment, I was stunned by the power of prayer when the congregation relied on God for the harvest amid natural disasters. The congregation's belief and the success of the harvest taught me—who was overwhelmed by doubts—a lot about God's power in the universe.

I met the “early church” atmosphere there, based on their true fellowship and mutual enrichment. Interconnectedness and strong impressions were born from strong relationality and from examples of faith in all aspects of the ministry. All the limitations I experienced in the hinterland could not compare to the experience of meeting “true communion” as a powerful learning community. I learned a lot about being “deeply attached” to the faith community's sincerity and love. I acknowledge that it was a fellowship of the cosmic Trinity. It had the balance of the explicit, implicit, and null curriculum. This community underwent a formal service program with a totality (explicit curriculum), but it framed it with a very strong kinship atmosphere (implicit curriculum). Domination of power, hypocrisy, and oppressive structures do not

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<sup>30</sup> Lee, *Transforming Congregations through Community*, chapter 4, Kindle e-book.

exist there (null). The church teaches a great deal about Christianity and spiritual praxis without saying a word.<sup>31</sup>

This personal story and my actual experience are part of my hope for the future of the GPIB. They are authentic examples of how to build a deeply communal vision. They are in line with the pedagogical steps presented by Boyung Lee. Faith education occurs in every ministry context because all aspects of the ministry of the church have an educational element. The pastor does not dominate the learning and formation of faith because the entire community of faith contributes to building a strong relationship. This means that the communal church administration and program development at the GPIB must also pay attention to the concept of communal pedagogy, which sees all of church life as the curriculum. Learning about the faith involves all members of the congregation. The teaching-learning process occurs through all aspects of church service.

The concept of communal pedagogy in the context of the GPIB allows us to say, with Maria Harris, that there is no need to be afraid to reconstruct the *Tri Dharma Gereja* by considering other aspects of ministry, education (*didache*), and liturgy (*leiturgia*).<sup>32</sup> Until now, *didache* and *leiturgia* have been separated from the ministerial aspect in the GPIB because *didache* is associated only with schools owned by the GPIB, and *leiturgia* is understood only as a part of the church's worship. The church itself is an educational program. Communal ministry in the GPIB should embrace *didache* and *leiturgia* in a holistic understanding.

Furthermore, among GPIB congregations that are spread throughout Indonesia, there should be a contextual study of each congregation so that the learning model can answer their respective needs. When the congregation feels "involved" in church activities and becomes the subject of church ministry, individualism can be overcome. The uniformity of curriculum is a fatal mistake that can perpetuate the problems with the ministry that members of GPIB congregations complained about. Moreover, in the context of the patriarchal community in the GPIB and in line with Lee's explanation, postcolonial biblical hermeneutics, including interpretation from a feminist perspective, also becomes relevant because "personal and communal stories become important

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., chapter 5, Kindle e-book.

<sup>32</sup> According to Maria Harris, there are five curricular aspects in the church ministry, *koinonia*, *leiturgia*, *didache*, *kerygma*, and *diakonia*. Further, the explanation of *kerygma* (the curriculum of proclamation) can complement the *martyria* concept used by the GPIB. *Kerygma* proclaims the word of Jesus' resurrection through preaching, curricular task, priestly listening, prophetic speech, and political advocacy. Harris, *Fashion Me a People*, 16-17, 134-140.

sources for theological and educational discourse.”<sup>33</sup> The 5Rs approach in communal Bible Study (Reading the Ground, Remembering, Reflecting, Reinterpreting, and Re-Searching) can be included in teaching the Bible in local GPIB churches.<sup>34</sup> They allow space for each context to enrich the existing stages to be relevant and beneficial to each congregation.

***What kind of space should be created so that the personal voices of each member of the congregation can correlate with the broader community context to connect faith and life?***

The theological and pedagogical grounding of communal religious education is related to communal ministry and communal pedagogy. Therefore, a social foundation must be related to these other two foundations. In the multicultural GPIB, interconnectedness is fundamental for sustaining relationality as a fellowship that mutually learns and teaches in all aspects of church service. It makes communal faith formation in the GPIB real. The communal identity is essential for diverse reality. It must not be destroyed in the name of promoting unity. Thus, communal ministry and communal pedagogy contribute to realizing the communal faith formation in the church community, which promotes intercultural transformation.<sup>35</sup>

In this process, personal and communal stories are primary sources for theological and educational discourse in the multicultural context of the GPIB. It promotes a communal faith formation between the self and community in an intercultural relationship. Lee states that “if we are really serious about being a multicultural society, we should create a web of dialogue so that all the groups are involved in multifaceted dialogue with each other, thus creating a just world for all...In this dialogical web, no one group claims to hold the place at the center.”<sup>36</sup>

In the Indonesian context, the web of dialogue is strongly related to relationships among the community. This is reflected in a social term, *musyawarah-mufakat*, which means mutual cooperation in the context of diversity to reach consensus as the basis of intercultural stability.<sup>37</sup> It acknowledges that all citizens are children of the motherland, with the same rights and obligations in everyday

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<sup>33</sup> Lee, *Transforming Congregations through Community*, chapter 7, Kindle e-book.

<sup>34</sup> Boyung Lee explains this approach deeply in her book. This approach can be applied while considering the existing context in the GPIB. Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., chapter 10, Kindle e-book.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Agustinus W. Dewantara, *Alangkah Hebatnya Negara Gotong Royong: Indonesia dalam Kacamata Soekarno* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2017), 67.

life.<sup>38</sup> This principle is related to *gotong royong* (mutual assistance), which is part of the noble identity of Indonesian society. The spirit of mutual cooperation is manifested not only in the GPIB itself but also with the entire community around it, both female and male, personal and non-personal, involving interfaith relations, and including the universe created by God.

### Conclusion

Communal ministry, communal pedagogy, and communal faith formation are very crucial in the GPIB. Diversity is the wealth to become an authentic church and to survive in changing times. Without it, the GPIB's ark cannot sail against storms and waves because its strength is divided and it becomes weak. This ship can be damaged, even sunk before reaching its destination, but there is always hope to strengthen and be strengthened through communal fellowship. That is the wealth of communal ministry which enables us to survive, not individually but in the spirit of togetherness. Therefore, in this article I propose three assumptions to build a theory of communal religious education in the GPIB. They are theological, pedagogical, and social. Communal identity is necessary for the diverse reality of the GPIB, and it must not be destroyed in the name of unity. This process is an early attempt at shaping a theory in religious education in the context of GPIB. Educational practices for communal religious education can be considered for future research of this article.

The Trinitarian God that includes feminine personhood embraces all of church life as the real curriculum. It engages the church's community through a web of dialogue (*musyawarah-mufakat*), which means through an authentic community. The GPIB can make a very significant contribution to the understanding of the diversity of Indonesian society. Communal identity is necessary for diverse reality in the GPIB, and it must not be destroyed when promoting unity.

### About the Author

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 19.

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