

## Exploring Holistic Catechesis for Catholic Teens

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**Abstract:** This research aims to discuss how to conduct effective catechesis for teenagers to maintain their Catholic faith amidst the currents of the modern world. The focus of this research is on the cases of several Catholic teenagers converting to Protestant denominations, which have occurred in the St. Gabriel Parish in Nunukan, Northern Kalimantan. This research utilizes a qualitative methodology. The author collects data through interviews and distributing questionnaires. The author will interview several teenagers who have abandoned the Catholic faith and converted to other churches. Based on the research, the author found that Catholic teenagers in Nunukan face various challenging faith issues. Those who are in a period of self-discovery must contend with the general environment and the times that offer various forms of worldly temptations. Some of the faith challenges they face include the influence of social media, free association, juvenile delinquency, early marriage, drugs, and conversion to another religion. One serious problem faced by the Church, especially for Catholic teenagers in Nunukan, is the proliferation and growth of Protestant denominations. As a result, many Catholic teenagers in Nunukan convert to other religions for various reasons and backgrounds. Here, the Church is required to adopt effective catechetical methods for teenagers so that they can maintain and remain faithful to their faith. One model of good catechesis is holistic mentoring.

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## INTRODUCTION

Religion serves as a means for individuals to express their faith. Since childhood, everyone has faith and beliefs inherited from their parents. However, as time goes by, individuals mature and often begin to contemplate or question their faith. Consequently, cases of religious conversion often occur. The increasingly modern era, coupled with the strong influence of globalization in various fields (worldly temptations, advancements in science and technology, economic needs, etc.), is cited as a reason for the increasing number of people converting religions (Anton, 2011). Some lecturers from one of the Pastoral Colleges in Malang conducted research on this matter. The results of their research showed that in one parish, there were 316 people who left the Catholic faith and converted to other religions. From the research findings, several factors causing religious conversion were identified, including rapid advancements in Science and Technology, a shortage of priests in the parish, and the lack of attention from the Church (diocese and parish) in enhancing catechetical resources (Kristian, 2013). This phenomenon (religious conversion) needs serious attention from the Church today (Goa & Batlyol, 2016).

There are several reasons why the Church needs to seek, find, and implement appropriate catechetical methods for teenagers to endure and remain faithful to the Catholic

faith. First, teenagers have a responsibility for the future sustainability of the Church. The future life of the Church depends on the depth of faith among teenagers. Second, adolescence is a period of self-discovery. During this time, teenagers strive to find their identity and lay the foundation for their future lives. In this regard, the search for and solidification of their faith as witnesses of Christ in their world and time is also important. Third, adolescence is a vulnerable and easily influenced period. This is a continuation of the second reason mentioned (Tse, 2011). During the search for identity, they confront the contemporary world, which offers various worldly temptations that may lead them to abandon their faith. Therefore, by conducting intensive catechesis using methods suitable for their age and the current era, the Church can assist teenagers, who are the future of the Church, in maintaining their faith (Tuhumury, 2019).

Teenagers face a period of transition to adulthood. During this period, teenagers face various issues and challenges, both in their lives and their faith. According to Zakiah Darajat, all forms of problems and challenges faced by teenagers are closely related to the age they are going through and the influence of their living environment (Widyaningsih, 2011). There are three common problems that teenagers often encounter: adaptation issues, religion, and education. Specifically regarding religion (faith), they encounter various problems that simultaneously pose challenges to the development of their faith, such as religious awareness and the practice of religious teachings. Teenagers begin to use their critical thinking skills towards adult behavior or, in this case, their parents. Anything they perceive as contradictory will affect the blurring of values (Panggabean, 2018). The rigid implementation of religious teachings sometimes becomes a hindrance for teenagers' faith development because they have to live their faith according to what their parents instilled in them during childhood. Rigidity in practice becomes an obstacle to the development of their faith, especially during this phase of life. They must live and adapt their behavior to God's will. Rigidity in religious practice, environmental influences, and the need for freedom make teenagers weary of practicing their faith (Messakh, 2018). Other factors such as economics and socialization also greatly influence teenagers in maintaining their faith. Therefore, this research aims to contribute a catechetical model for teenagers to maintain their faith in the face of these issues and challenges (Tse, 2011).

The focus of this research is to discover relevant catechetical methods for Catholic teenagers to maintain their faith in today's world. Specifically, this study will refer to the case of several Catholic teenagers converting to other churches in Nunukan Regency. There are two problem formulations to be discussed in this research based on the research focus. First: what causes some Catholic teenagers to convert to Protestant denominations? Second: how can Catholic teenagers maintain their Catholic faith amidst the proliferation of Protestant churches in Nunukan?

Previous research mostly discusses catechesis in general using literature review and phenomenological studies. Previous studies generally address the issues and challenges faced by teenagers in general (Widodo, 2011). This study will present a case study that occurred in Kalimantan, specifically in the parish of St. Gabriel Nunukan. By using Church documents that

discuss catechesis for teenagers and consulting several catechetical figures, this research aims to provide effective catechetical methods for teenagers to maintain their Catholic faith.

This research uses a qualitative methodology. The author collects data through interviews. Several Catholic teenagers who have left the Catholic faith and converted to other churches will be interviewed, as well as some Catholic teenagers and youth leaders from the St. Gabriel Nunukan parish. The author also draws information from Church documents, books, articles, and journals. The aim of this research is to assist Catholic teenagers from the St. Gabriel Nunukan parish and Catholic teenagers in general in maintaining their faith in today's world. Another objective is to find effective catechetical methods for today's teenagers.

## **METHOD**

The author distributed questionnaires using Google Forms. The respondents numbered 23 individuals. The respondents are Catholic teenagers from the St. Gabriel Nunukan parish. All respondents are from and reside in Nunukan. The author divided them into two categories: those living in the central area of the parish and those living in the station area. The respondents' educational levels vary, with some in junior high school, senior high school, and several university students. However, most of them are senior high school students (73%). The questions asked were divided into two categories: closed-ended questions and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions focused more on informational inquiries. Meanwhile, through open-ended questions, the author obtained answers that were more explanatory.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The phenomenon of religious conversion occurring in the St. Gabriel Nunukan Parish and various other places is a matter of shared concern. The Church needs to take a stance and specific steps to address these cases of religious conversion. Firstly, the Church must study and understand the reasons and backgrounds behind this phenomenon. By studying and understanding them deeply, the Church will be able to take appropriate catechetical measures to reduce cases of religious conversion (Supriyadi, 2011). The author will provide some foundational thoughts and research findings along with their discussions.

Teenagers are the hope of the Church's future. They have a significant responsibility for the development of the Church. They are responsible for preserving, continuing, developing, nurturing, and perfecting what has been initiated and pioneered by the Church before them. Additionally, teenagers also have the duty and responsibility to prepare the generations that will succeed them. This phenomenon concludes that teenagers play a crucial role in determining and safeguarding the future of the Church. Therefore, the Church needs to seek and enhance effective catechetical models for teenagers that are suitable for the current era (Tse, 2011).

The Church, through the Second Vatican Council, has emphasized the importance of accompaniment (catechesis) for young Catholics. Specifically, the council asserts that education for young people is crucial. This affirmation is based on two fundamental reasons: the right of young people to education and the mission entrusted to them by Christ. Furthermore, it is explained that based on the mission entrusted by Christ, young people are

responsible for proclaiming salvation to all, renewing in Christ, and preserving the integrity of human life in its entirety. The Council specifically elaborates on the right to education that young people must obtain. Everyone has the right to education that cannot be infringed upon. This right is based on their dignity as individuals. They (young people) must receive education that aligns with their goals and characteristics (GS, 1).

The adolescent age is a vulnerable period in terms of self-discovery. In this quest, they encounter various complex life issues. One of the problems they face is related to their faith (religion). In this regard, the Church plays a crucial role in accompanying them to find solutions and other forms of accompaniment (Nugroho, 2017). This should be taken seriously by the Church because young people are growing and developing in an ever-changing world. The accompaniment needed for them is very complex according to their spiritual and physical needs. Therefore, pastoral accompaniment (catechesis) must be made to accompany them in facing the situations and challenges of modern life (Dewantara, 2011).

Catechesis for young people is urgent. The phenomenon today reveals that many Catholic teenagers eventually leave the Catholic faith and join other Christian denominations. One of the reasons is the lack of pastoral accompaniment (catechesis) for young people. The Church tends to focus attention only on spiritual matters. Other aspects of life are often neglected. As a result, many people convert religions. Therefore, a holistic accompaniment model (catechesis) needs to be considered.

Holistic accompaniment is one form of comprehensive accompaniment related to four aspects of human life: physical, mental, social, and spiritual. This accompaniment should be the model of catechesis applied to young people today. The Church should not only focus attention on spiritual matters. If the Church's attention and accompaniment for young people are only directed or involved in spiritual aspects, such accompaniment will not comprehensively address the full needs of young people (Andalas, 2019). This is the focus of the author's attention in addressing it in this study. Where there are cases of religious conversion in the St. Gabriel Nunukan parish. Therefore, by basing this research on holistic accompaniment, the author aims to provide a catechesis model for young Catholics in the St. Gabriel Nunukan Parish.

Based on the phenomenon that occurred in the St. Gabriel Nunukan Parish, where several Catholic teenagers left the Catholic faith and joined Protestant denominations, the author conducted research on the reasons or backgrounds for this to happen. The author conducted research by interviewing several teenagers who were formerly Catholic and now embrace other Christian religions. In addition, the author also distributed questionnaires to 23 Catholic teenagers who remain faithful to their Catholic faith amidst the proliferation of Protestant denominations in Nunukan. The following will describe and attach the results of the interviews and questionnaires from the research.

Based on the research (answers to the questions given to the respondents) with closed-ended questions, the author found several research results as follows. Most respondents acknowledge that the phenomenon of religious conversion of some Catholic teenagers that

occurred in the St. Gabriel Nunukan Parish is caused by several reasons. Some of them did not receive sufficient religious education (faith) at home or at school. Some of them are less involved in youth organization activities. Moreover, the church (parish) provides inadequate facilities for the spiritual development of teenagers. Accompaniment and guidance for young people are still felt to be lacking.

There are several other reasons that cause some Catholic teenagers in the St. Gabriel Nunukan Parish to switch religions, including: First, in Nunukan, there are many Protestant church denominations. The abundance of Protestant denominations has a significant influence on Catholic teenagers in maintaining their Catholic faith. Most of them live in environments where there are many (mostly) people of other religions (Protestant denominations). Second, most of them have attended services and church activities organized by Protestant denominations. And there are even some among them who have been invited to convert from Catholicism to one of the Protestant denominations. These two factors are significant influences behind some Catholic teenagers in the St. Gabriel Nunukan Parish converting to other religions (Protestant denominations).

The research continued with several open-ended questions accompanied by explanations. The research results prove several things as follows. First, Catholic teenagers face several challenges in maintaining their faith amidst the proliferation of Protestant church denominations in the Nunukan district. These challenges include: living in areas where Catholics are a minority religion; lack of support from parents for teenage involvement in church activities; socializing with many friends mostly from Protestant denominational churches; feeling inferior as a religious minority; and lack of attention from the church in mentoring and accompanying teenagers. The Church (parish) pays more attention to the Catholic Youth Organization (OMK).

Second, the influence of living in a city or village with many Protestant denominational churches greatly affects their (respondents) Catholic faith. In general, many answered yes. The main reasons are two: First, having large families who are Protestant. Second, being frequently invited and attending youth activities in other churches (Protestant denominations) which are considered more vibrant and attractive. These two reasons are the main reasons why Nunukan Catholic teenagers easily convert religions and their faith wavers. In addition, there are also other reasons such as embarrassment for being a minority.

Third, most respondents have family or friends who are of other religions (Protestant denominations). Almost 40% of respondents have families of Protestant denominations and 100% of respondents have friends of other religions. Even respondents admit that they have more friends of other religions than fellow Catholics. These two factors have a significant influence on them in maintaining their Catholic faith.

Fourth, the methods or forms of mentoring provided by the Church (parish) for fostering the faith of teenagers in the St. Gabriel Nunukan parish still feel ineffective and conducive. The mentoring they receive is insufficient to help them maintain their Catholic faith. Most respondents acknowledge that the Church (parish) does not provide specific mentoring

for Catholic teenagers in the St. Gabriel Nunukan Parish. There are youth organizations and activities, but they are often combined with SEKAMI or OMK. In addition, they only receive mentoring from religion teachers at school. This poses a challenge for Catholic teenagers in Nunukan because most Catholic religion teachers in Nunukan are still honorary. Moreover, there are some public schools that do not have Catholic religion teachers. This becomes a challenge for Catholic teenagers in Nunukan to maintain their faith.

Fifth, most respondents have family or friends who have converted religions (from Catholic to other Christian churches). 75% of respondents said that there are families and friends who have left the Catholic faith and converted to several Protestant denominations. Some convert because they follow their parents; some convert by their own will; some convert because they marry a partner of another religion; some convert because they are more noticed in other churches; some convert because other churches provide assistance to their families; and some teenagers convert because they are invited by their school friends, even though their families and parents still embrace the Catholic faith.

Sixth, according to the respondents' opinions, there are several reasons why many Catholic individuals (teenagers) convert from Catholicism to Protestantism or other Christian churches. According to them, in other churches (Protestant denominations), the liturgy is more lively and creative. Additionally, certain churches (Protestant denominations) provide free schools and dormitories. This has a significant influence, especially for Catholic teenagers whose parents work in Malaysia (migrant workers). The influence of socialization and persuasion from friends who are Protestant, as well as frequently participating in activities and worship held by Protestant denominational churches, is also an influence that should not be underestimated by the Catholic Church. It has a considerable impact on Catholic teenagers. However, some of them also follow their parents.

Based on the research results, it was found that some respondents have been invited to convert religions. Some were even forced by their parents or families. Some reasons that emerged include Catholicism being a minority religion in Nunukan; it would be difficult to attend public school if they were Catholic; because there are many activities for youth and teenagers in other churches; if in other churches (Protestant denominations) there are many facilities and infrastructure for talent development, especially in music; and so on. This also has a significant influence on the theme of this research.

As teenagers, who inherently live in a world of strong friendships and during a period of self-discovery, the above-mentioned factors greatly influence them in maintaining and being accountable for their Catholic faith. These factors have even influenced many Nunukan Catholic teenagers to convert to several Protestant denominational churches. Although they often face these challenges, many Nunukan Catholic teenagers still hold firm to and maintain their Catholic faith. Most of them acknowledge that they were born and raised in Catholic families. Additionally, some answered that they have not been influenced to convert religions until now. Generally, they persevere in their Catholic faith because they receive sufficient

attention and mentoring, especially from their families. Also, because Catholic faith has been deeply rooted in them since childhood.

There are several suggestions and recommendations from the respondents for the Church (St. Gabriel Nunukan parish) in conducting catechesis (faith formation) for teenagers. They propose that mentoring for teenagers should be increased and that creativity in catechesis for teenagers should also be enhanced. The teenage world is a world full of creativity, so the church also needs to organize activities specifically for teenagers. Mentoring for teenagers should not only focus on deepening faith or religious education. There should be activities such as sports, music, or specific competitions for teenagers. Furthermore, a pastor dedicated to teenagers is greatly needed so that mentoring for teenagers is not combined with the Catholic Youth Organization (OMK) or Youth Ministry (SEKAMI). Lastly, catechesis methods for teenagers should consider and follow the development of the times, especially following the development of the teenage world.

The author conducted direct interviews using mobile phones and WhatsApp with three teenagers who used to be Catholic and have now converted to Protestantism. All three teenagers reside in Nunukan to this day. They all come from Catholic families, born and raised in Catholic families. Here are the results of the interviews with these three teenagers.

First, the author interviewed Mr. Julius Tangkeallo. Julius is a junior high school student at a public school in Nunukan. Julius is now 15 years old. He has left the Catholic faith for approximately 2 years. Currently, he is Protestant (GPIB). In the interview, he mentioned several reasons for leaving the Catholic faith and converting to Protestantism. The first reason is that in the Protestant church, he can develop his musical talent. Julius has a talent for music. Several times he was invited by his Protestant friends to play music in their church. Initially, Julius only wanted to follow his friends' invitation because he felt there were friends and opportunities to develop his talent and hobby in music. However, he had no intention of converting religions. However, after following his friends for some time, he was invited to attend worship at the Protestant church. At first, he refused because he was afraid of being scolded by his parents and family. However, because he was entrusted and given the opportunity to play music during the ecumenical Christmas event organized by the BAMAG (Interfaith Consultative Body), he began to be interested in converting to Protestantism. Additionally, environmental factors also influenced him. He and his family live in a predominantly Protestant neighborhood. Almost all of his neighbors and playmates are Protestant. Eventually, he decided to leave the Catholic faith and convert to Protestantism. His intention to convert was approved by both of his parents on the grounds that his talent could flourish. Additionally, his parents were happy when Julius converted to Protestantism because since converting, Julius has become more active in spiritual activities at the church (GPIB).

Secondly, Irwan Saleh. Irwan is a teenage boy who is related to Julius Tangkeallo (cousin). Unlike Julius, Irwan attends a private Catholic school in Nunukan. Irwan is now 17 years old. He converted to Protestantism since Christmas 2020. As Julius's cousin, Irwan acknowledges that he converted to Protestantism (GPIB) because he followed and saw changes

in Julius's life. Irwan said that since converting to Protestantism, Julius and some of his friends spent more time playing in their church. Many changes have occurred in Julius's life observed by Irwan. According to Irwan, Julius's life now (after converting to GPIB) is better than before (when he was still Catholic).

Irwan Saleh is a former Catholic teenager of the St. Gabriel Nunukan Parish who has left the Catholic faith and converted to Protestantism following in the footsteps of his cousin. In the interview, he admitted that the Protestant church is more creative in worship. Additionally, the Protestant church (GPIB) often holds activities for youth and teenagers. Almost every week there are spiritual activities for youth and teenagers. This is what makes Irwan even more interested in converting to Protestantism. Additionally, in GPIB, he feels that he (as a teenager) is being cared for. He feels he has many friends who can gather together in church every week. It can even be every day. His desire to convert to Protestantism grew stronger after receiving approval from both of his parents. Furthermore, Irwan's parents have now also left the Catholic faith and embraced Protestantism (GPIB).

The last interview was with a migrant worker's child named Bernadus Udjan. Bernadus is a teenager who was born and raised in Malaysia. Both of his parents work as migrant workers in Malaysia. He spent his childhood up to elementary school in that neighboring country. In 2016, his parents sent Bernadus to Indonesia (Nunukan) to continue his education (from junior high school to now high school). Initially, he lived with his family in Nunukan. However, after entering high school, he decided to live in a hostel (Anglican) after being invited by some of his friends. He got information from his friends that the Anglican church in Nunukan has free hostels. That information made him immediately contact his parents who were working in Malaysia. His parents agreed very much because it could reduce the financial burden.

Since the first time he entered and lived in the Anglican hostel, Bernadus was immediately impressed by the activities of the Anglican church youth. The Anglican church is still relatively new in the Nunukan district, but the growth of its congregation is quite rapid. Considering that he was the only Catholic living in the hostel, Bernadus began to intend to convert to Anglicanism. His intention was strengthened because the hostel was located in the Anglican Church complex in Nunukan. In addition, almost every week and even every day he attended worship services at the Anglican church. After two months of living in the hostel, Bernadus never went to Catholic church mass again. He decided to convert; leaving the Catholic faith and converting to Anglicanism. Because for Bernadus, the Anglican church pays more attention to his life. Finally, after six months of participating in all activities in the hostel and the Anglican church, he was baptized and accepted as a member of the Anglican church in Nunukan after obtaining approval from his parents. It is added that when his parents visited Bernadus in Nunukan, his parents also attended Sunday worship at the Anglican church and did not go to the Catholic church for mass.

Everyone has experienced and gone through a period known as adolescence. Adolescence is a period where an individual seeks and finds their identity as well as the direction and purpose of their life in the future. Adolescence is a period where life and all



aspects of its experience development. A basic need during this period is the need to build friendships with many people in a good and beneficial way (Koten, 2018). In addition, this period is also characterized by a longing to obtain love and comfort in life, searching for beautiful and beneficial things outside oneself. The dynamics in this period enable a teenager to imitate positive and good things for their current and future lives. The goal is for the fulfillment of their psychological and biological needs.

Based on the results of interviews and questionnaire distribution in the above research, the author found that teenagers are less interested in a somewhat conventional lifestyle. They do not want to live a life that seems rigid and filled with quite dominant authority. They (Catholic teenagers who converted) feel that they find that in their lives in the Catholic church. This brings its own clash and challenges for them in practicing their faith according to the current era. Teenagers want to live their faith more openly with something new, innovative, interesting, and able to pay attention not only to their spiritual needs (Utomo, 2018).

The dynamics of adolescent life as described above are phenomena faced by the contemporary church, especially in the parish of St. Gabriel Nunukan. Based on the research findings, several fundamental reasons why some Catholic teenagers eventually switch to Protestant church denominations have been identified. Apart from the rigid and less engaging pastoral care, liturgy, and catechesis models that seem out of touch with the souls and lives of today's teenagers, there are also several fundamental reasons that can be outlined here. First, teenagers want to seek and find things that they consider interesting, good, valuable, and limitless beyond themselves. Second, teenagers cannot find satisfaction if it does not come from God himself. This is consistent with what St. Augustine expressed, "My heart will not be at peace until it rests in the Lord." This expression depicts that all humans (teenagers) long for a unity with God in an atmosphere full of love, truth, beauty, goodness, and justice. This is what teenagers long for in their spiritual and physical lives.

Faced with the above situation, the Church is called to find good and appropriate catechesis methods for accompanying teenagers. The Church cannot remain silent in the face of such situations. Teenagers are the hope of the Church. They are the next generation of the Church who will continue to uphold and maintain the Catholic faith amidst a diverse and ever-changing era. Therefore, a proposal for the Church in catechizing teenagers is a holistic method.

Holistic accompaniment is one form of comprehensive accompaniment related to four aspects of human life: physical, mental, social, and spiritual. This accompaniment should be the catechesis model that can be applied to today's teenagers. The Church should not only focus on the spiritual aspect. If the Church's attention and accompaniment for teenagers only focus or are involved in the spiritual aspect, such accompaniment will not comprehensively address the full needs of teenagers.

## **CONCLUSION**

Catholic teenagers are the hope of the Church. The future of the Church lies in their hands. The phenomenon of some Catholic teenagers in the Parish of St. Gabriel Nunukan

converting to Protestant denominations should be a concern for the entire Church. From this research, it is found that the conversion of some Catholic teenagers in Nunukan to other churches is caused by several factors such as: the lack of specific attention from the parish for the development and accompaniment of teenagers; catechesis methods that seem rigid to today's teenagers; lack of creativity in fostering the faith of teenagers; and several other factors. This needs to be addressed and given special attention by the parish, especially in the Parish of St. Gabriel Nunukan.

The Catholic Church is called to continue to guide, nurture, and strengthen the faith of teenagers. The Church and its leaders in the Parish of St. Gabriel Nunukan should seek and find suitable catechesis methods for today's young people. Young people continue to grow and develop in an increasingly changing era. Catechesis methods should take that into account. The Church should not only pay attention to the spiritual needs of its faithful. The Church should be open to seeing the development of the times and the needs of today's youth. The holistic method is quite relevant in accompanying and fostering today's teenagers. The Church should pay attention to all aspects of teenage life in order to nurture strong faith in teenagers, who are the hope of the Church in the future.

The future face of the Catholic Church depends greatly on the lives of today's teenagers. Adolescence is a time of self-discovery. In this period, teenagers try to find and lay the foundation for their identity. Their identity is not only about physical aspects but also involves psychological and spiritual aspects. In this research, all aspects should be seriously considered by the Church. Teenagers should receive intensive and continuous attention so that the face of the Church continues to be renewed in accordance with the ever-changing times.

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