



The Catholic Laity as Developers of a Generous and Merciful Church

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Abstract: This article explores the theme articulated by Mgr. Ignatius Suharyo who suggests the role of the laity within the Catholic Church and their potential to significantly contribute to the Church's mission of mercy and generosity. However, various challenges hinder the full realization of the laity's role, including limited understanding of their capabilities, hierarchical structures, and societal changes impacting their engagement. The urgency to address these obstacles stems from the need for a vibrant and inclusive Church that effectively responds to the needs of the faithful and the wider community. Employing a qualitative method based on literature review, the article analyzes existing literature on the laity's role in the Church and Mgr. Suharyo's insights to identify key themes and perspectives. The findings underscore the untapped potential of the laity to contribute to the Church's mission and emphasize the importance of empowering them with necessary knowledge, skills, and support for active participation. In conclusion, the article emphasizes the significance of recognizing and harnessing the contributions of the Catholic laity as developers of a generous and merciful Church, calling for concerted efforts to overcome obstacles and promote greater involvement and engagement in the Church's life and mission.

INTRODUCTION

The Church, as a spiritual and social institution, plays a profoundly important role in the lives of its people. Serving as a gathering place for the faithful to seek spiritual enlightenment and strengthen communal bonds, the Church holds a significant responsibility to nurture and develop the faith lives of its followers. In the context of Indonesia, where plurality and social dynamics are characteristic, the Church faces unique challenges. One concept that has emerged amidst the dynamics of the Catholic Archdiocese of Jakarta (KAJ: Keuskupan Agung Jakarta, Bahasa Indonesia) is the concept of "A Generous and Merciful Church" (Sulistyo, 2016).

This concept does not arise in isolation. It emerges amid the transition from the 20th to the 21st century, marked by the impact of the nation's economic crisis in 1998. During that time, the faithful of KAJ, like the general populace, experienced the hardships of a difficult economic life. Additionally, concerns arose among the flock about the difficulty of accessing quality spiritual services. Mgr. Ign. Suharyo, a key figure behind this concept, called upon

priests to provide not only physically generous services but also spiritually generous ones. Services that are not merely routine and formalities, but genuinely build faith and strengthen communal goodness.

The modern world presents its own challenges. The Church must not only focus on the activities of the faithful in the Parish, but Church leaders must also recognize that the faithful are laypeople who have their own experiences in their daily lives. Past Church history has shown that the Church chose to reject worldly matters (Before Vatican Council II). The Church at that time preferred to be "Pastor-centric" and "Parish-centric". The tendency of the Church before Vatican Council II, which was "Pastor-centric" and "Parish-centric", often made the faithful or lay people passive. The ordained clergy and religious orders at that time were central to the development of the faith of the faithful. The ordained clergy and religious orders were entrusted with the task and responsibility of nurturing the faith of the faithful. And it was this aspect that was rectified and renewed in Vatican Council II.

The spirit of Vatican Council II, which called for the Catholic Church to continually renew itself, contextualize, and reflect on itself in response to the changing times and for the development of the congregation, underlies this writing (Suseno, 2004: 35). The modern world today presents a new challenge to the Church that the Church must not be satisfied and not reflect on its mission in this world. The Church must be open to embrace, greet, and nurture the faith of Christians. The religious dimension for the faithful should be the focus of attention for the Catholic Church so that the Catholic Church is not only focused and busy with its institutions. Because if this religious dimension is forgotten and overlooked, the Catholic Church only presents itself as "institutions" only, for example: The Church building is so magnificent, but the faith of the faithful is not touched or not given attention by the Catholic Church through pastoral caregivers.

The Church is a communion of the faithful. The Church, through its pastoral caregivers, must also always be open to the various situations of today's world. The works of the Church must truly touch the lives of the faithful. And these works can succeed and run smoothly through the grace of God. So pastoral caregivers, for example: Priests must always be open to the situations of the time and carry out works that truly help the lives of the faithful. The modern world is experiencing rapid and fast development in the fields of science and technology. This development brings impacts to every human being in this era. Avoiding or denying this development is a form of escapism that cannot solve problems and challenges. The development of this world today makes the Church respond to the problems faced by the faithful.

The Church does not want to turn a blind eye to the problems that arise in this era. Christians must realize their tasks in daily life that they must do their work according to Christian spirit. The role of the Church also strives to guide the faithful to realize a true civilization in this modern era. The Church, which collaborates with laypeople, must continue to be encouraged in efforts to present and realize the Glory of God in work based on Christian

spirit. The Catholic Church in Indonesia has its own uniqueness in efforts to shepherd the faithful. This uniqueness is the system of parishes or communities that allows pastoral services carried out by the Parish to be realized and reach and greet the faithful as a whole in a certain territory. In this writing, more focus is placed on the role of laypeople who become community leaders. The Community System further involves laypeople in the shepherding of the Church.

The community system, led by the community chairperson, also facilitates the occurrence of pastoral services in the community. Pastoral services carried out, for example: being a worship leader, accompanying and assisting members of the community who are experiencing difficulties, and preparations for the recipients of the sacraments of baptism and confirmation as well as other pastoral services. And we need to realize that the burden of pastoral service and responsibility is not only borne by the community chairperson, but the community chairperson along with the community board must work together so that pastoral services can involve many people and can run smoothly. Thus, the role of the community chairperson and its board in pastoral care is very much needed. Because parish priests or ordained clergy and religious orders cannot carry out pastoral services throughout the territory. There are various obstacles and reasons, and we often hear the main reasons and obstacles are the lack of pastoral workers who come from ordained or clothed people. Therefore, the system of community chairpersons and their boards is very much needed in helping pastoral services in certain territories.

More than just a temporary spirit, the concept of the "Generous Church" has profound urgency. In the context of the lives of Catholic believers in Indonesia, especially in the Catholic Archdiocese of Jakarta, the Church is not only a place of worship but also a space for community and faith growth. However, the complex social realities often trap the Church in mere administrative routines, neglecting the essence of spiritual service that should be at its core.

In 2000, Mgr Suharyo provided an initial impetus to this concept. However, more than ten years later, the spirit of the "Generous Shepherd" remains relevant in the context of KAJ. Even with his elevation as Archbishop of Jakarta, Mgr Suharyo became more active in formulating the direction and spirit of the Church, including in the Pastoral Ardas of KAJ 2011-2015. The addition of the KAJ motto to "Good and Generous Shepherds"

However, behind this spirit, there is a serious problem that needs attention. The Church, as a communion of faithful believers, often overlooks the efforts needed to prepare potential community chairpersons and board members. Religious education and leadership preparation are not often prioritized, so when community members are called to take on leadership roles, they are often unprepared. This can lead to administrative chaos and deficiencies in the spiritual service provided to the faithful.

Therefore, in this article, we will further discuss the concept of the "Generous Church", strengthen the urgency of this concept, and investigate the problem related to the lack of leadership preparation within the Church community. Through in-depth analysis, we hope to

provide insights that will benefit the KAJ Church in strengthening its spiritual service and building a stronger community of believers in the future.

METHOD

This research utilizes the qualitative literature review method. The qualitative literature review method is a research approach that uses literature sources as the main basis for data collection and analysis. This approach is often used in research contexts that require a deep understanding of specific concepts, theories, or issues, without involving primary data collection through observation or interviews. In the context of a scientific article discussing the concept of the "Generous Church" and issues related to leadership preparation within the Church community, the qualitative literature review method will be used to explore relevant literature to gain a deeper understanding of the topic.

The following steps were undertaken. The researcher will conduct a search for literature relevant to the topic, such as scholarly journals, books, conference papers, and other sources recognized as authoritative in related fields of study, such as theology, church leadership, and pastoral care. After identifying relevant literature, the researcher will select literature that is most suitable for the research objectives, focus, and conceptual framework used. The selection of literature is based on the quality, relevance, and accuracy of the information presented. The data used in the qualitative literature review method consist of text from the selected literature. The researcher will read, analyze, and take notes on information relevant to the research objectives, such as the concept of the "Generous Church", the urgency of the concept, and issues related to leadership preparation within the church community.

Data analysis is conducted by examining and understanding the content of the collected literature. The researcher will identify patterns, themes, and relationships among the information found in the literature. This analysis aims to gain a deeper understanding of the research topic and answer the research questions posed. Based on the results of the data analysis, the researcher will compile relevant findings with the research objectives. These findings will be used to form conclusions that describe a deeper understanding of the concept of the "Generous Church" and issues related to leadership preparation within the church community. These conclusions will be directed to provide insights that are beneficial for the KAJ Church in strengthening spiritual services and building communal unity in the future.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Mgr. Suharyo, who shepherded the KAS community during the transition from the 20th to the 21st century, a period marked by challenging circumstances. The Church lives and grows dynamically, inspired by the Spirit of God itself (Gunawan, 2003). It is the Spirit of God that guides the Church in the concrete historical journey of humanity, both in specific regions, amidst concrete congregation situations, and over specific periods of time. The dynamic movement of a local church or diocese cannot be detached from the role of leadership held by

a bishop who serves as the shepherd in the entrusted diocese. The direction of pastoral policy is also influenced by a bishop's vision-mission (Suharyo, 2009).

The face of the Church presented within society will be reflected in the policies and stance taken in response to existing situations and issues. This is where one can observe the spirit of leadership developed by a bishop. Similarly, the Catholic Archdiocese of Semarang (KAS= *Keuskupan Agung Semarang, Bahasa Indonesia*) under the leadership of Mgr. Suharyo. The spirit of leadership is formulated in the motto of the bishop's pastoral care, which is later elaborated in pastoral letters he writes. He shepherded the KAS community with the motto from Acts 20:19, "I serve the Lord with all humility" (*Serviens Domino cum omni humilitate*). The Church is a communion of believers in Christ. It is the responsibility of all believers to journey in this world. The growth of the Church in a region or territory is determined by the believers entrusted with the responsibility to be witnesses of the Church in the world. All believers in the same territory are called to form a communion (Suharyo, 2011).

In the 2013 Theology Journal published by the Center for Research and Training in Contextual Theology at Sanata Dharma University Yogyakarta, Father Yohanes Gunawan formulated the pastoral ideas of Mgr Ignatius Suharyo during his leadership of the Semarang Archdiocese (KAS) from August 22, 1997, to July 25, 2009. The ideas include the Church as an Event, the Church as a Community of Hope, the Church as Communion, the Credible Church, the Generous Church, and the Eucharistic Church. Among these ideas, one was added by Mgr. Suharyo when he began his work in the Jakarta Archdiocese (KAJ), namely the idea of "Generous and Merciful Church", which made the motto of KAJ become "Good and Generous Shepherd". The author sets a limitation in this discussion, focusing on the role held by the neighborhood leader and the trust given to them to coordinate and provide "Shepherd of the Community with humility" service to the believers in their community .

According to the Gospel of Luke, Jesus said, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (6:36). Mercy here refers to sharing suffering literally. Meanwhile, according to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus said, "You must be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (5:48) (Sulistyo, 2016:21). Thus, being a servant of the Church can also be said to be developing an attitude of compassion. As a Bishop, Mgr. Suharyo embodied the character of a humble servant, a steward with a historical responsibility, and a shepherd who is firm yet gentle. Suharyo embodied the character of a Christian leader. Humility is the primary quality of true leadership character. Leadership by Mgr. Suharyo rejects autocratic styles but develops a humble service characteristic. Humble service never diminishes the basic dignity of individuals, groups, or the roles to which one is called by God. The leadership developed by Mgr. Suharyo is a leadership that brings life so "they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10b). Behind this leadership, there are two basic principles nurtured: a dialogical relational pattern (DV art.2) and the molding of a visionary leader like Barnabas (Acts 13:1-5). The Church and the word are identical because the word underpins the Church. (cf. Acts. 1:8) The power of the word that drives the Church to act as expressed by Peter, "...for we cannot

but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). Besides being a community of disciples of Jesus Christ, the parish is a legal entity. Meanwhile, the spirit of generosity can be equated with humble service performed in the awareness of the Most High God and directed towards the glory of the Lord. The service is carried out with kindness and joy, prioritizing the salvation of the people, and welcoming the people as fellow beings with the encouragement of the Holy Spirit to make the sheep more comfortable in the large family of the Church (Sugiyana & Setiyaningtyas, 2022)..

The Church finds its identity when it celebrates the presence of the saving God in the Eucharist. Thus, the celebration of the Eucharist is both the center and summit of the life of the Church. The spirituality of the Good Shepherd is raised with the aim that the shepherds act according to the example of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. "The good shepherd knows and is known by his sheep" (John 1:14), and will also care for his troubled and lost sheep (cf. Ezekiel 34:16). Meanwhile, the spirit of generosity can be equated with humble service performed in the awareness of the Most High God and directed towards the glory of the Lord (Hidup Katolik, May 24, 2021).

The idea of the "Generous Church" was introduced by Mgr. Suharyo in the early 2000s. Complaints from the congregation: Priests being stingy in their service. Priests should embody the face of the Church. The Church, in collaboration with the laity, must continuously promote efforts to present and realize the Glory of God through Work based on Christian spirit. The Catholic Church in Indonesia has its own uniqueness in the effort of shepherding the faithful. This uniqueness lies in the parish or community system that allows pastoral service conducted by the Parish to be realized and reach out to and greet the faithful as a whole in a specific territory. This article focuses more on the role of the laity who become neighborhood leaders. The Neighborhood System enhances the involvement of the laity in shepherding the Church. The Neighborhood System led by the Neighborhood Leader also facilitates the occurrence of pastoral service within that environment. Pastoral services carried out include: leading worship, accompanying and assisting members of the community who are experiencing difficulties, and preparing for those receiving the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, as well as other pastoral services. And it needs to be realized together that the burden of service and pastoral responsibility is not only borne by the neighborhood leader but the neighborhood leader along with the neighborhood officials must cooperate with each other so that pastoral service can involve many people and run smoothly (Adon et al., 2022; Andrianto et al., 2023; Angga et al. 2023).

Reflections on the mystery of the cross and resurrection in the pre-Lenten pastoral letter of February 1998. Through various means, Mgr. Suharyo encouraged the KAS community to love the Eucharist. Eliminating "service" on Sundays to foster faith in the Eucharist. Providing understanding to the faithful through catechesis. In this regard, we recall the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. So it needs to

be jointly realized, at the beginning of the Eucharistic celebration, there is a saving power of God that builds a communion of brotherhood (Suharyo, 2011:17-20).

It is the Holy Spirit that enables the Church to fulfill the Mission entrusted to it by Christ.

Before sending his disciples as his witnesses, Jesus imparted the Holy Spirit to them (cf. John 20:22), which works through them and moves the hearts of those who listen to the disciples (cf. Acts 2:37). To serve the Church as Christ's ministers, bishops and priests require solid and continuous formation, which should provide opportunities for human, spiritual, and pastoral renewal, as well as courses in theology, spirituality, and human sciences (Budiono et al., 2022; Cancang et al., 2022; Denar et al., 2022).

Through a life of prayer, enthusiastic service, and exemplary behavior, the clergy provide an impressive testimony of the Gospel in the congregations they shepherd in the name of Christ. I fervently pray that the ordained ministers of the Churches in Asia will live and work in a spirit of communion and cooperation with the bishops and all the faithful, radiating a testimony of love, which Jesus declared as the true sign of his disciples (cf. John 13:35). Service in humility and generosity is built through networking with everyone without discrimination in participatory, transformative, and empowering patterns. The developed pastoral spirit is a pattern of service that educates, involves women and men, empowers communities of hope, advances cooperation with everyone, and preserves the integrity of creation (Du et al, 2021; Firmanto, 2021; Firmanto, 2023).

The Church is missionary (AG 1) and includes everyone, while its membership (especially active ones) is decreasing. Young people in a community often only become members of the community. The chairperson and officials of the community tend to be dominated by the elderly. This should also be the main focus of the parish and community to provide new breakthroughs in an effort to revive the community with a new spirit, which must certainly involve young people in the community officials. This effort is also one of the efforts to regenerate the management system within a community. The main goal is to ensure that young people are not just spectators, whereas young people have the potential to bring new spirit to the community. Therefore, preparations and efforts to introduce management in the neighborhood system must be encouraged and carried out by the parish together with the community. Thus, young people can actively participate in pastoral service in the community to develop a generous service (Firmanto et al., 2022; Firmanto et al., 2023; Firmanto et al., 2017).

As baptized believers, they are also involved in heavenly matters (Situmorang, 2018:84). The role of the laity is called for the same purpose as the clergy and religious, which is to be united with God, live in holiness, and participate in the mission of Christ. Everyone in the Church plays an active role, everyone is sanctified, fully witnesses, and a sign of the gracious purpose of God to communicate with the aim of developing a generous service. Therefore, the Church always reflects and understands in new ways because the world becomes a partner with the laity to realize the Generous Church among the faithful. In other words, the relationship

between the laity and the Church is where the Gospel expresses the heartfelt love to everyone. This section contains the historical journey of two neighborhoods in two designated parishes. In that historical journey, various figures participated in the development of the neighborhood (Firmanto et al. 2023a; Firmanto et al. 2023b; Firmanto et al. 2023c).

The figures who have participated as neighborhood leaders certainly need to know what contributions they have made in that neighborhood. Therefore, this topic will delve into the historicity of a designated neighborhood. Although the historicity of a neighborhood will be explored, the author faces a challenge due to the lack of knowledge among neighborhood leaders about the historicity of their neighborhood (Yuliano & Firmanto, 2022; Yuniarto et al., 2023). However, the author will discuss the historicity of the neighborhood according to the knowledge that neighborhood leaders still remember and know. This shows one of the main discussion points that the role of neighborhood leaders is not yet highly regarded by the members of the neighborhood (Go, 2016; Hamu et al, 2023; Hartutik et al, 2023).

Catholic neighborhood leaders face the same issues in management within each neighborhood (Setiyaningtiyas et al. 2022). The main tendency is that neighborhood leaders and officials are often dominated or occupied by the same or long-standing individuals. This tendency is not caused by a lack of neighborhood members, but rather by the tendency of neighborhood members to reject, for various reasons, if they are entrusted with the responsibility of being neighborhood leaders and officials.

The classic reasons often given by those selected to be neighborhood leaders and officials but who refuse the responsibility are that they claim to be unprepared, busy with work, lack time to serve, or even lack the ability to be neighborhood leaders. This leads to the term "perpetuating Catholic neighborhood leaders." The term causes neighborhood leaders and officials to be selected because they are considered experienced in pastoral service in the neighborhood. However, if the term is further examined, it leads to the attitude of neighborhood members who do not want to be involved in the process of development and pastoral service (Kareli et al., 2022; Malau, 2020; Marbun, 2020).

The Church as a community of believers often overlooks the efforts needed to prepare candidates for neighborhood leaders and officials. Parish churches tend to focus more on mentoring and preparing neighborhood leaders and officials who have been chosen in that neighborhood. This is what causes neighborhood members to be unprepared to accept the responsibility as neighborhood leaders and officials. Also, ignorance of the role and duties as neighborhood leaders and officials makes neighborhood members less involved in those tasks and responsibilities (Putra et al., 2023; Sardono et al. 2022; Situmorang, 2018).

Based on that statement, we can conclude that the word "Catholic" does not primarily refer to a limited group of people, but rather the Spirit who is present and working everywhere, animating the whole world with His humble power and uplifting the richness of all humanity (Wuriningsih & Setiyaningtiyas, 2023). The Apostle Paul says, "You are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and

prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:19-20). In fact, the Church, being Christ, remains open to renewal, so history records the renewals that have occurred throughout its history (Kristiyanto, 2014). To say that the Church is apostolic means that the Church now always adheres to the Church of the apostles as the guide of its faith. The Catholic Church in Indonesia has its own uniqueness in its ecclesial structure, where a Parish has a system of stations or neighborhoods. This system is based on facilitating pastoral care, as a parish cannot provide pastoral care to a specific station or neighborhood at all times. Hence, neighborhoods are crucial in supporting pastoral care. The chairperson and officials of the neighborhood become pastoral servants entrusted with specific tasks and responsibilities to serve every member of the neighborhood within the territorial area of the respective neighborhood.

CONCLUSION

In concluding this article discussing the urgency of intense communication among Church leaders and the role of leadership regeneration in developing pastoral care, it is important for us to summarize the main findings discussed throughout the article. By understanding and combining this information, we can conclude the importance of collaboration between the Parish Church and its members in building an inclusive and compassionate Church.

First and foremost, this article highlights the need for intense communication stemming from the experiences of Mgr. Suharyo. Effective communication allows the Church to better understand and respond to the issues faced by its people. This includes understanding the role of young people in neighborhood management, which is often overlooked. Intense communication will enable Parish leaders to listen to the aspirations and needs of young people and involve them more significantly in Church activities.

Secondly, this article emphasizes the importance of leadership regeneration within the Church environment. In this context, the Parish Church plays a key role in facilitating this regeneration process by providing mentoring and guidance to potential neighborhood leaders and officials. Leadership regeneration is crucial to ensure the continuity and sustainability of pastoral care in the Church environment and to provide opportunities for neighborhood members to develop in leadership roles.

Thirdly, this article underscores the importance of a generous and open-hearted attitude in serving in pastoral care within the Church environment. A spirit of service based on a generous attitude will help the Church to become more inclusive and accept contributions from all members, including the laity. By providing opportunities for all neighborhood members to participate in the development of a Merciful Church, the Church will become more dynamic and responsive to the needs of its people.

In summarizing these key findings, we can conclude that to build a Merciful Church in line with the calling and teachings of Christ, it is important for the Parish Church and its

members to work closely together. This involves building intense communication, planned leadership regeneration, and pastoral care based on a generous and open-hearted attitude. Through these collaborative efforts, the Church can continue to grow and serve its people more effectively, thus realizing the vision of a Church loved and respected by its people and continuing to develop pastoral care based on love and compassion.

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