



Spirituality Formation and Example of the Faith of Mary for Prospective Priests and Catholic Youth in Building a Spiritual Life

Gonti Simanullang

Program Studi Ilmu Filsafat, Fakultas Filsafat, Universitas Katolik Santo Thomas, Medan, Indonesia

Article Info	ABSTRACT
Corresponding Author: Gonti Simanullang	Changes in digital culture, individualism, and reduced reflective habits are challenges to the spiritual life of prospective priests and Catholic Young People. Coaching that is only oriented towards the delivery of material is not enough to form prayer discipline, maturity of faith, and commitment to service. This Community Service activity aims to strengthen Christian spirituality through the example of Mary's faith as a person who listens to the Word, obeys God's will, is faithful in suffering, and is ready to serve. The program uses a pastoral-participatory approach through needs identification, seminars, Scripture study, interactive discussions, group sharing, joint prayer, adoration, written reflection, and the preparation of personal commitments. Evaluation is designed through pre-test and post-test, participation observation, reflection rubric, questionnaire, and post-activity monitoring. The draft results showed an increase in average scores from 53.2 to 86.0 in aspects of spiritual understanding, Mary's example of faith, prayer discipline, Scripture reflection, and commitment to service. Qualitative achievements can be seen in the increased ability of participants to relate life experiences with the Word of God, develop prayer habits, and formulate realistic acts of service. The program shows that Mary's example can be used as a framework of formation that integrates the spiritual, human, moral, and pastoral dimensions. Sustainability is directed through prayer groups, periodic mentoring, reflection journals, and active involvement in Church service. Keywords: Christian spirituality; the faith of Mary; priest candidate; Catholic Young People; spiritual life.

This is an open access article under the [CC BY-NC](#) license



INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology and cultural change are affecting the way young people build identities, relationships, and a life of faith. Digital media can be a space for learning and preaching, but it can also encourage distractions, social comparisons, consumption of information without reflection, and reduced silence. The Synod's preparatory document on young people affirms that the Church needs to understand the digital world as a real-life environment that shapes the mindset and decisions of young people (Synod of Bishops, 2017). These challenges make spiritual guidance not enough to be done through rules or one-way lectures. Participants need to be listened to, accompanied, and helped to cultivate experiences in the light of faith. The final document of

Spirituality Formation and Example of the Faith of Mary for Prospective Priests and Catholic Youth in Building a Spiritual Life-
Gonti Simanullang

the 2018 Synod places mentoring, discernment, participation, and integration of experiences as important elements in the growth of the vocation and maturity of the faith of young people (Synod of Bishops, 2018).

Youth is an important period in the formation of identity, life orientation, moral values, and relationship patterns. These developments are influenced by family, community, education, culture, and spiritual experiences. Therefore, the coaching environment needs to help participants develop self-regulation, resilience, responsibility, and decision-making skills (Santrock, 2018). In the context of the formation of priests-to-be, the spiritual life is the center that connects human, intellectual, and pastoral development. Spiritual building needs to help participants build a personal relationship with Christ, deepen prayer, interpret the experience of calling, and direct all abilities to service. A contextual coaching framework needs to bring together faith traditions with the real experiences of participants (Bevans, 2018).

Mary is an important model for that process. His attitude of receiving the Word, keeping and meditating on events, and serving humbly shows active faith. Mary's example must not stop at emotional devotion, but rather must lead participants to Christ and form free and responsible obedience. *Gaudete et Exsultate* affirm that holiness is manifested in patience, joy, courage, prayer, and concrete service in daily life (Francis, 2018a). This perspective helps participants understand that spirituality is not an escape from the world, but a way of life that shapes decisions, relationships, and responsibilities.

The vocation of young people also has a missionary dimension. The message of World Mission Sunday 2018 emphasizes that every young person is called to be a witness and bring the gospel to others through life and service (Francis, 2018b). Therefore, the construction of Mary's example needs to connect prayer with willingness to be sent. *Christus Vivit* places young people as the main actors in the life of the Church and reminds that accompaniment must respect their freedom, creativity, and discernment process (Francis, 2019). Participants not only receive answers, but are trained to recognize inner movements, assess choices, and make commitments that are appropriate to the call. Decision-making in the spiritual life requires wisdom. Wise reasoning involves the ability to see problems from different angles, recognize the limitations of knowledge, and consider the common good (Grossmann et al., 2017). Case studies and group reflections are therefore used so that participants are able to connect faith with real problems.

The spiritual life is also related to social-emotional competence. Empathy, self-control, cooperation, perseverance, and openness help a person build healthy and responsible relationships in the community (OECD, 2021). For prospective imams and OMK, these competencies support mature, communicative, and sensitive service to the needs of others. The synodal process emphasizes that communion, participation, and mission must be lived through listening and mutual discernment. The preparatory document for the 2021 Synod invites the Church community to open up space for the experiences and voices of all people (General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, 2021a). This principle is relevant for small group coaching that allows participants to listen to and strengthen each other.

The *Vademecum Synod* explained that synodal consultation needs to be carried out through prayer, reflection, spiritual conversation, and openness to the Holy Spirit (General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, 2021b). This approach is the methodological basis for sharing experiences, reflecting on the Bible, and preparing commitments in service activities. Pope Francis affirmed three important actions in the synodal journey, namely meeting,

listening, and discernment (Francis, 2021). These three actions are also evident in Mary's life: she is open to encounters, listens to the Word, and responds to them through concrete life choices.

The Synod's continental stage document invites the Church to expand the space of encounter so that experiences and differences can be accepted in the community (General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, 2022). Spirituality development for prospective imams and OMK therefore needs to create a safe space for questions, struggles, and the search for meaning. The needs of partners show the existence of problems of prayer discipline, the understanding of Mary's faith that is still devotional, the involvement of the ministry that is not stable, and the limited space for reflection. Based on these conditions, this activity aims to increase the understanding of Christian spirituality, deepen the example of Mary's faith, build the habit of prayer and reflection on the Bible, and strengthen the commitment to service.

IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

Goals and Approaches

The activity is aimed at prospective priests, seminarians, Catholic Young People, Catholic students, Church activists, and faith companions. Based on the draft proposal, the activity can be attended by around 30 participants. The program uses an educational, pastoral, participatory, reflective, and contextual approach so that participants are involved in the processing of experiences, rather than just receiving materials. The main methods used in the activity are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Method of Implementation of Activities

No.	Method	Description
1	Pastoral seminar	Exposure to Christian spirituality, the faith of Mary, prayer, calling, and ministry.
2	Deepening the Scriptures	Reflections on Luke 1-2 and the text of the call to connect the Word with experience.
3	Interactive discussions	Discussion of the spiritual challenges of young people in the midst of digital culture.
4	Group sharing	Processing of faith experiences, difficulties of prayer, calling, and ministry.
5	Case study	Analysis of moral issues, media use, relationships, and ministry responsibilities.
6	Prayer and adoration	Silence, inner examination, and the strengthening of a relationship with Christ.
7	Follow-up commitments	Preparation of prayer habits, reflections, and personal service plans.

Stages of Implementation

The stages of the activity are arranged sequentially, starting from the identification of needs to evaluation and follow-up. The flow of the program is shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Flow of Spirituality Development and Example of Mary's Faith

Figure 1 shows that coaching combines understanding, experience, prayer, sharing, and commitment. The series is designed so that Mary's example does not stop at knowledge, but develops into spiritual habits and acts of service.

Evaluation Instruments

The evaluation components and instruments used are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Evaluation Components and Instruments

Aspects	Instruments	Indicator
Understanding spirituality	Pre-test dan post-test	Increased knowledge of prayer and spiritual life
Understanding Mary's faith	Q&A and reflection sheet	Ability to explain and apply Mary's example
Participant participation	Observation sheet	Activeness in seminars, discussions, sharing, and prayer
Reflective ability	Written reflection rubric	The ability to connect the Word with experience
Service commitment	Commitment sheet	Clarity of actions and execution times
Continued impact	Interviews and monitoring	Consistency of prayer and ministry involvement

RESULTS OF ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSIONS

Implementation of Activities

The activity began with a pre-test and an initial conversation to get an idea of prayer habits, understanding of Mary's faith, and ministry involvement. The seminar session then

explained spirituality as a living relationship with God that shapes all decisions and actions. Mary's example is discussed through an attitude of listening, keeping the Word in our hearts, being obedient, faithful, humble, and ready to serve.

A deep study of Scripture uses the story of the Jubilee, Mary's visit to Elizabeth, and Mary's contemplative attitude to all events. Participants were asked to identify Mary's actions, the spiritual values they contain, and their application in the context of school, seminary, family, digital media, and Church ministry.

In group sharing, participants discussed obstacles to maintaining prayer, digital distractions, fatigue, doubt in calling, and fear of taking responsibility. The discussion was directed at finding practical steps, such as prayer schedules, device restriction, spiritual journals, mentoring, and ministry involvement.

Quantitative Attainment

Changes in participants' understanding were measured through five indicators that best fit the program's objectives. The draft results of the evaluation are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Participant's Pre-test and Post-test results

Aspects Assessed	Pre-test	Post-test	Differences
Understanding Christian spirituality	55	86	+31
Understanding Mary's example of faith	52	88	+36
Discipline of prayer life	50	84	+34
Reflections on Scripture	53	85	+32
Service commitment	56	87	+31
Average	53,2	86,0	+32,8

To clarify the change in achievement in each indicator, the comparison of pre-test and post-test scores is visualized in Figure 2.

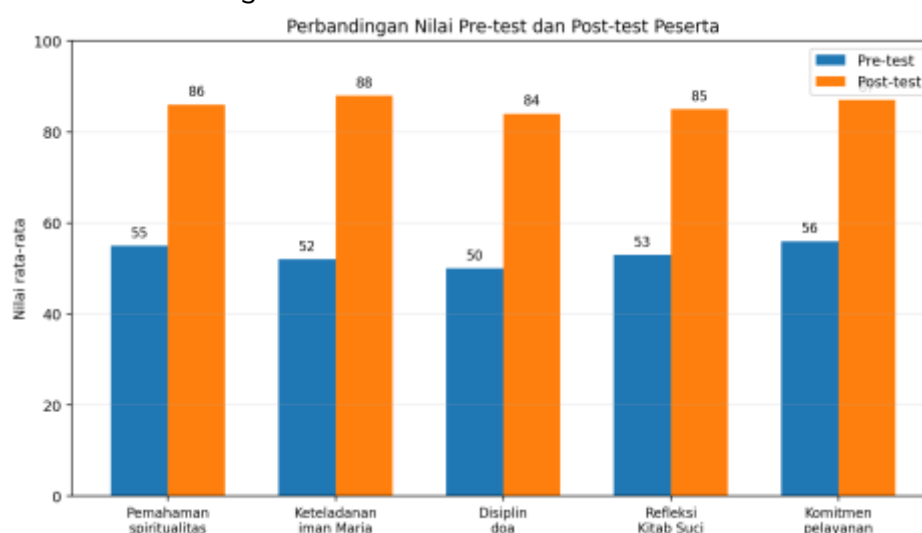


Figure 2. Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Scores of Participants

Figure 2 shows an increase in all indicators. The highest increase was in understanding Mary's example of faith by 36 points, while the overall average increased by 32.8 points.

Qualitative and External Outcomes

The qualitative achievements and outputs of activities are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Output and Activity Outcomes

Exterior	Reach	Meaning
Understanding spirituality	Participants are able to explain the relationship between prayer, the Word, the sacrament, and service.	A more complete framework of spiritual life
Mary's Example	Participants identified an attitude of listening, obedience, faithfulness, and serving.	Devotion is directed at transformation
Prayer habits	Participants develop a schedule of prayer and personal reflection.	Spiritual discipline strengthened
Journal of reflection	Participants write down experiences, inner movements, and responses of faith.	More directed discernment
Service commitment	Participants formulate concrete service actions.	Church involvement increases
Construction modules	Materials and reflection sheets can be reused.	Program sustainability supported

Discussion

Increased understanding of spirituality suggests that participants need a framework that connects prayer to concrete life. Daily holiness is not only seen in devotional practices, but in patience, courage, joy, and service (Francis, 2018a). Mary's example becomes effective when discussed through actions and life choices. Participants not only get to know Mary's title, but learn to see how she listened to the Word, discerned, and responded to the call. A contextual approach helps the teachings of faith meet the participants' experiences (Bevans, 2018).

Improving prayer discipline is related to the preparation of realistic steps. Youth has dynamics of identity development and self-control that require environmental support and structured habits (Santrock, 2018). Group sharing reinforces the participatory dimension as participants gain a safe space to express struggles. The synodal process emphasizes listening as a way to build communion and mutual discernment (General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, 2021a).

Scriptural reflection helps participants judge decisions more wisely. Thoughtful reasoning involves openness to other perspectives, recognition of limitations, and the search for the common good (Grossmann et al., 2017). Service commitment shows the connection between spirituality and mission. Young people are called to be Church actors who bring the gospel through life and concrete actions (Francis, 2018b; Francis, 2019).

Social-emotional competencies support the success of coaching. Empathy, perseverance, self-control, and cooperation help participants carry out their commitments and build healthy service relationships (OECD, 2021).

CONCLUSION

The program for fostering Mary's spirituality and example of faith is designed to address the low discipline of prayer, limited Scriptural reflection, Mary's devotional understanding, and inconsistent ministry involvement. The seminar approach, Scripture study, discussions, group sharing, prayer, adoration, and follow-up commitment help participants connect the Church's teachings with life experiences.

The evaluation draft showed an increase in average scores from 53.2 to 86.0. Qualitative achievements can be seen in the participants' ability to understand Mary's example, develop prayer habits, write reflections, and formulate concrete services. The sustainability of the program needs to be strengthened through prayer groups, periodic mentoring, spiritual journals, follow-up collections, and monitoring of ministry involvement. All quantitative data must be adjusted to actual implementation data before the article is published.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author expresses his gratitude to the Catholic University of Saint Thomas, the Faculty of Philosophy, the priests, the seminary coaches, the Catholic Young People's companions, the facilitators, and all the participants who supported the activity. Appreciation was also given to those who assisted in coordination, provision of facilities, administration, documentation, evaluation, and follow-up of the program.

REFERENCES

- Bevans, S. B. (2018). *Models of contextual theology* (Rev. ed.). Orbis Books.
- Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. (2018). *Decree on the celebration of the Blessed Virgin Mary Mother of the Church in the General Roman Calendar*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Francis. (2018a). *Gaudete et exsultate: Apostolic exhortation on the call to holiness in today's world*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Francis. (2018b). *Together with young people, let us bring the Gospel to all: Message for World Mission Day 2018*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Francis. (2019). *Christus vivit: Post-synodal apostolic exhortation to young people and to the entire People of God*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Francis. (2021). *Address for the opening of the synodal path*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. (2021a). *For a synodal Church: Communion, participation, and mission—Preparatory document*. Vatican.
- General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. (2021b). *Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality*. Vatican.
- General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. (2022). *Enlarge the space of your tent: Working document for the continental stage*. Vatican.
- Grossmann, I., Gerlach, T. M., & Denissen, J. J. A. (2017). Wise reasoning in the face of everyday life challenges. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 8(7), 813–821.
- International Theological Commission. (2018). *Synodality in the life and mission of the Church*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2021). *Beyond academic learning: First results from the survey of social and emotional skills*. OECD Publishing.
- Santrock, J. W. (2018). *Life-span development* (17th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.
- Synod of Bishops. (2017). *Young people, the faith and vocational discernment: Preparatory document*. Vatican.
- Synod of Bishops. (2018). *Young people, the faith and vocational discernment: Final document of the XV Ordinary General Assembly*. Vatican.