

Religious Coping of Servants at GBI Ayalon Kupang

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Abstract. Religious coping is the way a person relies on faith, worship, and support from their religious community to deal with life's pressures or challenges. The purpose of this study was to determine the religious coping of ministers at GBI Ayalon Kupang related to understanding, application, and assessment of religious coping. The research method used is qualitative. The data collection technique is structured interview. Sampling in this study used purposive sampling technique with a total of 5 participants. This study found that servants at GBI Ayalon Kupang face spiritual and interpersonal challenges, such as a crisis of faith, declining spirit of service, and conflict within the ministry team. They overcome these challenges by strengthening their relationship with God through prayer and seeking support from others and church leaders.

Keywords: *servant challenges, religious coping, church servant*

Abstrak. *Religious coping* ialah cara seseorang mengandalkan keyakinan, ibadah, serta dukungan dari komunitas keagamaannya untuk menghadapi tekanan atau tantangan hidup. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui *religious coping* pelayan di GBI Ayalon Kupang terkait pengertian, penerapan, serta penilaian terhadap *religious coping*. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif. Teknik pengumpulan data adalah wawancara terstruktur. Pengambilan sampel dalam penelitian ini menggunakan teknik *purposive sampling* dengan jumlah 5 partisipan. Para pelayan di GBI Ayalon Kupang menghadapi tantangan spiritual dan interpersonal, seperti krisis iman, menurunnya semangat pelayanan, serta konflik dalam tim. Para pelayan mengatasinya dengan memperkuat hubungan dengan Tuhan melalui doa dan mencari dukungan dari sesama serta pemimpin gereja. Hasil penelitian menegaskan bahwa dukungan spiritual dan hubungan yang harmonis berperan penting dalam meningkatkan kualitas pelayanan dan pertumbuhan iman.

Kata kunci: *masalah pelayanan, religious coping, pelayan gereja*

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Introduction

Gereja Bethel Indonesia (GBI) Ayalon Kupang is one of the GBI churches located in Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara. This church comprises ministers ranging from teenagers to the elderly, who are actively involved in various areas of ministry. However, being engaged in religious service does not exempt individuals from experiencing personal and interpersonal challenges. Serving in a religious setting still involves certain dynamics and pressures that may affect the psychological and spiritual well-being of the ministers. An interview conducted on July 9, 2024, with three active church ministers identified as respondents V, K, and L revealed several challenges they encountered during their ministry. These issues included interpersonal conflicts among fellow ministers, feelings of being offended that disrupted collaboration, and emotional exhaustion caused by the intense workload. In some cases, a minister could be involved in up to three different ministry responsibilities within a single week, which often led to mental and emotional fatigue.

These challenges indicate the need to understand how individuals cope with pressures encountered in ministry. One relevant concept is coping, which refers to the cognitive and behavioral efforts made by individuals to manage stress or problems (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984. Supradewi, 2019, p. 11). Coping strategies are generally classified into two types: problem-focused coping, which aims at addressing the source of the problem, and emotion-focused coping, which aims at managing emotional responses. In a religious context, a commonly employed coping strategy is religious coping, which involves relying on religious beliefs, practices, and community support to deal with stress and adversity (Pargament, 1997). Religious coping can include activities such as prayer, self-reflection, participation in rituals, and seeking support from the faith community. During the interview, the ministers stated that they often coped with ministry-related challenges by praying to God and engaging in personal introspection. Numerous

studies have highlighted the benefits of religious coping in various contexts. For example, Marettih (2017) found that parents of children with special needs, such as autism, used religious coping to accept and understand their child's condition. Daulay (2020) highlighted the positive impact of religious coping on life meaning and adaptation. In contrast, poor religious coping is linked to low self-acceptance, lack of gratitude, and higher stress and depression (Aldyafigama, 2019; Yuliasari, 2018). Studies by Sulistyani (2020) and Anggraini (2015) found that strong religious coping reduces stress and improves emotional regulation. Influencing factors include education, experience, culture, and age. However, research on religious coping in church ministry, especially in Eastern Indonesia like Kupang, is limited. This study explores how GBI Ayalon ministers apply religious coping and aims to contribute to both religious psychology and church development.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of complex, non-quantifiable phenomena. According to Meleong in Hasan (2020), qualitative research seeks to explore behaviors, perceptions, motivations, and experiences. The participants were five active ministers from GBI Ayalon Kupang, selected through purposive sampling based on specific criteria: active involvement in church ministry for at least two years and aged between 12 and 24. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing for guided yet flexible responses (Sugiyono, 2017). Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis model, including familiarization, coding, theme identification, review, definition, and reporting.

Result

Identified by the pseudonym Anggi, Andre, Bunga, Tesa and Edu. the three main themes and three sub-themes are identified as follows :

Classification of Problems in Church Ministry

The participants shared that their journey as church servants is often accompanied by various challenges in ministry. With 3 to 12 years of experience, they have gained sufficient insight to identify recurring issues. During the interviews, they described several common problems faced in their service, as outlined below:

1. Spiritual

Servants expressed problems related to spiritual experiences that could affect the quality of service. In this case what often happens is a crisis of faith, loss of enthusiasm for service, and loss of closeness to God. The following are quotes from some of the participants:

"Sometimes I feel distant from God, and problems make it hard to focus or find meaning in worship, even when I've prepared my heart to serve." (participant Anggi)

"I once felt bored with ministry because I continued doing things I knew were wrong. It was difficult to overcome and even harder to return after realizing my mistakes." (participant Andre)

"At times, we doubt if our service is accepted by God, especially when we've done wrong or carry unresolved issues—it creates a sense of distance from Him." (participant Bunga).

2. Interpersonal

While carrying out services in the church, servants experience problems that involve interactions between individuals in the church. This problem can arise mentioned participants due to differences of opinion, disputes, which lead to ineffective communication. The interview excerpt is as follows :

"There are always challenges, especially within the altar team. We often face differences of opinion for example, songs we've chosen and prayed over are sometimes rejected by the music team." (participant Anggi)

"I had a conflict with an older church member we stopped speaking without clear reason. He often gave me the silent treatment and scolded me if I didn't meet his expectations." (participant Tesa)

"Misunderstandings and differences of opinion are inevitable, especially when team members have varying skill levels. The key is communication and the ability to adapt to one another." (participant Edu).

Religious Coping of Servants at GBI Ayalon Kupang

When facing challenges in ministry, the servants rely on God's strength and apply various coping strategies. These include involving God in the problem-solving process, personal prayer, self-reflection, group prayer, teamwork, team evaluations, and viewing problems as opportunities for growth. These approaches align with key aspects of religious coping: maintaining spiritual connection, seeking support from fellow church members or clergy, and drawing on spiritual strength. This is reflected in the following statements from the participants:

1. Connecting with God

When facing a situation that puts the servants in trouble, the first thing that is expressed is to focus on strengthening the spiritual foundation and character personally first. The relationship between the person and God includes praying, reading God's word, and building a relationship with God through quiet time activities to make the servants get the wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit to make decisions to solve problems in the ministry.

"It can't be, no matter what happens, whatever problems occur in the service, we must be able to calm down and pray so that we can find a way out." (participant Anggi)

"Yes ... like that during a quiet time so when there is a problem so to deal with it we have to calmly ask God, which means we have to take the time to ask God "what about this?" so" (participant Andre)

"There must be peace in the heart, and it shouldn't be lost. Prayer before serving is essential repeating prayers like asking for God's help provides strength and readiness for ministry." (participant Bunga).

2. Social Support

The services carried out are activities that involve not only one person in it but together with other individuals who also have an important role in every service. This makes it a necessity for servants to conduct evaluations with the service team after providing services. Teamwork is needed to face and solve problems collectively. Below are interview excerpts from the servants :

"We will definitely tell each other and we will definitely find a solution, in the end we will pray for each other." (participant Anggi)

"We have to be together like sitting together and have to listen to everything and then to end everything we have to be able to let go of it and close with prayer." (participant Andre)

"What helped most was support from my family and encouragement from church members. At first, I served thinking the ministry depended on me, but I later realized that mindset was flawed." (participant Bunga)

"A spiritual brother encouraged me to play guitar, boosting my confidence to serve through music. The parable of the talents helped me overcome self-doubt and grow in ministry." (participant Tesa)

3. Spiritual Support

Support is crucial for sustaining the ministry of church servants. Participants emphasized that social and spiritual support have the most significant impact. This support helps build confidence, provides a safe space to share, offers guidance from senior ministers, and helps clarify motivations for serving. Spiritual support—through sermons, pastoral guidance, and prayer—also plays a key role in helping servants remain consistent in their ministry. Many believe that the prayers of the congregation and church leaders are vital to their strength in serving. The following quotes illustrate these experiences :

"It's very impactful. Given our many limitations, advice from fellow ministry team members, spiritual mentors, or pastors is essential. Prayer and shared guidance are vital in sustaining effective ministry." (participant Anggi)

"For me, advice especially from pastors or spiritual mentors is very important. They've experienced ministry before us and can guide us through it. Having spiritual brothers and sisters is essential for support and growth." (participant Andre)

"When we pray for ministers, I always remind them to come with humility—not to show off their skills. Prayer before serving is essential. Repeating certain prayers, like asking for God's help, brings strength and prepares us spiritually." (participant Bunga)

"Spiritual support kept me going during exhausting school days and evening church activities. Prayers, worship, and sermons gave me strength and motivation despite the fatigue." (participant Edu).

4. God's Best Plan

The servants hold personal beliefs about the challenges they face in ministry. During the interviews, they expressed a strong conviction that every problem whether in ministry or personal life is part of God's will and divine plan. They believe that nothing happens without God's permission, and each difficulty is an opportunity to reflect on His purpose. This perspective highlights how deeply religious coping is embedded in how they interpret and respond to problems. For them, challenges are seen as tests of faith and tools for spiritual growth. The following quote illustrates this belief:

"I am grateful that whatever happens, I believe it is God's intention and purpose to train me to become more mature spiritually for me to grow more in the way of Christ" (participant Anggi).

"Everything both good and bad comes from God. Like the story of Job, even suffering can be part of God's plan. We shouldn't blame God when facing problems, but seek to understand His purpose through them. Challenges are often a way for God to shape us. When problems arise, don't lose faith or assume God is absent. Instead, remember that as long as we live, difficulties will come and we must face them with trust and perseverance." (participant Tesa).

"For me, this is part of God's will. I used to be quick-tempered, but through these experiences, I've learned to be more patient and control my emotions. I believe failure often comes before success, and facing challenges has helped me respond more calmly and focus on finding solutions rather than staying angry." (participant Edu).

e. Forgiveness as a Reflection of God's Love

Forgiveness is an important aspect of religious life, especially in the context of ministry in the church environment. In the Christian tradition, forgiveness is not merely an ethical obligation, but a tangible act of faith and a reflection of God's grace. It is essential for maintaining harmony within the ministry community, especially amid the challenges of working together. Interviews with the servants reveal that forgiveness is practiced in various ways—through personal reflection on God's love, efforts to preserve relationships, and a deliberate choice to let go of resentment. The following excerpts illustrate how forgiveness is understood and applied in their ministry, highlighting its role as a foundation for a God honoring and spiritually healthy community.

"As a child, I didn't take forgiveness seriously, even in ministry. But with maturity, I've learned it's essential God forgives us, so we must forgive others. Though it's not always easy, I try to communicate and practice forgiveness in every situation." (Participant Anggi)

"Forgiveness is essential. Unresolved issues burden the heart and hinder ministry. Without a clean heart, service may lose its meaning and unity. Forgiveness restores trust and allows us to serve together in harmony." (Participant Andre)

"If someone wrongs me without causing harm, I let it go. I don't hold grudges over gossip or being ignored. I choose to forgive and respond kindly, believing in the principle of sowing and reaping." (Participant Tesa).

"Forgiveness is essential to maintain unity and teamwork. I choose to apologize, even for small things, because unresolved issues and ego can damage collaboration. Apologizing helps preserve harmony and mutual understanding." (Participant Edu)

Discussion

Classification of Problems in Ministry

1. Spiritual

Based on participant interviews, this study found that the ministers experienced various spiritual challenges, including a crisis of faith, loss of enthusiasm, and a sense of distance from God. Anggi shared that personal problems

affected her focus and diminished the meaning of worship. Andre described feelings of boredom and difficulty re-engaging in ministry due to ongoing personal shortcomings. Similarly, Bunga expressed uncertainty about whether God accepted her ministry, especially when emotional struggles affected her service. These findings align with Nesimnasi (2024), who describes a crisis of faith as a significant challenge among church ministers—marked by doubt, uncertainty, and loss of spiritual direction. Purmanasari and Andersen (2022) also highlight the central role of spirituality in ministry, noting its impact on congregational growth. They point out that the stagnation in Christian group growth over the past fifty years may reflect unresolved spiritual struggles among ministers. The participants' experiences reveal that spiritual problems often stem from a loss of purpose and meaning in life, leading to unmet needs for self-actualization and affecting their motivation to serve.

2. Interpersonal

Ministers in this study revealed that interpersonal problems in church ministry often arise from differences of opinion, disagreements, and ineffective communication. Anggi highlighted conflicts regarding the selection of songs for worship, while Tesa shared experiences of personal tension, such as silent treatment and unmet expectations. Edu, a church musician, also noted frequent disagreements during ministry collaborations. These findings align with Intarti (2018), who explained that interpersonal issues are often rooted in differences in mindset, perspective, culture, religion, and social background. Budiman and Doma (2021) similarly observed that ministry-related problems can stem from personal, relational, and communication struggles among ministers. Previous studies also emphasize the impact of ineffective communication on ministry effectiveness. Waruwu and Rohy (2023) found that communication between pastors and congregants plays a vital role in fostering strong, productive fellowship. Open and clear communication helps prevent misunderstandings and builds stronger relationships. Additionally, Sumarto (2018) emphasized that pastors should

personally engage with members to build trust and resolve conflicts, which helps reduce interpersonal tensions. In conclusion, interpersonal problems in church ministry are often caused by poor communication and unresolved differences. These findings underscore the importance of open dialogue, empathy, and a personal approach in fostering unity and harmony within ministry teams.

Religious Coping of Servants at GBI Ayalon Kupang

1. Connecting with God

Ministers interviewed in this study emphasized that a strong spiritual foundation and personal character are essential for facing challenges in ministry. A close relationship with God built through prayer, reading Scripture, and devotional practices was seen as a primary strategy for gaining strength, guidance, and wisdom. Participant Anggi expressed that she could not do anything without praying first, while Bunga emphasized the role of prayer in receiving help and strength from God. These findings are consistent with Utami (2012), who noted that reading Scripture provides inner peace, and Anjani (2019), who highlighted that prayer fosters confidence in facing life's problems with God's help. The results show that ministers rely on spiritual disciplines—often referred to as "quiet time" to strengthen their connection with God and to discern the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This spiritual connection is vital for making wise decisions and navigating ministry challenges. In conclusion, a strong spiritual foundation, rooted in regular spiritual practices and personal closeness with God, not only provides emotional and spiritual strength but also shapes effective and wise ministry. This supports previous research indicating that religious practices contribute to peace of mind and a confident, resilient approach to life's difficulties.

Social Support

Based on the ministers' accounts, ministry challenges often arise within team dynamics. Participants Anggi and Andre noted that openness among team

members and participation in group prayer helped resolve issues. To address these challenges effectively, fostering teamwork is crucial this includes joint prayer, open communication, and post-ministry evaluations. Such practices enable teams to reflect on and improve future ministry efforts. These findings align with Ritonga and Marbun (2022), who emphasize that strong teamwork reduces potential conflicts and enhances ministry efficiency. Additionally, Anjani (2019) underscores the importance of social support in reinforcing religious coping, particularly through affirming conversations, spiritual encouragement, and communal prayer. Participant Bunga also highlighted the significant role of family support in helping her regain confidence when facing self-doubt in ministry. This supports Jenaabadi's (2014) assertion that family is a vital source of social support and greatly influences coping mechanisms. In summary, support from both family and the church community plays a pivotal role in helping ministers navigate challenges. Social and spiritual support not only strengthens individual confidence and resilience but also fosters a collaborative and compassionate ministry environment.

Spiritual Support

Participants identified spiritual support from church elders and leaders as a key strategy in overcoming challenges in ministry. Regardless of the specific problems encountered, guidance and encouragement from more experienced spiritual mentors often delivered through sermons or personal counsel help ministers gain new perspectives and spiritual strength. Participant Anggi noted that prayer and advice from senior ministers were instrumental in resolving ministry-related issues. Similarly, Tesa shared that prayers from the congregation gave her strength in difficult times. This aligns with research by Saleleubaja (2023), which highlights the pastor's role as a spiritual mentor in fostering resilience and faith during life's challenges. Pieng, Pasande, and Yokiman (2024) further emphasize that support from church leaders significantly strengthens believers' faith and encourages active participation in spiritual practices. Beyond leadership, spiritual

support also comes from the congregation and fellow ministry members. Group prayers, encouraging words, and shared experiences offer meaningful reinforcement. For many ministers, spiritual support whether through being prayed for, receiving advice, or listening to sermons serves as a vital source of strength and motivation. In summary, spiritual support from church leaders and community members is crucial in helping ministers endure and grow through ministry challenges. It not only provides emotional reassurance but also deepens faith and commitment. These findings affirm the importance of a spiritually supportive environment in sustaining ministry resilience and spiritual development.

God's Best Plan

Participant Anggi expressed a belief that every life challenge carries God's purpose, viewing trials as a means for spiritual growth and greater faithfulness in Christ. Similarly, participant Tesa affirmed that all problems occur with God's permission, while Edu emphasized that difficulties help him learn patience and emotional control in ministry. Across participants, there was a shared conviction that challenges are not mere obstacles, but divine tools for strengthening faith and spiritual maturity. This belief fosters a positive, grateful outlook, even amid hardship. Anjani (2019) found similar results—participants believed that all experiences, good or bad, are part of God's will and serve to deepen faith. Likewise, Harlianty et al. (2022) noted that challenges were viewed as divine tests, with surrender to God seen as the best response. The perspectives shared by participants in this study, supported by previous research, reflect a consistent theological understanding: life's struggles are meaningful and intentional within God's plan. This belief empowers ministers to remain steadfast, grateful, and spiritually resilient, recognizing trials as opportunities to develop character and grow closer to God. In conclusion, church ministers hold a strong conviction that challenges whether in life or ministry are part of God's will. Rather than barriers, problems are seen as divine instruments for growth, maturity, and deeper spiritual connection.

This worldview not only sustains their commitment to ministry but also shapes a resilient and grateful attitude rooted in faith.

Conclusion

This study finds that church workers at Bethel Church of Indonesia (GBI) Ayalon Congregation in Kupang face significant challenges in three areas: spiritual life, interpersonal relationships, and religious coping. Spiritually, they struggle with faith crises, emotional distance from God, and diminished motivation. Interpersonally, conflicts and poor communication disrupt team cohesion. Despite these challenges, the workers rely on religious coping—through prayer, Scripture reading, and viewing hardship as a means of spiritual growth. Support from fellow ministers, family, and church leaders provides additional strength, while forgiveness fosters team harmony and deeper relationships. The study underscores the importance of spiritual intimacy, healthy relationships, and the lived practice of faith-based values in sustaining effective ministry.

Suggestion

It is expected that church ministers will continue to strengthen their religious coping strategies through spiritual disciplines such as prayer, personal reflection, and active participation in the faith community. Furthermore, the church is encouraged to provide ongoing spiritual formation programs and mentoring to support the servants, with the aim of enhancing their spiritual resilience in facing the challenges of ministry

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