

## Sunday School Teachers' Stewardship for Children's Faith Growth in The Community of Shalom at XYZ Church in Tangerang

Nostalgia Pax Nikijuluw

STT Amanat Agung

E-mail: [nostalgia.dewanto@sttaa.ac.id](mailto:nostalgia.dewanto@sttaa.ac.id)

### Article History

Submitted:

16 Agustus 2022

Accepted:

28 September 2022

Published:

Desember 2022

### DOI:

10.47530/edulead.v3i2.115

Copyright: ©2022, Authors.

### Keywords:

Early Childhood; Faith Growth; Phenomenology; Shalom Community; Sunday School Teacher; Stewardship

### Kata-kata kunci:

Anak Usia Dini; Fenomenologi; Guru Sekolah Minggu; Komunitas Shalom; Penatalayanan; Pertumbuhan Iman

Scan this QR Read Online



### License:

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.



**Abstrak:** Peran guru-guru sekolah minggu sangat berdampak bagi pertumbuhan iman anak sekolah minggu (ASM). Penelitian ini dilakukan untuk mengetahui makna penatalayanan para GSM bagi pertumbuhan iman di Gereja XYZ Tangerang. Pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode fenomenologi digunakan untuk menggali makna pengalaman pelayanan para GSM, khususnya GSM yang mengajar kelas anak usia dini di Gereja XYZ Tangerang. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa bagi para GSM yang mengajar kelas anak usia dini di Gereja XYZ Tangerang, pelayanan sebagai GSM adalah sebuah perjalanan dalam anugerah Tuhan, yang disikapi bersama dengan respons syukur dan ketaatan. Sikap yang membawa pada kesetiaan dalam melayani Tuhan, sebagai respons dari rasa syukur dan persembahan kepada Tuhan atas karunia keselamatan.

**Abstract:** Sunday school teachers are church activists whose their presence impact the children's faith growth. This study was conducted to determine the meaning of SST's stewardship for faith growth in the XYZ Church Tangerang. A qualitative approach with the phenomenological method is used to explore the meaning of the service experience of the Sunday School Teacher' (SST), especially SST who teaches early childhood classes at the XYZ Church Tangerang. The result shows that the SST's stewardship at early childhood classes in XYZ Church Tangerang is a journey in God's grace, which is taken together with a response of gratitude and obedience. An attitude that leads to faithfulness in serving God, as a response to gratitude and offering to God for the gift of salvation.

## INTRODUCTION

A study that measures the spirituality of Indonesian Christians was conducted in 2021. One of the conclusion was found that Christians who are active in ministry tend to have a higher level of spirituality (Irawan D. et al. 2021, 27). The findings of this study by Bilangan Research led the activist's understanding of ministry and spirituality. The presence of Sunday School Teacher (the rest of this article, the author will use SST for Sunday School Teacher') in the ministry is very influential in achieving Sunday school (the rest of this article, the author will use SS for Sunday School) service goals, especially for early childhood. Another study in an educational community found that most early childhood educators surveyed had multiple layers of understanding of children's spirituality (Mata-McMahon, Haslip, and Schein 2020, 667) .

Therefore, the praxis of teaching children through SS ministry needs special attention. Sunday school teachers who serve for many years may become in a stagnant situation, which has an impact on SS students' faith growth. Findings on the relationship between religious practices and habits on well-being and health in adolescents (Chi-Kin Lee 2022, 4), add to the evidence of the urgency of paying attention to educational praxis in Sunday schools. The attention is not only on the message of the Bible story that is conveyed, but also the presence of SST as the messenger of the Bible message.

All nine participants in this study are all women, because the SST who taught early childhood classes were all women, they're housewives with children, and four of them are housewives and also workers. Four participants' come from a non-

Christian family background, while five other, are from Christian families. Two of the five participants who came from Christian families live with parents who are church's activists.

This study identifies the following problems: 1) SST who serve for many years, have the potential to be in a stagnant situation, which has an impact on Sunday School Children's (the rest of this article, the author will use SSC for Sunday School Children') faith growth; 2) SSCs faith growth through SS classes are influenced by the understanding and teaching praxis of the SS teachers; 3) Teaching praxis for SSC's faith growth in SS ministry, is expected to be a unity in faith growth with all members of the community of believers in the church.

The SSC's interaction with the nearest environment affects the SSC's learning process. The active involvement of parents and attention to the growth of their children's faith will be seen in SSC's response and enthusiasm to various interactions in SS. The role of parents has a big influence on SS ministry, children's faith growth

The growth of parent's and SST's faith also influence by the role of the church through teaching and pastoral care given to the congregation, as well as the fellowship of believers who grow together in a faith community that brings shalom.

Obtaining the meaning of the SST's stewardship for faith growth of children is the general goal of this study. This research will answers the following questions: 1) What is the understanding of SST about services to SSC at Gereja XYZ Tangerang?; 2) How did the SST experience the growth of faith?; 3) How does SST's teaching practice play a role in children's faith growth?; 4)What is the role of SS

community members of the XYZ Church Tangerang children's faith growth?

Theoretically, the findings of the phenomenon in this study will provide an overview of the praxis of Christian education in the Sunday School of the XYZ Church Tangerang which involves the stewardship role of Sunday school teachers and the community for children's faith growth. Practically, the findings of this phenomenon will provide benefits for SS practice implementation in growing SSC's spirituality at an early age.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with phenomenological research methods. One of the main research methods is the search for meaning (Moustakas 1994, 12). A study of the phenomenon of a person's experience on the basis of his own experience (Brinkmann and Friesen 2018, 592).

Human experience needs to be studied because there is a unique special character from which scientific or cognitive values are obtained, which are permanently attached to the experience of human life (Husserl 1983, 31). Husserl further said that phenomenology is a process of philosophical analysis of various elements that talk about thoughts, feelings, situations and other sensory awareness (Zahavi 2019).

### *Research Techniques and Instruments*

The first stage of research instrument exert an online survey to find out the participants' data and the availability of time for conducting interviews. The second stage of data collection conducted by an interview with guidance, as follows:

**Table 1. Interview Guidance for Data Collection Phase Two**

Question Guide	A list of questions
How does SST understand the SS service?	How did you get started join SS ministry? Why do you want to be SST? Why did you serve for specific years in SS? How can SSC believe in God? How do you see the growth of SSC?
What is SST's personal experience with faith growth?	Was there a particular experience that made you change? Were you confronted with any challenges or difficulties? How did you overcome those challenges/ difficulties?
How does SST' teaching practice play a role in faith growth?	How was your experience in preparing story telling? What is your experience in assisting young children? Have you ever had an in-depth conversation with an SSC? How do you prepare yourself for storytelling? Do you think the existing curriculum brings children closer to God? How did you find out? How do you interact with SSC when they behave in a particular difficult act?
What is the role of members of the XYZ Church SM community in faith growth?	How do you cooperate with other SST? Have you had any memorable experiences with SSC? What is your experience with SSC's parents?

The researcher attempt to do *bracketing/ epoche*, refraining from giving directions or opinions to participants during interview conducted. The Exploration of participants' experiences through interviews was carried

out in an informal setting, by providing opportunities for participants to tell their stories.

## RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Sunday School Teachers' Stewardship for Faith Growth In The Community Of Shalom XYZ Church Tangerang, described in 32 topics, eight categories and three themes, as follows:

Topics	Category	Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The joy of being saved</li> <li>• Opportunity to serve</li> <li>• Call to serve</li> <li>• Serving experience in the past</li> <li>• Heart movement</li> <li>• The willingness to serve</li> </ul>	SST Calling Context	<b>Theme 1: A Journey As SST</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child-loving</li> <li>• Offering to God</li> <li>• Thanksgiving</li> <li>• Evangelism</li> </ul>	Self-Motivation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get supplies</li> <li>• Presence and guidance</li> <li>• Sadness of service</li> <li>• Transformed character</li> </ul>	Self-Formation	<b>Theme 2: Be formed and Form</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attempts to recognize SSC</li> <li>• Comforting SSC</li> <li>• SSC's desire to grow</li> <li>• Self-evaluation as SST</li> </ul>	SSC's Loving Process	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-realize as a sower</li> <li>• Sense of faith growth in SSC</li> </ul>	Faith Growth	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heart Preparation to convey The Gospel</li> <li>• Enthusiasm</li> </ul>	The Convey of God's word	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faith tot the work of The Holy Spirit</li> <li>• Evangelism for ASM companions</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serve with a sincere heart</li> <li>• Supportive family</li> <li>• Efforts to understand service partners</li> <li>• Accompany and accompanied</li> <li>• Parent involvement</li> </ul>	Partnership, SST, SSC, and Caretaker	<b>Theme 3: Shalom Community</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability from Allah</li> <li>• God's Sovereignty</li> <li>• Firm commitment</li> </ul>	God's Partner	

### Theme Analysis

#### *A Journey as an SST*

All participants have their own background life story and various experience, before join to children ministry, as a Sunday school teacher. Several of them have an encounter with their SST, parents life example which drive and motivate participants to join in the ministry.

Some of the participant highlighted their gratitude for God's salvation grace, the joyfulness for the opportunity to serve, and additionally, they confessed that they are children loving, so they want to tell the gospel to the SSC.

Teachers' understanding of spirituality in children, which was found to have a multi-layered understanding, as found by Mata-McMahon, Haslip, and Schein (2019, 667), was not apparent in this study. All SST in this study who are in the same community,

XYZ Church Tangerang, have the same understanding on their role and praxis as a SST. They understand that their role as SST as an offering to God to expressed their gratitude.

### ***Be Formed and form***

The ability to believe and praise God was given by God, since children and even babies who are still nursing, as said by the psalmist in Psalm 8:2, became the participants' belief as a principle of their ministry. It is believed that their service as a seed sower to SSC will not be in vain, because God Himself gave that understanding to this young SSC. This belief grows within each participant becoming a shared belief among SST members who serve together, accompanied by a willingness to work together, defeating ego. In addition, SST are also formed to love SSC more especially to SSC who need special handling.

In terms of faith growth, SST strive to provide teaching based on God's word through group or personal preparation, as Johnson-Miller and Pazmiño (2020, 13) wrote that the challenge for Christ based teaching. In each personal preparation, SST experiences faith growth in God by encountering God's word more.

Thus, growth through encounters with the truth of God's word first occurs in SST. This is a strength for teaching practice to SSC, a transformative, not just informative teaching.

According to the theory of faith development, early childhood SSC from infants to 2 years, are in the Primal/Undifferentiated Faith stage characterized by early learning by the sense of security and

warmth from their nearest environment. The SST's experience assisting SSC in the classroom, shows the importance of providing comfort to SSC, through greetings, hugs, and love so that SSC is ready to listen to God's word.

Early childhood SSC at the age of kindergarten, according to the theory of faith development is at the stage of Intuitive-Projective faith, at this stage SSC can feel various emotions and teach moral values. In line with what Jean Piaget said in the theory of cognitive development, that early childhood SSC is at the stage of sensorimotor and early cognitive development.

The age of the participants in this study, when viewed through the stages of James Fowler's faith growth, is in the Conjunctive faith stage. The stage where a person is characterized by self-acceptance of things that are contrary to him. The next stage is Universalizing faith/enlightenment, the structuring at this stage grounded in the completion decentration from self, such as emptying of self (Fowler 1986) From a limited perspective, the willingness of SST to accept uncomfot things especially when working with the SST team and dealing with SSC behavior, involves a process within the SST submission to follow God's will.

However, spiritual growth is a personal relationship with God. Human theories cannot limit this unique relationship through a faith classification. This relationship involves a transcendent character beyond human understanding.

Hebrews 11:1 states "Faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen," A belief in the knowledge of the person and character of God, accompanied by the belief that God

will keep His words, even though what is the hope has not been seen in the slightest form.

The ability to believe and praise God is given by God, to children and even nursing babies says the psalmist in Psalm 8:2.

Furthermore, God mandates parents to be involved in their children's faith. Family, Church, and School are the three main ambassadors in Christian formation and education (Brummelen 2006, 31) .

Rebecca Nye (2018, 116) states that a child can experience various experiences forming his spirituality within himself. Experience and formation can be observed through the expression of children's sensitivity in feeling the emotions of joy, admiration for something miraculous, sadness, fear, and so on (Gordon 2016, 10) .

Faith according to James Fowler develops gradually towards a maximum point in the individual which further minimizes the personal ego, which is not self-centered (Fowler 1986, 39) . The term stage refers to the model of faith development throughout the human life span, which is oriented towards a holistic relationship concerning the individual's relationship to the universal (Fowler 1991, 34-36) . The theory of the development of faith is addressed in a universal sense as well as virtue , not just faith in a particular religious sense.

The stages of faith development consist of six stages of constructive development patterns: stage 0 *Primal/Undifferentiated faith* (from birth to age 2 years), stage 1 *Intuitive-Projective faith* (ages 3-7 years), stage 2 *Mythic-Literal faith* (generally in school-age children), stage 3 *Synthetic-Conventional faith* (appears in adolescence), stage 4 *Individual-Reflective faith* (middle age 20 to late 30

years), Stage 5 *Conjunctive faith* (midlife crisis), Stage 6 *Universalizing faith/enlightenment* (Fowler 1981, 33-34) .

James Fowler identified three stages of faith development in childhood: 1) *Primal/Undifferentiated faith*, a child from birth to the age of 2 years, is at the stage of forming trust based on a reciprocal relationship between children and parents or their caregiver; 2) *Intuitive Projective Faith* , the stage of faith in children aged 3 and 4 years, is the time when children grow in their faith or trust intuitively; 3) *Mythic-literal faith* is in the belief mythic-literal faith which occurs between the ages of 6 and middle class age. At this stage the child can reflect on his feelings and ideas of faith (Fowler 1991, 34-36).

In religious life, faith is related to the transcendence of God. A person's faith will be reflected in his values formed, beliefs, and behavior.

### ***Shalom Community***

The church called to shepherd the congregation especially their faith growth. Children's ministry is a ministry that shapes someone by imprinting on wet cement (Barfield 2020, 14) . In line with that, James KA Smith (2009, 51) says that a person is an agent of love, which takes and is formed through the structure of desire in his daily life. All participants expressed their sincerity, their loving supportive family during their service as SST. Therefore, the church needs to pay attention to various aspects that affect the growth of children.

The “*shalom*” community is a community in which believers are gathered because of God's grace, and who have the blessing and inclusion of God Himself.

Bonhoeffer says emphatically that only a community (*Gemeinschaft*), not a society (*Gesellschaft*) is capable of raising children (Root 2014, 62). Communities where children are involved in personal and interpersonal interactions provide a growth process.

Lois E. Lebar (2006) stated that it takes a revolution so that teaching remains based on the authority of God's word through the presence of Christian leaders who have strong leadership. Christian educators need to understand the perspective of God's purpose in life and for believers in particular (Habermas 2008). Thus, Christian education is an excellent endeavor because of God's intervenes in a process involving individuals who are molded into Christlikeness throughout life (Issler 2001, 35).

The challenge in SS ministry is the relevance of Bible story-telling and its daily application in a child's everyday life (Anderson-Umana 2021). Research conducted by Mata-McMahon (2019) shows that most early childhood educators surveyed have a multi-layered understanding of children's spirituality.

Teaching children will be effective if teachers teach by increasing the active participation of children (Stonehouse 2011, 30), it is necessary to involve children (Ornstein and Hunkins 2018, 194).

Therefore, it takes a proper understanding of the teaching praxis in SS ministry, a call for comprehensive Christ-based teaching in all aspects of educational or discipleship ministry to be carried out (Johnson-Miller and Pazmiño 2020, 13).

Stewardship in Christianity means that believers exercise authority over various resources in the name of God as the owner

of all things (Lincoln 2008, 4). Stewardship on trust in God in many ways. Not only in fund management, but managerial, but also include concern for other creations, service, sharing of gifts possessed, participation in worship, and willingness to sacrifice (Gordon 2016, 29)

Human learning can not be separated from the environment surrounding it. The Theory of Ecological Development identifies five environmental systems showing relationships that begin with the closest interpersonal relationships leading to influence on broader relationship: microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, and chronosystems. (Santrock 2018). According to Rosa and Tudge (2020), the basic principle of Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory is humans are formed from one or more systems in which some individual interests and interactions that can develop.

Children tend to be shaped by various influences from their immediate environment. The role of parents at the micro level, as well as the wider influence that is transmitted through people's lives. (Granqvist and Nkara 2017, 6).

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

The SST or participants in this research understand that the key to a success Sunday school ministry is only rely on God Himself. The service to SSC is an opportunity given by God to SST, which is accepted as a response of gratitude and offering to God for the grace of salvation.

The faith growth is a life process involving many parties. SS teachers, parents, and all members of the XYZ Tangerang Church community. Thus, the stewardship of the Sunday school teachers of the XYZ

Tangerang Church in the Sunday school ministry is a journey in God's grace, which is taken together with a response of gratitude and obedience.

At last, advanced research recommendations for phenomenological research requires a depth of excavation in data collection. Interviews conducted face-to-face, which are not conducted online, will provide more opportunities for researchers to observe participants when interviewes are conducted. Observing body gestures and establishing an informal comfort in face-to-face interview, will allowed participants to speak and tell their stories more relaxed. It will be constructive to dig more profound deeper information about participants' experience

## REFERENCES

- Anderson-Umana, L. M. (2021). The Good Sower: A Novel Approach to Teaching Sunday School. *Christian Education Journal*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0739891321993127>
- Barfield, R. (2020). Children and the Imago Dei: A Reformed Proposal Regarding the Spiritual Openness of the Child. *Christian Education Journal*, 17(1), 7–17.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0739891319865911>
- Brinkmann, M., & Friesen, N. (2018). Phenomenology and Education. In P. Smeyers (Ed.), *International Handbook of Philosophy of Education* (Smeyers. P, p. 592). Springer.  
<https://doi.org/doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-72761-5>
- Brummelen, H. Van. (2006). *Berjalan dengan Tuhan di dalam Kelas*. Universitas Pelita Harapan Press.
- Chi-Kin Lee, J. (2022). Children's life and spirituality development and their educations: sensing, spaces, and sources of influence. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 27(1), 1–9.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1364436X.2022.2047280>
- Fowler, J. W. (1981). *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the quest for Meaning*. Harper Collins.
- Fowler, J. W. (1986). Faith and the structuring of Meaning. In C. Dykstra & S. Parks (Eds.), *Faith Development and Fowler* (pp. 1–40). Religious Education Press.
- Fowler, J. W. (1991). Stages in faith consciousness. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 1991(52), 27–45.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/cd.23219915204>
- Gordon, M. C. (2016). *Children's Ministry Help Children Grow in Faith*. The United Methodist Publishing House.
- Habermas, R. T. (2008). *Introduction to Christian Education and Formation*. Zondervan.
- Husserl, E. (1983). *Ideas Pertaining to Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*. Martinus Nijhoff Publisher.
- Irawan D., H., Gultom, G., Yahya, K., & Budijanto, B. (2021). *Spiritualitas Umat Kristen Indonesia 2021* (Issue April).



- Issler, K. (2001). Theological Foundations of Christian Educations. In *Introducing Christian Education Foundations for the Twenty-first Century* (pp. 35–44). Baker Academic.
- Johnson-Miller, B., & Pazmiño, R. W. (2020). Christian Education Foundations: Retrospects and Prospects. *Christian Education Journal*, 17(3), 560–576. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739891320943606>
- Lebar, L. E. (2006). *Proses Belajar Mengajar Kristiani & Kurikulum yang Alkitabiah* (T. S. Kaihatu (ed.)). Gandum Mas.
- Lincoln, T. D. (2008). *Stewardship in education: a world-bridging concept*.
- Mata-McMahon, J., Haslip, M. J., & Schein, D. L. (2019). Early childhood educators' perceptions of nurturing spirituality in secular settings. *Early Child Development and Care*, 189(14), 2233–2251. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2018.1445734>
- Mata-McMahon, J., Haslip, M. J., & Schein, D. L. (2020). Connections, Virtues, and Meaning-Making: How Early Childhood Educators Describe Children's Spirituality. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 48(5), 657–669. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-020-01026-8>
- Moustakas, C. E. (1994). *Phenomenological Research Method*. Sage Publications Inc.
- Nye, R. (2018). The spiritual strengths of young children. In C. Trevarthen, J. Delafield-Butt, & A.-W. Dunlop (Eds.), *The child's Curriculum Working with the natural values of young children* (First, pp. 139–159). Oxford University Press.
- Root, A. (2014). *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker*. Baker Publishing.
- Smith, J. K. A. (2009). *Desiring the Kingdom Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*. Baker Academic.
- Stonehouse, C. (2011). *Joining Children on The Spiritual Journey* (Ebook Edit). Baker Publishing.
- Tudge, J., & Rosa, E. M. (2020). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory. *The Encyclopedia of Child and Adolescent Development*, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119171492.wecad251>
- Zahavi, D. (2019). *Phenomenology: The Basic*. Routledge.