



## Competency of the liturgy of the word and preaching for the management of the Parish Church of ST. Damian, Lau Baleng Tanah Karo

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### ABSTRACT

The Liturgy of the Word serves to strengthen faith, shape congregational identity, and transform congregational life. Meanwhile, preaching, as part of the Liturgy of the Word, has a sacramental dimension and functions to renew the Word of God in the context of people's lives. The purpose of this study is to analyze the competence of church administrators in delivering the Liturgy of the Word and sermons, explore contextual challenges in its implementation in the midst of congregations without priests, and formulate strategies for empowering liturgy and homilies based on local culture as a relevant and sustainable pastoral solution. The approach used in this research is participatory action research. Data collection techniques include observation, interviews, and documentation. The results showed that in St. Damian Parish, Lau Baleng, there is a competency gap among church administrators in the understanding and animation of the Liturgy of the Word as well as preaching skills. The quality of service, including the abilities to inculturate the liturgy in Karo culture, requires structured training. A pastoral approach in liturgy is key to creating meaningful experiences for the people, especially in a multicultural context.



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## INTRODUCTION

The Liturgy of the Word is an integral part of the Catholic Church's worship that plays a crucial role in the life of the faithful. The Liturgy of the Word is "the first part of the Eucharistic celebration in which the Word of God is proclaimed, contemplated, and responded to by the faithful" (Martasudjita, 2011). This definition emphasizes that the Liturgy of the Word is not merely a reading of the Scriptures, but is an encounter between God and His people through the living Word. The main function of the Liturgy of the Word is to proclaim God's work of salvation and invite the faithful to respond to it with faith. Through the Liturgy of the Word, the faithful are invited to listen, contemplate, and absorb the Word of God that is proclaimed. This process helps the faithful to understand God's will in their daily lives and encourages them to live according to His teachings (Martasudjita, 2011). The Liturgy of the Word has a central role in strengthening the faith of the congregation. He explained that through the proclamation and explanation of the Word of God, the people are guided to know and love God more (Leo & Diterjemahkan R Hardawiryana, 2022). This process helps the people to deepen their understanding of the Catholic faith and encourages them to apply it. In addition, the Liturgy of the Word plays a role in shaping the identity of the community of faith. Through the proclamation of the same Word, the people are united in one faith and one hope. This creates a sense of togetherness and solidarity among members of the congregation, which in turn strengthens the Church as a community of faith (Leo & Diterjemahkan R Hardawiryana, 2022).

The Liturgy of the Word not only serves to convey information, but also to lead the congregation to an experience of encounter with the living God. Through the Liturgy of the Word, the congregation is invited to enter into the mystery of faith and experience the saving presence of God

(Rusmanto et al., 2023). The Liturgy of the Word emphasizes the importance of good preparation and delivery of the Liturgy of the Word. The effectiveness of the Liturgy of the Word in strengthening the faith of the congregation is very dependent on the quality of its preparation and delivery. Therefore, training for ministers of the Liturgy of the Word is very important to ensure that the Word of God can be proclaimed well and have a positive impact on the life of faith of the congregation (Tinenti, 2023).

The main challenges faced by church administrators in understanding and delivering the Liturgy of the Word. First, the complexity of the text of the Bible which often requires a deep understanding of the historical, cultural, and theological context. Many church administrators, especially those without a formal theological educational background, have difficulty interpreting biblical texts accurately and relevantly (Pambayun, 2021). The task of church administrators is not only to convey the contents of the Bible, but also to translate it into the language and life experiences of the congregation. This requires hermeneutical skills that are not always possessed by all church administrators (Pambayun, 2021). Another challenge lies in the ability to integrate the Liturgy of the Word with other liturgical elements harmoniously. He emphasized the importance of a holistic understanding of the liturgy so that the Word of God can be proclaimed in the right and meaningful context (Martasudjita, 2011). Church administrators need to have the ability to adapt their delivery style in order to reach both young people and adults effectively (Kobstan, 2023).

Previous studies have made important contributions to this issue, but have not directly touched on the liturgical competence of lay church administrators in the local context. Pranyoto (2024) in his research on the empowerment of Catholic Youth through the Shared Christian Praxis model showed that reflection-based and participation-based coaching can improve the understanding and active role of lay people in catechesis services. Likewise, Babawat (2024) emphasized the importance of the role of Sunday School teachers in forming the foundation of children's faith and character through in-depth spiritual education, showing that early faith formation is the foundation for forming quality church servants. Meanwhile, Tarigan (2025) stated that the practice of Christian Religious Education among Gen Z is still in the moderate category, indicating that faith formation and religious teaching have not been running optimally among the next generation of the church. These three studies highlight the importance of education and coaching in the church community, but are still focused on the aspects of children and young people, and have not specifically reviewed the readiness of lay church administrators in the context of implementing the Liturgy of the Word and homilies.

Thus, this study sees a gap (research gap) in the form of a lack of empirical and reflective studies on the competence of church administrators in leading the Liturgy of the Word and delivering sermons outside the presence of a priest, especially in the context of local culture such as the Karo community. In addition, there has been no approach that specifically links the liturgy and proclamation of the Word with the cultural values that live in the local community. From this gap, the novelty of this study emerged, namely offering a contextual approach based on local culture to strengthen the capacity of church administrators in the ministry of the word and sermons. This approach not only raises the liturgical dimension, but also empowers the laity pastorally and culturally.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze the competence of church administrators in delivering the Liturgy of the Word and sermons, explore contextual challenges in its implementation in the midst of a community without a priest, and formulate a liturgical and homiletic empowerment strategy based on local culture as a relevant and sustainable pastoral solution. It is hoped that this research can contribute to the development of contextual liturgical practices of the Catholic Church in Indonesia, as well as become a reference for community-based pastoral development.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The approach used in this research is participatory action research (Stephen Kemmis, Robin McTaggart, 2014). The research was conducted at the Saint Damian Parish in Lau Baleng - Tanah Karo on 63 members of the Station Pastoral Council in May 2024. The informants consisted of 1 Parish Priest, 2 Parish Pastoral Council members, and 63 Station Pastoral Council members. Data collection techniques through participant observation, researchers were directly involved in the liturgy of the word and sermon activities at the St. Damian Parish Church, Lau Baleng. Observing and recording details of the implementation of the Liturgy of the Word, congregational interactions, and sermon delivery (Garrido, 2017). In-depth interviews, conducting semi-structured interviews with church

administrators, liturgical leaders, and congregations to explore participants' understanding, experiences, and perceptions of the Liturgy of the Word and sermons (Kvale, S. & Brinkmann, S, 2015). Focus group discussions, conducting focus group discussions with 6-8 participants to explore topics collectively, the purpose of discussing congregational perceptions of the effectiveness of the Liturgy of the Word and sermons in the Karo cultural context (Krueger, R.A & Casey, M.A, 2015).

The first stage is document analysis by collecting and analyzing documents related to the Liturgy of the Word and preaching. The second is application by reviewing sermon manuscripts, liturgical guidelines, and church management meeting notes (Bowen, G. A, 2009). The third stage is Drawing conclusions by triangulating data. Using various data sources and methods to increase the validity of the findings. Comparing the results of observations, interviews, and document analysis to verify the findings (Bloom, 2017). Synthesizing the findings to answer research questions about the practice and effectiveness of the Liturgy of the Word and sermons at St. Damian Parish Church, Lau Baleng (Miles, M. B et al., 2014).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Understanding the Liturgy of the Word

The understanding of the congregation about the liturgy of the word, especially the board of directors of the station is very good, this is evidenced by the results of interviews with 23 Chairmen of the Pastoral Council of the Station on April 6, 2024 and the results of observations on April 7, 2024 showed that the congregation carried out the Sunday word service in accordance with the liturgy of the Catholic Church, but the liturgy movements, selection of songs and liturgy colors are not yet in accordance with the general guidelines of the Roman Missal. The Word Service is a celebration of the liturgy of the Catholic Church carried out by the congregation without being led by a priest. The leader of the service is one of the congregation who is one of the Church administrators. The most important part of the word service is the liturgy of the word, the main purpose of the Liturgy of the Word is "to proclaim the work of God's salvation" (O'Collins & Farrugia, 2015).

The Liturgy of the Word is not just a reading of a text, but a sacramental event in which Christ is present and speaks to His people (Rusmanto et al., 2023). This emphasizes the importance of the Liturgy of the Word as a means of communication between God and His people. The Liturgy of the Word has an important role in shaping the identity of the Christian community and deepening the understanding of the faith of the people (Tarigan, 2025). In an interview with the Parish Priest on April 6, 2024 about how the people and Church administrators understand the parts of the word service without a priest, it shows that the people and Church administrators are guided to understand every part of the word service without a priest, although in practice the people are more active when carrying out the Eucharist celebration compared to regular worship. This was found in the observation on April 27, 2024, the Parish Priest presented all Church administrators to carry out word service training activities and preaching exercises. Another thing found in the work agenda for April 2024 was training activities for Church administrators on Sunday word service and preaching.

Based on the General Guidelines of the Rusmanto et al. (2023), the basic structure of the Liturgy of the Word consists of: Readings from the Scriptures, Responsive Psalm, Homily or sermon, Creed and Prayer of the People. The Liturgy of the Word is an important part of the celebration of the word which is preceded by an opening rite and ends with a closing rite. In practice, Church administrators experience problems in this section. liturgy of the word such as reciting the Psalms, not all people can bring the Psalms and the introductory verse of the gospel, so that the participation of the people is very low in this section. Another problem faced by the people, especially the leaders of the word worship who have limited knowledge and skills in delivering sermons. The people tend to present sermons using existing references or available devotional texts, this was found in interviews with Church Administrators on April 26-27, 2024. In the Observations on April 7 and May 28, 2024, the psalm bearers had difficulty reciting the Psalms, there were errors in choosing the tone and lack of understanding of notation. The preacher had difficulty exegesis and elaboration with the concrete experiences of the people and the social context that occurred.

In conducting a sermon, it is important to analyze each element of the text of God's word and emphasize the importance of contextualization in conveying the message of the Scriptures. Sermons have a crucial role in connecting the text of the Scriptures with the daily lives of the people Martasudjita

(2021) offers an in-depth analysis of the relationship between liturgical texts and cultural contexts. He emphasizes the importance of "double hermeneutics" in understanding the Liturgy of the Word, namely the interpretation of the biblical text and the interpretation of the cultural context of the people. Martasudjita (2021) discusses the efforts to renew the Liturgy of the Word after the Second Vatican Council and the challenges faced in its implementation (Martasudjita, 2021). Effective preaching techniques are a crucial aspect of church ministry, especially in the context of the Liturgy of the Word. In an interview with the Parish Priest on April 7, 2024, he emphasized that each Church administrator, especially worship leaders in the environment or station, is required to prepare sermon materials. This shows that thorough preparation is the main key to effective preaching. One approach that can be used is the narrative approach.

In a homily, there are five stages: disturbing the balance, analyzing the imbalance, enlightening, revealing the gospel, and anticipating the consequences. This approach helps the preacher to structure the material in a structured and interesting way. Wilson emphasizes the importance of in-depth exegesis of the text of Scripture as a basis for sermon preparation. The use of historical-critical methods and literary approaches to understand the context and meaning of the text comprehensively (Ginting et al., 2025). In preaching, it is also necessary to focus on one issue or topic to be conveyed. The preacher must determine one central idea (focus) and a specific purpose (function) of his sermon. This helps in compiling coherent and directed material. The results of the FGD of congregational leaders and the Pastoral Council of the Station on April 26-27, 2024 illustrate that in preaching, there is a tendency to convey the preacher's personal experiences and the material presented is not directed. Too many aspects are conveyed in the sermon so that it takes quite a long time. Public ability The specs are less interesting and the methods used are unclear.

Effective preaching involves more than just reading a prepared text. Purba (2019) emphasized the importance of "performance" in preaching. Preachers need to use theatrical techniques such as voice variation, body language, and eye contact to increase the appeal of the sermon. Findings from observations on April 8 and October 28 showed that preachers had difficulty performing theatrical techniques, the most dominant thing was a monotonous speaking style and more one-way views. The intonation of the voice was unclear and tended to use regional languages while the listeners did not only come from one tribe, even though they lived in the area where the majority tribe was.

Findings in the FGD based on the congregation's frequency, the story method is rarely used, meaning starting the sermon with a story as an illustration or done at the end of the sermon. Illustrating in the form of a story at the beginning of the sermon is a very interesting method. Allen (2019) highlights the importance of using illustrations and stories in sermons. Relevant narratives can help the congregation connect the message of the Bible with their daily life experiences (Allen, 2019). Another thing that can also be used from the results of the FGD on April 27, 2024, emphasized that a dialogical approach needs to be taken in sermons. This is in accordance with Purba (2019) who proposed a dialogical approach in preaching. Preachers need to involve the congregation in the reflection process, for example through rhetorical questions or moments of silence for personal reflection.

The experiences expressed by FGD participants in worship leaders and also preachers in delivering worship and sermons need to use effective and efficient language and communication styles, so that it is easier for the congregation to understand what is being conveyed. Contextualization of messages is an important aspect of preaching in the contemporary era. The use of language and communication styles that are relevant to the lives of contemporary congregations and preachers need to be sensitive to current socio-political issues and use metaphors that can be understood by the millennial generation (Allen, 2019). Preachers need to understand the cultural, social, and economic backgrounds of the congregation in order to convey relevant and meaningful messages (Bradbury, 2019). The narrative approach in homilies or sermons has made significant contributions to the field of homiletics. The "homiletical plot" approach helps preachers to compose sermons that have an interesting plot and are easy for the congregation to follow. Current socio-political issues, such as political polarization and social injustice, can be integrated into sermons without sacrificing the integrity of the gospel message.

Contextualization in the Liturgy of the Word and sermons is an important aspect in bridging the universal teachings of the Catholic Church with local cultural realities, especially contextualization in the Karo context. The results of the FGD confirmed that relevance in the local cultural context is still lacking even though sermons are dominated by the Karo language, including in the celebration of the

Eucharist. The songs used are also in the Karo language. However, it will be difficult for people who have not mastered the Karo language. Contextualization is not just translating messages, but also involves in-depth dialogue between the Gospel and local culture.

In the context of Tanah Karo, this means understanding the worldview, belief system, and traditional values of the Karo people. Adimurti (2005) in his research on Inculturation of Church Music in Batak Toba and Batak Simalungun, identified several elements of Karo culture that can be integrated into the liturgy, such as the concept of kinship "ertutur" and the values of mutual cooperation. He suggested the use of Karo cultural symbols in church decorations and liturgical clothing to create a sense of familiarity for the local congregation. One example of the integration of Karo culture is the concept of God (Dibata) in traditional Karo beliefs and how this can be a bridge to understanding the concept of God in Catholic teachings. The use of local terms that are equivalent to Catholic theological concepts to facilitate the congregation's understanding (Barus, 2018a). In addition, cultural values, one of which is the kinship system in Karo culture, are very good to be used as a means of pastoral service for the Church, as stated by Adiprasetya & Sasongko (2019) who emphasized the integration of the values of "adat ertutur" (kinship system) of Karo in the pastoral activities of the Catholic Church. A pastoral approach that considers the kinship structure in resolving conflicts and fostering the faith of the people.

The use of Karo language in liturgy and sermons is an important step in contextualization. The awareness of the Local Church of the Archdiocese of Medan for inculturation is by translating the Holy Scriptures, song books, prayer books and the rules for celebrating the word and eucharist into local languages, namely Karo, Toba, Simalungun, Pakpak and so on, so as to facilitate building the understanding of the congregation regarding Christian teachings and traditions (Ginting et al., 2025; Tarigan, 2025). In sermons or homilies as illustrative material, Karo cultural folklore "turi-turin" (folklore) can be used as a method of contextual theology. Local stories can be used to explain complex theological concepts (Bengkiuk et al., 2025). The style of language in sermons also uses agricultural and natural metaphors, considering that the majority of Karo people come from an agrarian background. The use of illustrations from farming life and natural phenomena in Tanah Karo to explain Catholic teachings makes it very easy to provide understanding to the congregation who listen to the preaching. Schreiter in "Constructing Local Theologies" provides a theoretical framework for the contextualization of theology. The "local theology" model involves a dialogue between Christian tradition, local culture, and contemporary social realities. This approach is very relevant to the Tanah Karo context which has a strong cultural tradition. Steenbrink in his research on Catholicism in Indonesia provides a historical perspective on contextualization efforts in various regions in Indonesia. His study highlights the challenges and successes in integrating local cultural elements into Catholic practice, which can be valuable lessons for the Tanah Karo context (Martasudjita, 2021).

Improving the capacity of church administrators is a crucial aspect in ensuring the effectiveness of the ministry, especially in the context of the Liturgy of the Word and preaching. The coaching method used to train church administrators. This is in accordance with Osmer's view of providing a framework for church leadership development which includes four tasks: descriptive-empirical (context analysis), interpretative (interpretation of findings in a theological context), normative (determining the basic goals of Christian values), and pragmatic (designing strategies and their implementation to achieve targets) (Kobstan, 2023). The "strengths-based coaching" model focuses on identifying and developing the natural talents of church administrators. He emphasizes the importance of reflective dialogue and empowering questions in the coaching process. The coaching approach transformational "which aims not only to improve skills, but also to transform the way of thinking and being of church administrators. The use of methods such as theological reflection, case studies, and simulations in the coaching process.

In realizing quality services in the field of celebrating the word of faith and preaching, the Church needs to provide various human resource development activities for Church administrators as a form of concrete strategy. In an interview with the Parish Priest on April 28, 2024 regarding ongoing coaching or mentoring for Church administrators, it was stated that every year training or coaching activities are carried out in various pastoral fields, one of which is in the field of liturgy and kerygma. This was also found in frequent FGDs with Church administrators, it was emphasized that training in the field of liturgy and catechesis is very much needed by the congregation, especially for Church administrators. However, training, courses and coaching activities are still very lacking and specifically training activities for word of faith and preaching will be held in 2024. The ongoing development

program for church administrators Malphurs & Mancini offer a concrete strategy for an ongoing development program for church leaders in the form of training/courses, mentoring / coaching and independent learning (Krispin, 2020). In addition, the concept of a "learning community" for the development of church leaders. The occurrence of collaboration, joint reflection, and accountability in the process of continuous learning Tarigan (2025) and also the importance of skills such as adaptability, creativity, and digital literacy in pastoral care in the modern Catholic Church.

The implementation of the Liturgy of the Word and preaching experiences various challenges such as tension between universal tradition and local culture and resistance to cultural change due to the emergence of new civilizations from outside and a lack of deep understanding of local culture itself, making it difficult to integrate local cultural values into the Catholic Church. Limited human resources, especially regarding Catholic theology, have limited the ability to translate theological concepts into the Karo language. This reality is in line with Pambayun (2021) thinking, which states that common challenges in the contextualization of word worship applied by the Church in certain cultures such as tension between universal tradition and local expression, resistance to change from some people, and a lack of deep understanding of local culture. Another thing, a cultural expert Adimurti (2005) identified obstacles that occurred such as the difficulty of translating theological concepts in Karo culture, the difficulty of maintaining the balance of Karo customary values and Christian traditions.

In the FGD activity with the Parish Pastor, Community Leaders and Church Administrators on April 27, 2024, it was emphasized that in facing the challenges of contextualization, there are various strategies such as conducting dialogue activities with the Parish Pastoral Council, Station Pastoral Council, Neighborhood Pastoral Council and Community Leaders and local cultural figures to realize a better quality of church life in the field of liturgy and bring the congregation to achieve maturity in their faith. This is in line with Adiprasetya & Sasongko (2019) thinking, which states the importance of ongoing dialogue between church leaders, theologians, and traditional leaders, as well as a participatory approach in designing a liturgy that involves the congregation, and the need for intensive training for church administrators on worship of the word without a priest. In an interview with one of the Parish Pastoral Council members regarding the importance of training and mentoring in Sunday liturgy and preaching training on April 28, 2024, it was explained that the Church needs to collaborate with various parties, including the liturgy commission of the Archdiocese of Medan, the parish liturgy section, or liturgy experts and theologians to carry out mentoring activities in the form of workshops or training for Church administrators on Sunday liturgy and preaching.

This idea was also found by Ginting et al. (2025) who offered a strategy to improve the understanding of the congregation and Church administrators about Sunday word worship and preaching. The strategy offered is to form a liturgy team consisting of the congregation, Catholic liturgy or theologian experts, Karo cultural experts to develop education or training on church liturgy, both eucharistic liturgy and word worship and preaching. Meanwhile, Purba (2019) highlighted the need for a holistic approach by emphasizing "the integration of Karo values in catechesis and faith education, the use of social media and digital technology to reach the younger generation, and the formation of a base community that combines Catholic spirituality and local Karo wisdom. These strategies emphasize the importance of dialogue, participation, and cultural integration in an effort to present relevant and contextual theology.

To encourage innovation in the delivery of the Liturgy of the Word and sermons, the Church in the inculturation liturgy strongly recommends and encourages the understanding of the congregation and Church administrators to implement it in their respective parishes and tasi. This was conveyed in the FGD forum on April 27, 2024. The ideas put forward in the forum were in line with Pambayun (2021) who proposed the integration of "local art and symbols in church decoration and liturgical clothing," as well as "the incorporation of traditional music and dance into worship. In the context of preaching, the idea was conveyed by the resource person that the use of story telling and folklore are highly recommended as illustrations for sermons. Citing Wijzen's thoughts, he explores innovation in delivering teachings by promoting the use of storytelling and local myths as methods of theology. He also emphasizes the importance of developing "catechetical models based on local wisdom (Adiprasetya & Sasongko, 2019).

In the context of Karo society, Sembiring (2020) offers specific approaches, such as "the use of Karo 'turi- turin ' (folklore) in homilies," as well as the development of " inculturative liturgy that integrates Karo traditional rituals," and "the use of Karo carving art in the visualization of theological

concepts (Sembiring, 2020). Pasaribu (2025) research in "Inculturation of Faith: Dynamics of Pentecostal Culture and Theology in a Modern Context" provides a solid theoretical framework for understanding and addressing the challenges of liturgical contextualization, with an analysis of the tensions between universal tradition and local expression that is particularly relevant to the Parish Church of St. Damian in Tanah Karo. In addition, Adiprasetya & Sasongko (2019) work in "Christianity and Others Cultures " offers a valuable comparative perspective, and its innovative exploration of the delivery of Christian teachings across cultural contexts has been an important inspiration for the development of contextual approaches in Tanah Karo.

The impact of coaching on the quality of worship is an important aspect in evaluating the effectiveness of church leadership development programs. Smith, Josephine Mary (2013) in his research showed that training for church leaders significantly improved the quality of the Liturgy of the Word. The changes identified included improved skills in leading the reading of the Scriptures, more effective use of language and gestures in the liturgy, and better mastery in relating the text of the Scriptures to the local context. Specific changes that occurred in the implementation of the Liturgy of the Word after training, such as increased creativity in the use of symbols and rituals, better integration between music, readings, and homilies, and increased participation of the congregation in the preparation and implementation of the liturgy (Bradbury, 2019). In the context of the local church, Adimurti (2005) noted significant changes such as the use of more appropriate and meaningful regional languages in the liturgy, the incorporation of relevant local cultural elements in the Liturgy of the Word, and increased ability to explain the meaning of symbols and rituals to the congregation.

In an interview with the parish priest about the expectations obtained if the training of word worship and sermons for church administrators is that it can improve the congregation's response to sermons such as higher congregational attention during the sermon, their better ability to remember and reflect on the contents of the sermon, and increased discussion after the service on the theme presented. This is in line with the findings of Bradbury (2019) who observed that the congregation felt that sermons were more relevant to their daily lives, with greater appreciation for the use of illustrations and stories, and increased participation in understanding the text of the Bible. Meanwhile, Ginting et al. (2025) research in Karo churches showed that the congregation's understanding of complex theological concepts increased, appreciation for the use of Karo cultural elements in sermons grew, and the congregation's motivation to apply sermon messages in daily life also increased.

Increasing the participation and understanding of the congregation in worship is an important aspect that can be observed as a result of coaching for church leaders. This is the orientation of Smith, Josephine Mary (2013) idea that training for Church administrators on word worship and preaching practice will have a positive impact, especially increasing the number of congregations involved in liturgical services, increasing the quality of congregational responses to liturgical officers, and increasing congregational understanding of the meaning and structure of the liturgy. The same thing was also stated by Bradbury that the positive impact of word worship and preaching training for the congregation and Church administrators was an increase in congregational involvement in the preparation of the weekly liturgy, increased participation in Bible study groups and theological discussions, and increased congregational initiative in proposing ideas for liturgical innovation (Bradbury, 2019). In a more specific context, Purba (2019) noted several developments in the Karo church. The positive impact of coaching word worship and preaching for church administrators on the quality of worship and congregational participation will increase, this is the hope of the church administrators and parish priests in the FGD on April 27, 2024.

### **Understanding the Liturgy of the Word**

The celebration of the Word without a priest in the Catholic Church emphasizes the importance of the Liturgy of the Word, which functions to proclaim the mystery of Christ and strengthen the faith of the faithful, as stated by the Second Vatican Council in the document *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Dokumen Konsili Vatikan II, 2009). The basic structure of the Liturgy of the Word includes readings from the Holy Bible, the Responsorial Psalm, a homily or sermon, the creed (on Sundays and holy days), and the prayers of the people. As explained by Irwin, the Liturgy of the Word is not just a reading of texts, but is a sacramental event where Christ's presence is real and He speaks to His people, making each celebration a spiritual experience or a deep experience of faith for Catholics (Kevin W. Irwin, 2016). This experience was understood by the congregation in the FGD on April 27 2024, conveyed by

participants who attended the FGD. The parish priest hoped for the same thing in an interview on April 28, 2024, emphasizing the importance of celebrating the word without a priest and preacher who must be able to lead the congregation to listen carefully to the gospel message being proclaimed.

### **Effective Preaching Techniques**

In the FGD on April 26, 2024, Church administrators explored the importance of preparation for preachers and improving the skills of preachers through various trainings. Effective preaching requires thorough preparation and interesting delivery. Lowry (2018) proposed a narrative approach in homilies, which involves five stages: disturbing the balance, analyzing the imbalance, enlightening, revealing the gospel, and anticipating the consequences (Lowry, 2018). Another thing about preaching emphasizes the importance of using language that is contextual and relevant to the lives of local people, especially integrating the local cultural context. The use of illustrations from everyday life and current issues to make sermons easier to understand and apply (Allen, 2019).

### **Contextualization in the Liturgy of the Word and sermons**

Interview findings with Church administrators and Parish Priests emphasize that sermons should touch the needs of the congregation. In preaching, the gospel message needs to be integrated with the cultural values of Karo, Toba, and the experiences of contemporary congregational life. The congregation will be greatly helped if the gospel message is integrated with local cultural values. Contextualization is the process of adapting the gospel message to the local culture without sacrificing the core of Christian teachings (Schreiter, 2015) contextualization efforts in the Catholic Church such as the use of regional languages in the liturgy and the integration of local cultural elements in the celebration of the word and the Eucharist are increasing as evidenced by the use of local languages in the celebration of the word and the Eucharist, books of the rules for the celebration of the word and the Eucharist, hymn books and scriptures and other prayer books have been translated into local languages (Karel Steenbrink, 2017).

### **Improving the Capabilities of Church Administrators**

In an interview with the parish priest on April 8, 2024, the Church administrators really need to improve their human resources, especially skills in animating the worship of the word without a priest and preaching. This is in line with the hopes of the Church administrators in the interview on April 7, 2024 and the results of the FGD on April 27, 2024 which emphasized that the Church administrators need special training organized by the parish and the liturgy commission in the field of Sunday and holy day liturgy without a priest. In addition, based on experience in the field, the preachers have limited exegetical knowledge and communication skills, especially integrating the gospel message in the context of the local community, so training and technical guidance on preaching are needed. Church leadership development can be carried out using patterns such as descriptive-empirical, interpretative, normative, and pragmatic, where theological reflection is an important part of every aspect (Osmer, 2008). In addition, continuous development programs for church administrators can be implemented through concrete strategies such as mentoring, competency-based training, and regular performance evaluations (Malphurs & Mancini, 2016).

### **Challenges and Solutions**

In the FGD on April 27, 2024, it was found that the challenges faced by Church administrators were limited literacy, no special assistance and very limited time for Church administrators, another challenge was accommodation for resource persons and participants because the area was very large and transportation was very difficult. Based on the results of interviews with the parish priest and the parish pastoral council on April 8, 2024, it was explained that in facing the challenges faced by the congregation and Church administrators, especially Church liturgy officers, namely providing assistance in the form of workshops every year considering that Church administrators experience changes so that cadre formation is needed. Collaborating with external parties to conduct catechesis and training in the field of liturgy and preaching through sermons on Sundays and holidays, including in environmental worship activities.

In the effort to contextualize the liturgy, the church often faces various challenges, as identified by Arbuckle (Peelman, 2015). One of the main challenges is resistance to change, where some church



members may feel comfortable with existing liturgical practices and are reluctant to adopt new approaches. Another challenge is the tension between maintaining tradition and integrating innovation into the liturgy. To overcome these challenges, the Church applies a dialogical approach that involves all stakeholders, such as church leaders, congregation members, and liturgical experts, in the process of liturgical renewal. Through open and constructive dialogue, the Church can find a balance between maintaining the essence of tradition and adapting the liturgy to be more relevant to the local cultural context, so as to facilitate active participation and spiritual growth for all church members.

### **The Impact of Coaching on the Quality of Worship:**

In interviews with Church administrators and FGD forums involving parish priests, Church administrators, parish pastoral councils and congregational leaders on April 7-8 and April 26-27, 2024, it was believed that the training activities for word worship and preaching practice for liturgy officers, especially Church administrators, would have a positive impact. This was proven by the results of observations on April 28, 2024, liturgy officers and preachers experienced significant changes in animating the celebration of the word without a priest and delivering sermons on Sundays. This positive change was emphasized by the Church administrator on duty on that occasion in an interview on April 28, 2024, who said they were very satisfied with the results shown. This experience was different from before the training was carried out, because self-confidence was not yet stable, the exegesis of the gospel message and integrating it into the life experiences of the congregation were not yet well understood, so they more often used the results of reflections that had been presented by others.

Observational studies conducted by Wittberg revealed a positive relationship between training provided to church leaders and improvements in the quality of worship and congregational participation. After church leaders participated in an intensive training program, there was a significant increase in congregational understanding of Scripture and their active involvement in the liturgy (Smith, Josephine Mary, 2013). These findings emphasize the importance of investing in developing the capacity and skills of church leaders, as this can have a direct impact on the spiritual life and participation of the congregation in church activities.

### **CONCLUSION**

Understanding of the congregation and church administrators regarding the Liturgy of the Word in Sunday worship without a priest is very important. The Liturgy of the Word is an integral part of the celebration of faith which aims to proclaim God's work of salvation and present Christ among His people. Although the congregation's basic understanding of the structure and meaning of the Liturgy of the Word is quite good, there is still room for improvement in terms of song selection, liturgical gestures, and preaching skills. Effective preaching techniques, such as a narrative approach, use of relevant language, and integration of local cultural context, need to be developed to improve the quality of conveying God's Word. Contextualization of the Liturgy of the Word in local culture, such as the use of regional languages, integration of traditional symbols and values, and the use of folklore in sermons, is an important effort to make the Gospel message more relevant and easier to understand by the congregation.

Contextualization effort also faces various challenges, such as tensions between universal tradition and local expressions, resistance to change, and a lack of in-depth understanding of local cultures. To overcome these challenges, dialogue involving all stakeholders, a participatory approach, and intensive training for church administrators are needed. Improving the capabilities of church administrators through a holistic leadership development program, covering aspects of theological knowledge, practical skills, and spiritual formation, is key to improving the quality of Liturgy of the Word services. The positive impact of this training and mentoring can be seen from the improvement in the quality of worship, active participation of the congregation, and a better understanding of the relationship between faith and culture. Thus, ongoing efforts to improve the understanding, skills, and involvement of all parties in a contextual and transformative Liturgy of the Word is a shared responsibility for the growth of faith and the unity of the Church.

Recommendations for further research are to examine the improvement and sustainability of the congregation's understanding of word worship and the effectiveness of sermons for developing the congregation's faith in the 21st century as an effort by the congregation's synodality to build a Church

that is independent and sensitive to technology. The theoretical implications of this study enrich the treasury of contextual liturgical theology, especially in the Karo cultural context. Practically, the research findings emphasize the importance of regular training for church administrators, cross-cultural dialogue, and creative adaptation in the Liturgy of the Word, in order to increase congregational participation and the relevance of the Gospel message in everyday life.

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