

The Role of Personal Evangelization School in the Suffragan Diocese of Bogor in Fostering Lay Apostolate Spirituality in the Digital Era

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Abstract

The study explores the role of the Personal Evangelization School (PES) as a structured model of lay formation in fostering apostolate spirituality within the contemporary Church, particularly in the Indonesian context and the digital era. Rooted in the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, the study responds to challenges such as secularization, limited lay formation, and the expansion of digital culture. Using a qualitative descriptive approach based on literature review and supported by observational data from PES activities in the Suffragan Diocese of Bogor, the study analyzes the theological foundations and pastoral practices of PES. The findings show that PES effectively cultivates lay apostolate spirituality by integrating personal encounter with Christ, communal participation, and missionary engagement. A key contribution of the study lies in demonstrating how digital platforms, such as Zoom, reshape the nature of “personal encounter” through mediated, dialogical, and reflective interactions. While these digital encounters foster authentic forms of communion, they remain distinct from the embodied presence required in sacramental life. In conclusion, PES emerges as a strategic pastoral instrument that bridges theological reflection and pastoral praxis, forming missionary disciples capable of engaging both physical and digital spaces.

Keywords: Church; Digital Evangelization; Lay Apostolate Spirituality; Pastoral Theology; Personal Evangelization School.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji peran Sekolah Evangelisasi Pribadi (SEP) sebagai model terstruktur pembinaan umat awam dalam mengembangkan spiritualitas kerasulan di dalam Gereja kontemporer, khususnya dalam konteks Indonesia dan era digital. Berakar pada eklesiologi Konsili Vatikan II, penelitian ini menanggapi berbagai tantangan seperti sekularisasi, keterbatasan pembinaan umat awam, serta perkembangan budaya digital. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif berbasis studi pustaka dan didukung oleh data observasi dari kegiatan SEP di Keuskupan Suffragan Bogor, penelitian ini menganalisis landasan teologis dan praktik pastoral SEP. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa SEP secara efektif membentuk spiritualitas kerasulan awam melalui integrasi perjumpaan pribadi dengan Kristus, partisipasi komunal, dan keterlibatan misioner. Kontribusi utama penelitian ini terletak pada penjelasan bagaimana *platform* digital, seperti Zoom, mengubah hakikat “perjumpaan personal” melalui interaksi yang termediasi, dialogis, dan reflektif. Meskipun perjumpaan digital ini mampu menumbuhkan bentuk persekutuan yang otentik, tetap terdapat perbedaan mendasar dengan kehadiran yang berwujud dalam kehidupan sakramental. Sebagai kesimpulan, SEP tampil sebagai instrumen pastoral strategis yang menjembatani refleksi teologis dan praksis pastoral, serta membentuk murid-murid misioner yang mampu berpartisipasi baik dalam ruang fisik maupun digital.

Kata Kunci: Evangelisasi Digital; Gereja; Sekolah Evangelisasi Pribadi; Spiritualitas Kerasulan Awam; Teologi Pastoral.

1. Introduction

Evangelization constitutes the central mission of the Church and is inseparably linked to its identity. Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has consistently affirmed that all the faithful are called to participate actively in the mission of Christ.¹ The conciliar constitution *Lumen Gentium* emphasizes that the laity, strengthened by the sacramental grace of Baptism and Confirmation, are entrusted with sanctifying the world as “salt and light”.² Thus, the laity are not merely complementary to ecclesial life but are principal agents who embody and proclaim the Gospel within diverse social, cultural, and professional contexts.³

At the same time, contemporary socio-cultural transformations present significant challenges to the Church’s evangelizing mission. Secularization increasingly confines religion to the private sphere, individualism weakens communal bonds, and globalization promotes cultural trends that often diverge from Gospel values. The rapid expansion of digital technology has further shaped a “network society,” altering patterns of communication and meaning-making.⁴ These developments are reflected in crises of faith, declining liturgical participation, and a diminished sense of ecclesial belonging. Consequently, the Church is called to discern the “signs of the times” and to formulate evangelization strategies that are contextually relevant and pastorally responsive.⁵

¹ Al. Purwa Hadiwardoyo, *Ajaran Gereja Katolik Tentang Evangelisasi* (Kanisius, 2019).

² Ireneus Sibori, Antonius Denny Firmanto, and Nanik Wijiyati Aluwesia, “Kaum Awam Sebagai ‘Garam Dan Terang Dunia’ Di Zaman Teknologi Digital,” *Lumen Veritatis: Jurnal Teologi Dan Filsafat* 13, no. 1 (2022): 25–43, <https://doi.org/DOI:10.30822/lumenveritatis.v13i1.2000>.

³ Pope John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997).

⁴ Heidi A. Campbell and Rurh Tsuria (Eds.), *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media* (Routledge, 2021).

⁵ Maruli Tua and Yonas Pasiran, “Isu Budaya Dalam Perkembangan Gereja,” *Action Research Literate* 8, no. 10 (2024): 2839–49, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.46799/ar.v8i10.2206>.

In response, the Church promotes models of faith formation that integrate intellectual, spiritual, and pastoral dimensions. Such formation seeks not only to deepen theological understanding but also to foster a personal encounter with Christ, nurture prayerful lives, and build communities rooted in Gospel values.⁶ Within this framework, the Personal Evangelization School (PES) was developed as a structured formation program aimed at strengthening the faithful's relationship with Christ and equipping them for authentic witness in daily life. Emphasizing personal experience and practical discipleship, PES employs systematic pedagogical approaches to help participants discern and live their apostolic vocation within familial, ecclesial, and societal settings.⁷

Nevertheless, existing scholarship has primarily addressed the theological foundations of lay participation,⁸ the impact of secularization and digital culture,⁹ and general catechetical or pastoral models.¹⁰ While these studies provide valuable insights, they largely remain at the level of normative theology or broad pastoral reflection. Empirical and program-specific analyses of structured formation initiatives, particularly those integrating spiritual experience with apostolic praxis, are still limited. Research on digital evangelization similarly tends to propose adaptive strategies without closely examining how concrete formation programs cultivate sustained and transformative lay apostolic spirituality.

Therefore, the study aims to address that gap by offering a theological-pastoral analysis of PES, focusing on its theological foundations, formative methodology, and relevance within the contemporary digital context. In doing so, it bridges theological reflection and pastoral practice while situating PES within the broader call to missionary discipleship emphasized by Pope Francis.¹¹ Accordingly, the study also aims to contribute to both academic discourse and pastoral praxis by advancing contextual and transformative approaches to faith formation that strengthen lay apostolic spirituality in today's Church.

2. Research Method

The study employs a descriptive qualitative research design using a literature review methodology, following the approach proposed by John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell.¹² This method is considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth and interpretive exploration of the theological and pastoral dimensions of the PES in fostering lay apostolic spirituality.

The primary sources of the study consist of official Church documents concerning evangelization and the vocation of the laity, as well as instructional and formative materials used within the PES program from April to September 2025 in the Suffragan Diocese of Bogor. In addition, direct observations of PES activities were conducted to obtain empirical data regarding the formative processes, interactive dynamics, and concrete implementation of apostolic values. Secondary sources include relevant theological and pastoral literature, scholarly books, and academic journal articles that provide conceptual and analytical support

⁶ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013).

⁷ Berman Ali et al., *Misi Evangelisasi Baru* (Sekolah Evangelisasi Pribadi (SEP) Shekinah Jakarta, 2025).

⁸ Denis Barić, "Establishing the Lay Ministry of Catechists in the Church: Preserving Tradition in New Circumstances," *Religions* 16 (2025): 477, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16040477>.

⁹ Heidi A. Campbell and Ruth Tsuria, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media*.

¹⁰ Arthur D Canales, "Models and Methods for Confirmation Catechesis in Catholic Youth Ministry," *Religions* 11 (2020): 417, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11080417>.

¹¹ Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2018); Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2019).

¹² John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (SAGE Publications, 2018).

for understanding evangelization, lay spirituality, and pastoral formation in contemporary contexts.

The study process was carried out through several stages. First, relevant Church documents and PES materials were identified and systematically reviewed. Second, related theological and pastoral literature was examined to establish the theoretical framework. Third, direct observations of PES activities were undertaken to understand how formation is implemented in practice. Fourth, the collected data were analyzed using an interpretive analytical framework that integrates theological and pastoral perspectives. Finally, the findings were synthesized to evaluate the coherence of PES with ecclesial teaching and to assess its practical contribution to strengthening faith, promoting active lay participation, and sustaining apostolic commitment in everyday life. The theological dimension is articulated in relation to the Church's magisterial teaching, while the pastoral dimension is explained through narrative descriptions.

3. Findings and Discussion

Lay Apostolate Spirituality

The spirituality of the lay apostolate represents a particular modality of Christian spiritual life grounded in the missionary mandate of Jesus Christ in Gospel of Matthew 28:19–20. The so-called Great Commission is not limited to the apostolic college or to their hierarchical successors; rather, it encompasses the entire People of God. Accordingly, the proclamation of the Gospel cannot be reduced to the responsibility of ordained ministers or members of religious institutes. It constitutes an intrinsic dimension of the vocation and identity of every baptized person. Through Baptism, believers participate in the priesthood of Christ and are thereby commissioned to assume responsibility in the Church's apostolic mission (Barić, 2025).¹³

This theological perspective received renewed emphasis at the Second Vatican Council, particularly in *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, which characterizes the lay apostolate as a genuine participation in the salvific mission of the Church. The Council introduced a significant development in ecclesiological understanding. Whereas apostolic ministry had often been perceived predominantly as the domain of clergy and religious, the conciliar teaching highlighted the essential and irreplaceable role of the laity in witnessing to the Gospel within temporal realities. Domains such as family life, professional activity, political involvement, cultural engagement, and economic responsibility are thus interpreted as authentic loci of mission entrusted in a particular way to lay faithful.¹⁴

In *Christifideles Laici*, Pope John Paul II delineates three constitutive dimensions of lay apostolate spirituality.¹⁵

1. Unity of Life.

Faith is not confined to the private or liturgical sphere but is called to inform and shape the entirety of daily life. For lay believers, this entails a coherent integration between religious conviction and concrete responsibilities within the family, the workplace, public life, and even digital spaces. Such integration reflects the principle of the unity of life, in which belief and action are inseparably linked. The transmission of Christian values

¹³ Denis Barić, "Establishing the Lay Ministry of Catechists in the Church : Preserving Tradition in New Circumstances."

¹⁴ Mawarni Gea, "Tanggung Jawab Kaum Awam Dalam Mengaktualisasikan Imannya Menurut Dokumen *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (AA)," *Jurnal Magistra* 2, no. 1 (2024): 138–50, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.62200/magistra.v2i1.89>.

¹⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People: Christifideles Laici* (Pauline Books & Media, 1989).

within the household, as well as the practice of professional integrity in educational settings, constitutes tangible expressions of apostolic witness embodied in ordinary contexts.

2. Missionary Spirit.

Lay faithful are entrusted with the responsibility of rendering Christ present within the concrete circumstances of their daily environments. Evangelization, therefore, cannot be reduced to explicit verbal proclamation; it necessarily includes the credible testimony of a life shaped by the Gospel. Ethical consistency in professional conduct, such as refusing participation in corrupt practices, upholding justice in economic transactions, and demonstrating compassionate service in healthcare contexts, constitutes a lived expression of Christian faith. In these ways, the Gospel becomes incarnate within social and professional realities.

3. Communal Engagement.

The spirituality of the lay apostolate necessarily includes responsible and active involvement in the life of the Church. Such participation manifests the ecclesial character of lay vocation, wherein faith is lived not in isolation but within a community of communion and mission. Engagement in parish pastoral councils, the ministry of catechesis, and membership in ecclesial associations and movements, such as the Legion of Mary, Basic Ecclesial Communities, or parish-based Sunday School programs, constitute concrete expressions of faith embodied in communal and institutional contexts. Through these forms of service, laypersons contribute meaningfully to the Church's evangelizing mission while deepening their own spiritual formation within the ecclesial body.

A complementary perspective is offered in *Evangelii Gaudium* by Pope Francis,¹⁶ who affirms that every Christian becomes a missionary insofar as he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ. Mission, therefore, emerges from a lived experience of divine grace rather than from mere institutional obligation. When lay faithful recognize God's sustaining presence, particularly amid suffering, illness, or familial trials, they are moved to communicate that hope to others. In this light, lay apostolate spirituality may be understood as an existentially grounded and transformative orientation of life. It originates in a personal encounter with Christ, is nourished through prayer and ecclesial communion, and finds expression in credible witness within ordinary circumstances. Such spirituality unites faith with daily reality, fosters personal sanctification, and simultaneously encourages social responsibility and constructive engagement in cultural and societal transformation. Ultimately, it embodies fidelity to the universal evangelizing mission of the Church.¹⁷

Pastoral-Theological Perspective of the PES

The missionary mandate has remained a central concern of the Catholic Church, consistently reaffirmed in major magisterial documents. From *Maximum Illud* issued by Pope Benedict XV,¹⁸ to the decree *Ad Gentes* of the Second Vatican Council,¹⁹ and more recent exhortations such as *Gaudete et Exsultate*,²⁰ evangelization has been articulated as an enduring ecclesial priority. In the post-conciliar period, episcopal conferences worldwide intensified initiatives aimed at renewing Gospel proclamation both within ecclesial

¹⁶ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*.

¹⁷ Kurdo Irianto, "Kerasulan Awam Dan Transformasi Masyarakat," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Katolik* 19, no. 10 (2018): 50–59, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.34150/jpak.v19i10.41>.

¹⁸ Pope Benedict XV, *Maximum Illud: Apostolic Letter on the Propagation of the Faith* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1919).

¹⁹ Pope Paul VI, *Ad Gentes* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965).

²⁰ Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*.

communities and in the broader social sphere. This renewed emphasis was further consolidated by Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*,²¹ which underscored the universal responsibility of all Catholics to engage actively in evangelization within contemporary cultural contexts.

This theological and pastoral vision found practical expression in the work of Robert Deshaies, who developed the training manual *Mission: Evangelization, A Course to Train Evangelists*. The manual later served as a principal reference for the implementation of the PES across various regions globally. PES constitutes a structured faith formation program oriented toward equipping laypersons for evangelizing mission through a personal and relational methodology. Its objective is not limited to enhancing communicative competence but seeks to foster both awareness of missionary vocation and the capacity to bear credible witness within the ordinary circumstances of daily life. In addressing pastoral challenges such as secularization, moral relativism, and declining ecclesial participation, PES proposes a model of pastoral accompaniment attentive to the existential realities of contemporary believers.²²

At the theological core of evangelization lies discipleship. Authentic proclamation presupposes interior assimilation of the Gospel, since discipleship entails a lived commitment to Christ characterized by dynamism, coherence, and embodied faith. Discipleship thus serves simultaneously as the foundation and the ultimate aim of evangelization. As articulated in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, reception of the Gospel necessarily generates missionary responsibility; those who truly welcome the Word are impelled to communicate it through witness and testimony.²³ Within PES, the evangelization process is accordingly organized into a series of pedagogical stages designed to integrate personal conversion, formation, and apostolic praxis.

1. Building Relationships of Friendship.

Evangelization originates in genuine interpersonal encounter marked by attentive presence, hospitality, and receptivity to the other. Such relational dispositions establish the anthropological foundation upon which faith communication can unfold. Even seemingly modest gestures such as offering a sincere greeting or a welcoming expression serve to cultivate trust and openness, thereby creating a conducive environment for substantive dialogue concerning faith.

2. Sharing Personal Faith Experiences.

Personal accounts of encountering divine grace function not merely as testimonies to the salvific reality of God's action but also as catalysts for communal reflection. By articulating concrete experiences of faith, individuals invite others to examine, interpret, and express their own spiritual journeys. In this way, testimony assumes both a revelatory and dialogical character, fostering shared discernment within the community of believers.

3. Proclaiming the Story of Christ and the Gospel.

Evangelization is fundamentally Christocentric, focusing on the explicit proclamation of the person and saving work of Christ. It entails an interpretative mediation between the scriptural witness and contemporary human experience, such that the biblical narrative is presented as a living reality that continues to illuminate and transform concrete situations. By correlating the testimony of Scripture with personal and communal encounters of

²¹ Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi: Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1975).

²² Berman Ali et al., *Misi Evangelisasi Baru*.

²³ Ali et al., *Misi Evangelisasi Baru*; Yohanes Padmono Hapsara Jelantik, "Evangelisasi (Peran SEP Dan KEP Sebagai Salah Satu Wadah Pengembangan Iman Umat)," *Lux et Sal* 1, no. 1 (2020): 63–72, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.57079/lux.v1i1.12>.

redemption, evangelization discloses the enduring relevance of Christ's salvific action in history.

4. Inviting to Conversion.

Although conversion remains fundamentally the work of the Holy Spirit, the task entrusted to evangelizers is to present the person of Christ with authenticity and integrity. Their responsibility is not to compel assent, but to offer a credible witness and extend an invitation to transformation grounded in freedom. Such an approach acknowledges the irreducible dignity and uniqueness of each individual's spiritual journey, respecting the gradual and personal character of faith development.

5. Integration into the Community.

Evangelization attains its ecclesial completeness when individuals who receive the Gospel are incorporated into a concrete community of faith. Within such a community, the initial proclamation is deepened through sustained spiritual accompaniment, systematic doctrinal formation, and responsible engagement in ecclesial life. In this way, faith matures not in isolation but through communion, participation, and shared mission within the living body of the Church.

According to Hernandez,²⁴ the PES synthesizes catechetical instruction, spiritual formation, structured prayer practices, and context-sensitive evangelization into a coherent formative process. Its distinguishing characteristic resides in its explicitly transformative orientation. Rather than concentrating primarily on the transmission of doctrinal propositions, PES seeks to shape individuals who have encountered Christ personally and who are consequently impelled to communicate that encounter to others. In this respect, PES diverges from conventional models of catechesis both in its underlying purpose and in its pedagogical approach.²⁵ Whereas catechesis typically follows a systematic and doctrinal framework aimed at deepening theological understanding, PES places stronger emphasis on interior conversion, communal accompaniment, and the cultivation of practical competencies for evangelization. By intentionally integrating intellectual formation, spiritual maturation, and pastoral praxis, the program aspires to form evangelizers in a holistic manner. The defining characteristics of PES include the following:

1. Personal.

PES fosters the deepening of participants' communion with Christ through disciplined spiritual practices, including personal and communal prayer, *Lectio Divina*, and guided theological reflection. These formative elements underscore the conviction that authentic evangelization cannot be detached from a lived and conscious encounter with God. By nurturing interiority and attentiveness to divine grace, the program situates missionary activity within the broader horizon of contemplative discipleship.

2. Communal.

The program underscores the centrality of small-group engagement and structured faith-sharing as integral components of formation. Such dialogical settings cultivate mutual support, accountability, and spiritual solidarity among participants. In doing so, they embody the ecclesiological principle that Christian faith is not merely an individual conviction but a reality nurtured, discerned, and sustained within the context of community.

3. Missionary.

²⁴ M^a Consolacion Isart Hernandez, "Educación y Nueva Evangelización," 2019 XXIX, no. 57–58 (2019): 93–110.

²⁵ Yohanes Padmono Hapsara Jelantik, "Evangelisasi (Peran SEP Dan KEP Sebagai Salah Satu Wadah Pengembangan Iman Umat)."

PES provides lay participants with concrete pastoral competencies necessary for effective evangelizing practice. These include articulating concise personal testimonies, initiating contact with inactive parish members, accompanying the sick with pastoral sensitivity, and distributing Sacred Scripture in appropriate contexts. Through such practical formation, the proclamation of the Gospel is translated from abstract intention into tangible action, rendering evangelization an embodied and accessible reality within everyday life.

These characteristics converge with the missionary vision articulated by Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*,²⁶ which affirms that the Gospel attains its most persuasive expression through the credible witness of life. Within this framework, PES does not confine itself to imparting theological knowledge; it also offers experiential and formative processes that enable participants to incarnate and communicate the Gospel within their particular social and cultural settings. Consequently, PES functions as an integrated model of formation that shapes cognitive understanding, deepens faith commitment, and directs concrete action. By fostering coherence between belief and practice, the program equips the laity to embody the evangelical vocation described in the Gospel of Matthew 5:13–14, namely, to become “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” within the complexities of contemporary society.

The Role of PES in Fostering Lay Apostolate Spirituality

The PES offers a substantive contribution to the cultivation of lay apostolate spirituality within the contemporary ecclesial context. By interweaving personal conversion, communal belonging, and missionary responsibility, the program moves beyond a purely cognitive transmission of theological content and instead promotes an existential appropriation of faith. In this respect, PES serves as a mediating structure between interior spiritual formation and concrete apostolic engagement, responding to a pressing pastoral need in the life of the Church.²⁷ Its principal contributions may be identified as follows:

1. Fostering a Personal Relationship with Christ.

Lay apostolate spirituality finds its foundation in a lived and personal encounter with the love of God. Within this framework, the PES intentionally cultivates such relational depth through structured prayer, meditative engagement with Sacred Scripture, and guided spiritual exercises. Practices such as *Lectio Divina* facilitate the interior assimilation of the Word, enabling participants to discern its relevance and transformative implications for everyday life. These sustained encounters with divine grace nurture spiritual resilience, deepen interior conviction, and provide enduring motivation for apostolic commitment.

2. Cultivating Missionary Awareness.

The PES cultivates a fundamental ecclesiological conviction: that every baptized Christian participates in the Church’s missionary vocation. Within this perspective, evangelization is not confined to formal preaching or institutional ministry, but is interpreted as credible witness enacted within the ordinary circumstances of life: family relationships, professional environments, educational institutions, social interactions, and digital spaces. Through structured faith-sharing, reflective discernment, and supervised apostolic practice, participants gradually recognize that evangelization often unfolds through seemingly modest gestures. The articulation of personal experiences of faith,

²⁶ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi: Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World*.

²⁷ Józef Stala, “Formation of Adult Lay Catholics for Commitment in the World,” *The Person and the Challenges* 7, no. 2 (2017): 93–106, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.15633/pch.2184>; Yohanes Padmono Hapsara Jelantik, “Evangelisasi (Peran SEP Dan KEP Sebagai Salah Satu Wadah Pengembangan Iman Umat).”

offered with sincerity and prudence, emerges as a genuine form of Gospel proclamation. In this way, PES reframes mission as an accessible and daily responsibility, embedded within the fabric of ordinary Christian existence.

3. Strengthening the Communal Dimension.

Lay apostolate spirituality reaches maturity within a communal matrix. Through sustained small-group interaction, PES participants cultivate practices of attentive listening, mutual encouragement, and intercessory prayer. Such dialogical and prayerful exchanges create an environment conducive to trust, vulnerability, and authentic spiritual development. These formative communities function not merely as support groups but as practical settings in which evangelizing competencies are exercised and refined. Within these “laboratories” of mission, participants learn to articulate faith experiences, accompany one another pastorally, and discern appropriate forms of witness. Over time, this shared formation deepens the ecclesiological consciousness of the participants, reinforcing the Church’s identity as *communio* and affirming the laity as active and indispensable members of the Body of Christ.

4. Empowering the Laity for Ecclesial Mission.

The PES forms participants through a balanced integration of spiritual depth and practical competence for ecclesial service. Beyond nurturing interior conviction, the program intentionally prepares its graduates to undertake concrete responsibilities within parish structures, ecclesial movements, and initiatives of social outreach. As a result, many assume roles as catechists, youth mentors, facilitators of small faith-sharing groups, or volunteers engaged in charitable and pastoral ministries. Through this synthesis of contemplation and action, PES empowers lay faithful to actualize the evangelical vocation articulated in the Gospel of Matthew 5:13–14, namely, to become “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.” In this manner, apostolic commitment is no longer perceived as an abstract ideal but is embodied in sustained and visible participation in the Church’s mission within society.

5. Alignment with the Universal Church.

The missionary orientation of the PES coheres with the wider magisterial vision of the Church, particularly as articulated by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*. In that exhortation, the Pope affirms that every Christian who has genuinely encountered the love of God in Christ is intrinsically called to missionary discipleship. Mission is thus not an optional activity reserved for a select group but a constitutive dimension of Christian identity. Within this theological horizon, PES offers a structured formative context in which such transformative encounters can be cultivated and sustained. By integrating spiritual deepening, communal accompaniment, and apostolic training, the program facilitates a transition from passive reception of pastoral services to active participation in the Church’s evangelizing mission. In doing so, it contributes to the emergence of lay faithful as conscious and responsible agents of evangelization within contemporary society.

In summary, the PES occupies a strategic position in the development of an integral spirituality of the lay apostolate. Through a comprehensive and coordinated process of formation, it cultivates spiritual depth, ecclesial consciousness, and missionary competence among lay participants. By harmonizing personal encounter with Christ, communal belonging, and apostolic engagement, PES forms lay faithful as missionary disciples who are firmly rooted in Christ, strengthened within the community of faith, and actively committed to furthering the Church’s evangelizing mission amid the complexities of contemporary society.

To offer a clearer illustration of how the PES fosters lay apostolate spirituality in digital contexts, several observational data excerpts are presented below. First, during Zoom sessions, breakout room discussions served as key spaces for fostering both personal reflection and a sense of mission. In one observed session, participants were invited to share how they had lived out their faith in everyday life over the past week. Within small groups of four to five individuals, they recounted simple yet meaningful actions, such as: caring for an ill family member, offering encouragement to a colleague, or initiating prayer with friends. The exchanges were dialogical and affirming, with participants supporting one another's efforts. This indicates that digital small-group interactions can help participants recognize daily life as a genuine arena for apostolic mission.

Second, a participant's reflection underscores the emergence of missionary awareness:

"Before joining this program, I thought evangelization meant preaching or teaching. But now I realize that even listening to a friend and sharing my faith experience is already part of my mission."

This statement reflects a shift from a narrow, clerical understanding of evangelization toward a more integrated and accessible vision of lay apostolate. It shows how PES formation enables participants to internalize mission as something lived through ordinary relationships and daily encounters.

Third, the practice of online prayer and mutual encouragement further strengthens apostolic spirituality. In one session, participants were invited to name specific individuals they intended to accompany spiritually during the week. These intentions were then brought into communal prayer, with others offering brief spontaneous intercessions. This practice not only deepened a sense of shared responsibility but also encouraged participants to engage concretely in evangelizing actions beyond the session. In this way, the digital platform functioned not merely as a space for reflection, but also as a means of sending participants forth into lived apostolic practice.

Overall, these observations suggest that digital platforms, when used intentionally, can effectively support the formation of lay apostolate spirituality. Through structured interaction, guided reflection, and shared prayer, participants are able to integrate faith into daily life, develop a stronger sense of missionary identity, and take tangible steps in witnessing to the Gospel within their respective contexts.

Challenges and Relevance of the PES in the Indonesian Context

Characterized by extensive religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity, Indonesia presents a uniquely complex missionary context for the Catholic Church. The pluralistic configuration of its society, marked by interreligious coexistence, local traditions, and dynamic socio-political realities, requires approaches to evangelization that are both theologically sound and culturally sensitive. Within this environment, the PES encounters a landscape marked simultaneously by substantial opportunities for missionary engagement and by significant pastoral challenges that demand contextual discernment and adaptive strategies.

Challenges of the PES

The implementation of the PES in Indonesia is deeply influenced by the intricate pastoral realities of its pluralistic society. These realities are further shaped by processes of modernization, increasing secularization, and the accelerated proliferation of digital media

and culture.²⁸ Within this complex context, the program encounters several key challenges, which include:

1. Religious and Cultural Pluralism

As members of a religious minority within a predominantly non-Catholic society, Catholic evangelizers must exercise sensitivity, dialogue, and respect in their missionary engagement. Within this context, the PES is tasked with equipping participants to bear witness to the Gospel in ways that are inclusive, compassionate, and culturally attuned, while consciously avoiding exclusivist, confrontational, or coercive approaches. This formation emphasizes the importance of relational credibility, mutual understanding, and constructive interreligious engagement as essential components of effective evangelization.

2. Secularization and Modernization.

Globalization, consumer culture, and the pervasive influence of digital media exert a pronounced impact on younger generations, often fostering a preference for immediate gratification, entertainment, and social validation over sustained spiritual formation. In response, the PES must employ innovative, contextually sensitive strategies that resonate with the lived realities and communication patterns of youth. Such approaches include the integration of interactive digital platforms, culturally relevant narratives, and experiential learning methods that make faith formation engaging, accessible, and meaningful for this demographic.

3. Limited Lay Formation.

A persistent challenge in contemporary pastoral contexts is the widespread perception that evangelization is primarily the responsibility of clergy and members of religious institutes. To address this, the PES seeks to cultivate a more robust and accurate understanding of the lay vocation as intrinsically missionary. Through formation that emphasizes baptismal identity, personal discipleship, and practical apostolic engagement, PES empowers lay participants to recognize their active role in the Church's evangelizing mission and to assume responsibility for witnessing to the Gospel in diverse social and cultural settings.

4. Resource Constraints.

A further structural challenge confronting the implementation of the PES is the shortage of adequately trained personnel, instructional resources, and suitable facilities within many parishes and dioceses. These limitations constrain the program's reach, often restricting participation to select groups of the faithful, even as the broader pastoral landscape demonstrates a significant and growing need for systematic evangelization formation. Consequently, expanding access and capacity remains a critical priority for ensuring the program's effectiveness and sustainability.

Relevance of the PES

Within the Indonesian context, the PES assumes strategic significance across multiple dimensions, reflecting its capacity to respond to both pastoral needs and the unique challenges of a pluralistic society.²⁹

²⁸ Marianus Sesfao and Gaudensius Nabu, "Pluralisme Agama Di Indonesia Dan Tantangannya Serta Pandangan Gereja Katolik Tentang Pluralitas Agama.," *PROPHETA: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Kateketik Pastoral* 7, no. 2 (2021): 99–117; Ramlon Sinaga and Sang Putra Immanuel Duha, "Gereja Dan Tantangan Berteologi Dalam Masyarakat Yang Semakin Sekuler.," *LOGIA: Jurnal Teologi Pentakosta* 5, no. 2 (2024): 95–108, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.37731/log.v5i2.192>.

²⁹ Ignatius Eddy Putranto, "Kesadaran Dan Pertobatan Misioner.," *SAWI: Jurnal Misi* 22 (2018): 15–38; Jelantik, "Evangelisasi (Peran SEP Dan KEP Sebagai Salah Satu Wadah Pengembangan Iman Umat)"; B. Y. Kebin, *Aktualisasi Misi Gereja Pada Zamannya: Refleksi Atas Perjalanan Pembaruan Teologi Misi* (Penerbit CLEON, 2020).

1. **Promoting Inclusive Spirituality.**
In a pluralistic societal context, the PES prioritizes evangelization expressed through authentic witness in daily life rather than through solely verbal proclamation. Ethical and relational practices, such as integrity, selfless service, and proactive social engagement, function as credible and persuasive forms of evangelization, garnering respect and fostering dialogue across diverse cultural and religious communities.
2. **Strengthening the Role of the Laity.**
The PES cultivates a heightened awareness of apostolic identity among lay participants, preparing them to assume active and responsible roles within parish ministries, ecclesial movements, and broader social initiatives. In doing so, the program advances the post-Vatican II vision articulated in documents such as *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, which affirms the indispensable participation of the laity in the Church's evangelizing mission and underscores their vocation as co-responsible agents of pastoral action.
3. **Responding to Youth Challenges.**
Confronted with a growing crisis of faith identity stemming from secularizing influences, young people in Indonesia particularly benefit from the PES innovative pedagogical approaches. Through experiential learning, communal faith-sharing, and hands-on evangelization exercises, the program enables youth to internalize Christian beliefs, integrate them meaningfully into daily life, and bear credible witness to Christ within their familial, educational, and social environments.
4. **Encouraging Contextual Evangelization.**
The PES tailors its strategies to the specific social and cultural contexts in which it operates. In rural settings, the program often emphasizes community-centered evangelization, fostering relational networks and collective faith practices. Conversely, in urban environments, PES leverages contemporary tools such as social media, professional networks, and public engagement as avenues for mission. This contextual adaptability ensures that the program remains relevant and effective across the diverse demographic, cultural, and societal landscapes of Indonesia.

In summary, the PES in Indonesia operates not simply as a program of faith formation but as a strategic pastoral instrument for incarnating the Gospel within a pluralistic society. It equips lay Catholics to live as missionary disciples who are firmly rooted in Christ, actively committed to the life and mission of the Church, and adept at engaging in constructive dialogue and collaborative initiatives with the broader community. Through this integrated approach, PES fosters both personal sanctification and meaningful contribution to the Church's evangelizing presence in contemporary Indonesian society.

The Use of Digital Platforms in PES Instruction

The integration of digital platforms, particularly Zoom, represents a notable advancement in the implementation of the PES within the contemporary digital era. Beyond serving as a medium for virtual communication, Zoom functions as an interactive learning environment that facilitates the continuation of personal evangelization, even when facilitators and participants are geographically dispersed. From a pastoral-theological perspective, digital spaces may be understood as extensions of the Body of Christ, providing contexts in which communal life and spiritual growth are nurtured through virtual encounters, thereby forming a kind of digital communion.³⁰ Practically, Zoom enhances PES instruction by enabling synchronous formation sessions with interactive features such as screen sharing, breakout rooms for small-group discussion, and recording capabilities for later review. Evidence from

³⁰ Jodi Hunt, "And Then There Was Zoom: A Catholic Theological Youth Ministry," *Religions* 11 (2020): 565, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11110565>.

educational studies indicates that blended learning models, combining online and in-person engagement, can improve accessibility and flexibility while sustaining the quality of faith formation. Consequently, lay participants with limited mobility or demanding schedules are able to engage in formation in a manner that is both adaptive and inclusive.³¹

In addition to instructional benefits, Zoom supports the development of virtual faith communities, contributing to the cultivation of lay apostolate spirituality. Online prayer gatherings, faith-sharing activities, and virtual liturgical celebrations provide avenues for authentic engagement, demonstrating that digital contexts can facilitate meaningful experiences of Christian communal life.³² Nonetheless, the use of Zoom presents challenges. Prolonged online engagement can lead to “Zoom fatigue,” reducing participants’ concentration and active involvement.³³ Other limitations include unstable internet connectivity and a diminished depth of interpersonal interaction compared with face-to-face encounters.³⁴ These considerations underscore that while Zoom is a valuable pastoral innovation, its effectiveness depends on careful, creative, and discerning use. When deployed strategically, Zoom functions not merely as a technical tool but as a missionary instrument, supporting the holistic formation of lay spirituality and enabling the Church to extend evangelization into digital spaces in response to contemporary pastoral needs.³⁵

Expanded Theological Reflection on Digital Presence

While digital platforms such as Zoom have considerably improved the accessibility and flexibility of PES formation, their use also raises significant theological questions about the nature of presence in the life of the Church.³⁶ In particular, it is important to distinguish clearly between digital presence and real presence, especially in relation to the sacramental economy.³⁷

From a theological standpoint, Christian faith is fundamentally incarnational. The mystery of the Incarnation affirms that God communicates Himself through embodied and tangible reality.³⁸ This principle finds its fullest expression in the sacramental life of the Church, where grace is conveyed through visible and material signs.³⁹ Consequently, participation in sacraments such as the Eucharist requires not only an interior spiritual disposition but also physical presence within the gathered ecclesial community.⁴⁰

³¹ D. M. Tambunan and F. Iskandar, “The Impact of Technology-Based Learning Media on Students’ Interests in Christian Religious Education,” *Journal of Educational Management and Instruction* 4, no. 1 (2024): 185–195, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.22515/jemin.v4i1.9628>.

³² Sonny Eli Zaluchu et al., “Digital Discipleship in Digital Religion Perspective,” *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society* 14, no. 2 (2023): 27–40, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.18848/2154-8633/CGP/v14i02/27-40>.

³³ Jonathan Salim et al., “Zoom Fatigue and Its Risk Factors in Online Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Medical Journal of Indonesia* 31, no. 1 (2022): 13–19, <https://doi.org/10.13181/mji.oa.225703>.

³⁴ Yanto Sandy Tjang, Titi Savitri Prihatiningsih, and Yayi Suryo Prabandari, “Stress Level of Medical Students in Online Learning during COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Impact on Academic Achievement,” *Jurnal Pendidikan Kedokteran Indonesia* 12, no. 1 (2023): 57–68, <https://doi.org/10.22146/jpki.76645>.

³⁵ Julius Tumpak Marganda Simaremare, “Preferensi Spiritual Di Era Digital Peluang Misi Pastoral Gereja,” *Vocatio Dei* 2, no. 1 (2024): 6–15, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.62926/jtvd.v6i1.70>.

³⁶ Campbell and Tsuria, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media*; Zaluchu et al., “Digital Discipleship in Digital Religion Perspective.”

³⁷ John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*; John Paul II, *Lay Members of Christ’s Faithful People: Christifideles Laici*.

³⁸ John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

³⁹ Paul VI, *Ad Gentes*.

⁴⁰ John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

By contrast, digital presence, although it enables communication, interaction, and even certain forms of spiritual communion, remains mediated and non-embodied.⁴¹ Virtual gatherings can indeed foster authentic relational connections and support the sharing of faith experiences; however, they cannot fully replace sacramental encounters that depend on bodily participation.⁴² For instance, while online liturgical broadcasts or prayer meetings may nurture personal devotion, they do not constitute sacramental participation in the strict theological sense.⁴³

This distinction generates a constructive tension within contemporary pastoral practice. On the one hand, digital platforms extend the Church's missionary outreach, allowing evangelization to transcend geographical and social boundaries.⁴⁴ They open new avenues for proclamation, catechesis, and community-building, particularly for individuals who might otherwise remain distant from ecclesial life.⁴⁵ On the other hand, excessive dependence on digital mediation risks promoting a disembodied understanding of faith, which may weaken appreciation for its communal and sacramental dimensions.⁴⁶

Within the PES context, this tension is addressed by framing digital formation as complementary rather than substitutive. Online sessions function as preparatory and formative spaces that deepen personal faith, strengthen communal belonging, and cultivate missionary awareness.⁴⁷ At the same time, participants are consistently encouraged to embody these experiences through active involvement in parish life and participation in sacramental celebrations.⁴⁸

Therefore, digital platforms should not be regarded as replacements for real ecclesial presence, but rather as pastoral extensions that support the Church's evangelizing mission.⁴⁹ When used with discernment, they can mediate authentic, though partial, forms of communion that orient participants toward fuller engagement in the sacramental life of the Church.⁵⁰ In this way, the PES reflects a balanced approach that affirms both the possibilities of digital evangelization and the enduring importance of embodied, sacramental presence.

4. Conclusion

This study shows that the PES is a significant and contextually relevant model for fostering lay apostolate spirituality in the contemporary Church. Rooted in the ecclesiological vision of the Second Vatican Council, PES highlights the vital role of the laity as active participants in the Church's evangelizing mission. By integrating theological reflection, spiritual formation, and pastoral practice, it promotes a holistic and transformative approach to faith formation. The findings indicate that PES effectively cultivates key dimensions of lay spirituality, including a personal relationship with Christ, missionary awareness, communal engagement, and active participation in ecclesial life. Its structured yet relational approach enables participants to live out evangelization in everyday contexts. Moreover, its adaptability to digital platforms demonstrates its capacity to respond creatively to contemporary challenges while remaining faithful to the Church's mission. However, the study also identifies challenges, particularly in the Indonesian context, such as religious

⁴¹ Campbell and Tsuria, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media*.

⁴² Zaluchu et al., "Digital Discipleship in Digital Religion Perspective."

⁴³ John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

⁴⁴ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*.

⁴⁵ Simaremare, "Preferensi Spiritual Di Era Digital Peluang Misi Pastoral Gereja."

⁴⁶ Zaluchu et al., "Digital Discipleship in Digital Religion Perspective."

⁴⁷ Ali et al., *Misi Evangelisasi Baru*.

⁴⁸ Hadiwardoyo, *Ajaran Gereja Katolik Tentang Evangelisasi*.

⁴⁹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*.

⁵⁰ Zaluchu et al., "Digital Discipleship in Digital Religion Perspective."

pluralism, secularization, limited formation resources, and risks associated with digital mediation. These issues require ongoing contextualization and discernment, especially regarding the balance between digital and sacramental presence. Overall, PES serves as a strategic pastoral model that bridges theological vision and practice, contributing to the formation of mission-oriented laity in a rapidly changing world.

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