



Pastoral Care and the Renewal of Sunday School Teachers' Commitment to Ministry: A Review through the Lens of Henri Nouwen's Framework

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ABSTRACT

Sunday School teachers play a crucial role in the faith formation of children, yet they often face emotional exhaustion and a decrease in their ministry intensity. This study aims to understand how pastoral care can enhance Sunday School teacher engagement using Henri Nouwen's framework. The method used was a qualitative case study approach through in-depth interviews with two Sunday School teachers. The results indicate that the decline in ministry intensity is not due to a lack of commitment, but rather to emotional exhaustion, a lack of team support, and personal life stress. Relational and empathetic pastoral care, which provides space for ministers to share experiences, significantly restores their ministry enthusiasm. These findings emphasize the importance of paying attention to the minister's inner state as an integral part of successful children's ministry.

INTRODUCTION

The Sunday School Teacher's ministry occupies a position that cannot be underestimated in the life of the church, because it is in the hands of teachers that the faith and character of children begin to be formed from an early age. Sunday School teachers not only present Bible material in front of the class but also serve as spiritual companions who are truly present, who are willing to listen, and who live the Christian example in their daily lives. However, the reality on the pitch is often different. Not a few Sunday School teachers gradually lose their enthusiasm and begin to reduce the intensity of their ministry. In fact, being a Sunday School teacher is not only a matter of burdens and sacrifices that must be carried. There is also another side that often goes unnoticed; This service actually helps build the teacher's own faith, provides valuable spiritual experience, encourages personal faith growth, and opens up opportunities to help children prepare for their future.

A teacher needs to understand exactly what the child's construction is actually for. Without this understanding, coaching will just run aimlessly and will be difficult to produce. In addition to the goal, there is another thing that is equally important to pay attention to, namely the children themselves as the party who receives the coaching. Without understanding the needs, situations and conditions of the children he teaches, all coaching efforts risk being in vain. Coaching children is not just about having teachers, there is a teaching and learning process, the availability of classrooms, musical instruments, hymns, activities, stories, and various other equipment. The essence of child training is how the whole process is really centered on the Sunday School child himself. Child-centered Sunday school means that the coaching process starts with a deep understanding of who the child is being taught and what they really need, and then designing a coaching model that is specifically appropriate for a group of children in a given class. Every child has their own struggles. Their struggles cannot be equalized just like that. Child-centered Sunday school is a coaching

designed to build each child's personality according to their unique needs.

From the results of initial observations, the reality in the field shows that the intensity of the Sunday School Teacher's ministry has decreased quite noticeably. Based on data from the Integrated Information System (SIT) of the GMIM Bethesda Taas Congregation, it has 21 columns, 419 families and 1319 congregation members. The number of Sunday School teachers recorded was 105 people, spread across 21 columns with an average of 5 people per column. Unfortunately, a recapitulation of Sunday School attendance in recent years shows that not all registered Sunday School teachers are actually consistently engaged. In an interview with Pnt. ASM alias J. Winerungan: "Only a few do their duties, and many Minggu School teachers are not actively involved in the ministry" shows that many Sunday School teachers are administratively registered and carry out ministry responsibilities, but in practice only a small number are really active and really carry out their duties. In the end, the service is more supported by only a few people, while others are less fully involved.

A number of previous studies have actually touched on the issues surrounding Sunday School Teachers, albeit from different perspectives, such as the Journal of Influential Sunday School Teachers: Sunday School Teachers' Ministry Strategies for Children's Spiritual Growth written by Mikha Agus Widiyanto and Nostry Nostry in EDULEAD of Christian Education and Leadership, where this journal discusses the study of the importance of creative teaching methods, the use of Bible props, and the preparation of age-appropriate curriculum for children to know God more easily. In addition, research such as The Role of Sunday School Teachers for the Introduction and Growth of Faith in Sunday School Children written by Orpa Mariangga in REI MAI: Journal of Theological Science and Christian Education explains that the growth of children's faith in Sunday School is mainly formed through the active role of teachers as spiritual guides, creative teaching methods, and cooperation between church and family, Not only through the delivery of

religious materials. However, most of these studies still place Sunday School teachers primarily as a determining factor in the success of children's faith growth. The focus is more on what the teacher does to the child: the way to teach, the communication approach, and the learning strategies of faith. Meanwhile, attention to the inner life of the teacher himself is still very limited. Personal struggles, spiritual exhaustion, inadequacy, or service wounds are rarely seen as factors that affect the quality of a child's faith recognition. In fact, the condition of the teacher's heart greatly determines how faith is conveyed and accepted by children.

Until now, studies that specifically link pastoralism with efforts to increase the intensity of Sunday School Teacher service through Henri Nouwen's frame of mind are still relatively rare, and none have been specifically directed at the categorical service of Sunday School Teachers. This frame of mind becomes especially relevant when it is connected to the reality of the daily Sunday School teacher's ministry. In practice, Sunday School teachers are often in a position similar to the human image Nouwen intended: they are called to love, guide, and accompany children, but at the same time, they also carry personal wounds, fatigues, and struggles that are not always visible from the outside. Not a few Sunday School teachers have gradually lost their zeal for service due to the pressures of life, lack of attention, and lack of pastoral assistance that touches their inner needs. This condition shows that the problem of declining service intensity is not solely a matter of commitment or discipline, but is closely related to the inner experience and the meaning of the service itself.

Through Nouwen's view, shepherding is not understood only as supervision or structural guidance, but as a presence that accompanies man in his fragility and hope. Nouwen emphasized that the figure who presents the update often does not appear as a big figure, but is present in simple daily life. In this context, the Sunday School teacher can be understood as a minister who secretly partakes of God's work, even though it is often unnoticed or noticed. However, without shepherding that helps

them revisit the meaning and direction of their ministry, that hope can fade and the ministry loses its vitality.

Therefore, this article presents novelty by placing Henri Nouwen's thinking as a theological and pastoral lens to re-read the problem of the ministry of Sunday School teachers, especially in terms of declining intensity and involvement of ministry.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach. This method is used because the research emphasizes more on understanding the problem of Sunday School teacher service, not on data processing in the form of numbers. This research focuses on the meaning of Sunday School Teacher ministry and the role of shepherding in encouraging the involvement and seriousness of ministers. The type of research used is *library research*. Data were obtained from a variety of written sources related to the research topic. The main source of this research is the works of Henri Nouwen who discuss pastoral and ministry spirituality, including the concept of *wounded healer*. In addition, the author also uses pastoral theology books, journal articles, and brief interviews with Sunday School teachers as supporting sources.

The research approach used is descriptive and reflective, namely by explaining existing thoughts and then relating them to the context of church service, especially the Sunday School Children's ministry. Henri Nouwen's thinking is used as a framework for understanding the Sunday School teacher's experience of ministry, especially experiences of burnout, low morale, and the need for shepherding. Data analysis is carried out by reading and understanding the literature sources as a whole. After that, the author identifies the main ideas related to shepherding and ministry. The idea was then associated with the issue of the intensity of the Sunday School Teacher's ministry. Through this process, the author tries to see how Henri Nouwen's thinking about shepherding can give a new perspective to the ministry of Sunday School teachers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Conceptual Framework Henri J. M. Nouwen

Henri J. M. Nouwen is known as a pastoral theologian who emphasizes ministry based on relationships and life experiences. He taught at several universities, but later chose to live in the L'Arche community with people with intellectual disabilities. It was from this experience that he saw that the Christian ministry was not primarily determined by ability or position, but by sincere presence. For Nouwen, modern humans often live in a busy life but still feel alone, so the innermost need is not only teaching, but a restorative encounter. The main concept he offers is wounded healer. Nouwen explained that God's servants are not people who are free from problems, but rather humans who know their own fragility. The wounds of life do not hinder service, but can be a way to understand others. A servant is able to help not because he is always strong, but because he has struggled and found hope in it. He also emphasized the importance of ministry of presence, which is service through real presence. Presence here is not just physical presence or carrying out duties, but a willingness to be present as a person. Many ministries feel distant because the servant is present as a role, not as oneself. When the servant dares to be present honestly, the relationship becomes open and recovery can occur.

Henri Nouwen's thinking provides a perspective that helps to understand the situation of Sunday School teachers more realistically. Nouwen does not see the ministers of the church as people who are always strong, stable, and without struggle. Instead, he emphasized that Christian ministry is carried out by ordinary people who also have wounds, weaknesses, and limitations. In the idea of wounded healer, Nouwen reminds that a servant is not a person who serves from a perfect position, but from his own life experiences which are often not easy. Wounds and fragility are not something to be hidden, but can be an honest meeting space between one human being and another. If understood simply, Nouwen wants to say that a person can be a tool of recovery precisely because he has felt pain and struggle. It was that experience that made him able

to understand others more deeply. In the context of church ministry, this means that the minister does not have to wait for himself to be "okay" to serve. What is needed is not perfection, but a willingness to be sincere in attendance. Wounds that are recognized and treated in a healthy manner can actually be a source of empathy.

In his frame of mind, Nouwen sees ministry as an inner journey, not just an ecclesiastical activity. It depicts the life of a servant being between two poles: loneliness and communion. Many servants look active, busy, and engaged in various activities, but inside they harbor a sense of tiredness and loneliness. Therefore, according to him, the first task of a servant is not to directly improve others, but to dare to face himself, recognize his fear, need to be accepted, and his longing for God. From this self-acceptance comes the ability to accept others. Nouwen also emphasized the spiritual movement from "loneliness to solitude (silence with God)". Loneliness makes the servant seek recognition through activity, while solitude makes the servant serve from the depth of the relationship with God. Services born out of loneliness tend to demand results and recognition, while services born out of solitude produce a soothing presence. That is, the quality of service is not primarily determined by the number of activities, but by the depth of the spiritual life of the minister.

In addition, Nouwen understands service as a reciprocal relationship. Servers not only give, but also receive. In an honest encounter, the servant and the served alike experience recovery. Thus, service is no longer seen as a top-down relationship, but rather a meeting of fellow human beings before God. This framework helps to see that servant fatigue often arises when he feels he must always be strong and giving, with no room to receive and recover. Nouwen is actually criticizing the way the church sees ministers only in terms of function. Many ministries are ultimately measured by things that are visible: diligent attendance, able to teach, good at speaking, or able to organize activities. These things are indeed important, but according to Nouwen, they have not touched the core of the service. He sees that

when service is only understood as a task, the servant will easily fall into fatigue. He continues to give, but he has never really been present as a human being. As a result, the relationship becomes dry and the service feels like an obligation that must be completed.

Therefore, Nouwen invites waiters to see service as a relationship, not performance. Servants are not called first to succeed, but rather to be faithfully present. The presence in question is not a perfect presence, but an as-is. Precisely there lies the strength of Christian ministry not in the ability to solve all the problems of others, but in the willingness to walk together in the midst of limitations. In simple encounters, people can feel accepted and not alone, and that's where recovery often starts to happen. Nouwen also spoke about the dangers of "spiritual masks". Waiters often feel that they must always look strong, patient, and not tired. Unknowingly, he began to hide his personal struggles. Over time he served as a role, not as himself. When this happens, the distance from others increases. People may respect the servants, but don't really feel close. Nouwen assessed that this kind of service is difficult to bring recovery because there is no honesty in it.

On the contrary, when the servant dares to accept himself, including his limits, disappointments, and failures, he becomes more human. He no longer has to always give answers, but can learn to listen. He doesn't have to be always strong, but he can empathize. From there, a warm relationship emerged. People feel understood not because the waiter knows best, but because the waiter has experienced the same thing. In this understanding, wounds are not shown, but processed into sensitivity to others. This thinking helps to see that the ministry actually goes both ways. Not only children or congregations grow, but ministers are also formed. Each encounter becomes a space for learning patience, learning to accept differences, learning to entrust the process to God. Servers no longer impose quick results, but make room for slow growth. In this way, the service becomes lighter because it is not borne by yourself.

When associated with daily ministry life, Nouwen's frame of mind shows that problems in ministry are often not because people do not want to serve, but because they are tired of living roles without room to be themselves. When the ministry contains only demands to be present, teach, and responsible, the minister can lose meaning. However, when the ministry is understood as a mutually reinforcing encounter, the servant actually rediscovers the reason for his service. Thus, the essence of Nouwen's thinking is not simply that the servant has a wound, but that an honestly received wound opens up the possibility of a deeper relationship. The ministry is no longer seen as a mere work of the church, but rather a journey of shared faith in which the servant and the served alike learn to hope, endure, and trust in God in the midst of life's limitations

***Shepherding in the reality of Sunday School
Teacher ministry in the congregation of GMIM
Bethesda Taas***

Seeing the fact that the problem of Sunday School teacher service is not only related to teaching techniques, but also touches the inner side of the servant, a framework of understanding is needed that is able to read the ministry in a more human way. An approach that emphasizes only responsibility, discipline, or division of duties often does not adequately explain why a person is slowly losing the spirit of service. In many cases, the problem is not in unwillingness to serve, but in unrevealed and unaddressed inner experiences. Therefore, this study uses the thought of Henri J. M. Nouwen as a theological and pastoral foundation to understand these dynamics.

Henri Nouwen's thinking provides a perspective that helps to understand the situation of Sunday School teachers more realistically. Nouwen does not see the ministers of the church as people who are always strong, stable, and without struggle. Instead, he emphasized that Christian ministry is carried out by ordinary people who also have wounds, weaknesses, and limitations. In the idea of wounded healer, Nouwen reminds that a servant is not a person who serves from a perfect position, but from his own life experiences which are often not easy. Wounds and fragility are not something to be hidden, but can be an honest meeting space between one human being and another. If understood simply, Nouwen wants to say that a person can be a tool of recovery precisely because he has felt pain and struggle. It was that experience that made him able to understand others more deeply. In the context of church ministry, this means that the minister does not have to wait for himself to be "okay" to serve. What is needed is not perfection, but a willingness to be sincere in attendance. Wounds that are recognized and treated in a healthy manner can actually be a source of empathy.

Within this framework, herding is no longer understood as a one-way relationship, where there are parties who are considered stronger and others who always have to be fostered. Shepherding is more accurately seen as a shared journey. A servant doesn't always have to look strong or as if he's never tired. He is still a human being who can feel disappointed, tired, and even confused about certain situations. Therefore, healthy shepherding allows room for the servant to be honest about his limitations without fear of being blamed. Through mutually supportive and accompanying relationships, the recovery process can occur slowly and realistically. If this thought is associated with the Sunday School Teacher's ministry, its relevance becomes even more apparent. Sunday School teachers are present each week to teach, guide, and instill the value of faith in children. They are required to be patient, creative, loving, and able to be role models. However, behind these roles, they are still individuals who bring their own life problems. Some are struggling with work,

family, studies, or other personal issues. There are also those who feel underappreciated or less supported in service. All of this can affect the spirit and intensity of their ministry.

Often churches see a decrease in ministry intensity only as a matter of commitment or discipline. In fact, if explored deeper, it could be that what happens is an unhandled mental exhaustion. The Sunday School teacher may still be present, but his heart is no longer what it used to be. If this reality is ignored, the ministry will slowly lose its vitality. Service has become a routine, no longer a call that is lived with awareness. This is where Henri Nouwen's thinking becomes important. He reminded that waiters also need to be served. Those who strengthen others also need reinforcement. Shepherding that departs from the awareness of human fragility will be more sensitive to the inner needs of Sunday School teachers. With this approach, the problem of declining service intensity is not directly judged as a lack of loyalty, but is seen as a sign that the servant is in need of assistance.

Thus, Henri Nouwen's frame of mind helps to read the problem of Sunday School Teacher ministry more fully. The problem is not just about performance, but about meaning, fatigue, and untouched inner experience. When shepherding is done with a relational and empathetic approach, Sunday School teachers can rediscover the reason why they serve. It is from there that the intensity of the ministry can grow again, not because of pressure, but because of renewed awareness and calling.

The Sunday School Teacher's ministry plays an important role in the life of the church because it is directly related to the formation of a child's faith from an early age. However, in reality, this service is often carried out in situations that are not easy. Sunday School teachers are not only faced with teaching duties, but also with the demands of daily life such as work, family, and time constraints. In these conditions, the service that was initially carried out with joy can slowly turn into a burden. Sunday School teachers are church ministers who have a strategic role in the process of fostering children's faith. Their presence is not only limited to the

presentation of Bible stories, but also to the spiritual accompaniment that is present in the child's life. Through a simple and intimate approach to the child's world, such as stories, songs, prayers, games, and life examples, Sunday School teachers help children understand God's Word in a way that they can receive and live.

In the practice of service, Sunday School teachers are required to prepare earnestly. On the day of the service, they arrive early to prepare teaching materials, learning media, and arrange the classroom so that the learning atmosphere is comfortable and supports the child-centered process. In addition to technical preparation, Sunday School teachers also need to prepare themselves mentally so that they can serve with a calm and attentive attitude. They are expected to be able to welcome each child with a friendly attitude, get to know the children individually, and be sensitive to the background and needs of each child, including struggles that are often not revealed verbally. The Sunday School Teacher service is carried out on the basis of love and willingness. In the teaching process, they instill Christian values such as honesty, love, forgiveness, and responsibility through a constructive, non-judgmental approach. Sunday School teachers are also expected to be safe and trustworthy, so that children feel free to ask questions, share stories, and express their feelings. Through such presence, children can feel that the church is a space that accepts and loves them for who they are.

Service as a Sunday School teacher requires diligence and faithfulness, even though it is often done without great attention or appreciation. Sunday School teachers play the role of instilling faith values and shaping children's character from an early age. The foundation of faith built through this ministry is an important provision for children in facing various life dynamics in the future. Thus, although often in simplicity, the Sunday School Teacher's ministry has a long-term impact on the life of the church and its succeeding generations. The results of the study show that the decrease in the intensity of Sunday School Teacher service does not occur suddenly. Most servants experience inner fatigue that lasts for

a long time and is not much noticed, which is mostly experienced by themselves. This can be seen in the service journey at the end of this current year. This situation is increasingly real. Some Sunday School teachers still remain present in the service schedule, but no longer show the enthusiasm they once did. Many Sunday School teachers are not actively involved in the ministry, Teaching preparation is often done as necessary, and some even come without mature materials because they feel they do not have the energy to prepare more. Conversations between servers have become shorter and more necessary. If in the past there were discussions, sharing ideas, or encouraging each other before worship started, now the atmosphere tends to be calmer and flatter.

This fatigue manifests in the form of boredom, loss of enthusiasm, and feelings of undervalue. As a result, involvement in the ministry began to decrease, although they were still formally recorded as servants. In this situation, service is often undertaken simply to fulfill responsibilities. Presence remains, but without the involvement of the whole heart. These findings suggest that the main problem lies not in a lack of ability or willingness to serve, but in the inward-looking experiences of Sunday School teachers. Therefore, shepherding that only emphasizes the aspect of managing duties and responsibilities is not enough to answer the needs of the servants.

Furthermore, this situation shows that Sunday School teachers are also ordinary human beings with limitations. They can be tired, disappointed, and even feel self-doubted. When these feelings are suppressed and there is no room to share, the burden of service becomes even heavier. In some cases, there are Sunday School teachers who choose to slowly walk away from the ministry, not because they no longer love their children, but because they feel no longer able to bear the pressures that exist, whether because of fatigue or because of feelings of unappreciated or because of unpreparedness because of the demands of work and family responsibilities.

Based on interviews conducted with two Sunday School teachers, it was found that the decrease in the intensity of the ministry did not occur suddenly, but through a long inner process.

In an interview conducted, GSM 1 revealed that one of the causes of the decline in service spirit did not come from outside, but from within the service team itself. He felt underappreciated by his fellow Sunday School teachers because of the lack of cooperation and mutual contribution. He said that on several occasions, he was often the one who prepared teaching materials, made props, and even arranged the division of tasks. When he invites other GSM colleagues to discuss or share responsibilities, the response received is often minimal. Some come without preparation, some leave the responsibility completely to him, and some are even difficult to communicate with. "I don't mind working more," he said, "but if you're constantly on your own, it's tired, too." According to him, service should be a teamwork. But in practice, he feels like he's walking alone. This situation made him slowly withdraw. He is still present, but no longer as active as before in proposing ideas or taking initiatives. He chooses to do only the minimum part so as not to be too emotionally burdened. The thing that hurt him the most was not the amount of work, but the indifference he felt from his fellow servants. He hopes that there will be mutual support, mutual strengthening, and a sense of shared responsibility. "If one is tired, the other helps. That's what I expected,"

This situation shows that the issue of service intensity is not only influenced by personal factors, but also by the quality of relationships in the service team. When cooperation is not built properly, the burden of service can feel heavier and cause emotional fatigue. In light of a pastoral approach that emphasizes relationships and empathy, GSM 1's experience shows the importance of building healthy communication between fellow servants. Shepherding is not only aimed at individuals, but also at the service community as a whole. Relationships that respect and support each other are the key so that the service is not carried out alone.

When there is space to open up to each other and talk about the dynamics that occur without blaming each other, a new understanding slowly emerges. GSM 1 himself admitted that when finally, an honest and open team evaluation meeting was held, he felt more relieved. He realized that some of his colleagues also actually felt unconfident or lacked understanding of their duties. From there, the realization began to be built that service requires togetherness, not just the initiative of one person

Nouwen emphasized that a servant is not a person without wounds, but someone who actually serves from within his own fragility. In the context of GSM 1, fatigue, disappointment, and feelings of undervalue can be understood as "wounds" that arise in service relationships. If this wound is hidden, it can turn into distance, cynicism, and even a desire to stop serving. However, when the wound is given space to acknowledge and talk about, that's where the healing process begins. According to Nouwen, recovery does not happen because a person becomes stronger, but because he dares to open up and enter into an honest relationship. The evaluation meeting experienced by GSM 1 is a concrete example of how the community can become a space for healing. He is no longer positioned as the "most capable" or "most responsible," but as a fellow servant who also needs understanding. On the other hand, his colleagues are also seen not as indifferent, but as individuals who may also bring limitations and insecurity.

In the concept of wounded healer, shepherding means walking together in the awareness that all servants are fragile human beings. No one is completely strong, and no one is completely weak. It is precisely in acknowledging each other's fragility that empathy and solidarity are born. The experience of GSM 1 shows that when relational wounds are healed in the community, they are no longer a source of division, but rather a starting point for mutual growth. Thus, the restoration of service intensity does not always start from adding programs or affirming rules, but from the courage to build more honest and empathetic relationships. When servants see each other not as

burdens, but as fellow travelers who are both growing, the spirit of service can be restored more deeply and sustainably. This is the essence of Nouwen's approach: the wounded servant is not removed, but embraced, because it is from there that a more humane and authentic ministry can be born.

Meanwhile, GSM 2 has a different struggle. He stated that in recent times he felt that he no longer wanted to be actively involved in the Sunday School Children's (ASM) ministry. The reason is not because of conflict, but because of family economic pressure. He is the extra backbone in the family and has to work harder to help the household's financial needs. According to his confession, Sundays, which he previously dedicated entirely to ministry, are now often used for overtime or taking on extra work. "Sometimes I feel guilty, but I also know my family needs me,". He admitted that he had thought about completely withdrawing from the ministry because he felt that he could no longer give his best. However, in further conversation, he also said that he still has a longing to serve. It's just that he feels tired physically and mentally. When the church began to understand the situation and did not immediately judge the lack of involvement as a form of infidelity, he felt more relieved. He was given space to rest for a while without pressure, and it actually made him slowly want to get back involved as much as he could.

From the two interviews, it can be seen that the issue of service intensity is not solely a matter of spiritual commitment. There are factors of appreciation, emotional needs, and economic pressures that also influence. In Henri Nouwen's concept of thought, this experience shows that servants are also fragile human beings and need assistance. When pastoring is done with an approach that empathizes listening without judgment, understanding without directly demanding, then the room for recovery opens up. It is this approach that helps Sunday School teachers rediscover the meaning of their ministry. Not through pressure or additional demands, but through a relationship that recovers. From this process, the intensity of service

can regrow naturally, born from renewed awareness and calling, not from a sense of compulsion.

This reality emphasizes the importance of shepherding that touches the inner side of the ministers. Shepherding not only means setting a service schedule or dividing teaching assignments, but it also accompanies, listens, and understands the personal struggles of Sunday School teachers. They need a safe space to talk about the exhaustion, disappointment, or confusion they are experiencing without fear of being judged. When the church is present as a place of listening, the ministers will feel cared for and will not walk alone. In addition, the togetherness between Sunday School teachers is also an important factor. Regular meetings that not only discuss the technicalities of service, but also become a forum for mutual strength, can help restore the spirit that is starting to fade. Praying together, sharing experiences, and providing simple support to each other often have a big impact. From that togetherness grows a sense of belonging and awareness that service is a shared responsibility, not a personal burden. Reinforcement from others is also urgently needed. The form does not always have to be a big award, but it can be through small attention such as a thank you, a visit, or a sincere greeting. An appreciative attitude makes Sunday School teachers feel that what they are doing is meaningful and cared for. Simple things like this can rekindle the spirit of service that had dimmed.

Henri Nouwen's thought as a Framework for Pastoral Analysis

Henri Nouwen's thinking provides a perspective that is quite helpful to understand the situation of Sunday School teachers in a more humane and realistic way. Nouwen does not see the ministers of the church as people who are always strong, stable, and without struggle. Instead, he emphasized that Christian ministry is carried out by ordinary people who also have wounds, weaknesses, and limitations. In the idea of wounded healer, Nouwen reminds that a servant is not a person who serves from a perfect position, but from his own life experiences which are often not easy. Wounds and

fragility are not something to be hidden, but can be an honest meeting space between one human being and another. If understood simply, Nouwen wants to say that a person can be a tool of recovery precisely because he has felt pain and struggle. It was that experience that made him able to understand others more deeply. In the context of church ministry, this means that the minister does not have to wait for himself to be "okay" to serve. What is needed is not perfection, but a willingness to be sincere in attendance. Wounds that are recognized and treated in a healthy manner can actually be a source of empathy.

Within this framework, herding is no longer understood as a one-way relationship, where there are parties who are considered stronger and others who always have to be fostered. Shepherding is more accurately seen as a shared journey. A servant doesn't always have to look strong or as if he's never tired. He is still a human being who can feel disappointed, tired, and even confused about certain situations. Therefore, healthy shepherding allows room for the servant to be honest about his limitations without fear of being blamed. Through mutually supportive and accompanying relationships, the recovery process can occur slowly and realistically. If this thought is associated with the Sunday School Teacher's ministry, its relevance becomes even more apparent. Sunday School teachers are present each week to teach, guide, and instill the value of faith in children. They are required to be patient, creative, loving, and able to be role models. But behind these roles, they are still the ones who bring their own life problems. Some are struggling with work, family, studies, or other personal issues. There are also those who feel underappreciated or less supported in service. All of this can affect the spirit and intensity of their ministry. Often churches see a decrease in ministry intensity only as a matter of commitment or discipline. In fact, if explored deeper, it could be that what happens is an unhandled mental exhaustion. The Sunday School teacher may still be present, but his heart is no longer what it used to be. If this reality is ignored, the ministry will slowly lose its vitality.

Service has become a routine, no longer a call that is lived with awareness.

This is where Henri Nouwen's thinking becomes important. He reminded that waiters also need to be served. Those who strengthen others also need reinforcement. Shepherding that departs from an awareness of human fragility will be more sensitive to the inner needs of Sunday School teachers. With this approach, the problem of declining service intensity is not directly judged as a lack of loyalty, but is seen as a sign that the servant is in need of assistance. Thus, Henri Nouwen's frame of mind helps to read the problem of Sunday School Teacher ministry more fully. The problem is not just about performance, but about meaning, fatigue, and untouched inner experience. When shepherding is done with a relational and empathetic approach, Sunday School teachers can rediscover the reason why they serve. It is from there that the intensity of the ministry can grow again, not because of pressure, but because of renewed awareness and calling.

In the Old Testament, the concept of shepherding emphasizes God as the Shepherd who cares for and restores His people. Psalm 23 describes God as the Shepherd who leads His people to green pastures and calm waters, so that the soul becomes refreshed. This picture emphasizes the importance of being present and guiding, not just demanding formal obedience. In addition, Isaiah 40:11 affirms that God cares for His people with tenderness, shepherding the weak with patience, showing that shepherding includes attention to the inner condition and needs of the individual. In the context of Sunday School teacher ministry, this principle emphasizes that servants also need attention and restoration in order to serve lovingly. Even figures like Moses and David show how their personal struggles shaped their ability to lead and strengthen others, so that genuine service is born from real life experiences.

The New Testament emphasizes more personal and relational shepherding through the example of Jesus Christ. In John 10:11, Jesus refers to Himself as the Good Shepherd who willingly gave his life for His sheep, emphasizing deep love and sincere concern. This principle shows that service is not just an obligation, but a vocation that is lived with a fully present heart. In addition, 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 teaches that God comforts us in all difficulties, so that we are able to comfort others; This is in line with Henri Nouwen's concept of wounded healer, that a servant who has been wounded can be a means of recovery for others. Luke 6:38 also affirms the principle of sincere giving and receiving, which encourages the creation of a culture of service that supports each other and strengthens relationships. Galatians 6:2 emphasizes the importance of bearing the burden together, which is relevant in building the togetherness of the Sunday School Teacher team so that the ministry is not carried out alone, but becomes an experience that restores and grows spirit on an ongoing basis.

Analysis

The reality of Sunday School teacher ministry found in this study shows that the main problem lies not in a lack of faith or willingness to serve, but in unhandled inner experiences. So far, the church's approach has often been in the realm of arrangements: scheduling, class responsibilities, attendance, and readiness of teaching materials. All of that is important, but this study shows that the approach has not yet touched the root of the problem. Sunday School teachers are still present, but no longer present with their hearts. The ministry is running, but it has lost its vitality.

In Henri Nouwen's frame of mind, this condition is actually not surprising. Nouwen sees modern humans, including church ministers, as individuals who often live a life with many activities but still feel empty inside. The servant does not always stop serving because he does not want to, but because his mind is exhausted. Therefore, pastoral solutions cannot begin with additional demands, but rather with the restoration of meaning. This means

that the first step that the church needs to take is not to improve the service system, but to improve the way of looking at ministers. Sunday School teachers should not only be seen as implementers of the church's programs, but as individuals who are in the process of faith. During this time the church tended to treat the minister as "a person who must be strong". In fact, according to Nouwen, servants are actually human beings who also need support. If the church fails to understand this, then any evaluation of the ministry will always end in guilt, not recovery.

Therefore, the pastoral approach needs to be directed at the creation of safe spaces. The safe space here is not just a formal meeting, but a meeting that allows the waiter to tell a story without fear of being judged. From the results of the interview, it can be seen that when GSM 1 is given the opportunity to speak honestly in team meetings, his emotional burden is reduced. This shows that recovery doesn't necessarily require a new program, but an honest relationship. Nouwen called it a ministry of presence service through attendance. Presence means not rushing to fix, but being willing to live with the struggles of others. If implemented concretely, the church can start by changing the pattern of Sunday School teacher meetings. Meetings not only discuss the curriculum or the technicalities of worship, but also provide a special time to share ministry experiences. Not a report, but a story. In this context, the leader does not play the role of a supervisor, but as a listener. This approach is in line with relational pastoralism: the servant is restored not because he is instructed, but because he feels understood.

The second approach is to understand ministry as a shared journey, not an individual responsibility. A lot of fatigue arises because service is felt as a personal burden. GSM 1 feels self-paced; GSM 2 felt that he had to choose between family and church. This situation shows that the service team is not yet a community. In fact, Nouwen emphasized that healing occurs in a community that accepts each other, not in solitude. Therefore, the church needs to build a culture of bearing each other's burdens. The form is simple: a mentoring system, paired service, or flexible rotation of tasks. The goal is not just work

efficiency, but to build awareness that no servant has to be strong alone. When the burden is shared, the service no longer feels pressured. In many pastoral cases, community support is more effective than general spiritual motivation.

The third approach is to help the servant rediscover the meaning of the calling. Many Sunday School Teachers persist, but without the involvement of the heart. They are here because of responsibility, not because of calling. This is where the concept of wounded healer becomes important. Nouwen explained that a person serves not because he is perfect, but because he has experienced God's love in his own struggles. Wounds received and treated can be a source of empathy. This means that the church does not have to wait for ministers to be "spiritually ready" to serve. Instead, the church helps them read life experiences as part of a vocation. When GSM 2 is given space to rest without being judged, its desire to serve reappears. This shows that the recovery of the spirit is not born from pressure, but from acceptance. Pastoral assistance serves to reconnect life experiences with the meaning of faith.

The last approach is to shift the orientation of service from performance to relationship. As long as the service is measured by attendance, material readiness, and smooth class, the waiter will always feel judged. But when service is understood as a relationship with God, children, and fellow servants, the focus changes. The main thing is not the success of the program, but the loyalty of running together. This perspective is also in line with the modern pastoral understanding that the spiritual health of a minister determines the long-term sustainability of ministry. Thus, Henri Nouwen's framework does not offer a new technical method, but a paradigm shift. The church is called not to first improve the servants, but to accompany them. From there came a deeper recovery. The intensity of service is not restored through rules, but through received experience. When the servants feel understood, they find a reason to serve again. Finally, it can be concluded that the solution to the decrease in the intensity of Sunday School Teacher service is not an increase in control, but an increase in relationships. Shepherding that

departs from empathy, presence, and community will help the minister rediscover the meaning of his calling. From there the spirit of service grows naturally, not because of obligation, but because of a restored heart.

CONCLUSION

The Sunday School Teacher's ministry is greatly influenced by the inner condition of the ministers, not just by their abilities or commitments. A decrease in the intensity of service usually arises from fatigue, lack of support, personal pressure, or a sense of undervalue, so their presence can be seen, but the heart is not fully engaged. A pastoral approach that understands human fragility, provides space for servants to be open, supportive, and receive emotional assistance has been proven to restore the spirit and meaning of ministry naturally. To maintain the sustainability of ministry, churches can develop regular meetings that are reflective, build honest team communication, and foster a culture of simple caring between ministers. In this way, the intensity and quality of service not only increase, but also results in a better, sincere, and positive service experience for the children as well as the Sunday School teachers.

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