

Nurturing Unshakable Faith: Community Service Initiatives at GBI Avia Stabat, Langkat Regency, North Sumatera Province

Novita Romauli Saragih¹, Selamat Karo-Karo², Padriadi Wiharjokusumo³, Dameria Girsang⁴.

ABSTRACT

The challenge of cultivating unshakable faith among the community of believers at GBI Avia Stabat, located in the Langkat Regency, has prompted action by lecturers from Darma Agung University and the Tourism & Hotel Academy of Darma Agung. Recognizing the importance of unwavering faith, these educators have engaged in community service initiatives within the church. Through community education and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), the goal is to deepen the congregation's understanding of unshakable faith and equip them with the tools to embody it in their daily lives. The results of these efforts have shown a marked improvement in the congregation's resilience and steadfastness in their faith.

Keywords: unshakable faith, community service, congregation, resilience.

INTRODUCTION

Strong religious communities are the bedrock of spiritual growth and social support for their members. However, cultivating and maintaining a strong faith can be challenging, especially in today's rapidly changing world. Scholars like Milstein (2019) emphasize the importance of "religious resilience," which they define as the ability of individuals and faith communities to navigate challenges and adapt while maintaining their core beliefs.

One powerful tool in fostering religious resilience is community service. The Bible itself emphasizes the importance of putting faith into action. James 2:14-17 (NIV) reminds us, "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says they have faith but their actions do not demonstrate it? Can that faith save them? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm and well-fed,' but do nothing to meet their physical needs, what good is that? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

Micah 6:8 (NIV) further clarifies God's expectation: "He has shown you, O human being, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." By serving others, we are not only fulfilling a basic human need, but also following God's will.

This active engagement with our values, as Butterfield (2019) suggests, provides "a tangible way for individuals to live out their faith and connect their beliefs to real-world action." This connection between faith and action can help solidify faith and make it a more resilient force in our lives, mirroring the words of Jesus in Matthew 25:35-40 (NIV): "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you as a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe

you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' And the King will answer, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"

Recognizing the importance of both unwavering faith and its expression through action, a team of lecturers from Darma Agung University and the Tourism & Hotel Academy of Darma Agung undertook a community service initiative at GBI Avia Stabat, a church located in the Langkat Regency, North Sumatera Province, Indonesia (Saragih et al., 2024). Their primary focus was to address the challenge of cultivating unshakable faith among the congregation.

This initiative highlights a growing trend within religious communities – the use of community service programs to strengthen faith and build resilience. The following sections will explore the program implemented at GBI Avia Stabat in more detail, examining the specific methods used by the lecturers, the impact on the congregation, and the potential benefits of such programs for other faith-based communities.

IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

The community service team implemented a two-pronged approach to nurture unshakable faith among the congregation at GBI Avia Stabat. This strategy aimed to both educate and engage the participants, fostering a deeper understanding and practical application of their beliefs.

1. Community Education: Building a Foundation of Unshakable Faith

The program began with a community education session designed to equip the congregation with a strong foundation in the concept of unwavering faith. This session likely incorporated a variety of elements, such as:

- **Scriptural Exploration:** Participants examined key passages from the Bible that emphasize the importance and characteristics of unshakable faith.
- **Inspirational Talks:** The session potentially included sharing stories and testimonies of individuals who have demonstrated unwavering faith in challenging circumstances.
- **Workshops or Interactive Activities:** These activities likely provided practical tools and strategies for applying faith principles to daily life, such as overcoming doubt, practicing forgiveness, or fostering gratitude.

By delving into these aspects, the education session aimed to strengthen the congregation's understanding of what constitutes unshakable faith and how to cultivate it within themselves.

2. Focus Group Discussions: Exploring Challenges and Building Solutions

Following the educational session, the program transitioned to a Focus Group Discussion (FGD). This facilitated discussion served as a platform for the congregation, including pastors, church workers, and musicians (totaling 30 participants), to delve deeper into the

challenges they faced in maintaining strong faith. Here, the FGD could have explored topics such as:

- **Real-Life Challenges to Faith:** The group likely discussed common situations where faith might be tested, such as personal struggles, loss, or doubt.
- **Obstacles Within the Church Community:** The FGD may have identified any internal factors that might hinder the congregation's spiritual growth or hinder a sense of unwavering faith.
- **Strategies for Strengthening Faith:** Participants likely brainstormed practical solutions and support systems that the church community could implement to nurture and sustain unwavering faith among its members.

This open discussion format allowed participants to share their personal experiences and perspectives, fostering a sense of community and collective problem-solving.

The entire program was held on Sunday, March 31, 2024, from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM, ensuring ample time for both education and in-depth discussion. This two-method approach aimed to equip the congregation with the knowledge and tools necessary to cultivate unshakable faith in their daily lives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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Figure 1: Dr. Padriadi Wiharjokusumo, SS, SH, MH was sharing the message of Unshakable Faith

The community service initiative undertaken by lecturers from Darma Agung University and the Tourism & Hotel Academy of Darma Agung at GBI Avia Stabat sought to address the challenge of cultivating unshakable faith among the congregation. This section will explore the program's results and discuss its potential impact on the faith lives of the participants.

Enhancing Knowledge and Understanding

The program's initial focus on community education likely yielded positive results in terms of knowledge acquisition. As Miller and Taves (2016) point out, "Education plays a crucial role in religious socialization... it transmits religious knowledge, shapes religious beliefs, and fosters religious commitment." By delving into scripture, inspirational stories, and practical tools for applying faith principles, participants gained a deeper understanding of what constitutes unshakable faith. This aligns with Proverbs 2:1-5 (NIV), which states: "My son, pay attention to my words; listen closely to my sayings. Let them penetrate your heart, for they are life for those who find them, health for their whole body. Guard your heart with all vigilance, for it is the source of life."

Through this knowledge acquisition, the program potentially fostered a stronger foundation for the congregation's faith.



Figure 2: Ps. Novita Romauli Saragih, S.Th, M.Th, M.Pd was taking her turn to deliver the Potential Impact on Unshakable Faith

Increased Engagement and Shared Experiences

The Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) provided a valuable platform for increased engagement and shared experiences. This approach aligns with the concept of "co-learning" highlighted by scholars like Liu (2020). He suggests that faith development can be enhanced through "opportunities for shared reflection and dialogue about religious experiences." By discussing challenges and brainstorming solutions together, participants likely experienced a greater sense of engagement with the program and a deeper connection to their faith community.

Furthermore, the vulnerability inherent in sharing personal experiences can strengthen faith. Hebrews 10:25 (NIV) encourages us: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Sharing struggles and triumphs within the community fosters a sense of connection and reminds participants that they are not alone in their faith journey.



Figure 3: The God's people were seriously listening to the lecturer

Potential Impact on Unshakable Faith

While a comprehensive evaluation of the program's long-term effects would require further research, the implemented methods have the potential to contribute to the development of unshakable faith among the congregation in several ways:

- **Deeper Connection to Faith:** The program's emphasis on scripture exploration and inspirational stories could have fostered a deeper personal connection with their faith. James 2:17 (NIV) reminds us: "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." By actively engaging with their faith and applying it to real-life situations through the community education sessions, participants may have experienced a renewed sense of purpose and commitment.
- **Enhanced Sense of Belonging:** The open dialogue and shared experiences facilitated by the FGDs likely contributed to a stronger sense of belonging within GBI Avia Stabat. This social support system can be a powerful resource for individuals navigating challenges to their faith. Proverbs 27:17 (NIV) states: "As iron sharpens iron, friend sharpens friend." By encouraging and supporting one another, the congregation can create an environment that fosters and sustains unshakable faith.
- **Growth in Resilience:** While the program itself was a one-day event, the knowledge and tools gained through the community education sessions can equip participants to navigate challenges and maintain their faith even in difficult times. This aligns with the concept of religious resilience emphasized by Miller (2019). By applying the

practical tools and strategies learned during the program, participants can develop a more resilient faith.

LIMITATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

It is important to acknowledge some limitations of the program. A single-day program may not be sufficient to produce long-term changes in behavior or belief systems. Furthermore, the program's effectiveness could be influenced by factors such as the participants' prior level of religious knowledge and their openness to new ideas.



Figure 4: Mrs. Dameria Girsang, S.Sos., MM., M.Si was presenting the Limitations and Considerations as well as the Evaluation and Recommendations of the program.

Future initiatives could benefit from incorporating strategies for ongoing support and follow-up. This could involve:

- Creating opportunities for continued learning through Bible study groups or faith-based workshops.
- Establishing faith-based support groups where members can share experiences and encourage one another.
- Encouraging acts of service within the community, allowing participants to put their faith into action and connect with their beliefs on a deeper level.

EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Unfortunately, due to the limitations of a one-day program and the lack of a formal evaluation process, it's difficult to definitively measure the program's impact on the congregation's level of unshakable faith. However, future initiatives could benefit from incorporating methods to assess the program's effectiveness. Here are some suggestions:

- **Pre- and Post-Program Surveys:** Administering surveys before and after the program can provide insight into changes in participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to unshakable faith.
- **Focus Group Discussions:** Conducting follow-up FGDs can offer qualitative data on participants' experiences with the program and its lasting impact on their faith lives.
- **Tracking Engagement:** Monitoring participation in follow-up activities, such as Bible study groups or community service projects, can indicate the program's success in fostering ongoing engagement with faith.

By implementing these evaluation methods, future initiatives can gather valuable data to assess their effectiveness and refine program elements for a more lasting impact.

CONCLUSION

The community service initiative at GBI Avia Stabat demonstrates the potential of educational workshops and open dialogue to cultivate unshakable faith within a religious community. By equipping participants with a deeper understanding of faith principles and fostering a sense of belonging and support, the program has laid the groundwork for the congregation to navigate challenges and maintain a strong connection to their faith. Future initiatives that incorporate ongoing support and evaluation methods can build upon this foundation and ensure a lasting impact on the faith lives of the congregation.

This concludes the Results and Discussion section, providing a well-rounded analysis of the program's potential impact while acknowledging limitations and offering recommendations for future initiatives.

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