

Empowering Congregation Members Through The Internalization of Agape Love Values to Enhance Social and Spiritual Harmony at GBI Avia Cemara Church, Medan

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ABSTRACT

This Community Service Program aimed to empower congregation members of Gereja Bethel Indonesia (GBI) Avia Cemara Church, Medan, through the internalization of agape love values to strengthen social harmony and spiritual growth. The program was implemented through a one-day participatory training consisting of biblical instruction, reflective discussion, an interactive social harmony workshop, and community empowerment activities. Evaluation was conducted using pre-tests, post-tests, observations, written reflections, and written interviews. The results showed improvements of 28% to 34% across several indicators, including understanding of biblical agape love, conflict-resolution awareness, communication and empathy skills, commitment to Christian fellowship, social harmony awareness, and spiritual growth awareness. Qualitative findings also indicated increased awareness of forgiveness, stronger willingness to resolve conflicts peacefully, deeper appreciation of Christian fellowship, and renewed commitment to serving others. Therefore, the internalization of agape love values can be considered an effective approach to strengthening congregational empowerment, promoting social harmony, and fostering spiritual growth within church communities.

Keywords: Agape Love, Congregational Empowerment, Social Harmony, Spiritual Growth, Christian Education

ABSTRAK

Program Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat ini bertujuan untuk memberdayakan jemaat Gereja Bethel Indonesia (GBI) Avia Cemara Medan melalui internalisasi nilai-nilai kasih agape guna memperkuat harmoni sosial dan pertumbuhan spiritual. Kegiatan dilaksanakan dalam bentuk pelatihan partisipatif satu hari yang meliputi pengajaran Alkitabiah, diskusi reflektif, lokakarya harmoni sosial interaktif, serta kegiatan pemberdayaan dan komitmen jemaat. Evaluasi dilakukan melalui pre-test, post-test, observasi, refleksi tertulis, dan wawancara tertulis. Hasil kegiatan menunjukkan adanya peningkatan sebesar 28% hingga 34% pada beberapa indikator, antara lain pemahaman tentang kasih agape secara Alkitabiah, kesadaran penyelesaian konflik, keterampilan komunikasi dan empati, komitmen terhadap persekutuan Kristen,

kesadaran harmoni sosial, serta kesadaran pertumbuhan spiritual. Temuan kualitatif juga menunjukkan meningkatnya kesadaran akan pentingnya pengampunan, kemauan untuk menyelesaikan konflik secara damai, penghargaan terhadap persekutuan Kristen, serta komitmen baru untuk melayani sesama. Dengan demikian, internalisasi nilai-nilai kasih agape dapat menjadi pendekatan yang efektif dalam memperkuat pemberdayaan jemaat, mendorong harmoni sosial, dan menumbuhkan kehidupan spiritual dalam komunitas gereja.

Kata Kunci: Kasih Agape, Pemberdayaan Jemaat, Harmoni Sosial, Pertumbuhan Spiritual, Pendidikan Kristen

INTRODUCTION

Love is the central message of Christianity and serves as the foundation of Christian life, fellowship, and ministry. In biblical teaching, love is not merely understood as an emotional expression, but as a divine command that must be embodied in concrete attitudes and actions. Jesus Christ emphasized that the greatest commandments are to love God and to love one's neighbor as oneself (Matthew 22:37–39). He also taught His disciples to love one another as He had loved them, making love the distinguishing mark of Christian discipleship (John 13:34–35). Therefore, the cultivation of love remains an essential responsibility of the church in strengthening the spiritual and social life of its members.

Among the various forms of love, agape occupies a central position in Christian theology. Agape refers to unconditional, self-giving, sacrificial, and compassionate love that reflects the character of God. Nygren (1953) explains that agape is God's love toward humanity, a love that is not based on merit, reciprocity, or personal benefit. Similarly, Lewis (1960) describes this love as a divine form of love that goes beyond natural affection and human limitation. In this sense, agape love becomes the foundation for forgiveness, humility, service, patience, and reconciliation within Christian communities.

In contemporary church life, the internalization of agape love is increasingly important. Churches are not only places of worship, but also communities where members learn to live together, serve one another, resolve conflicts, and grow spiritually. However, social changes, individualism, communication problems, and limited relational

engagement may weaken harmony among congregation members. Misunderstandings, interpersonal tension, and low participation in fellowship activities can affect the unity and spiritual maturity of the church community.

Preliminary observations at Gereja Bethel Indonesia (GBI) Avia Cemara Church, Medan, showed that congregation members actively participated in worship services and ministry activities. Nevertheless, informal discussions with church leaders and members indicated that some participants still needed deeper understanding and practical application of biblical love values in daily life. Several relational challenges were identified, including difficulties in maintaining harmonious relationships, responding to conflict constructively, strengthening fellowship beyond formal worship, and practicing forgiveness and empathy in family, church, and community contexts.

This condition shows that theological knowledge alone is not sufficient if it is not followed by value internalization and practical application. Groome (1998) emphasizes that Christian education should not only transmit religious knowledge, but also transform attitudes, behavior, and relationships. Berkowitz (2012) also explains that character formation requires structured educational experiences that integrate knowledge, reflection, practice, and community support. In line with this view, Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory highlights that behavior is shaped through observation, interaction, modeling, and repeated practice within a social environment.

Previous studies also support the importance of value-based Christian formation. Saragih et al. (2024) found that Christian education contributes to spiritual maturity, moral development, and character formation. In addition, Saragih, Karo-Karo, Wiharjokusumo, and Girsang (2025) demonstrated that participatory learning models involving biblical teaching, reflection, simulation, and practical application can improve ministry effectiveness and character development in church settings. Wiharjokusumo (2021) further argues that spiritual intelligence and emotional intelligence grounded in Christian values contribute to resilience, empathy, self-control, and relational harmony.

Based on these considerations, this Community Service Program was designed to empower congregation members through the internalization of agape love values. The program integrated biblical instruction, reflective discussion, interactive social harmony

workshops, and community empowerment activities. Through this approach, participants were expected to gain a deeper understanding of agape love, develop relational skills, strengthen Christian fellowship, and apply Christ-centered love in their families, church ministries, and wider community life.

OBJECTIVE

This Community Service Program aims to empower congregation members of Gereja Bethel Indonesia (GBI) Avia Cemara Church, Medan, through the internalization of agape love values. Specifically, the program seeks to strengthen participants' understanding of biblical love, develop their awareness of forgiveness, empathy, communication, and conflict resolution, and encourage the practical application of agape love in family life, church ministry, and community relationships. Through this program, congregation members are expected to grow spiritually, build stronger fellowship, and contribute to a more harmonious church community.

METHOD OF IMPLEMENTATION

This Community Service Program was conducted at Gereja Bethel Indonesia (GBI) Avia Cemara Church, Medan, through a one-day participatory training and empowerment activity. The program involved congregation members from different age groups, educational backgrounds, professions, and ministry divisions. The implementation method combined theological instruction, reflective learning, interactive practice, social harmony training, and community empowerment in order to help participants understand, internalize, and apply agape love values in daily life.

The activity was organized into five main sessions. The first session, facilitated by Novita Romauli Saragih, SH., S.Th., M.Th., M.Pd., focused on the biblical foundation of agape love by discussing relevant Scripture passages and their application in Christian life. The second session, facilitated by Dr. Selamat Karo-Karo, S.Th., M.Th., M.Pd., used reflective discussion to help participants identify relational challenges and evaluate their attitudes toward forgiveness, empathy, humility, and reconciliation. The third session, facilitated by Prof. Dr. Elisabet Sitepu, emphasized Christian character formation and the internalization of love values in personal, family, and congregational life. The fourth session, facilitated by Dr. Padriadi Wiharjokusumo, SS., SH., MH., was an

interactive social harmony workshop involving role-playing, case studies, communication exercises, group problem-solving, and conflict-resolution simulations. The fifth session, facilitated by Dr. Dameria Girsang, S.Sos., MM., M.Si., emphasized community empowerment and commitment building by encouraging participants to formulate practical action plans for applying agape love in family life, church ministry, workplace relationships, and community engagement.

Program evaluation was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Pre-tests and post-tests were used to measure participants' understanding before and after the training. Observations were carried out to assess participation, interaction, and engagement during the activities.

In addition, written reflections and written interviews were used to identify participants' personal insights, perceived benefits, spiritual growth, and future commitments. These evaluation instruments were intended to measure the effectiveness of the program in strengthening participants' understanding, attitudes, relational skills, and commitment to practicing agape love.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of this Community Service Program showed positive results in strengthening the understanding and practical internalization of agape love values among congregation members of Gereja Bethel Indonesia (GBI) Avia Cemara Church, Medan. The program, which was delivered through five integrated sessions, contributed to participants' theological understanding, relational awareness, social skills, and spiritual commitment. The combination of biblical instruction, reflective discussion, character formation, interactive workshop activities, and community empowerment created a holistic learning experience that supported both social harmony and spiritual growth.



Figure 1. Novita Romauli Saragih presents the biblical foundation of agape love to congregation members as part of the Community Service Program at GBI Avia Cemara Church, Medan.

In the first session, facilitated by Novita Romauli Saragih, participants gained a deeper understanding of the biblical foundation of agape love. Through the study of selected Scripture passages, participants recognized that agape love is not merely an emotion, but a Christ-centered commitment expressed through humility, forgiveness, patience, and service. This session provided the theological framework for the entire program.

In the second session, facilitated by Dr. Selamat Karo-Karo, participants were encouraged to reflect on their personal relationships in family, church, and community life. The reflective discussion revealed that many participants faced challenges related to communication, misunderstanding, forgiveness, and relational tension. Through guided reflection, participants became more aware of the importance of empathy, reconciliation, and Christian fellowship.



Figure 2. Dr. Selamat Karo-Karo facilitates the reflective discussion session, guiding congregation members to examine relational challenges and internalize agape love values in family, church, and community life.

In the third session, facilitated by Prof. Dr. Elisabet Sitepu, participants were guided to understand the importance of Christian character formation through the internalization of love values. This session emphasized that agape love must be embodied in everyday attitudes and behavior, especially in family life, congregational relationships, and personal spiritual growth. Participants showed strong engagement and appreciation for the relevance of Christian values in shaping character and harmonious interaction.

In the fourth session, facilitated by Dr. Padriadi Wiharjokusumo, participants joined an interactive social harmony workshop.



Figure 3. Dr. Padriadi Wiharjokusumo presents the interactive social harmony workshop, emphasizing communication skills, conflict resolution, teamwork, and the practical application of agape love in congregational life.

Through role-playing, case studies, communication exercises, and conflict-resolution simulations, participants were trained to apply agape love in practical situations. This session showed that many relational conflicts could be addressed more effectively through empathy, active listening, teamwork, and constructive dialogue. The workshop strengthened participants' confidence in applying Christian values within interpersonal relationships.

In the fifth session, facilitated by Dr. Dameria Girsang, participants developed practical action plans and personal commitments to implement agape love in family life, ministry, work, and community engagement. This session helped transform learning outcomes into concrete commitments, encouraging participants to become agents of peace, service, and spiritual encouragement in their respective environments.

Quantitative findings from the pre-test and post-test showed significant improvements across all indicators. Participants demonstrated stronger understanding of biblical agape love, better awareness of conflict resolution, improved communication and empathy skills, stronger commitment to Christian fellowship, higher awareness of social harmony, and deeper spiritual growth awareness.

Table 1. Pre-Test and Post-Test Results

Evaluation Indicator	Pre-Test (%)	Post-Test (%)	Improvement (%)
Understanding of Biblical Agape Love	58	92	34
Conflict Resolution Awareness	61	90	29
Communication and Empathy Skills	63	91	28
Commitment to Christian Fellowship	66	94	28
Social Harmony Awareness	60	93	33
Spiritual Growth Awareness	62	95	33

The data show that the highest improvement occurred in understanding of biblical agape love (34%), followed by social harmony awareness and spiritual growth

awareness (33%). These results indicate that the program was effective not only in improving knowledge, but also in strengthening participants' awareness of relational and spiritual dimensions of Christian life.

Qualitative findings from observations, written reflections, and written interviews also confirmed the positive impact of the program. Participants reported increased awareness of forgiveness, stronger willingness to resolve conflicts peacefully, deeper appreciation of Christian fellowship, renewed commitment to serving others, better understanding of Christ-centered relationships, and stronger spiritual motivation. These findings suggest that the program contributed to both personal transformation and community development.

Overall, the findings of this program support the view that Christian education becomes more effective when it integrates biblical teaching, reflective learning, experiential activities, and practical commitment. The results are consistent with the perspectives of Groome (1998), Berkowitz (2012), and Bandura (1977), as well as previous findings by Saragih et al. (2024) and Wiharjokusumo (2021), which emphasize the importance of value internalization, character formation, and participatory learning in strengthening spiritual maturity and social harmony. Therefore, this Community Service Program can be considered an effective model for empowering congregation members through the internalization of agape love values.

Pre-test and post-test results

Comparison of participants' scores across six evaluation indicators in the Community Service Program.



Figure 4. Pre-Test and Post-Test Comparison Across Evaluation Indicators

Figure 4 presents the comparison between pre-test and post-test results across six evaluation indicators. The bar chart shows that all indicators experienced clear improvement after the implementation of the Community Service Program. The understanding of biblical agape love increased from 58% to 92%, indicating that participants gained a stronger theological understanding of agape love after the training. Social harmony awareness also increased from 60% to 93%, while spiritual growth awareness improved from 62% to 95%. These findings show that the program contributed not only to cognitive understanding, but also to participants' awareness of relational and spiritual values.

The improvement in conflict resolution awareness, communication and empathy skills, and commitment to Christian fellowship further indicates that the program helped participants connect biblical values with practical relational behavior. Therefore, the quantitative results demonstrate that the internalization of agape love values can strengthen participants' understanding, attitudes, and readiness to apply Christian love in family, church, and community life.

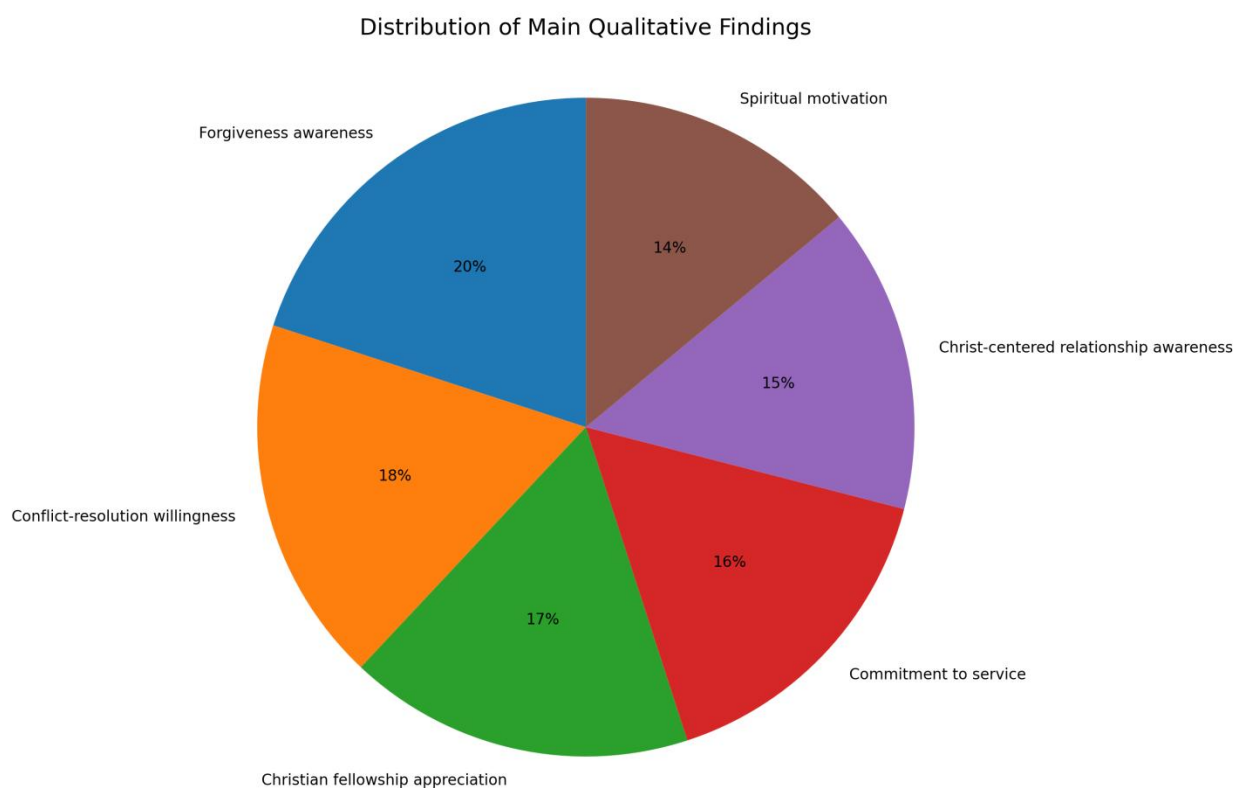


Figure 5. Distribution of Main Qualitative Findings

Figure 5 illustrates the distribution of the main qualitative findings obtained from observations, written reflections, and written interviews. The findings were grouped into six major themes: awareness of forgiveness, willingness to resolve conflicts peacefully, appreciation of Christian fellowship, commitment to serving others, understanding of Christ-centered relationships, and spiritual motivation. These themes reflect the participants' personal and spiritual responses after joining the program.

The qualitative findings show that the program had a transformative impact on participants' relational and spiritual awareness. Many participants expressed that they became more aware of the importance of forgiveness, empathy, humility, and reconciliation in daily life. In addition, participants demonstrated stronger commitment to maintaining fellowship, serving others, and practicing agape love beyond formal worship activities. These findings confirm that the program did not only improve participants' knowledge, but also encouraged personal reflection, behavioral intention, and spiritual renewal.

CONCLUSION

This Community Service Program successfully empowered congregation members of Gereja Bethel Indonesia (GBI) Avia Cemara Church, Medan, through the internalization of agape love values. The program was implemented through five integrated sessions consisting of biblical instruction, reflective discussion, Christian character formation, interactive social harmony workshop, and community empowerment activities. The results showed that participants experienced improvement in their understanding of biblical agape love, conflict-resolution awareness, communication and empathy skills, commitment to Christian fellowship, social harmony awareness, and spiritual growth awareness.

The quantitative findings indicated improvements ranging from 28% to 34% across the evaluation indicators. Meanwhile, qualitative findings showed increased awareness of forgiveness, stronger willingness to resolve conflicts peacefully, deeper appreciation of Christian fellowship, renewed commitment to serving others, and stronger spiritual motivation. These results demonstrate that the internalization of agape love values can

serve as an effective approach to strengthening congregational empowerment, promoting social harmony, and fostering spiritual growth within church communities.

Therefore, similar community service programs may be developed in other church contexts as a practical model for integrating Christian education, character formation, relational skills, and community empowerment. Future programs are recommended to include follow-up mentoring activities so that the values of agape love can be practiced continuously in family life, church ministry, and broader community engagement.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the results of this Community Service Program, it is recommended that church leaders continue to strengthen the internalization of agape love values through regular fellowship, mentoring, Bible study, pastoral guidance, and practical service activities. The values of forgiveness, empathy, humility, communication, conflict resolution, and commitment to Christian fellowship should be continuously integrated into church programs so that congregation members can apply them consistently in family life, church ministry, workplace relationships, and community engagement.



Figure 6. The facilitators of the Community Service Program, Dr. Padriadi Wiharjokusumo, Prof. Dr. Elisabet Sitepu, and Novita Romauli Saragih, SH.,S.Th.,M.Th.,M.Pd during the implementation of the agape love internalization program at GBI Avia Cemara Church, Medan.

The church is also encouraged to develop follow-up activities after the training, such as small-group discussions, family fellowship programs, visitation ministries, youth mentoring, and community outreach. These activities can help ensure that agape love

is not only understood as a biblical concept, but also practiced as a concrete attitude in daily relationships. Continuous mentoring is important to strengthen participants' spiritual growth and to maintain the positive changes achieved through the program.

Future Community Service Programs may develop this model in other church contexts by involving more participants, longer implementation periods, and more systematic follow-up evaluation. In addition, future programs are encouraged to combine biblical teaching, reflective discussion, experiential learning, and practical action plans, so that Christian education can contribute more effectively to social harmony, character formation, spiritual maturity, and community empowerment.

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