



Theology of Work and the Church's Social Mission: A Transformative Diaconal Approach to Addressing the Challenges of Street Children

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of street children remains a persistent social challenge in many developing regions, including Sentani, where poverty, family disintegration, educational inequality, and limited social protection contribute to children's vulnerability and marginalization. In this context, the church is increasingly challenged to move beyond traditional charity-based ministry toward a more transformative social engagement. This study aims to examine how the theology of work can serve as a theological foundation for the church's social mission in developing a transformative diaconal approach toward street children in Sentani, Papua. This research employs a qualitative case study design using a contextual theological approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving church leaders, social workers, parents, and vulnerable children within local faith communities. Data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis to identify recurring patterns and contextual meanings. The findings reveal that church social ministries in Sentani largely remain charity-oriented and have not fully integrated work theology as a framework for empowerment. However, local churches possess significant potential to become transformative agents through vocational mentoring, community-based skill development, and family empowerment initiatives. The novelty of this study lies in proposing an integrative model that connects theology of work, transformative diakonia, and indigenous community values as a contextual strategy for addressing street children in Papua.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of street children continues to be a complex social issue in Indonesia. Children living on the streets generally experience structural poverty, which limits their access to education, healthcare, and social protection. Research by Yuri Maulydina and Lina Miftahul Jannah shows that family poverty and weak public policy interventions contribute to the increasing number of street children (Maulydina and Jannah 2023). Research by Sofawiah Azizah et al. also confirms that family conflict, divorce, and parental neglect increase children's social vulnerability (Azizah, Nastia, and Achdiani n.d.).

From a health perspective, research by Muhafilah found a high risk of sexually transmitted infections due to low health literacy (Muhafilah, Husniawati, and Indriyati 2025). Psychosocially, research by Debasish Bhattacharyya and Sarmistha Chakraborty in *Frontiers in Public Health* emphasizes the importance of family- and community-based interventions in building children's resilience (Bhattacharyya and Chakraborty 2024). This finding is reinforced by the research of Nur Hasanah and Fitria Karimah regarding the effectiveness of community-based social workers (Hasanah and Karimah 2024).

At the policy level, research by Pera Wati highlights the importance of collaboration among social actors (Wati and Febrian 2025). Research by Putri Nurbaiti Utama and Eddy Supriyadinata Gorda shows that strategies for handling street children by social service agencies still face implementation barriers (Utama and Gorda 2024). These findings are strengthened by the research of Rina Puspita Wardani, Nina Winarti, and Andika Putra regarding institutional challenges in child development programs (Wardani, Winarti, and Putra 2025). In addition, research by Janice Adriana Wijaya and Nina Carina emphasizes the importance of community spaces as a means of social rehabilitation (Wijaya and Carina 2024).

In the context of Sentani, the presence of street children reflects a serious social problem. Most of these children live under family economic pressure, weak parental care, limited access to education, and social environments that expose them to deviant behaviors such as smoking, alcohol consumption, inhalant abuse (aibon), and school dropout. Research conducted in Jayapura shows that this issue is closely related to weak social protection and the suboptimal implementation of development programs for street children, as well as low psychological well-being and limited social support received by street children (Azizah, Nastia, and Achdiani n.d.).

On the other hand, the implementation of child protection policies in Jayapura continues to face various structural barriers (Syam 2024), highlighting the need for social services that emphasize rehabilitation and the strengthening of life skills (Warfandu 2024). In this context, the church in Papua holds a strategic role through transformative diaconal ministry based on the theology of work in order to restore, nurture, and empower street children in a sustainable manner.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Street Children as a Social and Theological Reality

Street children are an urban social phenomenon that reflects the complexity of structural inequality in modern society. From a sociological perspective, the existence of street children cannot be separated from factors such as poverty, family dysfunction, urbanization, and limited access to education and social protection. In many global contexts, street children constitute one of the most vulnerable groups, exposed to exploitation, violence, and social exclusion within increasingly non-inclusive urban spaces.

Recent studies indicate that children living and working on the streets experience high levels of instability, both economically and psychosocially. They frequently face risks of violence, limited access to basic services, and social stigma that further marginalizes their position within societal structures. Nevertheless, research also emphasizes that street children are not merely passive victims, but social actors who demonstrate adaptive capacities by developing survival strategies through informal social networks and solidarity among peers (M. Goodman et al. 2024).

Within urban sociology, street children, often referred to as street-connected children, are understood as having dynamic relationships with the street, family, and social institutions. This connectivity is multidimensional and shapes fluid identities under the pressures of the urban environment (Weatherill, Corcoran, and Ng 2024). Their mobility between home, street, and institutional spaces reflects ongoing negotiations of space and identity within a complex urban context (Blerk 2005).

From a theological perspective, street children are not only a social reality but also a spiritual and ethical concern. In Christian anthropology, every human being, including street children, is created in the *Imago Dei* (image of God), affirming their inherent dignity and intrinsic worth before God. Therefore, the existence of street children is not merely a social issue but also a matter of faith that calls for a response from the Church.

Furthermore, the theology of *Missio Dei* positions the Church as a participant in God's work of justice, restoration, and reconciliation in a broken world. Within this framework, the Church is called not only to engage in charitable acts but also to pursue social transformation that addresses the structural roots of poverty and injustice that produce the phenomenon of street children.

Recent policy studies also emphasize the importance of integrated intervention approaches, including social protection, psychosocial rehabilitation, education, and family and community reintegration (Sulaiman et al. 2025). From a practical theological perspective, this approach aligns with the principle of transformative diakonia, which emphasizes holistic and justice-oriented church ministry.

Thus, street children represent a dual reality: socially, they are products of structural inequality, while theologically, they are subjects of God's love who challenge the Church to embody solidarity, justice, and restoration in an unjust world.

The Role of the Church as an Agent of Transformation for Street Children

The role of the church as an agent of transformation for street children represents a concrete manifestation of the church's missional calling amid complex social realities. The phenomenon of street children is not merely related to economic poverty, but is also closely connected to family disintegration, domestic violence, educational discontinuity, social exploitation, and weak child protection systems.

In such circumstances, the church is called to provide ministry that is not merely charitable but also transformative, holistic, and sustainable. Theologically, ministry to marginalized children is rooted in the ministry of Jesus Christ, who consistently demonstrated concern for vulnerable and marginalized groups. This perspective affirms that children are not merely objects of compassion but individuals who possess dignity as bearers of the image of God (*Imago Dei*).

Recent studies in missiology indicate that children's ministry within the church requires deep theological reflection so that ministry does not stop at social activities alone, but leads to genuine life transformation. David Chronic argues that children's ministry in Christian mission must focus on identity restoration, spiritual formation, and community empowerment (Chronic 2025). This perspective highlights the church's responsibility to create safe and nurturing spaces for children living in social vulnerability.

In the social practice of the church, the Diaconal Studies approach serves as an important foundation for ministry among street children. Research by Godwin Ampony demonstrates that contemporary church diakonia has shifted from compassion-based service toward ministry oriented around social justice, empowerment, and community development (Ampony 2024). This finding emphasizes that the church cannot be limited to providing food, clothing, or temporary assistance, but must also build children's life capacities through education, mentoring, and strengthening social relationships.

Furthermore, the research of Johannes Eurich and Ignatius Swart shows that modern diaconal ministry must be capable of addressing social exclusion through contextual community-based approaches (Eurich and Swart 2025). In the context of Papua, particularly Sentani, this approach can be implemented through the integration of local cultural values, communal solidarity, and Christian spirituality in church ministry. The church can become a center of transformation through children's literacy programs, life-skills training, pastoral counseling, character formation, and family economic empowerment.

Highly relevant empirical findings are also presented by Michael L. Goodman and colleagues (2023) through their research on street-connected children in Kenya. Their study shows that the Flourishing Community model significantly enhances the structural resilience of children living on the streets through community support, family reintegration, education, and social mentoring (M. L. Goodman et al., 2023). These findings suggest that the successful transformation of street children is not determined solely by individual intervention but also by the active involvement of a supportive community system.

This model holds strong relevance for church ministry in Papua, where community and social bonds play a central role in shaping children's social identity.

In addition, research by Greeson and colleagues on family-strengthening programs for street children in Kenya demonstrates that reintegration through family empowerment approaches produces significant improvements in children's psychosocial well-being (Greeson et al. 2024). These findings strengthen the argument that the church should not only minister directly to children but also empower families as the primary environment for child development. In the context of church ministry, this can be realized through family counseling, parenting education, household economic empowerment, and the development of congregation-based support communities.

Therefore, the church as an agent of transformation has a strategic role in bringing holistic restoration to street children. The church is called not only to meet spiritual needs but also to build social resilience, restore family relationships, expand access to education, and empower children's lives holistically. Through the integration of theology, transformative diakonia, and community engagement, the church can become a tangible instrument of God's love for children living in social vulnerability.

The Church's Approach to Addressing the Issue of Street Children

1. Theological Approach

The theological approach to street children cannot be reduced merely to the church's social response to issues of poverty and marginalization. Rather, it must be understood as the church's concrete participation in the work of God in the world (*missio Dei*). Within contemporary theological perspectives, the church's engagement is inherently multidimensional, encompassing several integrated theological foundations, namely creation theology (*Imago Dei*), incarnation, the Kingdom of God, liberation, and diakonia. These five approaches do not stand independently but form a unified paradigm affirming that ministry to street children is both an expression of living faith and a response to God's call to bring restoration to all creation.

The first foundation is creation theology centered on the doctrine of *Imago Dei*, the belief that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27). From this perspective, every human being possesses an inherent dignity that cannot be erased by any social condition, including street children who live in vulnerable situations, poverty, and often face social stigma. They continue to bear the image of God, which is ontologically inherent within them. Therefore, the church is called to reject all forms of dehumanization and to treat them as persons endowed with divine worth and the right to restoration.

This understanding is affirmed that *Imago Dei* provides a crucial foundation for fostering communal awareness of human dignity among vulnerable populations, including victims of social injustice such as human trafficking and child exploitation. In a similar vein, John Stephanus Klaasen in *Religions* emphasizes that the concept of *Imago Dei* also serves as an ethical

foundation for affirming the agency of marginalized groups within unequal social relations (Klaasen 2023). Thus, the church's ministry to street children is not merely an act of compassion, but a theological affirmation of their divine dignity.

Furthermore, the theology of the incarnation provides a more dynamic basis for the church's engagement. The incarnation affirms that God is not only transcendent but also truly present in human history through Jesus Christ. God "became human" and lived among human suffering as the most radical expression of divine solidarity.

In the context of street children, the incarnation calls the church to make its presence tangible in marginalized spaces, not only through institutional programs but through relational and empathetic presence. This aligns with David Chronic's analysis in the *Journal of Missiology*, which emphasizes that ministry to children within Christian development contexts must be holistic, focusing not only on evangelism but also on meaningful social engagement in their lived realities (Chronic 2025). The incarnation thus becomes a model of ministry that is not distant, but present, dwelling, and sharing life with those who suffer.

The next dimension is the theology of the Kingdom of God, which provides both an eschatological and practical orientation for the church's mission. The Kingdom of God is not merely a future reality but is already present in the world through the work of Christ. In this sense, ministry to street children becomes a concrete sign of God's justice, peace, and restoration breaking into a broken world.

The concept of *missio Dei* is rooted in the dynamics of the Kingdom of God, which restores all creation and brings humanity back into a divinely ordered state of peace. Therefore, the church is called not only to teach the values of the Kingdom of God but also to embody them in tangible actions that transform the social structures that produce street children.

This approach is further strengthened by liberation theology, which emphasizes God's preferential concern for the oppressed, the poor, and the marginalized (Sung 2023). From this perspective, street children are not only victims of circumstance but also victims of unjust social structures. Therefore, the church must not remain neutral; instead, it must act as a prophetic agent that courageously critiques injustice and advocates for social transformation. That mission in contexts of vulnerability must be understood as the church's active participation in transforming the structures that produce marginalization, not merely responding to its consequences. Liberation theology thus calls the church to become a voice for the voiceless and an agent of real social change (Rieger and Silva 2023).

Finally, all these approaches are embodied in *diakonia* as the concrete expression of Christian faith. *Diakonia* is no longer understood narrowly as charitable assistance but as holistic ministry encompassing empowerment, education, advocacy, and social transformation. Veronica J. Mwakasungura in *Currents in Theology and Mission* affirms that *diakonia* has developed into a

transformative missional paradigm that places service to vulnerable groups at the core of the church's identity (Mwakasungura 2025).

In the context of street children, church diakonia includes various forms of ministry such as shelters, alternative education, psychosocial support, and basic healthcare services aimed at fostering long-term recovery and self-reliance. That prophetic diakonia directs the church outward ("church turned inside out"), so that the church becomes a true sign of God's love in the world.

Thus, these five theological approaches to creation (*Imago Dei*), incarnation, the Kingdom of God, liberation, and diakonia form a unified and complementary theological framework. *Imago Dei* affirms human dignity, incarnation affirms God's solidaristic presence, the Kingdom of God provides a vision of social transformation, liberation affirms solidarity with the oppressed, and diakonia embodies the church's concrete action in the world. Collectively, these approaches affirm that the church's engagement with the issue of street children is not merely a social activity but a real participation in God's restorative work in creation. Within the framework of *missio Dei*, street children are not merely objects of ministry but also theological spaces where God is at work and where the church is called to participate actively.

2. Ecclesiological Approach

In a contemporary ecclesiological perspective, the Church is no longer understood merely as a religious institution focused on internal worship and liturgical life, but as a missionary community sent into the world to bring about social transformation.

This understanding is grounded in the concept of *Missio Dei*, which affirms that God is fundamentally a missionary God, and the Church is called to participate in God's work of liberating, restoring, and transforming human life. Accordingly, the Church's presence in the world is inherently outward-oriented, serving as both a sign and instrument of the Kingdom of God, including in responding to pressing social issues such as street children.

Street children represent a concrete manifestation of structural social inequality, poverty, family dysfunction, rapid urbanization, and limited access to education and social protection systems. Within a transformative ecclesiological framework, these children must not be viewed merely as objects of charity but as subjects endowed with full dignity as the *imago Dei*. This perspective requires a paradigm shift from a purely charitable approach to a transformative approach oriented toward empowerment, restoration, and social justice.

The understanding of the Church as an agent of transformation emphasizes that ministry to street children must be holistic, encompassing spiritual, psychological, social, and economic dimensions. Theologically, the Church is called to embody God's love in concrete actions such as non-formal education, psychosocial accompaniment, child protection, and advocacy for public policies that favor vulnerable groups. Recent empirical studies indicate that church engagement in empowerment programs for vulnerable

communities contributes to strengthening social resilience and reducing the marginalization of children in urban contexts (Mawikere et al. 2024).

In this regard, Stephen Bevens argues that contemporary ecclesiology situates the Church as an agent of transformation in the global public sphere, one that is not limited to spiritual concerns but actively engages in social injustices. Therefore, the Church is called to exercise a prophetic role by critically addressing unjust social structures that contribute to the emergence of street children.

Furthermore, as an agent of transformation, the Church has a prophetic role in critically addressing unjust social structures that give rise to the phenomenon of street children. Street children are not merely understood as an individual problem, but as the outcome of social inequality and the failure of protection systems. In this context, the Church is called not only to adopt a charitable stance, but also a prophetic one in confronting structures of injustice. This is affirmed by Bevens, who states that contemporary ecclesiology situates the Church as an agent of transformation within the global public sphere (Mazzolini 2022).

On top of that, the Church functions as a space of social inclusion where street children can experience acceptance without stigma. Within such a space, the Church becomes a healing community that restores the identity and dignity of marginalized persons. That human vulnerability must be addressed through relational, empathetic, and long-term pastoral care. In line with this, rehabilitative approaches to street children require not only structural interventions but also relational and social dimensions that enable holistic recovery (Julien 2024). In this sense, the Church can function as a safe space that facilitates psychosocial and spiritual restoration.

Moreover, social analyses of street children demonstrate that this phenomenon is inseparable from structural factors such as poverty, urbanization, and weak social protection systems. That street children live within complex socio-economic instability that requires multidimensional interventions encompassing psychosocial, economic, and policy-related dimensions. Consequently, the Church, as part of civil society, bears an ethical and theological responsibility to engage in comprehensive and sustained social responses (Gahungu, Simbananiye, and Glowacz 2024).

Thus, an ecclesiological approach positions the Church as an agent of transformation that operates not only in the spiritual realm but also as an active social actor addressing the issue of street children. This transformation is holistic in nature, encompassing individual restoration, strengthening of social relationships, and contributions toward more just and inclusive social structures. In this framework, the Church is not only a religious institution but also a prophetic community that embodies visible signs of the Kingdom of God within fragile social realities.

3. Missiological Approach

The missiological approach to reaching street children is rooted in the understanding of *Missio Dei*, namely that God is a missionary God who has

been actively at work in the world before the involvement of the Church. From this perspective, the Church is not understood as the center of mission, but rather as a participant in God's work of bringing restoration, justice, and love into marginalized public spaces.

Street children, often referred to as street-connected children, are not merely seen as a social problem, but as individuals living within the complex realities of poverty, violence, family dysfunction, and limited social protection systems.

Within the framework of *Missio Dei*, the missiological approach requires the Church to move from a merely charitable ministry toward an incarnational and contextual ministry. The incarnational approach emphasizes a tangible presence among street children's lived realities, not merely providing assistance from a distance, but engaging relationally, listening attentively, and building trust.

Weatherill, Corcoran, and Ng affirm that understanding street children in contemporary contexts must take into account the dynamics of social space and public representation, which often shape stigma and influence the ways interventions are carried out (Weatherill, Corcoran, and Ng 2024).

Furthermore, the missiological approach to street children must be holistic, encompassing spiritual, social, psychological, and economic dimensions. Spiritually, street children are restored as the image of God (*imago Dei*) who possess inherent dignity. Socially and psychologically, they require trauma healing, emotional support, and reintegration into families and communities. Economically, they need empowerment through alternative education and life-skills training. Waheed emphasizes that risk factors such as poverty, unstable social environments, and limited access to protection significantly contribute to the vulnerability of street children; therefore, interventions must be multidimensional and integrated (Waheed et al. 2025).

In addition, contextual missiology positions the Church as a prophetic agent of social transformation, not only responding to social consequences but also critically engaging the structural roots that produce street children. In this regard, the Church is called to speak out against social inequality, uncontrolled urbanization, and weak child protection systems. Tafà, Cerniglia, and Cimino demonstrate that psychosocial factors within families and environments significantly influence patterns of aggressive behavior and child vulnerability, which are indirectly related to broader social conditions (Tafà, Cerniglia, and Cimino 2025).

Moreover, the missiological approach also requires the Church to build inclusive and restorative communities that welcome street children without stigma. The study by Burgos-Benavides highlights that exposure to violence within families and environments has a significant impact on children's social relationships, including relationships with parents and authority figures (Burgos-Benavides et al. 2025). Therefore, the Church as a community of faith is called to become a safe space that fosters relational healing, acceptance, and social reconciliation.

Thus, the missiological approach to reaching street children does not end with acts of charity, but represents a comprehensive participation in God's work that is incarnational, holistic, and prophetic. The Church is called to be present within the realities of street life, to work across sectors, and to engage in the transformation of social structures in order to bring about a more just and dignified life for street children.

4. Church Approaches to Empowering Street Children By Work Theology

The theology of work in the context of addressing street children represents an approach that integrates theological reflection with the praxis of social transformation. Within the perspective of *Missio Dei*, work is understood not merely as an economic activity but as a means of participating in God's work of restoration, liberation, and holistic human empowerment. Street children, who live in vulnerable conditions due to poverty, violence, and limited access to education, cannot be adequately addressed through a purely charitable approach alone.

Instead, they require a comprehensive process of healing and empowerment. Therefore, the theology of work emerges as a framework that integrates spiritual, social, psychological, and economic dimensions in efforts to rebuild their dignity and future.

a. Soft Skills

The development of soft skills such as communication, empathy, and cooperation is a crucial foundation in helping street children adapt socially. These skills enable them to build healthy relationships, improve positive social interaction, and reduce tendencies toward risky behaviors that often arise from unstable environments. In this way, soft skills serve as a key instrument in the process of social reintegration and the restoration of interpersonal relationships among street children.

Empirically, various studies have shown that interventions focused on strengthening social skills significantly enhance resilience in vulnerable children. This means that the stronger a child's soft skills are, the greater their capacity to survive, adapt, and recover from difficult life circumstances. Soft skills development, therefore, plays a strategic role in supporting long-term psychosocial stability and social functioning.

From a theological perspective, soft skills reflect humanity's calling to live in love, relational harmony, and mutual respect as beings created in the image of God (*Imago Dei*). The ability to empathize and communicate healthily aligns with the values of the Kingdom of God, which emphasizes love, peace, and social justice. Therefore, the development of soft skills is not merely a psychosocial process, but also part of the formation of the new humanity restored in right relationship with God and with others.

b. Hard Skills

Hard skills refer to technical and vocational competencies that provide an essential foundation for the economic independence of street children. Through skills-based education, they acquire practical abilities that can be

directly applied in the workplace, thereby creating opportunities for more decent and stable employment. This approach also helps reduce dependence on informal work that is often exploitative, unsafe, and lacking adequate social protection.

From an empirical standpoint, vocational hard skills training increases employability, enhances income-generating capacity, and supports long-term socioeconomic stability for vulnerable youth. By equipping street children with market-relevant competencies, such programs contribute significantly to breaking cycles of poverty and marginalization.

From a theological perspective, the development of hard skills can be understood as part of humanity's calling to work and steward God's creation responsibly (cf. Genesis 2:15). Work is not merely a means of economic survival, but also a form of participation in God's sustaining work in the world. In this view, empowering street children through vocational skills becomes a concrete expression of social justice and the restoration of human dignity as the image of God (*Imago Dei*), who is called to live productively, meaningfully, and in service to the common good.

c. Life Skills

Life skills include basic abilities needed to manage daily life, such as decision-making, time management, problem-solving, and personal responsibility. In the context of street children, these skills are essential foundations for building independence while also strengthening their capacity to adapt and integrate socially within the broader community. With adequate life skills, children are better equipped to face life's challenges in a structured and responsible manner and are less likely to fall into unproductive patterns of living.

From a theological perspective, life skills reflect humanity's calling to live in wisdom and order as God's creation, entrusted with responsibility over life. In the light of the theology of creation, human beings are called to steward time, decisions, and actions wisely as an expression of stewardship over the life God has given (cf. Ephesians 5:15-16).

Therefore, the development of life skills among street children is not merely a practical educational process, but also part of spiritual character formation that leads them toward an independent, meaningful life aligned with God's will.

5. Vocational Pathway

The vocational pathway is an approach that helps street children identify their interests, talents, and personal potential, while also guiding them toward appropriate pathways in further education or the world of work. This approach functions as a bridge of transition from conditions of vulnerability toward sustainable economic independence. Through structured mentoring, street children not only acquire technical skills but also develop a clearer vision of their future, which in turn strengthens their motivation to break free from cycles of poverty and social marginalization.

From a theological perspective, the vocational pathway can be understood as part of God's calling (divine vocation) for every human being. Each person is created with unique gifts, talents, and purpose (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:4-6), meaning that discovering and developing one's potential is a response to God's grace. Within this framework, accompanying street children in finding their vocational direction is not merely an educational process, but also an act of restoring human dignity as beings created in the image of God (*Imago Dei*).

Therefore, the vocational pathway becomes a transformative instrument that leads children toward an independent and meaningful life, enabling them to participate in God's work within society. It affirms that economic empowerment and spiritual formation are not separate realities, but deeply integrated dimensions of holistic human restoration.

6. Digital Literacy

Digital literacy is an essential competence in the modern era, encompassing the ability to use information and communication technologies in a safe, critical, and productive manner. For street children, acquiring digital literacy not only opens access to information and education but also expands future opportunities in employment, entrepreneurship, and personal development. With adequate digital literacy skills, they can overcome informational barriers and become better prepared to face the demands of an increasingly technology-driven world.

From a theological perspective, digital literacy can be understood as part of humanity's responsibility to steward knowledge and technology as gifts from God. Technology is not merely a neutral tool, but a means that can be used to promote goodness, justice, and truth in human life. In light of the theology of creation, human beings are called to exercise wise stewardship over creation (cf. Genesis 1:28), including the domain of digital technology.

Therefore, equipping street children with digital literacy becomes a concrete expression of liberative and empowering ministry. It enables them to enter the modern public sphere with dignity, critical awareness, and responsibility, while affirming their value as beings created in the image of God (*Imago Dei*) who are called to participate meaningfully in the life of society.

Church Approach to the Restoration of Street Children

1. Spiritual Formation Training

Spiritual formation in the context of street children is a process of shaping spiritual identity that affirms they are precious and beloved creations of God. Through spiritual practices such as prayer, reflection, Scripture reading, and learning Christian values, children are guided to rediscover meaning, hope, and a clearer sense of direction amid life's challenges. This process is not merely ritualistic but deeply transformational, as it touches their inner life, emotions, and worldview regarding themselves and their future.

From a theological standpoint, spiritual formation is rooted in the doctrine of the *Imago Dei*, which affirms that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27). Within this framework, street

children are not viewed as socially marginalized individuals but as persons who possess inherent worth before God. Spiritual formation thus becomes a means of restoring relationships between human beings and God, themselves, and others.

Ultimately, this process brings about renewed hope and life restoration. In the framework of a theology of work, spiritual formation plays a vital role in establishing a strong foundation of faith that supports holistic and integrative empowerment for street children, enabling them to grow into individuals who live with dignity, purpose, and restored identity in God.

2. Trauma Healing

Trauma healing is a psychological and emotional recovery approach that is critically important for street children who frequently experience violence, neglect, and various forms of unsafe life circumstances. Such conditions can leave deep emotional wounds that affect their behavior, self-esteem, and ability to build healthy social relationships. Community-based approaches and pastoral counseling are effective strategies because they provide a safe space characterized by acceptance, empathy, and continuous accompaniment, allowing the healing process to occur gradually and holistically.

From a theological perspective, trauma healing reflects the work of God as Healer, who restores human beings in their wholeness, body, soul, and spirit. In the light of pastoral theology, the Church and faith community are called to become instruments of healing that embody God's love concretely in the midst of human suffering (cf. Psalm 147:3). Pastoral care does not only focus on reducing trauma symptoms, but also on restoring meaning in life, affirming identity as God's creation, and reconciling broken relationships.

Thus, trauma healing becomes an integral part of the *missio Dei*, through which God brings healing, hope, and restoration to street children in a holistic and transformative way.

3. Character Building

Character building is an important process of instilling core values such as discipline, responsibility, honesty, and integrity in street children. These values serve as a moral foundation that helps them build a more stable and directed life amid vulnerable social conditions. Character education functions not only as behavioral control but also as a process of internalizing values that shape ways of thinking, attitudes, and decision-making in everyday life.

Empirically, character education has been shown to contribute to reducing deviant behavior and improving children's social adaptation skills. With strong character, street children are better able to manage conflict, build healthy relationships, and make responsible decisions. This demonstrates that character formation plays a strategic role in their social rehabilitation and the strengthening of their prospects.

From a theological perspective, character building is rooted in humanity's calling to live according to God's will as beings created in the image of God (*Imago Dei*). Values such as honesty, discipline, and responsibility

reflect the holy and just character of God. In the light of Christian ethical theology, character formation is not merely a process of social morality, but part of discipleship that leads individuals into a life transformed into the likeness of Christ (cf. Ephesians 4:22-24).

Therefore, character building among street children represents a concrete expression of holistic transformation that restores their dignity, behavior, and relationships with God and others.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study method to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the theology of work within the church's social mission toward street children in Sentani. Research data were collected through in-depth interviews with church ministers, social workers, and street children, and were further supported by field observations and documentation studies of church-based ministry programs.

The selection of informants was conducted through purposive sampling, based on their direct involvement in social ministry activities. Data were analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing in order to identify patterns of relationships between the theology of work, diaconal practices, and social transformation.

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed source and methodological triangulation, thereby enhancing the credibility and accountability of the research results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Work as God's Calling and the Restoration of Human Dignity

The research findings indicate that the church's ministry to street children in Sentani needs to be built upon a strong theological understanding of human dignity and the meaning of work. Biblically, the concept of work first appears in the Book of Genesis. In The Book of Genesis 1:26-28, God created humanity in His image and likeness, then entrusted them with the cultural mandate to steward the earth. This demonstrates that work is not a consequence of sin, but rather an essential part of human identity as co-workers with God in creation.

Furthermore, in Genesis 2:15, humanity was placed in the Garden of Eden "to work it and take care of it." This text emphasizes that work possesses spiritual dimensions, moral responsibility, and relational significance with God. In the context of street children, this understanding is highly important because many of them experience a loss of identity due to poverty, family rejection, or social marginalization. The church is therefore called to restore the awareness that every child still possesses divine worth and a meaningful purpose in life.

The ministry of Jesus Christ also demonstrates God's concern for the marginalized. In The Gospel of Luke 4:18-19, Jesus declared His mission to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the oppressed, and healing for the brokenhearted. This narrative becomes the Christological foundation that the

church's ministry to street children is not merely a social activity, but participation in Christ's mission of liberation.

Moreover, the Epistle of James 2:14-17 affirms that faith without works is dead. Therefore, concern for street children must be expressed through concrete actions, including mentoring, education, economic empowerment, and psychosocial restoration.

The Church as a Transformative Diaconal Community

From a theological perspective, the church is called not only to be a worshiping community but also a community of service and social transformation. Martin Luther emphasized that every work done in faith is a calling from God (vocation). In this view, work does not belong exclusively to professionals or clergy, but is part of humanity's service to God and neighbor.

Within the theology of diakonia, the church is called to make God's love visible amid human suffering. Diakonia is not merely about providing charitable assistance, but about building human capacity and restoring life. Therefore, the ministry to street children must move from a model of "giving assistance" toward a model of "empowering life."

Ecclesiologicaly, the church as the Body of Christ is called to manifest signs of the Kingdom of God through justice, love, reconciliation, and social restoration. Street children must be viewed as part of the faith community, worthy of acceptance, accompaniment, and restoration.

The Reality of Street Children in Papua

In the social context of Papua, particularly in Sentani, the presence of street children cannot be separated from structural issues such as family poverty, limited access to education, urbanization, family dysfunction, domestic violence, and rapid social change. Many children eventually enter the streets either to support their family's economic needs or to seek a sense of social acceptance.

Within Papuan society, which is characterized by strong communal and relational cultural values, the separation of children from their families or communities creates profound psychological consequences. They not only lose economic support, but also their social identity and sense of belonging. Therefore, the church's ministry cannot focus solely on the individual child, but must also engage families, indigenous communities, and their broader social environment.

This context demonstrates that the church's social mission must be contextual in nature. The church needs to develop ministries that integrate: (1) Spiritual restoration: rebuilding the child's identity in Christ; (2) Psychosocial restoration: trauma healing and rebuilding self-confidence ; (3) Soft skills development: communication, discipline, teamwork, and leadership; (4) Vocational skills training: entrepreneurship, arts, agriculture, and appropriate technology; (5) Social reintegration: reconnecting children with family, school, and society.

Through this approach, the church is present not merely as a religious institution but as an agent of social transformation that makes the love of God visible within society.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study demonstrate that the theology of work can serve as a foundational framework for the church in developing transformative diaconal ministry for street children in Sentani. The study reveals that empowerment through life skills development, character formation, spiritual mentoring, and the strengthening of social relationships significantly contributes to the holistic restoration and improvement of the quality of life of street children.

From a theological perspective, this research affirms that work is an integral part of humanity's calling as bearers of the *Imago Dei*, the image of God. Human beings are therefore called to live productively, with dignity, and to embody the values of love, justice, and restoration within social life. In this sense, the church's involvement in social ministry represents a tangible expression of God's mission toward marginalized communities.

This study also recommends that future research examine the effectiveness of diaconal models based on the theology of work in broader social contexts. Furthermore, future studies should explore collaborative partnerships among the church, families, communities, and government institutions in supporting the sustainable empowerment and social reintegration of street children.

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