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The Enthusiasm of Youth in Strengthening Character Through Creative Worship at Bukit Zaitun Church Makassar

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to elucidate the enthusiasm of the youth of GPIB Bukit Zaitun in participating in creative worship. This research uses qualitative research methods with a phenomenological approach. Data collection was conducted through participatory observation by directly engaging in the creative worship activities held at GPIB Bukit Zaitun. The results of these observations were then reinforced by conducting interviews with 2 pastors, 3 church council members, and 9 youths involved in the creative worship activities. The data that has been collected was then analyzed, interpreted, verified, and subsequently concluded. The research results show that the Bukit Zaitun church council provides support to the youth in creative worship activities. The goal is for GPIB Bukit Zaitun to be responsible for producing youth who are ready to carry out the Christian mission in supporting national development. There are eight factors that support the youth's enthusiasm in participating in creative worship, namely: the work of the Holy Spirit, service oriented towards gifts, prayer, praise and worship, music, engaging sermons, identity strengthening, and adequate church facilities. In addition, it is also supported by the factor of pastoral leadership that can motivate the youth

INTRODUCTION

Makassar City is known as an area where the people are very religious. This is evidenced by the crowded houses of worship during worship. Every Friday and every five daily prayers, mosques are crowded with worshippers. Likewise with the church, every Sunday, the congregation flocks to the church to worship. However, behind these religious nuances, Makassar City still has social problems, namely acts of criminality. In 2023, Makassar Police recorded 5,670 reports of theft, motorbike theft (curanmor), sexual abuse and illegal crimes. Another social problem is the occurrence of war between groups, where in 2023, 43 incidents were recorded (Tiar, 2023). On average, the perpetrators of these crimes are dominated by youths and teenagers.

The rise of crime in Makassar City, which is dominated by young people, reflects that although worship activities are rampant, the religious messages contained in each worship have not been able to be implemented in everyday life. This means that obedience to worship is not directly proportional to behaviour outside the house of worship. Criminal acts involving youth are certainly a concern for religious leaders and community leaders, because if this phenomenon continues, then youth will lose their future (Hawken et al., 2023). Therefore, it is the responsibility of the community, including church leaders / church assemblies to provide guidance to young people so that they are not trapped in actions that harm themselves and others.

The church as a religious social institution has an important role in fostering youth, especially those related to character (Teku et al., 2024). Based on the results of the study, it was found that the church has an important role in efforts to shape the character or personality of the younger generation as the nation's successor. Therefore, the church has the obligation to instil virtues and patterns of life based on the word of God on an ongoing basis (Pello, 2021). Other research shows that the church has a significant role in building Christian faith and Christian character through various activities such as worship, social activities, sidi, baptism, and catechisation (Gea et al., 2023). In character building and spiritual growth, the church must encourage its congregation, especially the youth, to interact with the Holy Spirit as an intermediary in living as learners. The mission of character education is relevant to the mission of the Triune God to strengthen spiritual, moral, and social

aspects (Sirait et al., 2023). Religious messages presented by the church can provide and expand insights to its congregation to understand and live character values (Morehouse & Lemon, 2023). Character education is one very important way for the church to reduce the crime rate. Through character education, religious people can live and understand moral values such as honesty, justice, and love for others (Lamak & X, 2024).

Efforts to strengthen character in youth are also made by the Western Indonesian Protestant Church (GPIB) Bukit Zaitun Makassar City. The church realises that the role of youth in church growth is very important. According to Fonaso Mendrofa, in church life, young people are the actors of the present and future of the church and are the main element because youth are the fillers and successors of ecclesiastical tasks that have been carried out by adults, for example in terms of ecclesiastical office holders and heirs of the Christian faith (Harefa, 2022). Youth who can become the backbone of church activities are certainly not random youth, but must have qualified knowledge about Christianity, and most importantly, youth with character. In an effort to strengthen the character of the youth who worship at GPIB Bukit Zaitun, every month a worship service is held specifically for youth known as creative worship. The pattern of worship with creative liturgy is seen as an opportunity to be able to strengthen the character of youth in a better direction (Wange et al., 2022). Thus, creative worship is not just a technical issue regarding worship that is coloured with various creations in it, but this worship model is an effort to attract young people to church while strengthening their character based on the doctrines contained in the Bible.

The implementation of creative worship not only provides the doctrine of Christian theology, but also shapes the attitudes and behaviour of youth so that they can appear as individuals who have responsibility, integrity, and empathy for others. Creative worship as a character strengthening space for youth has an important meaning as a strengthening of identity that is always with God's love. Through creative worship, young people can process to have knowledge that can distinguish between good and bad, or truth and error, and guide them to dare to make decisions that can be accounted for. Creative worship can also be utilised for the ability to control emotions by communicating

effectively both to the pastor and to fellow youth congregants. The habit of communication can be used to resolve disputes peacefully as well as to prevent behaviour that leads to criminal acts.

Research on character education based on creative worship has actually been done a lot. This can be seen in the Bethany Indonesia Church (GBI) congregation in Talaud Regency, where congregants including youth continue to be trained in character through church music activities (Wibowo, 2020). Similarly, teachers at the Indonesian Christian Church (KKI) Menining in West Kalimantan, where creative worship coupled with Sunday school activities continues to be promoted by teachers in producing a young generation with character (Christia & Hutabarat, 2021). Character education through Christian learning packaged in creative worship was also organised at Germita Baitani Pulutan Church, Talaud Islands Regency. In this activity, youth are given an understanding by pastors, congregation assemblies, and youth elders of the importance of character in life (Ilat & Martoyo, 2024). Youth character development carried out at the Indonesian Christian Church (GKI) Kasih Perumnas is packaged in catechisation activities, namely character building through a combination of theology and education (Elias et al., 2023). Similarly, at the HKI Pagar Beringin Church in North Tapanuli, creative worship activities have generated enthusiasm among youth to actively come to church. Thus, the church has played an active role in fostering the character of the youth who are part of the church (Siahaan et al, 2024).

Research on creative worship conducted by the youth of GPIB Bukit Zaitun is important to do as an effort to actualise that in the midst of modern times which are always identified with hedonism and promiscuity, there are still youth groups who pay attention to religious activities. Based on the results of previous studies that have been described above, there are still things that have been neglected, namely the results of these studies in general find that creative worship has an important role in character building, but there has been no mention of character-nuanced practices in the community. On that basis, this research aims to elaborate in depth on the implementation of creative worship by the youth of GPIB Bukit Zaitun which is oriented towards character education as well as its practice by youth in

the midst of community life which contains elements of religious character.

METHODS

This research was conducted by applying a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach to elaborate character education based on creative worship among the youth of the Bukit Zaitun Church. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it provides an opportunity to understand the phenomenon deeply and contextually (Rofiah, 2023). GPIB Bukit Zaitun was chosen as the research location. The selection of this location is based on the consideration that the youth of GPIB Bukit Zaitun are the most active and routine in conducting creative worship activities compared to youth organisations in other churches. In addition, the youth who worship at GPIB Bukit Zaitun have an emotional closeness to the author, making it easier to obtain information related to the research topic.

The research data was collected by making involved observations, by attending creative worship activities, sometimes even acting as a music team in accompanying worship activities. These observations were then reinforced by conducting interviews with the research subjects. Interviews were conducted freely with 2 pastors, 3 church council members, and the youth of GPIB Bukit Zaitun. Informants were selected on the basis of eligibility and availability of access to sources of information that could provide comprehensive insights into the topic under study. Especially for the main informants from among the youth, a total of 9 people were determined on the basis of the consideration that they have been actively participating in creative worship for 3 years, and during 2024 only a maximum of 3 times absent. In addition, data was also obtained through interviews by asking closed questions to 37 young people to obtain information relating to the pull factors that make them so enthusiastic in participating in creative worship.

Data analysis was carried out using the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model which includes three important stages, namely: data reduction, data display, and data verification (Rahman, 2022). The collected data were then sorted and selected based on the main objectives of this research. Furthermore, the data is presented based on the understanding and experience of the informants.

If there is data that still needs explanation, it is asked again to the informant concerned, then clarified by exploring the opinions of other informants. This activity involves filtering and simplifying the data, presenting the data in a format that can be interpreted, and verifying and drawing conclusions in order to ensure that the data is valid and accurate based on the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Generation z is generally defined as young people born between 1995-2012 (Wijoyo, 2020). Currently, the Youth Movement of the Western Indonesian Protestant Church (GPIB) Bukit Zaitun is a forum for youth dominated by generation z. This youth organisation has an important and enthusiastic role in reviving and enlivening worship activities, including creative worship at GPIB Bukit Zaitun. Enthusiasm is an assumption of pleasure in something that happens, a positive action towards something that is found in a special environment and is highly desirable because it is felt to bring benefits and arouse enthusiasm in carrying out the dynamics of life. In the context of spirituality at GPIB Bukit Zaitun, the enthusiasm of the youth is an important pillar of the growth and sustainability of creative worship. The youth have a seriousness in participating in creative worship which is characterised by their arrival at church always earlier than the predetermined time. Likewise, when the worship activities are held, they follow it with great serenity. The main factors that make youth very enthusiastic in participating in creative worship activities are supported by several factors, including: **Firstly**, the work of the Holy Spirit. The religious awareness and enthusiasm that grows within the youth of GPIB Bukit Zaitun to participate in creative worship cannot be separated from the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit becomes a driving force for them in expressing their hearts, leading them to have an understanding of God's truths, and guiding them towards a better direction. They also believe in the Holy Spirit as God's messenger in providing help to pray properly and as a partner in solving life's problems. The belief in the help of the Holy Spirit makes the youth proactive in creative worship as a space to make full surrender to God, with the hope that God will always give blessings in life and can also be humble.

Second, gift-orientated ministry. The youth of Bukit Zaitun GPIB realise that they are the next generation of the church who must have a deep understanding that only God is the Lord who must be worshipped throughout life. Creative worship is one of the ways they serve God and hope that it can become a lifestyle. As a generation that lives in the flow of life that is full of challenges, they are required to have the right attitude and utilise all the potential that has been given by God to serve in the way of God. Gifts in the form of skills in singing, music, poetry can be channelled into creative worship activities as long as they are in accordance with the worship procedures set by the Bukit Zaitun GPIB Assembly. The main factors that make youth very enthusiastic in participating in creative worship activities.

Thirdly, Prayer. Prayer is one of the important pillars in the life of a believer. The youth at GPIB Bukit Zaitun understand that prayer is a spiritual activity for humans to commune with God. Creative worship is utilised by the youth to establish communication with God, and the youth pray because God has led them to face the presence of God Himself. By participating in creative worship, the youth believe that they have been taught, just as Jesus taught about praying not to those who did not know God, but to those who knew God, namely to his disciples and those who followed him. Creative worship is felt by the youth to have increased spirituality, where the prayers made in creative worship are used as a source of strength for the youth who experience a longing to always be with God on an ongoing basis.

Fourthly, Praise and Worship. God is pleased with people's quiet worship of Him, in spirit and in truth, as a very effective means by which God can fellowship with people. Praise and worship in creative worship is one of the attracting factors for youth to enthusiastically express their desires before God. Praise and worship is a beautiful part of worship under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit. The existence of praise and worship activities makes the youth more eager to be active in creative worship, so that they feel in a high state of confidence to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ and will be inflamed with joy and motivated to live as true followers of Christ, provide services to Christ, and share the love of Christ to people who are still hesitant.

Fifth, Music. In the creative youth worship activities at GPIB Bukit Zaitun, contemporary church music has adapted to cultural and technological changes and enriched the worship experience of the congregation. The church music performed has the power to influence the lives of youth in the community. Through song lyrics, and sometimes there are also upbeat melodies, church music can provide entertainment, inspiration, and spiritual teaching to youth in life with all its dynamics.

Sixth, Interesting sermon. Pastors who often deliver sermons at creative worship activities at GPIB Bukit Zaitun have understood that the target audience is young people who sometimes struggle with life problems. This condition makes the pastor try to contextualise his sermon so that youth can make the divine messages in the sermon a guide in overcoming life's problems. To raise the spirit of the youth, pastors usually quote the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus exclaimed with the words 'happy, happy' and repeated up to nine times. The exclamation was apparently addressed to people who were sad, the poor, and people in distress.

GPIB Bukit Zaitun which is located in Makassar City as a multicultural city is also understood by the pastors that the youth congregation certainly has a lot of contact with a multicultural environment. Therefore, the pastors when delivering sermons also always convey that in the midst of differences that exist, we must direct this life in the frame of togetherness. The message of togetherness makes the youth appear in the community to implement it, for example providing compensation to anyone regardless of religious background, even engaging in takjil wars (competing to provide fast-breaking snacks to Muslims).

Seventh, Identity Strengthening. Youth participation in creative worship is also related to identity. Identity is the characteristic of an organisation, which distinguishes it from other organisations. Identity can be used to define oneself within a particular group. Thus the concept of identity contains two main questions, who we are and what our mission is. Understanding who we are will be a determining factor in achieving the mission, and vice versa, the mission will explain who we really are.

One of the missions of GPIB Bukit Zaitun is to be a church that is present as an example of life, which is manifested through initiatives and participation in social solidarity and harmony in society, based on the behaviour of a strong and prosperous family life. This mission can be reflected in the active participation of the youth in this church to carry out creative worship every month. The youth at GPIB Bukit Zaitun claim their organisation as a fellowship in which they regularly hold sectoral and cross-sectoral meetings, share and build mutual love, strengthen each other, share, encourage and prioritise cooperation. By appearing as a fellowship that prioritises the above attitudes, they appear as public servants. They can be widely recognised, including among people of other faiths, as a result of their actions. They always endeavour to manifest the love of God in their daily lives as part of their actions that are expected to benefit themselves and others.

Eighth, Adequate Church Facilities. Important facilities, especially the church building, can bring enjoyment to the youth to worship in wisdom. Church rooms that have been equipped with air conditioners keep the room temperature cool when the youth perform worship activities. Church facilities are basically not classified as the main part of creative worship, but they cannot be ignored. GPIB Bukit Zaitun has been equipped with the availability of parking spaces, toilets, audio visual quality, a good sound system, and adequate lighting.

In addition to these eight factors, the role of the pastor also plays an important role in encouraging youth enthusiasm in participating in creative worship. Leadership is important in an organisation because it is one of the main keys to achieving organisational success. All decisions, movements and organisational dynamics require leadership (Abijaya et al, 2021). The main reason for the importance of leadership in an organisation is as a basis for building a solid, strong, and committed team in realising the vision and mission of the organisation. The progress of an organisation lies in the performance of leaders at every level, considering that leadership encompasses a variety of personal qualities and skills (Bolden et al., 2023).

In the context of GPIB Bukit Zaitun, Christian leadership is a dynamically planned process related to Christian ministry related to a specific time, place, and situation in which there is God's intervention, in the sense that He calls Himself as a leader with full

authority to lead His people in grouping themselves as an institution/organisation in order to achieve its goals that bring collective benefits to leaders, subordinates, and the environment. In the practical aspect, the leadership that takes place at GPIB Bukit Zaitun is transformative leadership, in which this model, the pastor as the highest leader in the church assembly is very concerned about the development of the youth congregation. The pastor seeks to change the mindset of the youth congregation by helping them see old things with a contemporary perspective (up to date). The pastor makes the youth excited and take the initiative to achieve the goals that have been set together.

In general, the youth gathered in the Bukit Zaitun GPIB Youth Movement view that the current leadership has focused on building the life of faith, in the sense that there has been a balance of ceremonial faith development with faith development that pays attention to quality aspects. This can be seen in the ability of pastors and ministers of the word who are creative and proactive in finding and creating ways to make youth congregations grow towards maturity of faith so that they are eager and fully participate in the building of the Body of Christ.

CONCLUSION

One of the functions of GPIB Bukit Zaitun is to provide guidance to the younger generation so that they have good character amidst social interactions. One of the ways to develop the character of the youth is by holding creative worship. Creative worship that places youth as both actors and subjects is conducted while adhering to the worship order established by GPIB Bukit Zaitun. The worship activities facilitated by GPIB Bukit Zaitun, particularly creative worship, are efforts to shape and strengthen the character of the youth, meaning that the youth must present themselves as whole individuals reflecting the image of God, possessing qualities of love and obedience to God, intelligence, skills, noble character, and concern for both the social and physical environment. So in principle, creative worship emphasizes the active participation of each young person to shape themselves or become doers of God's word as found in the Bible and dedicate themselves to the interests of religion, nation, and state.

The character of the youth formed from creative worship activities at GPIB Bukit Zaitun includes a

religious character. That character is not only understood conceptually by the youth but has also been practiced in community life. Institutionally, the youth who are part of the GPIB Youth Movement organization have engaged in social activities oriented towards environmental love through monthly community service activities to clean the environment. In addition, activities oriented towards compassion for fellow humans are also carried out by providing assistance to those who are less fortunate, such as orphanage children and the elderly. These social activities do not consider elements of SARA (ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group relations), meaning that assistance is not only provided to fellow Christians but also to Muslims, for example, in the distribution of iftar packages carried out every weekend during the fasting month.

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