

# THE ROLE OF FELLOWSHIP IN BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AMONG CONGREGATION MEMBERS AT GMIM FILADELPHIA WOWONTULAP

Peran Persekutuan Dalam Membangun Hubungan Antarwarga Jemaat Di  
GMIM Filadelfia Wowontulap

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## Abstract

Ecclesial fellowship in GMIM Filadelfia Wawontulap has ceased being a ritualized liturgy to a crucial place of creating genuine relationships, solving conflicts, and the assimilation of Biblical values and Minahasan culture. Through descriptive-interpretative qualitative research approach, the study analyzes the role of fellowship as a merging and healing process among church members and uses five themes namely, the strengthening of social-spiritual relationships, the church as a reconciler, the leadership of pastors and elders, the integration of mapalus in koinonia, and the means of increasing participation and belonging. Results indicate that social bonding among fellowship activities at the column, commission, and categorical levels, generational relational gaps, and helpful mutual support between generations, be it at the hospital visit or a common meal. The church plays an active role in mediating conflicts in an all-inclusive pastoral ministry which involves prayer, open dialogue, and personal accompaniment. Although pastors and elders are appreciated as spiritual advisors, members want more personal contact and less formality to help bring openness, particularly among young people and those who are shy. The Minahasan cultural ethics, especially of mapalus (mutual cooperation), are highly effective social capital, and support equality, solidarity, and togetherness, which is similar to New Testament koinonia. Some of the best approaches to promote participation are informal intergenerational events, youth participation with planning the events, frequent visits to the aged and non-judgmental area where the youth can share their personal plight.

## Background

Fellowship in the ecclesial scenario will never simply be seen as a Sunday gathering agenda, but it is the very reality of the church that is the living body of Christ and is thus marked by mutual love, mutual support, and mutual growth in faith. In the context of New Testament ecclesiology, the area where faith is cultivated through relationships, teaching manifests itself in community practices, and the love of God is turned into service to each other, is called koinonia (Tomana, 2024). Thus, in the conditions where social, cultural, and technological processes are shifting, with the increased individualism rate, the decline of face-to-face communication, and the overload of information of dubious quality, the fellowship of the church is to be manifested not only as an ordinary practice, but also as a healing and unifying instrument of the community of faith

(Meruntu & Palembang 2025). The challenge that GMIM Filadelfia Wawontulap faces in a tangible sense is how to preserve the relational integrity of the congregation when physical presence is no longer a satisfactory signifier of the quality of fellowship (Sudjarwo et al., 2024).

The Biblical basis of the fellowship of the churches theologically is found in the passage of Acts 2:42-47 in which the believers are described as dwelling in the teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayer of the church. This trend confirms that fellowship is the praxis aspect of faith: faith does not culminate in confession but results in social attachment (Sularno et al., 2023). However, in the present context, this basis is challenged by social disintegration, a post-truth society that clouds the power of truth, and modern ways of living that change communities into virtual worlds (Sofyan et al., 2025). Indonesian churches, such as GMIM, must design biblically oriented, transformative, and inclusive models of fellowship that can accommodate generational differences, social backgrounds, and different levels of engagement (Saragih, 2024). True fellowship is not just a matter of attending liturgy, but a process of emotionally, spiritually, and socially long-lasting activity, the foundation of which is the principle of love, humility, and mutual respect (Hermin & Sibidang, 2025).

Previous research has offered significant grounds for understanding church fellowship. Studies on the practical application of Ephesians 5:1-2 indicate that in a situation where congregations form relationships based on the premise of the sacrificial love of Christ, the integrity of the community is buttressed as the relationships are not founded upon structural interests but rather on the identity as children of God (Ulum and Anggaini, 2020). In a study conducted to determine the role of elders in Toraja Mamasa churches, the personal and pastoral presence of less active members was found to reinstate them in the flow of fellowship and restore their sense of belonging (Satria, 2024).

These observations echo studies in Stasi Santo Petrus Pematang Purba that understand Ephesians 4:16 as a theological model of fellowship that values humility, gentleness, and patience when dealing with differences (Rozi, 2020). The findings from other studies on how to strengthen biblical literacy among the youth prove that a group of people united around the Word creates a group faith identity and closes the generational divide (Gomer, 2024). Moreover, the critical analysis of the phenomenon of post-truth in Toraja churches underlines the idea that disinformation and exposure of truth to being relative may harm the trust and internal communication among the congregation members, so that fellowship should also be considered a place where the truth of faith is checked (Tamukun et al., 2025).

However, these studies have various limitations that apply to the GMIM situation (Press, 2023). To begin with, the majority of the works are descriptive-theological and are still at a normative level, explaining that fellowship is significant and that love should be lived out; however, they seldom look empirically at how congregants in specific settings experience, perceive, or see barriers to fellowship (Paembonan, 2024). Second, other scholars have usually studied only a single participant (pastor or elders) or a single problem (youth participation or post-truth challenge); thus, the interaction between the whole congregational ecosystem categorical groups, commissions, service divisions, and GMIM synodal structure has not been depicted in a holistic manner (Lisaldy, 2025). Third, the local Minahasan cultural values, including *mapalus* (mutual cooperation) which presuppose the concept of *koinonia*, have not been directly implemented into the design of church fellowship (Sugiyana, 2023). However, when biblical values are combined with local culture, it can result in various prototypes of fellowship that are not only theological but also contextual and acceptable in GMIM congregations (Patandean et al., 2024).

The other gap is the lack of an analytical framework that relates the three significant dimensions of fellowship simultaneously (Lalong, 2022): the theological dimension (biblical and ecclesiological roots), the sociological dimension (relations, communication, and social capital of the congregation), and the cultural dimension (local values and practices of Minahasan) (Manguju, 2023). Indeed, some studies have found that responsive pastoral leadership can recover spiritual alienation or that shared teaching can empower the faith identity of younger generations (Rannu &

Sari, 2023). However, the GMIM fellowship has a unique structure and practice that acknowledges kolom (cell-like districts), commissions, and ministry categories (Firmanto, 2021). That is, research is still needed that does not consider fellowship a fixed phenomenon (Susanta, 2020) but a process that is constantly cultivated, bargained, and supported by ecclesial participants in the situation of GMIM Filadelfia Wawontulap.

Based on these gaps, the current research stands at the position to examine the role of fellowship in establishing relationships among the members of GMIM Filadelfia Wawontulap in a multidimensional fashion. This study does not simply answer the question of whether fellowship is an important component (Pakpahan, 2022), but rather how fellowship is exercised, perceived, and understood by people of different ages, degrees of engagement, and responses to faith (Rannu and Sari, 2023). The research is also aimed at determining the fellowship mechanisms that have been effective, for example, kolom fellowship, small growth groups, or categorial meetings, and the structural issues that could be in the way of the development of the egalitarian relation, for example, busyness of the members, hierarchical communication, and the overwhelmingness of some groups. By doing this, the results should offer pastoral advice that does not end with moral appeals but contains practical measures that conform to the GMIM church structure and culture (Firmanto, 2021).

The novelty of this study can be found at various points. First, it deliberately synthesizes biblical values (in particular, Ephesians 45 and the koinonia model of early Christians) and Minahasan cultural values as the foundation for developing a contextual model of fellowship (Firmanto, 2021). Second, it changes the approach by focusing not on single actors, but on the whole system of fellowship; thus, the relations examined are not pastor-congregation, but also congregation-congregation and group-ministry relations (Firmanto, 2021). Third, it aims to address post-truth issues by suggesting fellowship as a secure dialogical field of faith where truth is not negotiated through hoaxes but is upheld in the community (Firmanto, 2021). Fourth, it reveals the notion of transformative relationships, that is, relationships that lead to attitude, openness, and participation changes, as a better measure of fellowship effectiveness than attendance numbers (Firmanto, 2021). In this regard, this research is likely to make contributions to the literature of contextual ecclesiology in Indonesia, as well as can provide a viable paradigm on GMIM congregations with the aim of renewing their fellowship life.

## METHOD

The variable used in This research is a qualitative study with a descriptive-interpretative research design, as the main aim of the research is to develop a deep insight into how fellowship works in establishing relationships among GMIM Filadelfia Wawontulap. This methodology was selected because it is impossible to measure the phenomenon of church fellowship in numbers; it has to be described using the experience of life, meanings, and socio-religious practices that are formed within the community (Syafudien, n.d.). In this way, the study aims to develop a contextual interpretation of congregational relationships, the power of church structures, and the incorporation of biblical values with Minahasan culture into the practice of fellowship (Wagiu et al., 2025).

The congregation of GMIM Filadelfia Wawontulap was the research location. Purposive selection of research participants is done by focusing on representatives of key actors in church fellowship, namely: (1) the pastor or congregational shepherd who perceives the pastoral vision of fellowship (Yelicia & Siswanto, 2022); (2) the elders or special office-bearers who are directly involved in planning and execution of kolom, categorial, and commission-based fellowship activities (Wiwin & Jumilah, 2020); (3) colleagues of the congregation of various age groups (youth). The informants are not predetermined and are based on the principle of data saturation (Wiwin and Jumilah, 2020): the data collection process is ended when the information received becomes monotonous and no new categories emerge (Muslihah et al., 2022).

Data were collected using three primary methods. To answer the questions of what the meaning of fellowship is, what makes congregants attend fellowship or not, how fellowship is communicated, and how well fellowship brings them together and makes them feel connected to their

faith, semi-structured interviews were performed (Sugianto, n.d.). These interviews were digitized, transcribed, and kept confidential (Palasa et al., 2024). Second, the process of participant observation is conducted during ongoing fellowship events (such as *kolom* fellowship, categorial meetings, or family worship) to record the actual patterns of interaction: who is active, how elders work, whether there is a generational divide, and how the fellowship atmosphere is created (Tiku, 2024). Third, it conducts document research in the form of minutes of meetings of the elders, schedules of fellowships, the order of the GMIM church, and the materials utilized in the services of the congregation. These documents contribute to unveiling the continuity of programs and the theological strikes on which they are based (Ludji, 2020).

The thematic data analysis follows the steps listed below: (1) transcription and repetitive reading of the data (Oktavianas et al., 2025); (2) open coding of statements and observational notes of the informants (Sunusi et al., 2022); (3) coding of data by thematic categories, that is, theological foundations of fellowship, relational bonding mechanisms, barriers to involvement, role of local culture, and role of pastors/elders; (4) interpretation of the findings in the field in relation to the ec. The source triangulation (pastor, elders, congregants), technique triangulation (interviews, observation, documents, etc.), and limited member checking with the key informants are used to ensure that the interpretations the researcher arrives at are not too different as compared to what they lived through.

Ethical concerns are minimized through informed consent, ensuring anonymity, and reporting data without favoring a certain party (Sibarani and Albina, 2025). In this design, the research is likely to yield a holistic portrait of how fellowship in GMIM Filadelfia Wawontulap is a reconciliatory space, a place where spiritual intimacy is carried on, and a place where Christian Minahasan's communal values are imparted.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

This section presents the key results of the research in the form of a thematic analysis of the interviews with the pastor, special officials (deacons and elders), and members of the congregation of different ages in GMIM Filadelfia Wawontulap. Based on the coding and categorization process, five key themes were obtained: (1) fellowship as a place of strengthening congregational relations; (2) church as a mediator of conflict restoration and accompaniment; (3) the dynamics of the roles of pastor and elders in creating the atmosphere of fellowship; (4) the integration of Minahasan culture as the practice of *koinonia*; and (5) concrete strategies for increasing the number of people and the feeling of acceptance in fellowship.

#### 1. Fellowship as a Place of Intensified Congregational Relationships

All the informants highlighted the fact that all the fellowship activities, especially *kolom* worship, commission meetings, and categorial services, are seen to be the main areas where one gets to know the other and strengthens the bond of the congregation members. The pastor explained *kolom* and commission services as a place where members who used to shake hands only formally get to know each other better since they meet regularly and discuss stories in a personal and intimate atmosphere. Special office-bearers emphasized that fellowship is expressed not only through joint prayer but also through daily practical concerns. According to one of the deacons, the love of Christ is embodied through fellowship in worship, commissions, and *kolom*, which may be accomplished not only in prayers but also in practical care among the members of the church. In these fellowships, members who are sick, struggling with economic difficulties, or bereaved are known and assisted within a short time.

Verifiable examples prove this trend by members of the church. One member told me that with a fellowship where only Sunday worship was kept, the relationships between the people in the congregation would always be shallow and confined to pleasantries. However, with the help of *kolom* worship and *mapalus* activities in churches, this individual became more acquainted with several other members to the extent of eating meals together after activities. The older members contributed

to the fact that the elderly have found the service of the seniors as a place to talk to someone and relieve them of the loneliness they felt before, when they just sat at the back of the church and hardly interacted with anyone. Overall, this theme indicates that fellowship at the kolom, commission, and categorial levels is a form of social connection that strengthens relationships, minimizes the distance between members of the group, and provides space where they may support each other in practical needs.

## **2. The Church as an Intermediary of Strife Renovation and Escort.**

The second result is the way congregants perceive the role of the church in conflict and misunderstanding situations. All the members, the pastor, and special office-bearers agreed that the church is not only considered a teaching institution but also a community that actively brings about reconciliation. One of the deacons emphasized that in cases of disagreements, the church, as well as an arbiter, had to be a community that engaged in reconciliation, where the special office-bearers should listen to both parties, visit their homes, and create peace-making experiences. The same trend can be observed through the testimonies of the members who had gone through conflicts regarding land boundaries or interpersonal tensions. In these scenarios, the pastor and the elders would call the warring sides into a meeting, start the meeting with prayer, give both sides the opportunity to express their opinions, and then lead them towards a peaceful compromise.

This way of solving conflicts was deemed effective by members since it was not a unilateral decision that would end conflicts, but a process of clarifying and praying together. Some of the informants also indicated that the relationships that were initially strained got closer following church-mediated mediation. Simultaneously, the youth said that even at the age of teenagers and youth, the situations are usually solved more informally, by simply talking and having dinner together, and the pastor or older people are only involved more formally when the situation is deemed serious. These results prove that GMIM Filadelfia Wawontulap has established itself as a community where one can restore relationships through a mixture of pastoral tactics (prayer, visitation, and accompaniment) and open discussions by special office-bearers.

## **3. Athletics of the Roles of Pastors and Elders in Promoting the Vibe of Fellowship**

In the third theme, the issue of the pastor and elder roles as perceived by the congregants is explained in terms of establishing an atmosphere of fellowship where the church members feel comfortable and welcome. The pastor believed that the trend of collaborating with the elders has been very good, especially in regard to organizing worship and fellowship activities. This perception was supported by some of the members who have observed the solidarity between the pastor and elders as a significant process that renders the ministry well-synchronized and mutually enforcing. However, critical notes are found in the narratives of congregants and special office-bearers. Special office-bearers emphasized the significance of firm and love in leadership. One of the elders said that love and firmness without love can harm members, whereas love and firmness without love can cause spiritual anarchy. In this aspect, the pastor and the elders are seen as bridges whose role is to make sure that all voices are given without any form of bias, and at the same time, they are the ones who are to watch over the decisions to ensure that they are not outside the truth of faith.

Other members complained that the seniors appeared too bossy at times, which made them reluctant to express or reveal personal hardships. Others believed that the pastor must be a busybody in the office or in official engagements and therefore they assumed that he should be seen more in small kolom meetings as well as during regular visitations. However, the congregation also showed their appreciation when the pastor made home visits, even when they were not sick, as they felt that the pastor took personal care of them. This is why the functions of the pastor and elders in this congregation are viewed in an ambivalent way: on the one hand, they are valued as spiritual leaders who ensure the direction of the fellowship; on the other hand, they should create a more familiar and relaxed environment, particularly among young people and other members who usually feel insecure.

## **4. Koinonia is the practice of integration, where Minahasan Culture is integrated into the practice.**



The second theme pertains to the content and meaning of the local Minahasan culture, especially mapalus, in the communal existence of the congregation. Almost all the informants cited these two aspects of culture as significant strengths that solidified the fellowship within GMIM Filadelfia Wawontulap.

According to the members, church-based mapalus is a very tangible form of mutual cooperation. One of the informants showed that when the church building was being constructed, many members volunteered to assist without being called upon, and through this, he got to know people whom he had never seen before outside of passing by them. One more of the members observed that mapalus used to be applied primarily in rice fields, but today it has been applied in the church, but the same spirit is being used: one should help one another with no expectation of return. Masambo is also viewed as a strong representation of fraternity. According to one of the informants, the reason why masambo is beautiful is that the members sit together and share a meal, converse, and pray. It does not distinguish between the rich and the poor. All are brothers and sisters." In their case, this exercise provides them with a sense of equality and togetherness that cannot be easily achieved in formal interactions.

Local culture is not perceived as a menace to the purity of faith by the special office-bearers but as a mission field that should be developed critically. The positive values of Minahasan culture (solidarity, mutual cooperation, and the feeling of being ashamed of not being involved) could be channeled into commendable forms of church social ministry, as did the deacons and elders, but it must be subjected to consistent tests and filtering in a manner that does not put it in opposition to the teachings of the faith. These results reveal that mapalus and masambo have assumed an organic role in fellowship practice in GMIM Filadelfia Wawontulap and that they are social and cultural capital that reinforces congregational koinonia.

#### **5. Practical Plans for raising the level of participation and the feeling of acceptance**

The conclusion theme outlines different practical suggestions and ideas expressed by the informants on actions that should be taken because every member of the congregation, such as families, youth, and the elderly, should be more active and feel welcomed in fellowship. As far as forms of programs are concerned, some of the members suggested the creation of intergenerational programs that were not confined to formal worship, such as family outings, cooking competitions, spiritual camping, or other recreational programs that would bring different categories of the congregation together in a relaxed environment.

Such activities are perceived to eliminate generational barriers and enhance close relationships. The youth stressed the need to engage them during the planning of activities, and not as technical performers. This gives them more motivation and makes them feel like they own the fellowship when they are entrusted to come up with ideas and concepts for events. Meanwhile, other members reminded the church that it should not merely concentrate on big events but also on regular visits, particularly to those members who are very old and may feel isolated unless such members are contacted individually.

On the relational sphere, some of the participants talked of the necessity of a special safe space where they could share stories and struggles, and have an open table where they could empty their hearts with no fear of being judged. One of the settings, which is already close to this role, is Kolom activities, where members feel more comfortable sharing life burdens and praying on behalf of other members. Lastly, the special office-bearers discussed the necessity of enhancing teaching based on the identity of the members as children of God who are loved, and not people who are judged by their accomplishments, social position, or seniority. To them, numerous feelings of inferiority and the lack of acceptance in fellowship can be attributed to the way the members perceive themselves; thus, pastoral ministry should always remind them that they are accepted by Christ.

### **Discussion**

This study aims to analyze the role of fellowship in building relationships among congregational members at GMIM Filadelfia Wawontulap in a multidimensional manner, focusing on the experiences, meanings, and dynamics of fellowship practices as they are lived out within the community. The findings show that fellowship is not merely a weekly liturgical routine but a dynamic living space for nurturing faith relationships, strengthening social capital, and transmitting theological values as well as local culture. Through five main themes—fellowship as relational strengthening, the church as a mediator of reconciliation, the dynamics of pastoral–elder leadership, the integration of Minahasan culture, and strategies for enhancing participation—a common thread emerges: fellowship at GMIM Filadelfia Wawontulap is a concrete form of *koinonia* that is contextual, transformative, and inclusive.

### 1. Fellowship as a Space for Strengthening Relationships: From Formality to Emotional Closeness

The first finding affirms that fellowship—especially in the form of *kolom* services, commission activities, and categorial meetings—functions as a crucial mechanism for deepening relationships among church members. This is in line with the New Testament ecclesiological understanding that views the church not only as a doctrinal institution but also as the body of Christ that lives through relationships of mutual love (Ephesians 4:16). In the context of GMIM Filadelfia Wawontulap, fellowship succeeds in going beyond the boundaries of liturgical formality and becomes a space for profound emotional–spiritual interaction.

Informants' statements that "close relationships only began to form after joining *kolom* worship" indicate the effectiveness of the micro-ecclesial structure in creating personal closeness within the church. *Kolom* worship, the smallest fellowship unit in the GMIM structure, appears to have a significant capacity to dismantle social barriers that often hinder the formation of communal bonds. Here, the dimension of *koinonia* becomes tangible: not merely gathering but knowing, caring for, and supporting one another. As noted by Tomana (2024), *koinonia* is a locus where faith is nurtured through relationships, and the present findings show that this occurs organically in the congregational life.

Furthermore, the practical function of fellowship—such as disseminating information about members who are ill or facing economic hardship—shows that *koinonia* also has a dimension of social solidarity. This corresponds to the model of the early church in Acts 2:44–45, where believers "sold their property and possessions and gave to anyone who had need." Although it does not reach the level of extreme collectivism, the congregation of GMIM Filadelfia Wawontulap displays a similar pattern: information sharing and material assistance flow through fellowship networks. This indicates that *koinonia* is not merely a matter of subjective spirituality but also a collective responsibility for the well-being of others.

The presence of categorial worship, particularly for older adults, also demonstrates the church's sensitivity to its members' psychosocial needs. Loneliness in old age is often a hidden problem within communities; however, through categorial services, elderly members are not only physically present but also feel accepted and have a space for social interaction. This is a highly concrete form of pastoral care in which the church is present not only to proclaim the Word but also to provide a place for those who are emotionally vulnerable.

Nevertheless, several challenges remain. Some members admitted that their relationships remained shallow outside fellowship activities. This implies that although *kolom* worship deepens relationships, the intensity and frequency of meetings are still decisive factors. If activities are held only monthly or quarterly, the momentum of attachment can quickly fade away. Therefore, it is important for the church to evaluate the frequency and format of fellowship activities to maintain and sustain the relational momentum that has been built.

### 2. The Church as Mediator of Reconciliation: Fellowship as a Space of Restoration

The second finding shows that GMIM Filadelfia Wawontulap plays an active role in reconciliation. The church is regarded not only as a place of worship but also as a locus for mediating conflicts, whether personal or structural in nature. Pastors and elders are trusted to act as facilitators of peace, employing a pastoral approach grounded in prayer, home visits, and open dialogue. This phenomenon is highly relevant to the theological context of Ephesians 4:3, which urges believers to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” The mediation processes undertaken by the church demonstrate that *koinonia* is not a space without conflict but a space where conflict is resolved in a biblical and pastoral manner. This is a concrete expression of the church as a “community of reconciliation” that reflects the work of Christ as the Reconciler (2 Corinthians 5:18).

What is particularly interesting is the difference in approach between the older and younger generations. Older generations rely more on formal structures—elders and pastors—as mediators, whereas younger generations tend to resolve conflicts informally through casual conversations and sharing meals. This phenomenon reflects a shift in communication culture from hierarchical to horizontal and formal to relational. The church needs to value both models and integrate them. For instance, mediation processes may begin informally among peers and, when necessary, involve special office-bearers as mediators who provide theological and spiritual grounding for the process. Furthermore, the successful mediation of land or family disputes indicates that the church continues to be trusted as a neutral, moral authority. However, this also carries significant responsibilities. If mediation is not conducted fairly or if there is a perception that elders are taking sides, trust in the church as a space for reconciliation can collapse. Therefore, transparency, justice, and confidentiality must be the key principles in every mediation process. In the post-truth context described in the background, the church’s role as a mediator becomes even more critical. Amid streams of information filled with hoaxes and misinformation, the church is one of the last spaces that is still trusted to be a bearer of truth. In conflict mediation, the church does not only resolve problems but also verifies the narratives that circulate among members. In other words, fellowship becomes a space for verifying the truth, as suggested by Tamukun et al. (2025).

### 3. Dynamics of the Roles of Pastor and Elders: Between Authority and Humility

The third finding reveals the complexity of the roles of pastors and elders in shaping the atmosphere of fellowship. They are regarded as important spiritual leaders, yet are also expected to be more approachable and closer to their congregation. There is a tension between structural authority and emotional closeness that must be negotiated continually. Some members admit feeling “afraid” or “hesitant” to share personal struggles with elders because they appear “too authoritative.” This suggests that symbols of ecclesial authority, such as robes, titles, or official positions, can sometimes become obstacles to the formation of authentic relationships. However, in biblical ecclesiology, church leaders are not portrayed as rulers but as servants (Mark 10:42–45). Jesus Himself provided a model of humble leadership, even washing the feet of His disciples (John 13:1–17).

Therefore, it is important for pastors and elders to consciously balance firmness and love, as one elder noted. Firmness is needed to maintain doctrinal integrity and church discipline, but love must be the foundation of every pastoral action. The ideal leadership model is servant leadership, in which leaders serve rather than seek to be served. One concrete way to reduce this distance is to increase the pastor’s presence in micro-level activities such as *kolom* worship, home visits, and family gatherings. Although seemingly simple, home visits have a profound spiritual impact. It conveys the message: “You matter to me, and God cares about you.” In an increasingly individualistic world, the personal presence of a spiritual leader is one of the most tangible expressions of love.

Simultaneously, it is important to strengthen training and mentoring systems for special office-bearers. Many elders and deacons are chosen because of their dedication, but they do not necessarily possess adequate pastoral skills to be effective leaders. Training in effective communication, active listening, and conflict management can greatly assist them in fulfilling their role as “bridges” between the congregation and God.



#### 4. Integration of Minahasan Culture: *Mapalus* and *Masambo* as Social Capital for Fellowship

The fourth finding is one of the most unique and valuable aspects of this study: the integration of Minahasan cultural values—particularly *mapalus* (mutual cooperation) and *masambo* (communal deliberation)—into fellowship practices. These values are not merely preserved but revitalized within the context of Christian faith, thereby creating a highly contextual form of *koinonia*. *Mapalus* in the ecclesial context shows that solidarity is both spiritual and practical. During the construction of the church building, members came to help without pay, demonstrating that the spirit of mutual cooperation is alive. Moreover, through *mapalus*, many members met each other for the first time. This is a form of horizontal evangelization, where faith is transmitted through concrete action, not merely through preaching.

Likewise, *masambo* creates an egalitarian space where everyone—rich or poor, young or old—sits together, eats from the same dish, and prays as a family. This practice is powerful in forging a sense of brotherhood that lies at the heart of *Koinonia*. In a world that is increasingly polarized socially and economically, *masambo* is a peaceful protest against hierarchy and exclusivism. However, it is important to remember that local culture is not risk-free. As some special office-bearers caution, cultural values must always be tested against the Word of God. For instance, shame in Minahasan culture can be a positive motivation not to neglect worship, but it may also become a burden that makes someone afraid to come to church because they feel “unworthy.” Or, *masambo* can turn into an arena for displaying status if not managed wisely.

Therefore, cultural integration must be critically and reflectively undertaken. The church must continually reinterpret local traditions so that they do not hinder spiritual growth but instead become a means of proclaiming the Gospel. This is what is meant by contextual theology: faith rooted in Scripture that bears fruit in the local reality. Such a model is highly relevant for GMIM, a church with strong Minahasan roots. By integrating *mapalus* and *masambo* into the structure of fellowship, GMIM Filadelfia Wawontulap has found a unique pastoral formula: a *koinonia* that is both biblical and local in nature. This can serve as an inspiration for other churches in Indonesia that wish to develop fellowship models that are not alien to their communities’ culture.

#### 5. Concrete Strategies for Enhancing Participation and the Sense of Acceptance

The fifth theme offers several highly applicable practical recommendations. Proposals from members, such as family outings, cooking competitions, spiritual camps, and “open table” forums, indicate that the congregation desires fellowship that is more relaxed, inclusive, and intergenerational. This is a very appropriate response to contemporary challenges, in which children and adolescents are more interested in interactive activities than in rigid rituals. The church should not be afraid to innovate itself. Worship need not always occur within the church building; fellowship can take place outdoors, in the kitchen, on the playing field, or virtually.

Involving young people in the planning of activities is also a strategic step in this direction. When youth are engaged as executors and designers, they develop a sense of ownership and are more motivated to participate. This is a form of empowerment that aligns with the ethos of a young church that longs to be active and creative in its ministry. Meanwhile, the proposal for a “safe space for sharing” shows that members need a place to express their struggles without fear of being judged. This can be realized through small-group ministries, pastoral counseling, or moderated online forums facilitated by special officeholders. In an increasingly stressed and depressive world, the church must become a safe space—a place where souls can breathe.

The emphasis on identity as “beloved children of God” is a theologically crucial one. Many members feel inferior because they see themselves as “not active enough,” “not yet good enough,” or “unworthy.” However, God’s love is not based on achievement but on grace. Pastoral ministry must continually affirm this truth so that fellowship does not become a venue for spiritual competition but a space for acceptance and restoration.

#### 6. Towards a Transformative Fellowship Model: Integrating Theological, Sociological, and Cultural Dimensions

The findings of this study indicate the need for a holistic fellowship model that integrates three main dimensions: theological, sociological, and cultural. To date, many studies have focused on a single dimension. This study successfully links all three factors simultaneously, thereby providing a comprehensive and in-depth picture. The theological dimension is reflected in the congregation's commitment to God's word, prayer, and biblical teaching. However, faith does not stop at the doctrinal level; it is embodied in the relationships. The sociological dimension is evident in efforts to build social capital through *kolom* worship, conflict mediation and pastoral visitation. The church becomes a strong network of relationships in which every member feels noticed and needed by others.

The cultural dimension emerges through the use of local values, such as *mapalus* and *masambo*, as instruments for strengthening the community. Culture is not abolished but sanctified and directed toward God's glory.

Such a model corresponds to the concept of transformative relationships proposed in this study: fellowship that not only results in attendance but also in changes in attitude, openness, and active participation. The indicator of a successful fellowship is no longer the number of people present at Sunday worship but the extent to which they love, pray for, and help one another in their daily lives.

### 7. Pastoral Implications and Strategic Recommendations

Based on the findings and discussion, several pastoral recommendations can be adopted by GMIM Filadelfia Wawontulap: Strengthen *Kolom* Worship as the Primary Fellowship Unit. More frequent meetings (at least once every two weeks) should be scheduled, training should be provided for *kolom* leaders, and devotional materials relevant to everyday life should be supplied. Develop Intergenerational Programs: Organize joint activities, such as family gatherings, youth camps, or "senior days" that involve all age groups so that generational barriers can be broken down. Create Safe Forums for Sharing: Establish small groups or online forums facilitated by special office-bearers where members can share their struggles anonymously or openly, without fear of being judged. Train Elders in Pastoral Skills: Provide training in communication, active listening, and conflict mediation so that they can be more responsive and empathetic in their ministries. Integrate Local Culture Reflectively: Use *mapalus* and *masambo* as media for ministry while continually evaluating them so that they do not become empty rituals or instruments of exclusion. Emphasizing Grace-Based Identity in Preaching and Faith Formation: Teach that a person's value before God is not determined by service or social status, but by God's grace, so that fellowship becomes a space of acceptance rather than competition. Use Technology Wisely: Utilize WhatsApp groups or social media to strengthen communication while still prioritizing face-to-face encounters as the core of fellowship.

### CONCLUSION

This paper presents a detailed description of how fellowship plays a role in developing relationships among the members of the congregation at GMIM Filadelfia Wawontulap as a dynamic process with theological, social, and cultural aspects. Fellowship does not simply conceive of a ritualistic routine or physical attendance during worship, but a place of residence in fellowship with *koinonia*, a fellowship of faith-loving, nurturing, and maturing together in Christ. The results show that the fellowship practice in this congregation has been effective in strengthening social relationships, especially in *kolom* services, commission activities, and categorial fellowship. These smaller areas allow closer interaction and open opportunities for personal encounters, mutual prayer, and practical reactions in situations when members are sick or struggling. Such fellowship forms are essential in the environment of growing individualism and social isolation as a fortification of the Christian unity.

Moreover, the church is viewed as a proactive participant in the process of conflict resolution and pastoral accompaniment. The elders and the pastor have managed to establish a safe reconciliation venue via their method of prayer, visitation, and candid dialogue that is based on the love of Christ. This mediation process is not only effective in solving problems, but in most cases, it

strengthens the relationship between individuals, proving that true fellowships are created in the ability of the community to be able to incarnate restoring love. Nevertheless, leadership dynamics also show that there are some issues: pastors and elders are not so simple and personal; they are required to become more approachable, accessible, and personally present, particularly among young and insecure people. This is a matter of balancing pastoral authority and the hospitality of humility.

The difference between GMIM Filadelfia Wawontulap and other ghettos lies in the fact that Minahasan principles (*mapalus* (mutual cooperation) and *masambo* (deliberative communion) were applied to the practice of fellowship in the former. These values not only enhance solidarity but also serve as social capital to determine the communal identity of the congregation. The local culture that coincides with the spirit of the Gospel would be an essential base in the context of a model of fellowship that is relevant and generally accepted. In the future, participation improvement strategies should focus on two dimensions: structural and emotional, including the development of intergenerational activities and safe spaces to exchange personal experiences. Teaching identity as loved children of God also needs to be reinforced to handle feelings. In summary, this study reaffirms that the measurement of transformative fellowship is not the number of people present in church but the quality of fellowships that are a result of love, fellowship, and bravery to be a healing community in a divided world.

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