CHRISTIAN FORGIVENESS, RECONCILIATION, AND CONGREGATIONAL LIFE: QUANTITATIVE EVIDENCE FROM GMIM CHURCHES IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports a quantitative research on CM Christian forgiveness, reconciliation, and life in GMIM churches in Indonesia. This study examines the actualization of theological beliefs regarding forgiveness in daily relationships using a cross-sectional survey of adult members of various congregations and their role in the vitality of congregations. The concept of forgiveness is heavily asserted as a non-negotiable Christian ministry, and it is commonly experienced as peace in the soul. Respondents associated the forgiveness of other people with obedience to God and the release of anger and bitterness, and they considered other spiritual practices, such as prayer, to be relevant supports towards release. Simultaneously, the participants have a reticent and discriminating attitude: they note that they find it more demanding to forgive serious or recurrent crimes, and they always distinguish between intrapersonal forgiveness and interpersonal reconciliation. It is typically considered that reconciliation would only be acceptable where there is repentance, change of behavior, and relational safety, and in most cases under the mediation of pastors or elders. The sense of congregational climate indicates that teaching forgiveness is perceived to be consistent and clear, and practices of conflict handling and leadership modelling are perceived to be uneven. The patterns of correlation show that a better sense of belonging, perceived unity, and active engagement in ministries are linked to stronger forgiveness and reconciliation orientations. This study concludes that forgiveness and reconciliation are not just theological principles but also practical sources of congregational well-being and valuable tools in Christian witness in a plural and postcolonial society.

INTRODUCTIONS

The concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation hold a special place in Christian theology and church life. The call to forgive seventy times seven and be at peace with one another is not just an individual moral principle in the New Testament, but a shared calling that permeates the way churches make the gospel real in day-to-day relationships between one another. The current state of psychology has further confirmed that forgiving those who offend you is

related to lower levels of negative affect, good mental health, and functioning relationships (Davis et al., 2013; Fehr et al., 2010; Toussaint et al., 2015). These processes in religious communities assume a more spiritual sense of forgiveness, since the concepts of grace, sin, and redemption connected to forgiveness are mediated through liturgy, preaching, and pastoral care (Hill et al., 2000; Pargament, 2007).

Christian congregations in Indonesia exist in a world of religious plurality and infrequent intergroup conflicts. The theologically inclined literature suggests that forgiveness may represent a key social resource for perpetuating pluralism, national unity, and harmonious coexistence (Arina & Suoth, 2022; Utami et al., 2022). Similarly, in the Global South, public theology has highlighted the necessity of reinterpreting biblical forms of reconciliation into tangible actions of ubuntu, koinonia, and diakonia, which oppose violence and cultivate mutual recognition among social diversities (Breed & Semenya, 2015; Volf, 2000). However, in the day-to-day life of local churches, cell groups, choirs, consistory meetings, youth fellowships, conflict, hurt, and latent resentment are frequent occurrences, and the practice of forgiveness and reconciliation is not well embodied in most churches (Greer et al., 2014b; Hernandez et al., 2012).

The Gereja Masehi Injili di Minahasa (GMIM) is a massive Protestant Church with a long history of involvement in education, diakonia, and community building. GMIM congregations live at the crossroads of Minahasan and national culture of Pancasila ideology and global Protestant traditions, and they are constantly under pressure to negotiate within the group, generational differences, and broader social conflicts in a manner that indicates the gospel of reconciliation. Theologically oriented Indonesian studies emphasize that Christian forgiveness is presented as a gift from God as well as a moral duty, which is closely related to the integrity of the nation and the peace of society (Arina and Suoth, 2022; Rumbi and Sulle, 2024). However, the question of how these theological ideals are applied in the quantitative attitudes and practice patterns of members of ordinary congregations like the GMIM is very unclear.

Scientific research on forgiveness over the last 30 years has formed a solid conceptual and empirical basis. Situational and dispositional correlates of interpersonal forgiveness have been synthesized through meta-analytic work and provide consistent evidence of the relationship between forgivingness and reduced anger, depression, and hostility, and increased life satisfaction and relationship quality (Fehr et al., 2010; Davis et al., 2013; Wade et al., 2014). Longitudinal and cross-sectional studies also indicate that forgiving and being forgiven by God are both independently related to psychological well-being, although the positive impact of forgiving others is, in most cases, more obvious (Krause & Ellison, 2003; Pargament et al., 2005; Mróz, 2024).

Intervention research is no longer a simple theory but a systematic program that enables forgiveness in clinical, educational, and community environments. A significant number of randomized trials and quasi-experimental studies have demonstrated that psychoeducational and psychotherapeutic interventions have the potential to boost forgiveness and alleviate distress in a variety of populations (Freedman and Enright, 1996; Wade et al., 2014; Vasiliauskas and McMinn, 2013). The REACH Forgiveness model is significant in the literature. The literature on such multi-site work demonstrates the possibility of adapting REACH-based interventions to different cultures and the efficacy of the intervention in inducing emotional forgiveness (Lin et al., 2014; Worthington, 2024). More recently, studies have theorized forgiveness promotion as a health-focused intervention that can alleviate relational hostility and scale-to-flourish (Toussaint et al., 2015; Washington-Nortey et al., 2022).

More importantly, some studies have investigated forgiveness in Christian congregational contexts. Greer et al. (2014a) also evaluated a self-administered Christian workbook for victims of within-congregation crimes and recorded substantial benefits in forgiveness levels and reductions in distress associated with unforgiveness. Similarly, Greer et al. (2014b) evaluated forgiveness toward an in-group offender among Christian congregations and demonstrated that climates related to forgiveness within congregations in terms of conflict and grace influence members' willingness to forgive fellow believers. In church-related settings, complementary interventions have shown that faith-based psychoeducation can advance the knowledge of forgiveness and assist in behavioral change in the

participants of the study (Harper et al., 2014; Hernandez et al., 2012). These studies indicate that congregations are not passive sceneries but living ecologies that may either foster or hinder forgiveness.

Simultaneously, religion and spirituality scholarship has stressed that forgiveness cannot be studied in the context of spiritual dynamics being isolated. This is because measures of religiousness and spirituality capture multidimensional constructs (such as religious meaning systems, sacred emotions, and spiritual coping), which tend to mediate the relationship between faith and health outcomes (Hill et al., 2000; Pargament, 2007; Vieten and Lukoff, 2022). Recent studies have demonstrated, among other things, how religiosity, religious meaning, and guilt-proneness have a combined effect on forgiveness tendencies and reconciliation-seeking tendencies in different cultural settings (Ghorbani et al., 2017; Mróz, 2024; Ho et al., 2017). This helps us understand that forgiveness in churches is a psychological and theological reality created by the church's teaching, liturgy, and communal stories.

Forgiveness and reconciliation have been a growing subject of theological and practical-theological reflection in Indonesia and the broader Global South as a way of surviving in plural societies characterized by historical traumas and continued conflict. Arina and Suoth (2022) believe that forgiveness is a religious command that allows Christians to maintain the pluralism of nations and overcome horizontal violence. Breed and Semanyi (2015) explain the use of ubuntu, koinonia, and diakonia as relational approaches to reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa, and that the resonances of these approaches can be well applied to other postcolonial church settings. Rumbi and Sulle (2024) demonstrate that the Christian memory of political violence in Indonesia can be re-written using the concept of forgiveness to oppose resentment and create restorative justice. This theological agenda is also present in Indonesian discussions on church and nation in the context of Pancasila and the legal safeguarding of religious diversity (Utami et al., 2022).

The combination of the state of the art proves three major points. First, forgiveness is empirically associated with well-being and is comprehensively amenable to interventions (Fehr et al., 2010; Toussaint et al., 2015; Wade et al., 2014). Second, congregations are an effective place to learn about forgiveness and develop it, and recent findings suggest that climbing climates and practices at the congregation level do not go to waste (Greer et al., 2014a, 2014b; Harper et al., 2014). Third, theologically speaking, the concept of forgiveness and reconciliation in Indonesia and the Global South has been theorized as an essential element of Christian witness in plural and post-conflict societies (Arina and Suoth, 2022; Breed and Semenya, 2015; Rumbi and Sulle, 2024; Volf, 2000).

Although such a rich theoretical and empirical basis exists, there are various gaps. The vast majority of psychological research on forgiveness and congregational life has been conducted in churches in North America, typically in predominantly white evangelical or mainline Protestant churches (Greer et al., 2014a, 2014b; Hernandez et al., 2012; Krause and Ellison, 2003). Although these studies reveal general processes, they fail to represent the experience of forgiveness and reconciliation in postcolonial, majority-Christian, but religiously plural societies such as Indonesia. The inclusion of ethnic identity, local culture, and national ideology can enormously influence the manner in which congregants understand the biblical dictates of forgiveness, their reaction to conflict within the church, and their association with other religious groups.

Furthermore, a large portion of the Indonesian literature on Christian forgiveness and reconciliation is qualitative, theological, or narrative in nature, with exegesis, doctrinal reflection, and narrative analysis as sources (Arina and Suoth, 2022; Rumbi and Sulle, 2024; Utami et al., 2022). These contributions are essential to the expression of normative visions; nevertheless, the descriptions are not systematic and quantitative accounts of the attitudes of the congregants, their perceived practices, and relational experiences. There is a dearth of survey-based, multi-congregation studies that measure the relationship between forgiveness, reconciliation, and congregational life among ordinary Protestant church members in Indonesian Protestant churches.

Moreover, the existing quantitative literature tends to concentrate either on the outcome of individual-level forgiveness or on the support provided by churches. Thus, it does not merge a set of indicators that may adequately measure forgiveness, reconciliation, and tangible elements of congregational life, including participation, perceived unity, conflict management, and intergroup attitudes (Krause & Ellison, 2003; Lin et al., 2014; Washington-Nortey et

al., 2022). Consequently, we have a wealth of little information on how differences in beliefs and practices of forgiveness in local churches relate to the quality of life lived in those churches, particularly in denominations that are historically extensive, socially entrenched, and theologically engaged with the issue of national pluralism, such as GMIM.

There are practical and theoretical implications for filling these gaps. At a practical level, pastors, elders, and lay leaders in GMIM and other such denominations would need an empirically based understanding of the way their congregations are negotiating hurt, conflict, and reconciliation in reality. Quantitative mapping of forgiveness-related attitudes and experiences can guide the development of pastoral counselling, small-group curricula, conflict-mediation efforts, and public-witness programs that are sensitive to local realities (Greer et al., 2014a; Harper et al., 2014; Hernandez et al., 2012). Since the relationships between forgiveness and mental health, as well as forgiveness and relational flourishing, have been documented, the efforts of churches to enhance forgiveness and reconciliation can also help promote the overall well-being of the communities where churches are incorporated (Krause and Ellison, 2003; Toussaint et al., 2015; Washington-Nortey et al., 2022).

On a theoretical level, the investigation of forgiveness and reconciliation among GMIM congregations enables the existing models, which are usually created in the West, to be tested, refined, or expanded in a postcolonial and pluralistic environment. Indonesian churches can provide quantitative data to demonstrate whether the connections between religiosity, forgiveness, and well-being found in other countries can also be confirmed in a context where Christianity is a minority religion at the national level but the majority religion at the regional level (Arina and Suoth, 2022; Ho et al., 2017; Mróz, 2024). Such work is helpful for a more genuinely global theology of religion and a more contextually based practical theology of reconciliation (Breed & Semanay, 2015; Volf, 2000).

Based on this context, the current study, Christian Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Congregational Life: Quantitative Evidence in GMIM Churches in Indonesia, makes several contributions. First, it presents one of the limited quantitative, multi-congregational studies of forgiveness and reconciliation in an Indonesian Protestant congregation, based on data randomly gathered among the members of multiple GMIM congregations between August and November 2025. In contrast to the previously noted Indonesian literature, which is mostly theological or historical in character (Arina and Suoth, 2022; Rumbi and Sulle, 2024; Utami et al., 2022), the current work deploys a systematic survey design, which allows capturing patterns in the level of ordinary congregants.

Second, the study combines validated psychological constructs of forgiveness, based on the research of REACH-based interventions, as well as other empirically supported interventions (Greer et al., 2014a; Lin et al., 2014; Wade et al., 2014; Worthington, 2024), with signs of congregational life that are directly applicable to pastoral practice in GMIM (perceived unity, conflict-handling, participation, and attitudes toward other religious groups). This ecological approach goes beyond the individualistic or purely theological approach, and forgiveness and reconciliation are treated as a relationship process that is part of the ecclesial structure and practices (Hill et al., 2000; Pargament et al., 2005; Vieten and Lukoff, 2022).

Third, through the examination of the relationship between forgiveness and reconciliation with experiences of congregation within a denomination with historical participation in societal matters and pluralism, the study produces context-based evidence that can be used to enrich the current activity of GMIM to incarnate the gospel in Indonesian society. It also augments the explanation of theological appeals to forgiveness as social capital (Arina and Suoth, 2022; Breed and Semanya, 2015; Rumbi and Sulle, 2024; Volf, 2000) with empirical evidence of the extent of such principles on the attitudes and experience of church members. Thus, the article represents a subtle, empirically based concept of Christian forgiveness and reconciliation as lived experiences in congregational life, and could be described as a unique contribution to be included in high-impact international journals of practical theology, psychology of religion, and intercultural studies.

METHOD

The research design was a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, which was used to test the relationships between Christian forgiveness and reconciliation and perceived congregational life in GMIM church members. Cross-sectional design is vital in the measurement of attitudes and self-reported practices at one point in time and the estimation of correlations among the latent constructs within the natural congregational context (Kelley et al., 2003). It is mostly descriptive in nature and correlational, with an added explanatory element in the form of multivariate modelling.

Primary data were gathered from August to November 2025 in some GMIM congregations in North Sulawesi. The sampling plan was a two-stage process. To achieve a variety of geographical representation (urban, peri-urban, rural), a variety of ministry profiles (e.g., large city congregations and small village churches) was chosen, but this was without going outside the GMIM denominational structure. Second, adult members who attended Sunday services or planned fellowship events in each of the chosen congregations were approached randomly following the service and invited to participate. This method is a type of probability sampling that is estimated in congregational scenarios where complete membership lists are not always available and eliminates the bias of more limited convenience sampling (Etikan et al., 2016).

The inclusion criteria were: (a) aged 18 years or older, (b) self-identified as a baptised member or regular attendee of the congregation in GMIM, and (c) able to comprehend the questionnaire in Indonesian. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. The ultimate analytic sample included all questionnaires that were considered full of the core constructs following data screening (see "Data analysis").

The questionnaire that was designed in Indonesian was a self-administered questionnaire that was either provided via paper or online (Google Forms) based on local infrastructure. The instrument was divided into four parts: (1) demographic and congregational traits (age, gender, marital status, education, involvement in church, length of membership); (2) attitudes toward Christian forgiveness (e.g., beliefs about meaning, limits, and costs of forgiving other people); (3) perceptions and self-reported practices of reconciliation (e.g., readiness to restore relations, mediated conflict resolution experience); and (4) indices of congregational life (e.g., sense of belonging, perceived unity and conflict, trust in leadership, involvement in ministries).

Sections 2–4 had 5-point Likert-type scales (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) on which most items were measured, enabling the construction of composite indices of major constructs. The format is common in congregational survey studies and allows the treatment of the responses as approximately continuous to undertake parametric analysis and is reasonable under reasonable assumptions (Kelley et al., 2003). The internal consistency of the constructs (forgiveness, reconciliation, congregational life) was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, and the reliability was understood based on the existing methodological debates, where high alpha values should not be over-supported, but dimensionality needs to be considered (Taber, 2018). Items with very low item-total correlations or reduced scale reliability were dropped or revised in the further run.

Data collection in each congregation was synchronized with the church board and pastor. The researcher or trained research assistants briefly described the purpose of the study after worship or fellowship activities, focusing on voluntariness, confidentiality, and anonymity. The respondents were allowed to fill in the questionnaire either on-site (paper) or through a link that they accessed using their devices. The questionnaire paper questionnaires were completed and placed in a sealed envelope, which was then placed in a central box to reduce social desirability and perceived pressure. The responses obtained over the Internet were stored in a database with passwords known to the members of the research team.

Data were exported, cleaned, and analyzed using a statistical package. Primary screening was performed by checking for missing values, out-of-range responses, and multivariate outliers. The sample was characterized using descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies) and central tendencies and dispersion of all the scale scores. Cronbach's alpha was used to test the scale reliability (Taber, 2018).Pearson correlations were used to test the

bivariate relationships between key constructs (forgiveness, reconciliation, and congregational life indicators). The magnitude of the effects was understood in terms of the standard rates of behavioral studies (Cohen, 1992). A sequence of multiple regression equations was estimated to investigate more intricate patterns where indicators of congregational life (i.e., perceived unity and participation), forgiveness and reconciliation scales, and appropriate demographic controls represented both dependent variables and predictors, respectively. A structural equation modelling procedure, namely, partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), will be used to estimate a latent structural equation between forgiveness, reconciliation, and congregational life, where both the size of the sample and measurement properties allow it (Hair et al., 2011). All analyses were based on the established rules of transparent and rigorous reporting of survey research (Kelley et al., 2003).

Data collection was performed after the study protocol was reviewed and approved by the appropriate institutional ethics committee. Participation was voluntary, and there were no consequences for non-participation in any form, including not answering any question or dropping out. No personal data were gathered in the questionnaire, and the names of the congregations were anonymized in the presentation to ensure the privacy of the individual and the institution.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The first set of analyses describes respondents' attitudes toward key dimensions of Christian forgiveness. As shown in Table 1, all forgiveness items have relatively high mean scores, especially those relating to Christian duty, inner peace, and the role of spiritual practices. By contrast, the more moderate mean on forgiving without apology and the higher difficulty in severe cases indicate a more cautious and nuanced stance.

Table 1. Key Findings on Christian Forgiveness among GMIM Members

No.	Forgiveness indicator	Mean (1–5)	SD	% Agree/Strongly agree	Brief description
1	"Forgiving others is a non-negotiable Christian obligation."	4.63	0.62	92%	Forgiveness is widely perceived as an integral element of Christian discipleship.
2	"When I forgive, I experience inner peace and relief."	4.35	0.70	88%	Forgiveness is experienced as contributing to personal peace and emotional restoration.
3	"I can forgive even when the offender never apologises."	3.74	0.89	69%	Many respondents are willing to forgive without an explicit apology, though levels are more moderate.
4	"It is difficult for me to forgive severe or repeated offences."	3.91	0.82	74%	Willingness to forgive becomes more conditional when offences are serious or repeatedly committed.
5	"Prayer and spiritual practices help me to forgive others."	4.47	0.64	90%	Spiritual practices are frequently reported as concrete supports for forgiving offenders.

The second block of descriptive statistics focuses on reconciliation and the conditions under which respondents consider it appropriate. Table 2 shows that respondents strongly agree that reconciliation is distinct from forgiveness and typically requires repentance and behavioural change. At the same time, high mean scores on the importance of boundaries and mediation suggest an emphasis on cautious, structured relational repair.

Table 2. Key Findings on Reconciliation and Relational Repair

No.	Reconciliation indicator	Mean (1–5)	SD	% Agree/Strongly agree	Brief description
1	"Forgiveness and reconciliation are not the same thing."	4.28	0.73	86%	Respondents clearly distinguish an inner decision to forgive from restoring the relationship.
2	"I am willing to reconcile when the offender shows repentance and change."	4.02	0.78	81%	Reconciliation is generally seen as appropriate when repentance and behavioural change are evident.
3	"In serious conflicts, it is important to keep healthy boundaries."	3.98	0.80	79%	Respondents emphasise the need for boundaries in cases of serious or long-standing conflict.
4	"Pastors and elders should mediate when church conflicts become difficult."	4.10	0.76	83%	Reconciliation processes are frequently expected to involve formal church leadership and mediation.
5	"Successful reconciliation usually leads to warmer relationships and cooperation."	4.21	0.72	85%	When reconciliation occurs, it is associated with more harmonious interaction and joint service.

The third set of indicators describes how respondents perceive the congregational climate and its impact on their experience of church life. As presented in Table 3, teaching on forgiveness is rated very positively, whereas perceived consistency between teaching and practice and leadership modelling receives more moderate scores. Sense of belonging and participation are generally high, especially among those who perceive a supportive forgiveness climate.

Table 3. Congregational Climate and Perceived Impact on Congregational Life

No.	Dimension of congregational life	Mean (1–5)	SD	% Positive (Agree/Strongly agree)	Brief description
1	Teaching about forgiveness is clear and consistent.	4.50	0.65	91%	Respondents generally perceive strong, consistent teaching on forgiveness in their congregations.

No.	Dimension of congregational life	Mean (1–5)	SD	% Positive (Agree/Strongly agree)	Brief description
2	Practice of forgiveness matches what is taught in the church.	3.56	0.87	62%	Perceived consistency between teaching and daily practice is moderate and varies between congregations.
3	Leaders model humility and openness when dealing with conflict.	3.72	0.82	66%	Leadership modelling of forgiveness is seen as present but not uniform across all settings.
4	I feel a strong sense of belonging and unity in my congregation.	4.08	0.74	84%	Higher forgiveness and reconciliation orientations co-occur with stronger feelings of unity and belonging.
5	I actively participate in ministries and activities of the church.	3.95	0.79	78%	Active participation in ministries is generally high, especially where the forgiveness climate is perceived as good.

Finally, composite indices were constructed to summarise forgiveness beliefs, reconciliation prudence, conflict-handling practices, and overall congregational life. As shown in Table 4, all indices are above the scale midpoint, with conflict-handling practices and forgiveness beliefs showing moderate positive correlations with the congregational life index. These patterns indicate that more positive forgiveness-related orientations tend to accompany richer experiences of congregational vitality.

Table 4. Synthesised Indices and Association with Congregational Life

Focus area (index)	Mean index score (1–5)	SD	Correlation with congregational life index (r)	Short descriptive conclusion
Forgiveness beliefs and motives	4.38	0.58	0.43	Stronger forgiveness beliefs are moderately associated with richer congregational life experiences.
Reconciliation prudence (boundary-sensitive stance)	4.05	0.61	0.28	A nuanced, prudent view of reconciliation shows a small-to-moderate positive link with congregational life.
Conflict-handling practices (leadership & processes)	3.54	0.76	0.52	Better perceived conflict-handling practices show a moderate association with congregational health.

Focus area (index)	Mean index score (1–5)	SD	Correlation with congregational life index (r)	Short descriptive conclusion
Overall congregational life index	4.01	0.51	–	On average, respondents report a generally positive experience of congregational life.

Discussion

This project aimed to investigate how Christian forgiveness, reconciliation, and congregational life are lived by the members of GMIM churches and examined quantitatively in the cross-congregational survey. The results may be classified into four interrelated themes: the centrality of forgiveness in GMIM spirituality, the distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation, the influence of congregational climate on these processes, and the implications of forgiveness on congregational health and public witness.

1 Forgiveness as normative discipleship and spiritual well-being.

This robust support for forgiveness as a duty of a Christian is in line with a general body of empirical evidence that religious commitment is positively related to trait forgivingness and willingness to forgive interpersonal offences (Davis et al., 2013; Fehr et al., 2010). In the GMIM, respondents tend to base forgiveness on the previous act of grace in Christ by God and biblical imperatives, which are repeated in theological explanations of forgiveness as a fundamental discipline and an indicator of engagement with the life of God (Arina & Suoth, 2022; Volf, 2000).

Simultaneously, the information supports the idea that forgiveness is not only worshipped as obedience but also as a way of healing the soul. This is similar to studies that have demonstrated strong correlations between forgiving others and psychological health, such as reduced depression and anger and increased life satisfaction (Fehr et al., 2010; Krause and Ellison, 2003). The focus on such a component of the issue as peace of mind shared by numerous respondents is consistent with the results of health-centered research, where dispositional forgiveness and forgiveness interventions are used to help people get less upset and lead better, healthier lives (Chen et al., 2018; Toussaint et al., 2015). Therefore, forgiveness in GMIM congregations appears to play the same role as a spiritual practice, moral obligation, and psychosocial coping skill.

2. making a distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation.

The second outstanding result is that there is always a difference between respondents' forgiving and reconciling. Forgiveness is viewed as letting go of resentment in the presence of God, and reconciliation is the reestablishment of trust and restoration of intimacy in relationships. This theoretical distinction reflects theological and psychological arguments that warn against equating forgiveness with the automatic restoration of the status quo, particularly in instances of maltreatment, lifelong exploitation, or power imbalance (Arina and Suoth, 2022; Rumbi and Sulle, 2024). Psychologically speaking, this difference corresponds to models that distinguish between intrapersonal forgiveness (emotional and motivation change towards the offender) and interpersonal reconciliation (resumption of relationship behavior), with the former possible in the absence of the latter when perceived safety or justice issues are not addressed (Fehr et al., 2010; Toussaint et al., 2015). The GMIM evidence indicates that a good number of congregants intuitively work with this subtle knowledge: they approve the message of forgiveness but demand repentance, responsibility, and structural reforms as the terms of reconciliation.

This pattern questions naïve pastoralism that may unwittingly coerce victims into oblivion by forgiving and forgetting without necessarily touching on processes. It also substantiates the topicality of context-sensitive interventions of forgiveness, including those that have been experimented with in Christian congregational

communities, which combine theological education, psychological knowledge, and power relations (Greer et al., 2014; Harper et al., 2014). In the case of GMIM, the support and acknowledgment of the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation can assist leaders in not spiritualizing harm while promoting the spirit of true mercy at the same time.

3 Congregational climate: Theology teaching and lived practice.

The third theme is related to the role of the congregational climate. The general perception of the respondents is that their churches have been consistently teaching about forgiveness through sermons, Bible study, and pastor counselling. This is in line with past Indonesian theological research that claims churches consider forgiveness key to maintaining national pluralism and countering the rhythms of horizontal violence (Arina & Suoth, 2022). This also aligns with the general body of literature on community sanctification, which reveals that the higher the congregation treat forgiveness as a holy value, the more likely members are to interpret relational strains in spiritual terms and find faith-grounded solutions (Davis et al., 2013; Washington-Nortey et al., 2022).

However, the statistics also point to a clash between rhetoric and practice. Other respondents expressed unresolved conflicts between councils, ministry teams, or families, and leadership styles as being perceived as not making tough discussions. This resembles the results of congregational research demonstrating that simple affirmation of forgiveness in the doctrines of a specific community is not enough; the availability of actual, relationally secure practices, such as facilitated dialogue, confession, and restitution, defines whether forgiveness does remake communal life (Greer et al., 2014; Breed and Semenya, 2015).

In the South African context, Breed and Semenya (2015) suggest that to achieve reconciliation, there is a need to integrate ubuntu, koinonia, and diakonia, which are community solidarity, abiding fellowship, and service to others. Such a revelation was experienced in this GMIM study. In a setting where leaders are humble role models capable of making wrongful decisions and creating a room where honest dialogue is possible, forgiveness seems to have a greater chance of turning into reconciliation and restored koinonia. Where power is defensively applied or a conflict is even allowed to simmer down without being openly worked on, the teaching on forgiveness may be received as an imposition of morality instead of being received as liberation.

4 Forgiveness, reconciliation, and congregational health.

In a descriptive way, the more forgiving and reconciliation-oriented respondents in this sample also experience more of the congregational life, more belonging, a sense of unity, and participation. This trend is in line with empirical studies that have found a causal relationship between forgiveness and relationship and community prosperity, even though causal directionality is not available in cross-sectional studies. Studies involving older adults have found that forgiving others and receiving divine forgiveness are linked to improved social relations and mental health (Krause & Ellison, 2003). Intervention research also reports that when participants learn to forgive, they tend to declare their relationships to be better, more empathetic, and they are willing to re-enter community life (Greer et al., 2014; Harper et al., 2014).

On a population health level, Washington-Nortey et al. (2022) proposed that forgiveness can be described as a kind of relational health resource that protects against chronic interpersonal stress and provides resiliency. The existence of a climate of forgiveness in GMIM, where congregations frequently act as extended family and civic organizations, can thus extend to impact relationships outside the church walls, influencing neighborhood integration and intergroup relationships. On the other hand, unforgiveness and unresolved conflict can destroy trust and decrease participation, undermining the ability of the church to engage in diakonia and public witness.

This is theologically echoed in Volf's (2000) argument that forgiveness and reconciliation are not virtues practiced by each individual but by society, building a new form of community in which there is no cycle of exclusion and vengeance. According to GMIM data, where forgiveness is joined to straightforward confrontation, repentance, and building of humility, congregational existence might be a place of recovery and belonging. In cases where such elements are lacking, the discourse of forgiveness can conceal or even sustain structural injustices.

5 Contextual implications for GMIM and Indonesian churches.

The findings also have some contextual implications. The plural society and the history of local strife in Indonesia ensure that forgiveness and reconciliation are not an issue of intra-church but, rather, they are a part of Christian involvement in the national project of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika. Both the theological literature by Arina and Suoth (2022) and the historical study by Rumbi and Sulle (2024) show how Christian tales of forgiveness might leave resentment or lead to restorative justice, depending on the interpretations of memory, power, and trauma.

This study supplements such theological reflections by providing quantitative evidence from some common congregants. This alludes to the fact that several GMIM members already possess an advanced, embodied theology of forgiveness, which places more weight on grace, inner healing, and the need to have intelligent boundaries. Concurrently, it exposes areas of weakness: unresolved conflicts, inconsistent leadership modelling, and the risk that victims would be pressured to reconcile too soon. The resolution of these tensions will involve conscious investments in the formation of leadership, conflict-transformation practices, and pastoral counselling that combine psychological understanding with contextual theology: In practice, GMIM and similar churches may want to ponder the following:

Coming up with systematic curricula of forgiveness and reconciliation in small groups and catechesis, based on both Scripture and experience; Educating pastors and elders about basic conflict mediation and trauma-informed pastoral care to integrate members into the complicated path of forgiving and, where suitable, reconciling; Providing harm reduction through facilitated circles or retreats in which long-standing disputes may be named, lamented, and worked through without the fear of stigma; It is important to make it very clear in preaching and teaching how to distinguish between forgiveness and reconciliation to guard the victims against spiritualized coercion, whilst not being disobedient to the call to forgive.

6 Limitations and future directions.

Several shortcomings should be mentioned. Although the sample varied among the congregations, it is not yet a nationally representative sample of Indonesian churches, and the cross-sectional design makes it impossible to make causal claims. There is also the vulnerability of self-report measures to social desirability bias, especially in a religious world where forgiveness is greatly valorised. Further studies may include longitudinal designs, behavioral measures (e.g., actual reconciliation programmes), or mixed methods methodologies involving a combination of survey questionnaires and in-depth interviews or case studies of congregations.

Moreover, further research is required to investigate the interaction between forgiveness and other aspects of spirituality in Indonesian churches, such as lament, prophetic critique, and structural justice. Based on the new world literature on religion, forgiveness, and health (Chen et al., 2018; Toussaint et al., 2015; Washington-Nortey et al., 2022), Indonesian researchers could create context-related models, combining local cultural resources (e.g., mapalus, musyawarah) with biblical images of koinonia and shalom.

7 Conclusion

Overall, the research indicates that GMIM congregants have a high level of affirming Christian forgiveness, perceive it as spiritual obedience and inner healing, and firmly distinguish between it and reconciliation. The life of the congregation is typically viewed as supporting forgiveness, whereas conflict-handling processes are lopsided. Where forgiveness and reconciliation are practiced in a manner that respects justice and boundaries, as well as accountability to one another, they seem to be linked to a stronger sense of belonging and livelier congregational existence.

These results indicate that GMIM and other Indonesian churches have important theological and psychosocial resources for responding to conflict, both within and outside the church. They emphasize the importance of deliberate creation, contemplative leadership, and context-based practice that would make forgiveness not an instrument of coercion but a way to actual healing and community prosperity.

CONCLUSION

This quantitative research investigates Christian forgiveness, reconciliation, and life in GMIM churches in Indonesia. Taking a cross-sectional survey of adult members of multiple congregations, the study examined the relationship between theological beliefs concerning forgiveness and practices and sense concerning congregational vitality. The conclusion combines the key empirical trends and comments on their consequences for Indonesian practical theology and pastoral ministry. First, the conclusions reveal that the issue of forgiveness is firmly supported as a non-negotiable Christian vocation and is perceived as a channel to inner peace. The respondents always associated the forgiveness of others with serving God and getting out of anger and bitterness. Pastoral counselling, prayer, and Bible reading are concrete spiritual practices that help congregants process their hurt and move towards release. Simultaneously, the participants did not support a naive perspective of forgiveness. They report having more trouble forgiving serious or recurring crimes and that forgiveness must be coupled with wisdom, limits, and the safety of victimized persons. Second, this study proves that there is an apparent difference between forgiveness and reconciliation. Forgiveness is an inner, spiritual process, and reconciliation can be seen as a process of re-establishing a relationship with renewed trust, behavior change, and very often, mediated dialogue. Respondents will be more than happy to make peace when repentance and change are clear, but will not be persuaded to revert to close fellowship with people whose conditions do not offer such circumstances. This delicate position is particularly crucial in congregations with an unequal distribution of power, family issues, and lengthy histories of discord, and it provides an empirical remedy to pastoral strategies that may unconsciously limit harm. Third, the survey indicates areas of strength and weaknesses in the congregational climate of GMIM churches. Theoretical teaching about forgiveness is seen as direct and even-handed, but daily conflict management and modelling of leadership are seen as lopsided. However, increased forgiveness and reconciliation orientations come with an increased sense of belonging, perceived unity, and being more active in ministries. These trends indicate that forgiveness and reconciliation are not merely theological concepts but realistic sources of congregational health.

Finally, this study describes the importance of the continuous training of pastors, elders, and lay leaders to transform conflicts, engage in trauma-sensitive pastoral care, and wisely incorporate forgiveness, justice, and reconciliation. Such methodological constraints as cross-sectional design and the use of self-reports call into doubt the cause-and-effect interpretation and suggest the usefulness of longitudinal and mixed-methods studies in future studies. Future research should compare GMIM congregations with other denominations or inter-religious contexts and give voice to those most affected by conflict and violence. Collectively, the results leave GMIM congregations in a considerable position of being key laboratories of learning how Christian forgiveness and reconciliation can be practiced in a plural, postcolonial society and how the practices can be used to ensure the prosperity of both church and community at large.

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