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Strengthening Children's Faith Through SEKAMI Activities at St. Joseph Watulajar Parish: The Effectiveness of SEKAMI Activities in Strengthening Children's Faith at St. Joseph Watulajar Parish

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ABSTRACT

This community service activity was conducted to address the low level of children's participation and engagement in church-based faith development programs at St. Yoseph Watulajar Station. The activity aimed to analyze the effectiveness of SEKAMI (Pontifical Missionary Childhood Association) activities in strengthening children's faith. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, involving direct observation, interviews with facilitators and participants, and documentation. The collected data were analyzed using a SWOT framework to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges in the implementation process. The results showed that well-designed, creative, and participatory SEKAMI activities showed clear improvement in children's involvement, enthusiasm, and confidence in engaging with faith-related practices such as prayer, group interaction, and religious reflection. Children showed more regular attendance, more active participation in prayer, and a stronger sense of belonging to the Church. They also demonstrated more positive attitudes toward church participation, including greater consistency in attending spiritual activities. In addition, the program strengthened social relationships among participants and encouraged a sense of responsibility within the group. These findings indicate that SEKAMI activities are effective in strengthening children's faith through meaningful and participatory experiences. In conclusion, SEKAMI activities provide an effective, contextual, and sustainable model of faith formation that is responsive to the challenges faced by children in the modern era.

INTRODUCTION

Faith is the primary foundation of Christian life and must be instilled from an early age. Childhood is a crucial stage in the formation of values, attitudes, and character that will influence a person's future life (Cahyaningrum & Prasetyo, 2021). Therefore, faith formation for children should not only focus on knowledge but also on the lived experience of faith (Reyaan & Tarihoran, 2023). Consequently, the Church bears a pastoral responsibility to provide faith formation resources appropriate to children's developmental stages (Darina, 2024). However, in the pastoral context at the parish level, children's faith formation often does not run optimally due to limited

guidance and low child participation. This condition is also evident at St. Joseph Watulajar Parish, where children's involvement in faith formation activities remains relatively low and has not been consistent; therefore, more contextual and participatory efforts are needed to strengthen children's faith.

In the tradition of the Catholic Church, children's faith formation is realized through various forms of pastoral ministry, one of which is through the activities of the Pontifical Missionary Society for Children and Youth (SEKAMI) (Darina, Agustiningtyas, & X, 2021). SEKAMI is a movement aimed at fostering children's faith, missionary zeal, and social awareness through prayer, faith deepening, and concrete acts of love (Mendrofa, 2025). Through a simple and contextual approach, these activities allow children to discover and experience Catholic values in a more enjoyable and meaningful way (Sijabat & Simarmata, 2025). In the parish context, SEKAMI serves as a potential tool to bridge regular and contextual faith formation for children.

However, the development of digital technology and current lifestyle changes pose serious challenges to children's faith formation. Children tend to be more interested in digital media such as online games, social media, and visual entertainment compared to spiritual activities, leading to a decline in their engagement in church life (Abiddin et al., 2022). This situation highlights a gap between the need for faith formation and the reality of children's lives in the modern era, which is increasingly shaped by technology. Consequently, conventional faith formation activities are often less appealing to children because they are perceived as uninteresting. At St. Joseph's Parish in Watulajar, the influence of technology and entertainment activities is also evident in the declining interest of children in regularly attending faith formation activities. Many children prefer to spend time with digital devices rather than participating in SEKAMI activities or other spiritual activities. Therefore, a more creative, contextual, and child-centered approach to faith formation is needed to re-engage them in church life.

Previous studies have shown that faith formation conducted in a planned, participatory, and contextual manner can enhance children's understanding of faith and their engagement in religious life (Gultom & Sitepu, 2025). This underscores that an approach actively involving children in the faith formation process plays a crucial role in shaping more meaningful religious experiences. However, most of these studies still focus on conceptual aspects or are conducted in different contexts, thus failing to specifically examine the implementation of SEKAMI activities as a form of community service at the parish level (Atasoge & Aran, 2024). This situation indicates a gap between theoretical research and actual practice in the field. Therefore, more contextual and applied research is needed to address local pastoral needs. Previous findings indicate that participatory faith formation is effective; however, there are few articles on community service that specifically examine the implementation of SEKAMI activities at the parish level as a model for sustainable children's faith formation.

This situation is also found at St. Joseph's Parish in Watulajar, where children's participation in faith formation activities remains relatively low. Children have not yet demonstrated consistent participation in SEKAMI activities, which is attributed to a lack of activity variety, limited guidance, as well as the influence of family environment and technology (Lumbanbatu & Gurusinga, 2025). This is reinforced by initial observation results indicating that children's attendance frequency in SEKAMI activities remains irregular, some children often arrive late, and activities have not been conducted routinely. Furthermore, parental involvement in accompanying their children remains insufficient, resulting in suboptimal faith formation at home. This situation leads to a lack of continuity in children's faith experiences in their daily lives. Consequently, there is a need for more targeted, sustainable, and multi-stakeholder efforts particularly involving families as a crucial component in children's faith development.

Based on these conditions, the novelty of this article lies in the development of a SEKAMI activity model designed contextually and participatively at the parish level, by adapting the form of activities to the characteristics of the children and local pastoral conditions. This approach emphasizes not only theoretical aspects but also practical implementation oriented toward children's needs and concrete on-the-ground situations. Consequently, the developed activity model is expected to provide more relevant, engaging, and sustainable faith experiences for children as the primary target (King et al., 2023).

The solution offered in this activity is the development of creative, participatory, and child-centered SEKAMI activities through various core activities, namely communal prayer, brief faith reflection, educational games, simple reflections, and communal activities. These activities are designed contextually to attract children's interest while helping them understand faith values in a simpler and more enjoyable way. This approach emphasizes not only the delivery of content but also the active involvement of children in every stage of the activity. Through these direct experiences, children are expected to internalize the values of faith in their daily lives. Thus, SEKAMI activities are not merely routine tasks but also serve as a meaningful means of faith formation. This approach is expected to increase children's engagement while fostering a more concrete experience of faith in their lives. This article aims to strengthen children's faith through the implementation of SEKAMI activities at St. Joseph Watulajar Parish and to analyze the effectiveness of these activities in enhancing children's engagement and religious attitudes.

IMPLEMENTATION METHODS

This community service activity employs a qualitative descriptive approach aimed at deeply understanding the conditions of children's faith formation and designing programs aligned with the needs of the partner (Atasoge & Aran, 2024). This approach was chosen because it can describe phenomena contextually and provide a foundation for making appropriate program decisions. The implementation methods used combine community education, mentoring, and training deemed relevant to enhance children's engagement in faith activities (Nuryana et al., 2025). Community education is used to convey foundational faith materials in a simple and easily understandable manner for children. Mentoring is conducted directly during activities to guide, direct, and ensure their active participation. Meanwhile, training is implemented through prayer exercises, hymns, and educational games that support the faith formation process in a fun and participatory manner.

The target audience for this activity is children participating in SEKAMI activities at St. Joseph's Parish in Watulajar, with a total of 25 participants aged 7–12 years. The participants are elementary school-aged children who currently have a low level of involvement in church activities (Darina, Agustiningtyas, & Pius X, 2021). This target group was selected based on the urgent need to enhance children's participation and understanding of faith from an early age as the foundation of their religious lives (Cahyaningrum & Prasetyo, 2021). The activities were designed using language and activity formats tailored to the participants' age range to ensure equitable participation.

This activity was conducted at St. Joseph's Parish in Watulajar during the community service period, specifically from July to August 2025. The program was implemented over four sessions, scheduled according to the participants' availability. This location was chosen due to its real-world challenges regarding low child participation in faith formation activities (Lumbanbatu & Gurusinga, 2025). The materials and media used in this program include the Holy Bible, the SEKAMI guidebook, educational aids, children's spiritual songs, and game-based media that support the faith learning process in an enjoyable way (Sari et al., 2024). All these materials are used to create a participatory and contextual formation environment (Bustomi, 2024).

The implementation stages are carried out systematically, beginning with problem identification through initial observation, needs-based program planning, coordination with mentors and parish leaders, the implementation of SEKAMI activities, ongoing mentoring, activity evaluation, and the development of program follow-up plans (Gultom & Sitepu, 2025). Each stage is designed to ensure active participant engagement and the sustainability of the children's faith development program (Mukin & Tarihoran, 2026). The implementation of activities is also organized in stages over several sessions: the first session focuses on communal prayer and an introduction to SEKAMI; the second on a simple deepening of faith; the third through educational games that support faith understanding; and the fourth on reflection and joint evaluation. This activity structure is designed so that children can participate in the faith formation process in a gradual, enjoyable, and meaningful way (Mukin & Tarihoran, 2026).

Data collection techniques were conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation (Creswell, 2020). Observation was used to directly observe children's engagement in activities, with indicators including attendance, willingness to answer questions, active participation in prayer, interaction with peers, and attitudes toward church activities (Sugiyono, 2021). Interviews were conducted with mentors, parents, and participants to obtain deeper insights into their experiences and the changes that occurred during the activities. Meanwhile, documentation was used to record the entire activity process as supporting data. The evaluation instruments used included observation sheets, interview guidelines, and activity reflection notes, all systematically organized to facilitate the data analysis process (Auliya et al., 2020).

The data obtained were then analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis combined with SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats). SWOT analysis was used to identify internal and external factors influencing the implementation of the activities, thereby enabling the formulation of appropriate strategies to enhance the program's effectiveness (Witara et al., 2023). The results of the SWOT analysis are then presented in a matrix to illustrate the interrelationships between strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the implementation of SEKAMI activities. Based on this matrix, strategies for developing activities that are more contextually relevant, participatory, and aligned with the needs of children at the parish level are formulated. Additionally, an evaluation of changes in children's faith was conducted descriptively by comparing their engagement and attitudes before and after the activities based on observation and interview results. Thus, the methods used in this activity were deemed appropriate for the partners' needs as they effectively integrated problem analysis and program implementation directly within the context of children's church life.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of community service activities through the SEKAMI program at the Santo Yosep Watulajar Parish was carried out based on the results of problem identification conducted in the methodology phase. The activities focused on nurturing children's faith through a participatory approach, which included communal prayer, simple faith deepening, educational games, and communal activities. This approach was designed to align with children's characteristics, thereby creating a joyful and meaningful environment for faith learning (Mayela et al., 2025). Overall, these activities demonstrated changes in attendance, engagement, participation in prayer, and children's attitudes toward the Church.

The results of the activity implementation show that the children's level of engagement has clearly increased. Children who were previously less active began to show enthusiasm in participating in the activities. This is evident from more consistent attendance, active participation in prayer and hymns, as well as the courage to interact with peers and mentors. The group activities conducted also helped foster a sense of community and boost the children's confidence in expressing their faith (Simulingga & Sitepu, 2025).



Figure 1. Children's faith formation activities through prayer and fellowship during SEKAMI activities at St. Joseph Watulajar Parish.

Furthermore, ongoing mentoring activities have a positive impact on changes in children’s attitudes. Children who were previously passive have begun to show active engagement in church activities. They not only participate physically but also begin to understand the meaning behind the faith activities they undertake. This indicates that faith formation methods based on experience and participation are effective in enhancing children’s religious understanding (Sinulingga & Sitepu, 2025). Figure 1 illustrates the atmosphere of prayer and fellowship that fosters children’s initial participation in activities. Meanwhile, Figure 2 depicts group activities that help children become more confident in interacting with peers and mentors.



Figure 2. Faith mentoring for children through group activities in the SEKAMI program at St. Joseph Watulajar Parish

Table 1. Changes in Children’s Engagement and Religious Attitudes Before and After SEKAMI Activities

Observed Aspects	Before the Service	After the Program
Children’s attendance	Inconsistent	More regular and consistent
Active participation in activities	Tends to be passive	Active and enthusiastic
Participation in prayer	Limited	Courageous and engaged
Attitude toward the Church	Not very interested	Shows joy and a sense of belonging

The results of the activity evaluation also show improvements in several key aspects of children’s faith formation, as presented in the table. The results of the activity evaluation indicate improvements in several key aspects of children’s faith formation, as presented in Table 1. These changes are evident in attendance, engagement, participation in prayer, and children’s attitudes toward the Church. The before and after categories were determined based on the results of observation sheets completed by the during the activity and supported by interview data from mentors, parents, and participants. These findings indicate that the SEKAMI activities have a positive impact on children’s engagement and the development of their religious attitudes.

The table shows significant positive changes in various aspects of children’s faith formation. These findings reinforce the results of the methodological analysis through a comparison between the initial and final conditions, which demonstrate an improvement in the quality of children’s faith. Thus, the SEKAMI program can be deemed effective in enhancing children’s engagement and religious attitudes, as reflected in the pre- and post-activity evaluation results, which indicate an overall improvement in the quality of faith formation.

From an analytical perspective, the success of this activity cannot be separated from the supporting and inhibiting factors that influenced the program’s implementation. The supporting factors namely the enthusiasm of the mentors and the support from the parish were utilized to the fullest during the activity. Meanwhile, hindering factors, such as the children’s low initial interest, were addressed through creative and interactive activity innovations (Nirfayanti, Rahmawati, 2023). Additionally, the church’s environmental support further strengthened the program’s success, while challenges such as the influence of technology were addressed by introducing activities that were more engaging and aligned with the children’s world (Banjarnahor et al., 2025).

The findings of this article reinforce the results of the study (Winditya, 2021), particularly regarding the aspect that faith formation designed in a planned, participatory, and contextual manner and aligned with the children's world is more effective in enhancing children's engagement compared to one-way instruction. However, previous research has tended to emphasize conceptual aspects without delving deeply into the practical implementation of contextual activity models, particularly within the parish setting. In this study, the increase in children's activity and participation in SEKAMI activities indicates that an approach directly involving children can foster a deeper internalization of religious values. Thus, the findings of this study not only align with previous studies but also fill a research gap by presenting an implementable model of contextual and participatory faith formation for children at the parish level.

The tangible impact of these activities is evident not only in increased attendance and participation among children but also in shifts in their attitudes and sense of belonging toward the Church (Gultom & Sitepu, 2025). Children have become more open, confident, and show greater interest in participating in church activities. This is evident in their behavior, such as the courage to lead prayers, more punctual attendance, and more active involvement in singing and faith formation. These findings indicate that SEKAMI activities serve not only as routine events but also as an effective and sustainable means of faith formation.

Nevertheless, these activities still have limitations, particularly regarding the relatively short duration of sessions and the lack of supporting resources (Sitinjak, 2025). Additionally, the family's role, which remains suboptimal, poses a challenge in sustaining children's faith formation outside of SEKAMI activities. Limitations in resources for implementing activities are addressed by utilizing simple media and easily accessible materials, while still supporting children's active engagement. Meanwhile, time constraints are addressed by condensing core sessions focused on essential and meaningful activities. Regarding the still-limited family involvement, this is addressed through parent-centered follow-up recommendations, such as faith guidance at home and more intensive communication between mentors and families. Therefore, follow-up actions are needed to strengthen parental roles and develop more sustainable programs (Bungin & Bua, 2025). Overall, the results of this community service activity indicate that the contextually and participatively designed SEKAMI program is capable of making a tangible contribution to enhancing children's faith at St. Joseph's Parish in Watulajar. This program can serve as an effective and relevant model for children's faith formation to be applied in similar pastoral contexts (Sinulingga, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The SEKAMI activities at St. Joseph Watulajar Parish clearly demonstrate that a participatory and contextual approach is effective in increasing children's engagement and religious attitudes, as evidenced by increased attendance, active participation, involvement in prayer, and the development of a positive attitude toward church life. Therefore, this activity model is not only relevant but also worthy of recommendation as an approach to children's faith formation at the parish level. The sustainability of this program requires a genuine commitment through the strengthening of the role of mentors and the active involvement of families, so that children's faith formation can proceed consistently, purposefully, and sustainably.

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