

# Phenomenological exploration of pastoral theology praxis among IPI Malang alumni as lay missionaries



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**Abstract** Lay missionaries play a crucial role in proclaiming the gospel, particularly within inclusive and community-oriented pastoral contexts. The Indonesian Pastoral Institute (IPI) has produced numerous alumni who serve as lay missionaries in diverse regions, facing theological, cultural, and social challenges. This research employs Edmund Husserl's phenomenology to explore the essential meaning of lay missionaries' experiences in practicing pastoral theology, particularly in light of Paul Janssen's theological insights. This research aims to uncover the essential meaning of the missionary experience in the practice of pastoral theology. Additionally, it seeks to understand the personal and spiritual transformations experienced by lay missionaries and their impact on the communities they serve. This research adopts a qualitative approach using Husserlian phenomenology. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with IPI alumni who have undertaken pastoral missions. The analysis follows the phenomenological reduction method, incorporating epoché, noesis-noema analysis, and the constitution of meaning through intersubjectivity. The research reveals that the lay missionary experience is a multidimensional transformation encompassing theological, emotional, and social aspects. The duality of experience, between joy and struggle—is an inherent part of their spiritual journey. The proclamation of the gospel within a pastoral context is not only verbal but also manifests in social and cultural engagements, demonstrating a more inculturated and dialogical approach to pastoral theology. This research recommends that pastoral education institutions such as IPI emphasize an integrative approach in their curriculum. This should include phenomenological reflection training, inculturated evangelization methods, and enhanced social and emotional competencies for future lay missionaries. By adopting these approaches, alumni will be better equipped to navigate the complexities of pastoral missions and serve as effective agents of transformation.

**Keywords:** praxis in pastoral, pastoral theology, lay missionary, husserlian phenomenology, spiritual transformation, inculturation

## 1. Introduction

The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) was a pivotal turning point in the history of the Catholic Church. One of its most significant contributions was the recognition and affirmation of the role of laity in the Church's mission. Prior to the Second Vatican Council, the role of missionaries was often identified with religious and clerical figures. However, the Council's documents, particularly "Ad Gentes" and "Apostolicam Actuositatem," emphasized that the Church's mission is the responsibility of all believers, including the laity. This marked a paradigm shift in understanding who is called to engage in missionary work. The life and development of the Catholic Church truly became a shared responsibility among all Catholics (Prasetyo, 2011).

Father Paul Janssen, a theologian and one of Indonesia's representatives at the Second Vatican Council, grasped the essence of this shift in thought and actively participated in its implementation. His presence at the Council was a historic moment for the Catholic Church in Indonesia. The involvement of the laity plays a crucial role in the Church's development as coworkers with the clergy in making God present among His people. According to Father Paul Janssen, understanding laity as missionaries involves recognizing that every member of the Church is called to actively participate in the mission, both in their immediate environment and in regions that have yet to be reached. He emphasized that lay missionaries carry the message of the gospel through their daily lives, work, and social interactions. This perspective enriches the understanding of the Church's mission as being more inclusive and holistic (Riyanto, 2022). The experiences of lay missionaries, particularly the alumni of IPI Malang, serve as a manifestation of gospel theology, as it is through this pastoral work that the Holy Spirit operates and is present in their lives as a community under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Janssen, 1972).

The Indonesian Pastoral Institute (IPI) is an educational institution that prepares young individuals to become coworkers with clergy. Education and formation at the IPI play a central role in shaping lay missionaries through a holistic approach to pastoral theology. The curriculum, which incorporates various teaching methods, fosters critical reflection and the application



of theology in real-life contexts. Through this approach, IPI students are not only provided with theoretical knowledge but also trained to connect theology with the social, cultural, and religious realities of Indonesia. IPI serves as a place where future lay missionaries are equipped with profound understanding and relevant skills to spread religious teachings within diverse and complex Indonesian societies. This formation takes place within a pastoral learning context, and upon completion, graduates are commissioned to undertake pastoral work (Farley, 1983).

Father Janssen recognized the importance of forming lay missionaries capable of fostering a community life in building the Church. In this context, the community serves as a foundation for pastoral work that involves collaboration and mutual support among lay missionaries in their ministry. The understanding of laity as missionary, as emphasized by the Second Vatican Council and interpreted by Paul Janssen, provides both theological and practical foundations for this study. By examining the experiences of IPI alumni, this research aims to uncover how the vision of the Council has been realized in practical contexts and to provide valuable insights for the future development of the Church's mission. The experiences of alumni serve as a source of inspiration and learning for the growth of the Church and for other believers in understanding and carrying out their mission in an increasingly complex and diverse society.

In this context, lay missionaries are understood as members of the laity (distinct from the ordained clergy) who are responsible for ministering to fellow believers while being rooted in communion with Christ through the Word of God and the sacraments. This communion enables lay missionaries to participate in Christ's threefold office as priests, prophets, and kings. This study focuses on IPI alumni who are engaged in lay missionary work across various regions of Indonesia. The reason for this focus is that researchers have observed and heard how IPI alumni, as missionaries, demonstrate a strong commitment to pastoral theological praxis in accompanying, nurturing, forming, and developing communities in different regions, including remote areas of Indonesia. Despite numerous challenges, they remain dedicated to bringing people to Christ and leading them toward salvation.

This research aims to address the experiences of IPI alumni as lay missionaries in implementing the pastoral theological praxis of Paul Janssen. Furthermore, it seeks to uncover the essential theological meaning derived from their experiences in carrying out this praxis. The central research question focuses on the experiences of lay missionaries and their efforts to realize the pastoral theological praxis of Paul Janssen. Therefore, this study is conducted under the title: "Phenomenological Exploration of Pastoral Theology Praxis among IPI Malang Alumni as Lay Missionaries".

## 2. Materials and Methods

The present study employs a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach. This choice is justified by the study's primary focus on observing phenomena consciously experienced by the research subjects or participants (Giorgi, 2009). Qualitative research, particularly in the context of theological studies, is advantageous because it allows for a more in-depth exploration of words, thoughts, and lived experiences (Hoyle et al., 2002; Van Manen, 1990). The subjects of this study are lay missionaries, specifically alumni of the IPIs, who are engaged in mission work across various regions, carrying out pastoral ministry or what is referred to as the praxis of pastoral theology. These research subjects are spread across multiple regions in Indonesia.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with the research subjects. The data were analyzed via phenomenological procedures, which include the following steps: (1) reading transcripts of the subjects' experiences; (2) identifying meaning units within the transcripts; (3) structuring the meaning units; (4) formulating a structural description (a description that progressively captures the core of the subjects' experiences); (5) explicating themes from the structural description; (6) synthesizing the themes; and (7) discovering the essence (eidōs) (Husserl, 1970).

## 3. Results and Discussion

This study found two forms of experiences from lay missionaries working in mission areas. These two experiences are as follows: first, the experience of working in the mission field, which includes both joyful and challenging moments. Second, the experience of presence, which illustrates how IPI alumni engage with the local community in the mission field. These experiences are described phenomenologically below.

### 3.1. Experience of Working in the Mission Field

The researcher conducted interviews with the study subjects, namely IPI alumni who became lay missionaries. Some of them shared their experiences of working in mission areas, which are located in remote regions far from urban centers. These experiences reflect how IPI alumni, as lay missionaries, apply the pastoral theological praxis of Paul Janssen.

Chatarina Suharti, a research subject from Batulicin, South Kalimantan, shared her positive experience in an interview conducted on September 19, 2024:

"What is enjoyable is that we can visit the community. The community consists of people from diverse backgrounds, including Javanese, Flores, Eastern Indonesians, Medanese, and Torajans. Meeting different people is a joyful experience

because it allows us to encounter a variety of backgrounds. We also interact with Muslims, not just Catholics. Therefore, we get to know each other across religious boundaries and collaborate with one another."

The positive experiences of these IPI alumni include rich social interactions, acceptance by the local community, fulfillment in service, personal transformation, and success in overcoming challenges. These aspects highlight the importance of their role as lay missionaries in building relationships, serving the community, and growing in faith.

Emerensiana Laka, who serves in Lembata, shared:

"It is difficult because the roads are far, and transportation is scarce. Back then, the roads were not paved; they were still rocky, and sometimes we had to walk. Now, things have improved, we have vehicles, and the roads are better. We also accompany the SEKAMI (Children's Missionary Group)."

The descriptions above illustrate how lay missionaries face significant challenges, both physically and emotionally, in carrying out their mission in remote areas with limited infrastructure. Nevertheless, their achievements in various aspects reflect an extraordinary spirit of dedication.

A unique subject for phenomenological investigation into pastoral theology praxis is the lived experiences of IPI graduates working as lay missionaries in isolated mission regions. These narratives, which are based on Paul Janssen's praxis pastoral theology's integrated framework, reflect an existential commitment that combines faith, service, and cultural absorption rather than only recounting outward missionary endeavors. According to phenomenology, especially in the Husserlian and subsequent Heideggerian traditions, these lay missionaries' testimony reveals a being-in-the-world (Dasein) that is constitutively open to the Other in addition to intended acts (intentionalität).

This research aligns with the current missiological movement toward *missio Dei*, which views mission as God's initiative into the world via the lives of regular Christians, in contrast to ecclesiological frameworks which situate mission largely inside institutional or clerical structures. The praxis-oriented approach of Janssen, which combines reflection and action (orthopraxis) as the core of pastoral theology, is reflected in the experiences of the IPI graduates, who represent this theological transformation. Wahyudi (2019), who researched lay health workers in East Nusa Tenggara and highlighted their integration of spiritual mission with local contextual knowledge, discovered similar findings. However, the IPI graduates take a more holistic approach to community-building, religious discourse, and catechetical accompaniment than Wahyudi's subjects, who largely served as health educators.

It is essential to view the difficulties described by Emerensiana Laka as more than just logistical barriers, especially the physical strain of travel and the constraints of infrastructure. According to phenomenology, these encounters mold the missionary's lifeworld (Lebenswelt), demonstrating the interdependence of the mission, body, and surroundings. Walking great distances and navigating challenging terrain is a real manifestation of commitment and incarnational presence rather than just a test of endurance. This is consistent with research by Adebayo, (2023), who highlighted adversity in mission settings frequently serves as a catalyst for spiritual growth and a sense of community.

The dialectic between struggle and satisfaction, difficulty and happiness, is what sets apart the testimonies of the IPI graduates, nevertheless. What philosopher Jean-Luc Marion would refer to as saturated phenomena, experiences that beyond our capacity for intellectual understanding while revealing a profound level of divine presence, are composed of this tension. Their stories serve as testaments to everyday faithfulness under exceptional circumstances rather than epic victories. The delight of being involved in the community, making friends from different religions, and following kids on their spiritual journeys (as in the SEKAMI program) demonstrates how lay missionaries do more than just serve; they are changed.

Ultimately, these experiences reflect a phenomenological depth that redefines mission as relational, contextual, and embodied. They confirm and extend earlier studies while offering a distinct contribution: a view of missionary vocation not as an extension of clerical work, but as a unique manifestation of theological reflection-in-action rooted in daily life. As living examples of a theology that walks and a faith that thinks, the IPI alumni are theologians in action via their lived practice.

### 3.2. Experience of Presence with the Community

Chatarina Suharti, commonly known as Harti, described her experience as follows:

"They truly experience joy when we serve them with heart and sincerity. They are happy and deeply moved because they receive Jesus, the body and blood of Christ. Even though they live far away, the Sisters remain faithful in their service. It is truly joyful to celebrate the Word of God or the Eucharist together, share faith experiences, and discuss any issues that need to be addressed. The community is active in these discussions. If they are reprimanded, they listen instead of resisting, and they strive to improve. This illustrates how they experience joy."

A similar statement was expressed by Sr. Yasinta Melni, ALMA. She shared her experience of being present with the community in her mission area:

"There is undoubtedly a positive impact of my presence here as an envoy. I can measure this by the increasing participation of the community in religious activities. Previously, the community was less active or even inactive in church events. Now, they are eagerly involved in various spiritual activities, such as retreats, catecheses, faith deepening, neighborhood prayers, basic ecclesial communities (BEC) prayers, and SEKAMI activities, which are now regularly held on Saturday afternoons. Additionally, spiritual camping activities for youth (OMK) have become an annual event."

Yatiman described his presence within the community as follows:

"Back then, when I arrived in Banjarmasin, I was still working at a company. At that time, I noticed many Catholic children, but there was no one to nurture their faith—no Sunday school. Since I had studied at PGA and IPI, I felt compelled to take the initiative. I gathered the children and began providing Sunday faith formations. Eventually, people became aware of my efforts, including the visiting priest. This work requires responsiveness, willingness, and dedication. In Banjarmasin, religious matters can be quite sensitive, so we need strategies to be accepted by the local community."

Sujito, who serves in Papua, shared his experience:

"I noticed that for several Sundays, there was no Sunday school (SEKAMI). When I asked the priest about it, he said that SEKAMI had been inactive for many years. I asked if I could engage the children in activities. Since 2007, I have been a parish council member and a catechist, and I continue to serve in these roles to this day."

These testimonies illustrate how lay missionaries immerse themselves in the community, resulting in transformation in faith engagement and spiritual participation. Their presence fosters a deep sense of belonging, rekindles religious enthusiasm, and strengthens communal faith practices.

Verbatim description of the research subjects on the experience of IPI alumni as Lay Missionaries in Communal Life. First, their presence brings joy and positive change, as experienced by Chatarina Suharti and Sr. Yasinta Melni, ALMA. Their consistent presence has increased the level of faithful participation in religious and spiritual activities, which were previously inactive or entirely absent. Various spiritual activities, such as recollections, catechesis, faith deepening, neighborhood prayers, and SEKAMI, have been revived or improved, becoming routine practices embraced with enthusiasm by the community.

Second, the initiative aims to enhance faith formation. This was experienced by Yatiman (Banjarmasin) and Sujito. They recognized the needs of faithful, particularly Catholic, children who lacked faith formation due to the absence of Sunday School. Yatiman took the initiative to start faith formation activities independently, without directives from others. His role in fostering the faith of the community was supported by his responsiveness, willingness, and openness to the local society, despite the potential religious sensitivities in the area.

Third, previously inactive spiritual activities should be revitalized. Sujito (Papua) described how SEKAMI activities had long been discontinued. He took the initiative to revive them by engaging children through play. Since 2007, he has been consistently involved in parish activities and catecheses, becoming a key figure in sustaining children's faith formation in the region.

Fourth, the positive influence on the involvement of the faithful. The presence of lay missionaries consistently encourages the community to be more actively engaged in various spiritual activities across all age groups, from children (SEKAMI) to youth (OMK). Innovative activities such as spiritual camping and increasing faith create spaces for faithful people to participate more profoundly in the life of the Church.

Lay missionaries from IPI play a significant role in building and strengthening the faith of the community through their presence. With a loving, proactive, and consistent approach, they successfully revive previously dormant spiritual activities, increase community participation, and foster a more engaged and vibrant faith community.

According to phenomenology, the experience of pastoral servers in the mission community is a whole being-with that includes relational, existential, and spiritual aspects in addition to their bodily presence. This sensation of presence is consistent with Edmund Husserl's famous concept of the *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld), which is the world that the subject immediately experiences when engaging in practical activities (Husserl, 1970). In this regard, pastoral workers' genuine encounters with the people they serve, rather than just official church structures, shape their lifeworld.

Chatarina Suharti's statement illustrates authentic presence, sincerity and love, creating spiritual resonance in the community. Lively encounters in the celebration of the Word and Eucharist, and participatory conversations of faith, demonstrate the experience of transformative presence. This reflects Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of the body as a medium of experience and relation: the bodies of pastoral ministers become "relational bodies" that are affectively and intersubjectively present in the community (Williams, 2021). This presence does not impose change, but animates a reciprocal relationship, like a community that does not resist when reprimanded, but is willing to grow.

The experience of Sr. Yasinta Melni, ALMA, strengthens this argument by revealing the correlation between consistent personal presence and growth in participation in spiritual activities. She emphasized the concrete shift from inactivity to active engagement as an indicator of impactful presence. In contextual pastoral studies, this is known as "relational agency" (Emmons, 2021), the ability of a pastoral minister to build relationships that open up space for voluntary and deep community participation. Presence is not just about 'visiting' but about living together, sharing life and hope.

Yatiman and Sujito show that missionary presence is also proactive and responsive to the local context. They do not wait for structural mandates, but respond creatively and adaptively to community needs. This perspective is in line with Paul Ricoeur's phenomenological-hermeneutic approach that emphasizes the importance of praxis in understanding the meaning of experience. In this case, their actions are concrete interpretations of the community's faith needs, which then produce new meanings for the entire network of community relations (Ricoeur, 1981).

This finding is in line with previous findings in contemporary mission studies. For example, the study by Bosch (2011) in "Transforming Mission" emphasizes that missionary presence should be incarnational, i.e. living with, learning from, and

walking with people, not teaching from above. Similarly, the study by Bevans and Schroeder (2004) in "Constants in Context" shows that successful mission in plural and marginalized contexts is mission that fosters "communion" and not just doctrinal preaching. A qualitative study by Sundararajan (2015) on Catholic missionary experiences in Asia emphasizes the importance of empathy and openness in building relationships with local communities.

However, the experiences shared in these findings show new nuances compared to previous research. Whereas previous studies tended to focus on the relationship between missionaries and institutional or cross-cultural structures, the results of this study emphasize micro-interactional dynamics: how small actions, daily presence, and spiritual dialogue shape a vibrant and resilient community order. The phenomenological approach in this study succeeded in capturing the depth of the subjective experience of pastoral ministers as agents of faith transformation, not just as an extension of the institutional church.

Thus, the experience of presence in the community as demonstrated by the resource persons, not only demonstrates the effectiveness of mission in a practical sense, but also reveals the theological-phenomenological reality of authentic human encounter. This is a strong basis for concluding that a missionary presence that is reflective, incarnational, and open to the intersubjectivity of the community is one of the most impactful and sustainable forms of pastoral praxis.

### 3.3. *The Essential Theological Meaning of the Experience of IPI Alumni as Lay Missionaries*

The essential theological meaning of the experience of IPI alumni as lay missionaries is analyzed via Husserlian phenomenology. Husserl considers experience as a consciousness that is always directed toward something (intentionality). The experience of lay missionaries can be analyzed as noesis (act of consciousness) or noema (the intended meaning) (Husserl, 2014).

Missionary experience such as noesis and noema. Lay missionaries experience both joys and struggles in their service. In Husserlian phenomenology, experience is not only objective but also subjective, depending on how individuals assign meaning to it. For example, the difficulties encountered in the mission field (such as transportation access, limited facilities, and developmental challenges) may be perceived as negative noema, but they can also be transformed into positive noema in the form of spiritual growth and personal resilience.

Phenomenological reduction: unveiling the essence of experience. By applying phenomenological reduction, we can set aside contingent factual aspects and uncover the essence of missionary experience. This essence may lie in openness to others, meaningfulness in service, and personal transformation. Missionary presence and the phenomenology of intersubjectivity. Husserl emphasized that individual consciousness always exists within a social world. The experience of lay missionary presence in the community reflects intersubjectivity, demonstrating how they become part of the collective consciousness of the faithful (Shiraishi, 2000).

Faith revitalization and communal noema. The presence of missionaries who revive religious activities (such as recollections, catechesis, and neighborhood prayers) indicates that religious experience is not only subjective but also communal. In Husserlian terms, this constitutes an intersubjective meaning-making process, where the meaning of pastoral presence is constructed through interpersonal relationships. In this context, empathy emerges as a manifestation of presence for the marginalized. In Husserlian phenomenology, empathy is the way we understand the experiences of others. The presence of missionaries in marginalized communities (children, elderly individuals, and the poor) demonstrates how religious experience is not solely oriented toward doctrinal teachings but also a shared experience shaped through empathy.

Pastoral theology praxis in phenomenological reduction: exemplary living as recurrent noesis. In pastoral theology praxis, missionary exemplarity is not merely a spontaneous act but also a structured experience continuously revitalized by the community. This resembles the concept of recurrent noesis, in which similar patterns of experience are repeatedly lived by the community, reinforcing pastoral meaning (Husserl, 2014).

First, the transformation within IPI alumni who become lay missionaries reflects a shift from theoretical learning to concrete pastoral praxis. During their studies at IPI Malang, students acquire academic understanding of theology, mission, and pastoral work. However, field experiences often transcend and even transform these theoretical understandings. This occurs because the theories learned in academic settings must be adapted to the dynamic realities of the mission field (Bosch, 2011).

Additionally, working in mission areas requires alumni to undergo an identity transformation from being mere graduates of a theological institution to becoming lay missionaries who must directly engage with society. In this process, they experience contextual learning, adapt to local cultures, and develop relevant pastoral skills (Gittins, 2000). Interaction with local communities enriches their experience, allowing them not only to convey the gospel message but also to embody and integrate it within the social realities they encounter (Grenz & Olson, 1992).

From a fundamental epistemological perspective, the transformation of theory into praxis in carrying out missions in remote areas relies on direct experience and critical reflection. Theological knowledge acquired during studies is not merely an academic concept but must serve as a guide in facing real challenges in the field. Experience precedes conceptual understanding. This means that a deeper and broader comprehension is gained through firsthand experience while serving as

a lay missionary. This epistemological model is based on a hermeneutic praxis approach, in which theological understanding is enriched through concrete experiences, social interactions, and learning from local contexts (Kroeger, 2014).

In the field of pastoral theology, Paul Janssen may be the first to present a more comprehensive method for conducting pastoral praxis in a way that is interwoven with contemporary times, the requirements of the Second Vatican Council, and human development (Riyanto, 2024). The continuous effort to enhance evangelization techniques through experimentation with different evangelization models demonstrates this. With all his methodological advancements in evangelization, Paul Janssen actively updated pastoral models while listening to the will of the Church and addressing contemporary issues. This approach fosters the praxis of pastoral theology. Janssenian pastoral practice is not confined to the five tasks of the Church.

Paul Janssen implemented a knowledge process on the basis of data from lay missionary work. An alumnus of the IPI who decides to become a lay missionary begins their mission work at a station, parish, or remote area. The first essential step is to obtain comprehensive demographic data. These data are crucial for mapping the number of faithful people, their places of residence, and the demographics of youth, children, mothers, and especially elderly individuals. Such data-driven knowledge enables lay missionaries to carry out their mission in accordance with the needs of the faithful and the local context. These comprehensive data are further complemented by the lay missionary's ability to conduct pastoral theological praxis through the integration of data and mission programs within the Church's evangelization efforts. In this way, lay missionaries can integrate various aspects of life with data to align with the mission's objectives. Moreover, communication and engagement with the Church and societal elements are essential for the success of a lay mission.

In carrying out missions in remote areas far from major cities, lay missionaries must develop inculturation methods that allow the gospel proclamation to be accepted within the local culture (Shorter, 1994). They do not only teach doctrine but also accompany communities in their social, economic, and spiritual struggles. Consequently, the theoretical knowledge they acquire at IPIs serves as a foundation that is continually tested, enriched, and adapted to real-life situations (Magesa, 2014).

With respect to Father Janssen's vision of lay missionaries, as the founder of the IPI, he envisioned lay missionaries as bridges between the Church and society. He emphasized the importance of direct lay involvement in the proclamation of the gospel, not only through clergy but also through laypeople who have close connections with their communities (Janssen, 1972a). According to him, lay missionaries are not merely ecclesiastical extensions but also agents of social and spiritual transformation who bring gospel values into daily life (Janssen, 1972a).

The concept developed by Father Janssen also underscores the importance of community-based ministry, in which lay missionaries function not only as religious instructors but also as servants to the community (Smith, 2012). This reflects a more inclusive pastoral approach, where the proclamation of Christ is conveyed not only through words but also through concrete actions that bring about changes in the lives of the communities they serve (Van Engen, 1996).

The ideal theological praxis in the above context for lay missionaries in mission areas when Jesus is proclaimed involves three key aspects: inculturation, social engagement, and faith reflection. Lay missionaries' inculturation efforts focus on understanding, respecting, and adapting the gospel message to the local culture without compromising the essence of the Christian faith. Proclamation must be carried out in a manner relevant to the local community, whether through language, traditions, or symbols familiar to them (Shorter, 1994).

Praxis in the form of lay missionary social engagement prioritizes active involvement in supporting community welfare through education, healthcare, and economic empowerment. This praxis demonstrates that the proclamation of the gospel is not confined to liturgy but also encompasses concrete efforts to improve the quality of life within society (Bosch, 2011). The final aspect of this praxis is faith reflection. Missionaries must continuously reflect on their experiences, relating them to the teachings of Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Gittins, 2000). Such reflection enables them to grow in faith and adjust their missionary approaches to be more effective and meaningful for the communities they serve.

The experiences of IPI alumni as lay missionaries in implementing pastoral theological praxis affirm that the essential meaning of mission is a complex process of transformation. This transformation occurs across various dimensions-theological, cultural, emotional, and spiritual- while maintaining the core essence of change. The dual-meaning process of both joyful and sorrowful experiences becomes an inseparable part of the missionary journey. Moreover, variations in subjective experiences illustrate how each individual lives out and internalizes their calling in unique ways. The transformation within IPI alumni who become lay missionaries reflects a shift from theoretical learning to real pastoral praxis. During their studies at IPI Malang, students gain academic knowledge about theology, mission, and pastoral care. However, field experiences often transcend and even reshape this theoretical understanding. This occurs because theories acquired in academic settings must be adapted to the dynamic conditions of the missionary field (Wiwin et al., 2024).

Furthermore, working in mission areas requires alumni to undergo an identity transformation, from merely being theology graduates to becoming lay missionaries who directly engage with communities. In this process, they experience contextual learning, adapt to local cultures, and develop relevant pastoral skills. Their interactions with local communities enrich their experiences, enabling them not only to convey the gospel message but also to embody and contextualize it within the social realities they encounter.

The second essential meaning highlights a dual-meaning process within mission transformation. Mission transformation is not solely about individual change; it also involves a dual-meaning process that encompasses emotional and spiritual

dynamics. In fulfilling their duties, lay missionaries inevitably experience both joys and struggles. Success in proclaiming the gospel, witnessing community growth, and fostering faith-based solidarity are joyful aspects that strengthen enthusiasm. However, they also face challenges such as cultural differences, resistance from local communities, economic hardships, and even threats to personal safety. Despite this duality of experiences, the core of transformation remains consistent: the proclamation of Christ as the essence of their mission. The inner struggles they endure in confronting challenges deepen their spiritual experiences, leading to transformation not only externally but also internally, shaping a more mature faith and a deeper theological understanding.

The third essential meaning acknowledges the variability of subjective experiences. While there is a general pattern in the transformation of lay missionaries, the subjective experiences of each IPI alumnus can vary significantly. Factors such as personal background, mission assignments, psychological preparedness, and the sociocultural context of their mission sites influence how they experience and comprehend their mission. Some alumni may quickly adapt to new communities, whereas others struggle with language and cultural barriers. Some may find profound spiritual fulfillment in their service, whereas others may feel isolated or undergo a crisis of faith owing to the challenges they face. These differences indicate that while mission transformation retains its essential character of change, individual experiences remain unique and cannot be homogenized.

The essential meaning of these lay missionary experiences is explained within the paradigm of integrative theology. Integrative theology serves as the paradigm because it represents the discovery of the *eidos* inherent in this study. The research analysis indicates that alumni of the Indonesian Pastoral Institute (IPI) who undertake missions as lay missionaries, as conceptualized by Paul Janssen, undergo a theological journey that demands a deeper understanding of faith integration into the life of the faithful. They are sent to remote areas to accompany, empower, and enrich the faith life of local communities. In practice, they do not only teach theological doctrines but also embody faith through concrete actions that are contextually relevant to the lives of the people (Janssen, 1978).

As Bosch (2011) asserts, mission is not only verbal but also a concrete manifestation of God's love and justice throughout history. Therefore, lay missionaries serve as a bridge between academic theology and everyday life, where their theological understanding must be integrated with the social, economic, and cultural realities of their mission contexts.

#### 3.4. *Integrative Theology: A Theological Approach to Lay Missionaries*

The key points of Integrative Theology are elaborated on the foundational work of Lewis and Demarest. The integrative theology developed by Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest in *Integrative Theology* (1996) emphasizes an approach that harmonizes various aspects of faith, including biblical, historical, philosophical, and practical dimensions. This theological framework aims to construct a holistic and transformative understanding deeply rooted in the life of the faithful. Lewis and Demarest (1996) explain that integrative theology is not merely the unification of theological concepts from various traditions but rather a reflective method that enables faith to take deeper root in concrete human experiences. In the context of lay missionary work, this approach implies that every act of evangelization must consider social, economic, and cultural dynamics to ensure relevant and effective proclamation. For example, in ministering to impoverished and remote communities, lay missionaries not only convey faith teachings but also engage in social and economic empowerment as part of the integration of faith and action (Gutiérrez, 1988). Thus, their proclamation becomes a tangible manifestation of theology deeply embedded in the lived experiences of the faithful.

The role of IPI alumni as lay missionaries in various social and historical contexts. In various social and historical contexts, IPI alumni serve as agents of change who carry the spirit of incarnational evangelization. They not only convey spiritual messages but also participate in the social transformation occurring within the communities they serve. For example, in indigenous societies, faith proclamation must align with local values and respect cultural traditions. The concept of inculturation in missions (Schreiter, 1985) asserts that Christian faith must be translated in ways that align with the understanding and social practices of the community. Lay missionaries must be able to interpret the signs of the times and respond contextually to the needs of the faithful (Bevans, 2002).

IPI alumni, as lay missionaries, play a crucial role in the lives of the faithful, particularly in remote areas that often face unique social and historical challenges. They are not only evangelists but also agents of change who bring gospel values into the daily lives of the faithful. According to Bosch (2011), Christian mission must be understood as participation in God's mission (*missio Dei*), which involves both social and spiritual transformation. In this context, IPI alumni act as bridges between the tradition of faith and social realities, helping faithful individuals find meaning in their faith within their lived context. For instance, in regions experiencing social conflict, lay missionaries can apply integrative theology to promote reconciliation and peace (Bosch, 2011). Additionally, in social contexts where religious freedom is suppressed, lay missionaries have the responsibility to advocate for the rights of believers and create spaces for constructive interfaith dialog. This aligns with Dulles' (1985) perspective, which asserts that the Church has a responsibility to engage in the defense of social justice as part of its missionary calling.

The theological significance of lay missionaries in the paradigm of integrative theology. The essential theological meaning of lay missionaries within the paradigm of integrative theology lies in the awareness of the necessity of integrating

faith with the concrete realities of the faithful. Through the integrative theological approach developed by Lewis and Demarest, lay missionaries can present faith proclamation that is more holistic, contextual, and transformative. In various social and historical contexts, they serve as mediators linking academic theology with the lived experiences of the faithful, thereby allowing faith to take deeper root and have a tangible impact on the communities they serve (Schaeffer, 2020).

#### 4. Conclusions

IPI alumni, as lay missionaries, play a vital role in accompanying faithful people, especially in remote areas facing social and historical challenges. They not only disseminate the teachings of faith but also act as agents of change, bringing gospel values into everyday life. Mission is a complex process of transformation encompassing theological, cultural, emotional, and spiritual changes, with both joy and struggle as inseparable elements. This transformation not only occurs at individual level but also involves emotional and spiritual dynamics that deepen their understanding of faith and theology. Despite challenges such as cultural differences and economic hardships, the proclamation of Christ remains at the core of the missionary experience. Each individual experiences missions uniquely, influenced by their background, psychological readiness, and different sociocultural contexts.

From the perspective of pastoral theological praxis, the mission of lay missionaries encompasses both social and spiritual transformation, in which they serve as bridges between faith and social reality. In the context of social conflicts, they apply integrative theology to foster reconciliation and peace. Additionally, they play a role in advocating for religious freedom and fostering constructive interfaith dialog, aligning with the Church's calling to uphold social justice. Theologically, their role lies in integrating faith with the realities of the faithful's lives. Through the integrative theological approach, they present faith proclamation that is holistic, contextual, and transformative, ensuring that faith takes root and has a meaningful impact on the communities they serve.

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#### Ethical considerations

We confirm that I have obtained all the consent required by the applicable law to publish any personal details or images of patients, research subjects, or other individuals used.

#### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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