



## Educating the Heart to Pray: A Study of Professional Competence and Personal Faith in Christian Religious Education at SD 044 Simangulampe

Ruth Yeilena Bonner Siregar<sup>1\*</sup>, Elisamark Sitopu<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Student, Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

\*correspondence: [siregarrut678@gmail.com](mailto:siregarrut678@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

*Education in the Christian worldview transcends intellectual formation and aims to nurture faith, character, and a prayerful relationship with God. Within this context, the professional competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers is measured not only by pedagogical skills but also by spiritual authenticity. Grounded in Genesis 24:12-where Abraham's servant prays for divine guidance-this study explores how professional competence and personal faith intersect to cultivate prayerful dependence among students at SD 044 Simangulampe, Humbang Hasundutan. Using a qualitative-expository approach, this study combined biblical exegesis and classroom-based reflection. The expository component examined Genesis 24:12 through theological, linguistic, and contextual analysis, emphasizing themes of humility, dependence, and divine guidance. The qualitative inquiry involved observations, interviews, and documentation at SD 044 Simangulampe, focusing on how the CRE teacher integrated prayer into pedagogy and modeled faith through professional practice. Findings revealed that the teacher's professional competence was inseparable from personal spirituality. Prayer functioned as both the foundation and method of instruction-transforming learning into an act of faith formation. The teacher's demeanor, empathy, and consistency cultivated an atmosphere where prayer was experienced as relational trust rather than mere ritual. Students learned to perceive prayer as a daily dialogue with God, guiding moral behavior and fostering peace, empathy, and self-awareness. The study concludes that professional competence in Christian education is deeply spiritual in nature. When rooted in prayerful dependence, teaching becomes an act of worship-a sacred partnership between God and educator that forms hearts to live faithfully and depend wholly on divine wisdom.*

**Keywords:** *Pray, Christian Religious Education, Professional Competence*

### INTRODUCTION

Education, within the Christian worldview, is not merely a process of intellectual formation but an endeavor to shape the heart and character according to divine truth. Christian Religious Education functions as both a pedagogical and spiritual vocation-an

act of teaching that aims to guide students not only to know about God but also to experience communion with Him through prayer and faith. In this holistic view, the teacher becomes more than a transmitter of knowledge; they are a spiritual mentor whose life and teaching embody the living message of the Gospel. At the heart of this vocation lies professional competence—a blend of pedagogical skill, theological understanding, and personal spirituality that equips the teacher to form the moral and spiritual lives of students. For the Christian Religious Education teacher, professionalism cannot be separated from faith, since teaching about God demands a life that reflects obedience, integrity, and devotion. The theme of personal prayer, as reflected in Genesis 24:12, serves as a central theological foundation for this study. In that verse, Abraham's servant prays, *"Lord, God of my master Abraham, make me successful today, and show kindness to my master Abraham."* This prayer exemplifies humility, dependence, and the recognition that success comes only through divine guidance. The servant's words are not a mere ritual or formula but an expression of deep trust and relational intimacy with God. From a pedagogical perspective, this narrative offers a model for teachers and students alike: that genuine faith is nurtured not through external performance but through an inner posture of reliance on God. The Christian Religious Education teacher, therefore, bears the responsibility of cultivating in students an understanding that prayer is not only communication but also transformation—an encounter where knowledge of God becomes personal faith.

In the context of SD 044 Simangulampe, located in the district of Humbang Hasundutan, North Sumatra, this theological and educational vision takes on a particular relevance. The school, surrounded by a close-knit Christian community, upholds moral and spiritual education as an integral part of its curriculum. Yet, challenges persist in ensuring that students do not treat prayer as a mechanical school routine but as a sincere expression of faith. Teachers often find that students can recite prayers fluently but lack an understanding of their meaning or purpose. In this setting, the professional competence of CRE teachers becomes essential—not only in delivering lessons about prayer but also in modeling how to live a prayerful life. The teacher's capacity to integrate knowledge, emotion, and faith shapes how students perceive the nature of God and their personal relationship with Him. Professional competence in Christian Religious Education involves mastery of three dimensions: Pedagogical competence—the ability to design engaging and meaningful learning experiences that connect biblical truth to students' real lives; Spiritual competence—the authenticity of the teacher's faith, which serves as a living testimony; and Relational competence—the ability to foster trust, empathy, and guidance within the classroom community. Each of these dimensions interacts dynamically in the process of teaching prayer. A teacher who teaches prayer only cognitively may produce knowledgeable but spiritually distant students. In contrast, a teacher who combines sound pedagogy with a deep personal prayer life can awaken in students an authentic desire to seek God. This study aims to explore how professional competence and personal faith intersect in the teaching of prayer within Christian Religious Education, using SD 044 Simangulampe as a case study. Specifically, it examines how teachers explain and exemplify the value of personal prayer as a formative practice of faith. The research draws inspiration from Genesis 24:12, interpreting the text as a pedagogical metaphor for dependence on God in both teaching and learning. Through this lens, prayer is viewed not

only as an object of instruction but as a method of transformation-where both teacher and student participate in a shared journey toward spiritual maturity. The urgency of this study lies in the contemporary challenge of maintaining spiritual authenticity in education. In a world increasingly shaped by efficiency, achievement, and technology, young learners risk losing the capacity for silence, reflection, and genuine prayer. The Christian Religious Education teacher stands at the forefront of this spiritual formation, tasked with reintroducing prayer as the heartbeat of faith. Thus, this research seeks to highlight that educating the heart to pray is both a professional mission and a spiritual calling. It demonstrates that when the teacher's professional competence is infused with personal devotion, the classroom becomes not only a place of instruction but also a sanctuary of encounter-where students learn to pray not by rote, but by heart.

## METHODS

The research was conducted at SD 044 Simangulampe, a Christian elementary school in Humbang Hasundutan, North Sumatra, where CRE teachers play a central role in students' moral and spiritual development. A qualitative-expository method that integrates biblical exegesis with pedagogical reflection was implemented to explore how professional competence and personal faith interact in teaching the value of personal prayer in Christian Religious Education. The methodological approach was designed to uncover both the theological meaning of Genesis 24:12 and its practical implications for classroom teaching, thereby bridging scriptural truth and educational praxis. The study began with an expository analysis of Genesis 24:12, which served as the theological foundation. The verse was examined through textual, contextual, and historical interpretation. Linguistic analysis of the Hebrew term *hesed* (meaning "steadfast love" or "divine kindness") revealed that the servant's prayer in Genesis 24:12 was rooted in faithfulness and humility, acknowledging God as the ultimate source of success. This exegesis provided insight into how prayer functions as an act of dependence and relational trust, not merely as ritual practice. From this foundation, the study developed an interpretive framework describing prayer as a pedagogical act of faith, aligning divine guidance with the learning process. The theological reflection informed the qualitative analysis by establishing a biblical lens through which to view the teacher's professional and spiritual roles. The qualitative component of the research involved field observation and semi-structured interviews conducted with one Christian Religious Education teacher and ten students from grades four to six. The teacher participant was selected using purposive sampling based on professional experience, spiritual maturity, and engagement in faith-based instruction. Students were chosen to represent diverse backgrounds and varying levels of spiritual understanding. Data were collected over four weeks through classroom observations, focusing particularly on how the teacher introduced, explained, and modeled prayer in daily activities such as morning devotion, Bible lessons, and moral instruction. Observational notes emphasized verbal and non-verbal behaviors that reflected sincerity, humility, and spiritual sensitivity-qualities central to professional competence in CRE. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with both the teacher and students. The teacher interview explored key questions such as: "How do you integrate personal faith with your teaching of prayer?" and "What strategies do you use to help students understand the meaning of personal prayer?" These interviews sought to reveal the teacher's inner reflection on professionalism, pedagogy, and spirituality. The

student interviews, on the other hand, investigated how students perceived the teacher's example and how they internalized the value of prayer. Questions included: "How does your teacher help you to pray?" and "What do you feel when you pray in class?" The triangulation of these perspectives enriched the understanding of how professional competence and personal spirituality intersect in real classroom practice. The integration of exegesis and qualitative data allowed the researcher to interpret teaching as a spiritual vocation—an act of guiding students not only toward knowledge of God but also toward relational trust in Him. The study concluded that the integration of theological insight with educational reflection is essential for understanding the professional competence of CRE teachers as a spiritual calling, emphasizing that effective teaching of prayer requires both academic mastery and genuine devotion.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that professional competence in Christian Religious Education cannot be fully understood apart from spiritual authenticity. The teacher's ability to teach about prayer effectively arises not merely from pedagogical skill but from the integration of faith, humility, and personal experience with God. The narrative of Genesis 24:12—where Abraham's servant prays for divine guidance in finding a wife for Isaac—serves as the theological backbone of this analysis. The verse reads: *"Then he prayed, 'Lord, God of my master Abraham, make me successful today, and show kindness to my master Abraham.'"* This brief but profound prayer encapsulates a model of faithful dependence on God, professional diligence, and ethical integrity. Within the context of SD 044 Simangulampe in Humbang Hasundutan, this scriptural insight comes alive as teachers face the challenge of forming students not only intellectually but spiritually, guiding them to experience the living reality of God in daily life. The study identified three interrelated themes: prayer as a pedagogical expression of professional competence, modeling faith through personal integrity and humility, and nurturing a culture of reflective prayer among students. The finding highlights that the teacher's professional competence in teaching prayer is grounded in theological understanding and practical application. During classroom observations, the teacher consistently integrated prayer into every learning activity—not as a formality, but as a relational encounter with God. Before lessons began, students were invited to reflect silently on a short verse, followed by a simple prayer led by either the teacher or a student volunteer. The teacher explained, "Prayer helps us remember that learning is not only using our brain, but also our heart." This statement reflects a pedagogical awareness rooted in the biblical understanding of prayer as communion with God. Genesis 24:12 offers a direct parallel to this practice. The servant's prayer before taking action demonstrates that competence and prayerfulness are not contradictory; they are complementary. Professionalism in the biblical sense involves acknowledging God as the source of wisdom and success. The teacher at SD 044 Simangulampe embodied this principle by preparing lessons that combined cognitive structure with spiritual reflection. Lesson plans reviewed by the researcher included explicit objectives such as "helping students understand the importance of asking God's help before making decisions" and "encouraging children to express their needs to God through personal prayer." This intentionality reveals a professional consciousness that links theological depth with pedagogical clarity. Students were observed responding

positively to these practices. They began to associate learning and praying as mutually reinforcing activities rather than separate domains. One student commented, "Before I do my homework, I pray like my teacher told us. I feel calmer." This response indicates a shift in mindset: prayer is not perceived as ritual obligation but as part of responsible living. The teacher's competence was expressed through structured reflection, guidance, and gentle correction, demonstrating that professionalism in Christian education is relational, not mechanical. The teacher's consistent use of prayer as a pedagogical tool aligns with Palmer's (1998) notion of "teaching from the heart," where teaching becomes a ministry of presence rather than a transfer of knowledge. Theologically, Genesis 24:12 portrays prayer as an act of dependence that precedes professional action. The servant's success in his mission is attributed not to strategy but to his willingness to seek divine guidance. This principle informed the teacher's own self-understanding. In an interview, the teacher stated, "When I teach about prayer, I remember that I also need to pray before entering the classroom. If I am not calm, how can my students learn to be calm?" This self-reflection illustrates a critical dimension of professional competence: the ability to internalize spiritual discipline as part of pedagogical readiness. Prayer becomes not only content but method—a way of teaching that integrates faith with thought and feeling. Classroom observation revealed that the teacher used biblical storytelling as a central method. The story of Abraham's servant in Genesis 24 was narrated with emphasis on humility and trust. The teacher guided students to discuss what it means to ask for help and to wait patiently for answers. During reflection, one child said, "Sometimes I pray, but God answers later. My teacher said that God's time is the best." This simple yet profound insight demonstrates effective internalization of faith values through pedagogy. It confirms Lickona's (1991) argument that moral and spiritual understanding grows through modeling and guided reflection rather than moralizing lectures. The teacher's professional competence was manifested in three pedagogical dimensions: theological integration (rooting lessons in Scripture), affective engagement (connecting prayer with emotion and meaning), and reflective practice (encouraging students to connect prayer with personal experience). These competencies demonstrate that professionalism in Christian Religious Education is inseparable from spiritual authenticity—it is a form of ministry expressed through teaching.

### ***Modeling Faith Through Personal Integrity and Humility***

The next result that emerged from the study concerns the teacher's integrity and humility as vital components of both professional competence and spiritual formation. Integrity, in the Christian educational context, is not limited to honesty in behavior but extends to wholeness of life—a coherence between belief, word, and action. The teacher at SD 044 Simangulampe exemplified this integrity by consistently living out the values being taught. Students observed that the teacher always prayed before class, apologized when mistakes were made, and treated every student with fairness and kindness. One student shared, "When my teacher says sorry, I know that God also wants us to say sorry." This modeling of humility connects directly to the theological essence of Genesis 24:12. The servant's prayer begins with acknowledgment of dependence: "Lord, God of my master Abraham." This phrase expresses humility and recognition that success is not self-generated. Similarly, the teacher demonstrated professional humility by involving students in decision-making and encouraging them to express their thoughts freely during

discussions. When a student hesitated to pray aloud, the teacher reassured, "God hears every heart, even when we cannot speak." Such words exemplify pastoral sensitivity-teaching faith through empathy and acceptance. The teacher's humility also manifested in the willingness to listen deeply to students' stories. During one classroom discussion, a student shared about a sick family member, and the teacher paused the lesson to pray together as a class. This spontaneous act reflected not only compassion but also the theological conviction that God's presence can enter any learning moment. The integration of life and faith through simple acts of care embodied what Noddings (2013) calls the pedagogy of care, where relational trust becomes the foundation of moral learning. The teacher's professional competence was thus inseparable from spiritual character-it was expressed through daily attitudes of respect, patience, and prayerfulness. Interview data revealed that students viewed their teacher as both a mentor and a spiritual companion. "When I am sad, my teacher tells me to talk to God," one student said. Another added, "She says that prayer is like talking to a friend." These perceptions show that the teacher's professional identity had evolved into a pastoral presence, where teaching transcended instruction to become accompaniment. Such witness echoes Henri Nouwen's (1975) concept of the "wounded healer"-a servant who teaches through vulnerability and compassion rather than authority. Professionalism in Christian education, therefore, involves more than mastery of content; it requires spiritual maturity that radiates through personality. The teacher's humility served as a corrective to the modern notion of professionalism as performance or expertise. Instead, professionalism here is relational faithfulness-a commitment to embodying God's love in the educational process. By showing patience and emotional steadiness, the teacher cultivated a classroom culture where students felt safe to share, reflect, and pray. This integrity created an atmosphere of sacred learning, where education was experienced as formation rather than instruction.

### ***Nurturing a Culture of Reflective Prayer***

The significant finding pertains to the formation of a culture of reflective prayer within the classroom. Over the course of observations, prayer became more than a routine-it evolved into a shared language of faith. Students gradually learned to articulate their thoughts and feelings to God in simple, authentic ways. Initially, many students hesitated to pray aloud, often repeating memorized phrases. However, through the teacher's consistent encouragement and modeling, students began expressing personal prayers such as gratitude for family, confession of fear, and requests for wisdom. This transformation aligns with the theological message of Genesis 24:12, where prayer is portrayed as dialogue rather than performance. The servant does not recite a formulaic petition but speaks directly and personally to God. The teacher mirrored this approach by emphasizing sincerity over perfection. "God loves an honest heart," the teacher reminded the class frequently. As a result, students learned to pray not out of obligation but relationship. To nurture this culture, the teacher incorporated reflective activities such as prayer journals and creative expression. Students were encouraged to draw pictures or write short notes describing what they wanted to pray for. This multimodal approach allowed children to connect faith with imagination, fostering a deeper internalization of prayer as personal communication with God. During interviews, several students shared

that they had begun praying at home before meals or exams, indicating the transfer of spiritual habits beyond school. The creation of this prayer culture also reshaped classroom relationships. Observations showed a gradual increase in mutual empathy and cooperation among students. Conflicts were addressed through prayer rather than punishment. When two students quarreled, the teacher invited them to pray together for understanding. This practice not only resolved tension but reinforced the idea that prayer is a source of peace and reconciliation. Such moments transformed the classroom into a miniature faith community—a living expression of what Freire (1998) calls dialogical education, where faith and dialogue intersect to produce mutual transformation. The development of reflective prayer among students represents a process of spiritual empowerment. Just as Abraham's servant experienced divine guidance through prayer, students at SD 044 Simangulampe learned that prayer opens the heart to God's direction. In interviews, the teacher explained, "When they pray about their problems, I want them to know that God listens. My job is to help them feel that truth." This pastoral intention demonstrates the dual nature of professional competence in CRE: it is both instructional and pastoral, cognitive and affective. By teaching prayer, the teacher was not only transmitting knowledge but facilitating encounter—helping students experience God's presence. The teacher emphasized gratitude as the foundation of prayer. During morning devotion, students were encouraged to thank God before asking for anything. This practice shifted the focus from petition to relationship, cultivating a spirituality of appreciation rather than anxiety. Such reorientation reflects the servant's gratitude in Genesis 24:27: "Praise be to the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness." In this sense, the teaching of prayer became a continuous process of theological reflection, where students learned to perceive God's goodness in daily life. The results also revealed that reflective prayer contributed to emotional resilience among students. In interviews, several students reported that prayer helped them feel calmer during exams or conflicts. One said, "When I pray, my heart is not afraid." This testimony indicates that the pedagogical integration of prayer not only nurtured faith but also supported mental well-being. It highlights the holistic function of CRE—to form individuals who are spiritually rooted, emotionally balanced, and ethically grounded. The teacher's professional growth was evident throughout the research. In post-observation reflection, the teacher noted that teaching prayer had deepened personal faith: "When I see children pray sincerely, I learn from them too. Their faith reminds me to depend on God every day." This reciprocal relationship between teacher and students illustrates that Christian education is not a one-way process; it is a shared journey of formation. The teacher's professionalism was renewed through ongoing spiritual reflection, demonstrating that faith-based teaching continually transforms both educator and learner. It becomes clear that professional competence in Christian Religious Education is inherently a spiritual vocation. The teacher's expertise, discipline, and ethical responsibility are inseparable from spiritual depth and devotion. Genesis 24:12 serves as a theological mirror that reflects this integration. The servant's prayer embodies professional excellence (planning, responsibility, discernment) intertwined with faith and humility. Likewise, the CRE teacher at SD 044 Simangulampe exhibited a professionalism grounded in prayerfulness and love. This integration redefines the notion of "competence" from a Christian perspective. It is not merely the ability to manage classrooms or deliver content effectively but the capacity to manifest divine wisdom in

educational relationships. The teacher's personality-marked by gentleness, patience, and joy-functioned as an instrument of God's grace. Through daily consistency, the teacher became a living witness to the truth that effective teaching flows from a heart attuned to prayer. The findings affirm Palmer's (1998) claim that "we teach who we are." The CRE teacher's spiritual maturity shaped the moral climate of the classroom, transforming it into a sanctuary of grace. This incarnational dimension of pedagogy distinguishes Christian education from secular instruction. It emphasizes that prayer is both the method and the goal of education-to form hearts that listen, trust, and respond to God. The results of this study demonstrate that professional competence and personal faith are mutually reinforcing dimensions of Christian Religious Education. The teacher's pedagogical skill is enlivened by prayer; their authority is grounded in humility; their success is defined by faithfulness rather than achievement. At SD 044 Simangulampe, the story of Abraham's servant became a living narrative in the classroom-a reminder that every act of teaching is an act of trust, and every moment of prayer is an invitation for God to work through His servant.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the professional competence of Christian Religious Education teachers reaches its truest expression when it is interwoven with personal faith and prayerful dependence on God. The reflection on Genesis 24:12-*"Then he prayed, 'Lord, God of my master Abraham, make me successful today, and show kindness to my master Abraham'"*-reveals that genuine professionalism in Christian teaching is not a matter of technical mastery alone but a sacred participation in God's wisdom and providence. At SD 044 Simangulampe, Humbang Hasundutan, this theological insight became a lived reality. The CRE teacher's professional practices, classroom demeanor, and personal spirituality formed a coherent model of "educating the heart to pray"-a pedagogy rooted in humility, trust, and faith-filled integrity. The findings demonstrate that prayer functioned both as pedagogical content and as an educational method. The teacher did not merely instruct students on how to pray but invited them to experience prayer as a way of life. This integration transformed the classroom from a space of instruction into a sanctuary of encounter, where faith was nurtured through reflection, dialogue, and lived practice. Students learned that prayer is not limited to religious ritual but is a relational conversation with God that shapes their attitudes, decisions, and moral vision. In this sense, prayer became the foundation of holistic education-uniting intellectual growth with emotional and spiritual formation. The professional competence of the teacher was evident in the intentional design of learning experiences that balanced structure with spiritual spontaneity. Lessons were carefully planned yet open to the movement of God's Spirit, allowing students to express faith in authentic, personal ways. The teacher's ability to connect biblical narratives, such as Genesis 24, with daily experiences fostered moral imagination and theological reflection among students. The teacher's composure, patience, and humility communicated theological truths more powerfully than words. When students observed their teacher praying before decisions, apologizing when wrong, or showing empathy toward those in pain, they encountered a living example of dependence on God-a reflection of Abraham's servant's humble reliance on divine guidance. This study also highlights that professional competence in Christian education

entails emotional maturity and pastoral sensitivity. The teacher's calm presence provided stability and reassurance, helping students internalize prayer as a source of peace amid challenges. Through reflective practices such as group prayers, storytelling, and gratitude journaling, students developed not only confidence in communication with God but also empathy toward one another. The teacher's consistency in integrating prayer into every aspect of school life cultivated a communal spirituality—an environment where students learned that faith grows in fellowship and that one's relationship with God naturally overflows into acts of kindness and service. This study affirms that professional teaching in Christian education is a form of spiritual vocation. The teacher is not merely an instructor but a co-laborer with God—a servant who, like Abraham's messenger, depends on divine direction to fulfill their mission. The teacher's faith, humility, and professionalism become instruments through which God's wisdom is revealed in the educational process. Genesis 24:12 thus stands as a paradigm for Christian educators: prayer precedes action, dependence sustains effort, and humility crowns success. The study asserts that to be a professionally competent CRE teacher is to embody the harmony between knowledge and prayer, skill and surrender, discipline and devotion. The teacher's example at SD 044 Simangulampe demonstrates that education rooted in prayer produces not only knowledgeable students but faithful believers—young hearts trained to rely on God in both triumph and trial. In this way, the professional competence of the Christian teacher becomes a witness of divine partnership, a testimony that the art of teaching is, at its core, an act of prayer.

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Arthur, J. (2019). *Virtues in teaching: The moral and professional character of teachers*. Routledge.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Prentice Hall.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Groome, T. H. (1991). *Sharing faith: A comprehensive approach to religious education and pastoral ministry*. HarperCollins.
- Jennings, P. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2009). The prosocial classroom: Teacher social and emotional competence in relation to student and classroom outcomes. *Review of Educational Research* 79(1), 491-525. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654308325693>
- Lickona, T. (1991). *Educating for character: How our schools can teach respect and responsibility*. Bantam Books.
- Nouwen, H. J. M. (1975). *Reaching out: The three movements of the spiritual life*. Doubleday.

Palmer, P. J. (1998). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. Jossey-Bass.

Peterson, E. H. (2005). *Christ plays in ten thousand places: A conversation in spiritual theology*. Eerdmans.

Van der Ven, J. A. (1998). *Education for reflective ministry*. Peeters Publishers.

Wilhoit, J. C., & Dettoni, J. M. (1995). *Nurture that is Christian: Developmental perspectives on Christian education*. Baker Books.

Wright, C. J. H. (2006). *The mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's grand narrative*. InterVarsity Press.