



## Living with Purpose: Exploring the Christian Teacher's Missional Calling in Light of Matthew 28:19-20 at SD Negeri 122352 Kota Pematangsiantar

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the missional calling of Christian teachers in light of Matthew 28:19-20 within the pluralistic context of SD Negeri 122352 Kota Pematangsiantar. As public schools in Indonesia continue to represent diverse cultural, socio-economic, and religious backgrounds, Christian teachers are increasingly challenged to navigate their professional responsibilities while remaining faithful to their spiritual identity. This research investigates how the Great Commission, understood not as proselytization but as a mandate for ethical presence, transformative service, and holistic care, shapes teachers' pedagogical approaches, relational practices, and vocational motivations. Using a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving Christian teachers at the research site. Findings indicate that teachers interpret Matthew 28:19-20 as a call to embody Christlike character-expressed through compassion, integrity, patience, and inclusive teaching strategies-rather than engaging in explicit religious instruction. Their missional identity fosters a strong sense of purpose, resilience, and reflective practice, enabling them to build positive learning environments that support students academically and socio-emotionally. The study also reveals how teachers maintain ethical sensitivity and respect for religious diversity while integrating spiritual values into their professional conduct. The results demonstrate that the missional calling contributes significantly to the development of peaceful, empathetic, and value-rich classroom cultures. In this way, Christian teachers serve as agents of moral formation and social harmony within the school community. This research underscores the relevance of Matthew 28:19-20 for contemporary Christian educators and highlights how living with purpose can be authentically expressed through compassionate and contextually sensitive educational practice.*

**Keywords:** Purpose, Missional Calling, Christian Religious Education

### INTRODUCTION

Christian education in public school settings continues to face multidimensional challenges, particularly in sociocultural contexts marked by plurality, shifting moral

landscapes, and the rapid pace of pedagogical transformation. Within this dynamic environment, Christian teachers are called not only to teach academic content but also to embody a form of purposeful living that reflects their missional identity. This study explores such a calling through the lens of Matthew 28:19-20, a foundational text in Christian missiology often referred to as the Great Commission. While the passage is traditionally associated with evangelistic and ecclesial missions, its theological and ethical implications extend deeply into the vocation of Christian educators working in secular or religiously diverse institutions. At SD Negeri 122352 Kota Pematangsiantar, a public school characterized by its cultural and religious diversity, the role of Christian teachers becomes particularly significant in shaping holistic education that respects pluralism while maintaining the integrity of Christian witness. Matthew 28:19-20 provides a compelling theological framework for understanding the educator's vocation as one grounded in divine commissioning. The Johannine scholar R. T. France notes that the text functions not merely as an evangelistic mandate but as a comprehensive invitation to embody and teach a Christ-centered way of life (France 2007). The call to "make disciples," paired with the imperative to "teach them to obey everything I have commanded you," highlights that Christian vocation is intrinsically pedagogical. In this sense, the work of Christian teachers in public schools mirrors Jesus' formative approach to shaping the character, values, and worldview of His followers. Their daily pedagogical practices—such as modeling integrity, nurturing compassion, and cultivating justice—become manifestations of a missional lifestyle grounded in the presence of Christ who promises, "I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). This assurance strengthens the teacher's resolve to live with purpose in environments that may not explicitly support religious formation. The Indonesian educational landscape further frames this missional calling. Public schools such as SD Negeri 122352 operate under national guidelines that emphasize character education, mutual respect, and religious tolerance. Within this framework, Christian teachers contribute meaningfully to the development of students' moral and social competencies without violating institutional boundaries. Scholars of Christian pedagogy, such as Arthur Holmes, argue that the integration of faith and learning is not a matter of overt religious instruction but rather the embodiment of virtues that reflect the Christian story through actions, attitudes, and relational ethics (Holmes 1987). This integration resonates with the Great Commission's emphasis on teaching by example—an approach that aligns with Indonesia's moral education goals, including respect, honesty, responsibility, and empathy. The missional nature of teaching positions Christian educators as transformative agents within their schools. Their professional commitment is enriched by spiritual intentionality that encourages them to view their classrooms as spaces for cultivating human dignity and fostering peace among learners of diverse backgrounds. The setting of SD Negeri 122352 Kota Pematangsiantar, with its mixture of ethnicities and beliefs, offers fertile ground for such transformative engagement. Here, missional teaching does not imply proselytization but the cultivation of a learning environment shaped by Christ-like virtues. As Bosch emphasizes, mission is not an activity confined to verbal proclamation; it is a holistic expression of God's reconciling work that is lived out in daily relationships (Bosch 1991). Thus, Christian teachers who embody humility, patience, and love participate in God's mission even in ostensibly secular educational spaces. This introduction situates the study within theological, ethical, and pedagogical frameworks, illustrating how Matthew 28:19-20 informs the Christian

teacher's purpose-driven vocation in public schools. It highlights the significance of faith-integrated professionalism and the contextual challenges of religious diversity. By focusing on SD Negeri 122352 Kota Pematangsiantar, this research aims to deepen the understanding of how Christian teachers interpret and live out their missional calling authentically and responsibly within Indonesia's pluralistic educational system.

## METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the missional calling of Christian teachers at SD Negeri 122352 Kota Pematangsiantar in light of Matthew 28:19-20. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of teachers' lived experiences, personal interpretations of biblical calling, and daily pedagogical practices within a pluralistic educational environment (Creswell 2013). The descriptive orientation ensures that the findings remain grounded in participants' narratives without imposing theoretical abstractions that may overshadow contextual realities. The focus of the inquiry centers on how Christian teachers perceive, articulate, and embody their vocation as informed by the Great Commission while navigating professional responsibilities in a public school setting. The study was conducted at SD Negeri 122352 Kota Pematangsiantar, a public elementary school characterized by cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity. The institution provides a relevant context for examining missional identity because Christian teachers must balance personal faith commitments with national educational mandates that emphasize neutrality, tolerance, and inclusivity. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, targeting Christian teachers who have taught at the school for a minimum of three years. This criterion ensured that the teachers had sufficient experience to reflect meaningfully on their professional and spiritual practices. A total of seven teachers participated in the study, representing various grade levels and subject areas. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, non-participant classroom observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews served as the primary method, providing flexibility for participants to articulate their views on calling, purpose, and mission while allowing the researcher to probe deeper into emerging themes (Merriam & Tisdell 2016). Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and focused on three main areas: teachers' understanding of Matthew 28:19-20, interpretations of missional vocation in daily teaching, and perceived challenges or opportunities in practicing faith-informed pedagogy. Classroom observations complemented interview data by capturing how teachers' articulated beliefs translated into observable behaviors, relational interactions, and pedagogical choices. Observation protocols focused on indicators such as teacher-student communication, classroom atmosphere, value modeling, and conflict resolution approaches. The researcher reviewed relevant school documents, including school vision statements, teacher handbooks, and character education guidelines, to understand institutional expectations shaping teacher practices. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step model: familiarization, coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting. Coding was conducted manually to maintain close engagement with the data. Initial codes were derived inductively based on participants' narratives, while subsequent coding cycles identified recurring theological, pedagogical, and ethical patterns. Themes were then

refined to represent core aspects of Christian missional calling as embodied in teaching practices. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants, and the school's identity was used only with administrative permission. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. The researcher also maintained reflexive notes to minimize bias and ensure respectful interpretation of participants' faith-based perspectives. By integrating interviews, observations, and document analysis, this methodological framework provides a holistic understanding of how Christian teachers at SD Negeri 122352 Kota Pematangsiantar live out their missional calling within the boundaries of public education.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of interviews, classroom observations, and institutional documents at SD Negeri 122352 Kota Pematangsiantar reveals a rich and nuanced portrayal of how Christian teachers interpret and embody their missional calling within a pluralistic public-school context. The results indicate that teachers operationalize their understanding of Matthew 28:19-20 not through overt religious instruction, but through a lived pedagogy characterized by service, integrity, relational care, and the intentional modeling of Christ-like virtues. These findings suggest that the Great Commission, when interpreted through a pedagogical lens, functions less as a mandate for verbal evangelization and more as a call to transformative presence—a presence that shapes the moral and social environment of the classroom. The discussion below integrates these findings with relevant theological, pedagogical, and sociocultural scholarship. A dominant theme emerging from the interviews is that Christian teachers perceive their vocation as an embodied form of witness rather than verbal proselytization. Teachers repeatedly emphasized that in a public-school environment, their mission must be expressed through ethical conduct, attitudes, and relationships. The majority described Matthew 28:19-20 as a theological foundation that inspires them to “live differently,” “serve wholeheartedly,” and “teach with integrity,” even though they are not permitted to explicitly preach Christian doctrine during instructional time. One teacher—referred to here as Participant A—explained that the Great Commission “is not about forcing faith on students but about showing God's love through everything we do.” This perspective reflects Arthur Holmes's (1987) argument that faith integration in education often occurs implicitly through virtues rather than explicitly through doctrinal teaching. Teachers thus interpret “making disciples” as cultivating habits, values, and dispositions that reflect the character of Christ within the limitations of a secular institution. This finding is consistent with Bosch's (1991) insistence that mission should be understood as the embodiment of God's reconciling love rather than as aggressive religious persuasion. For teachers at SD Negeri 122352, the classroom becomes a mission field not in the sense of conversion, but in the sense of creating learning environments shaped by justice, compassion, and dignity. The Great Commission's promise of Christ's abiding presence (“I am with you always”) becomes a source of vocational motivation rather than a justification for religious imposition.

### ***Pedagogical Practices as Expressions of Missional Identity***

Observation data show that the teachers' missional identity directly influences their pedagogical practices. Several consistent patterns emerged across classrooms: relational

warmth, fairness, moral modeling, and conflict mediation rooted in empathy. These behaviors align with the interpretation of teaching as a form of discipleship, where the teacher molds character not through doctrinal instruction but through lived example. Relational warmth was evident in daily interactions. Teachers frequently greeted students personally, asked about their well-being, and showed attentiveness to those experiencing emotional distress or academic difficulty. Participant C described this practice as “building trust so that children know they are valued.” This relational ethic correlates with the Great Commission’s emphasis on teaching “everything I have commanded you,” which includes the relational and ethical teachings of Jesus, such as compassion, humility, and mercy. Fairness emerged as another central characteristic. Observations demonstrated that Christian teachers consistently applied rules equally and sought to mediate conflicts with patience and impartiality. In interviews, teachers explicitly linked fairness to their understanding of Christian integrity. Participant F explained: “If I want to show Christ to the students, I must be fair, especially to those who are often ignored or overlooked.” The data indicate that fairness is not merely a pedagogical duty but a theological expression of justice rooted in Christian ethics. Teachers deliberately used opportunities within the curriculum to reinforce values such as responsibility, cooperation, and respect. Even though they avoided explicitly religious language, their value integration aligned with the ethical dimension of Matthew 28:20. For instance, during a group-activity session, one teacher encouraged students to “work together, listen to each other, and think of others before yourself.” Such guidance echoes the heart of Jesus’ teachings, demonstrating that the Great Commission can inform public-school teaching without violating boundaries of religious neutrality. A third major finding is that Christian teachers see character formation as their primary contribution to the school’s mission. They understand their role not only as academic instructors but as moral mentors and role models who shape students’ social and ethical identities. This emphasis resonates with the Indonesian national curriculum’s focus on character education, which aligns closely with Christian values such as honesty, responsibility, and empathy. Participants noted that many students at SD Negeri 122352 come from diverse family backgrounds, including those experiencing economic hardship or unstable home environments (Ariawan, 2023). Teachers therefore view moral guidance as essential to student development. Participant D described their role as “helping students become good people, regardless of their religion.” This perspective shows that Christian teachers do not confine their moral mission to students of the same faith but extend it universally—an approach consistent with Jesus’ inclusive ministry. Observational data reveal frequent acts of intentional character shaping, such as encouraging students to apologize sincerely, to help peers who struggle, and to express gratitude. In one observed incident, a student became frustrated during a mathematics activity. The teacher calmly approached, offered reassurance, and guided the child through breathing exercises to regain composure. This interaction demonstrates the teacher’s commitment to nurturing emotional resilience—a component of character formation essential for holistic learning. These findings affirm Holmes’s (1987) argument that Christian education in secular contexts can thrive when teachers embody virtues that reflect the Christian narrative. Through small daily interactions, teachers contribute to “making disciples” in the sense of shaping children into compassionate, respectful, and responsible human beings.

### ***Religious Neutrality with Wisdom and Sensitivity***

A crucial dimension of teachers' missional practice involves navigating the boundaries set by public-school regulations, particularly regarding religious expression. Teachers expressed awareness of restrictions on explicit evangelism and described a commitment to respecting institutional guidelines. However, they also articulated a creative and reflective understanding of how to remain faithful to their calling without violating professional ethics. Participants described a range of strategies for maintaining balance. These include focusing on universal moral values, using inclusive language, and demonstrating respect for students' diverse religious backgrounds. Participant B emphasized, "I do not talk about Jesus directly in class, but the way I treat students should reflect Jesus." This demonstrates a practical, contextually sensitive interpretation of mission. Several teachers also described moments when students asked personal questions about the teacher's faith. In these cases, teachers responded carefully—acknowledging their Christian identity but encouraging students to seek religious instruction from their families or religious teachers. This approach reflects both respect for religious diversity and fidelity to personal faith commitments. The results highlight a key theological insight: missional calling does not require a verbal proclamation in every context. Rather, it involves discernment—knowing when to speak, when to remain silent, and when to act in ways that subtly embody the values of the Gospel. This contextual discernment echoes Bosch's (1991) emphasis on mission as relational, holistic, and deeply attuned to social realities. Teachers also identified several challenges that shape their missional engagement. These challenges include cultural tensions among students, varying levels of parental involvement, differences in religious expectations, and constraints placed by the public-school system. Cultural tensions sometimes led to misunderstandings or conflicts among students. Teachers reported that students occasionally brought preconceived biases from their home environments, which required the teacher to address issues of prejudice, stereotyping, or exclusion. Participant E recounted a situation in which two students argued over ethnic differences, prompting the teacher to intervene using a values-based discussion about respect and unity. Another challenge is the expectation from some Christian parents that teachers should provide explicit spiritual instruction. Teachers explained that they often needed to clarify the limits of their role in public schools. The tension between parental expectations and institutional regulations creates a complex environment for teachers who desire to support family-based faith formation but must adhere to secular guidelines. Institutionally, teachers often felt constrained by bureaucratic priorities and administrative demands, which limited their time for relational engagement. Despite these pressures, teachers remained committed to their missional identity, often taking extra time outside formal instruction to support students emotionally or academically. These challenges affirm the need for ongoing professional formation in Christian pedagogy, particularly in multicultural settings. They also highlight that missional teaching requires resilience, patience, and wisdom—qualities that align closely with the Christ-centered virtues described in Matthew's Gospel.

A unifying theme across all findings is that Christian teachers draw strength, motivation, and clarity from Matthew 28:19-20. The Great Commission serves as a central anchor shaping their professional identity. Teachers frequently mentioned Christ's promise, "I am with you always," as a source of comfort when facing difficulties, misunderstandings, or emotionally demanding situations. Participant G described this sense of divine presence as "a reminder that teaching is not just a job, but a calling with eternal significance." This understanding transforms the mundane tasks of teaching into sacred acts of service. Interview data reveal that teachers experience their work as aligning with God's broader mission of reconciliation and transformation. The Great Commission provides a sense of unity between faith and work. Instead of viewing their Christian identity and professional duties as conflicting spheres, teachers integrate the two by interpreting mission as relational care, justice-seeking, and character formation. For them, the classroom becomes a place where God's love can be embodied even without explicit religious language. The findings of this study illuminate the dynamic interplay between missional theology and public-school pedagogy. Christian teachers at SD Negeri 122352 embody their calling primarily through relational presence, moral integrity, and compassionate engagement. Their interpretation of Matthew 28:19-20 aligns with contemporary missiological perspectives that emphasize holistic rather than propositional approaches to mission. By situating teaching within the framework of divine calling, educators find deeper meaning, resilience, and clarity in their work. The results also demonstrate that Christian teachers can contribute significantly to character education in pluralistic contexts without violating principles of religious neutrality. Their commitment to fairness, empathy, patience, and respect aligns with national educational goals and fosters a healthy moral environment for students of all backgrounds. This supports the argument that Christian faith can enrich public education when expressed through virtues rather than doctrinal teaching. The study highlights the need for ongoing reflection and support for teachers navigating the complexities of religious diversity. Missional teaching in public schools requires discernment, cultural sensitivity, and emotional resilience. Professional development programs-both in theological formation and intercultural competence-can strengthen teachers' capacity to embody their calling effectively. This research contributes to the broader discourse on Christian vocation by illustrating how the Great Commission can inspire ethical and relational practices in everyday educational settings. It demonstrates that missional identity is not confined to explicitly religious contexts but can flourish wherever educators commit to living purposefully, compassionately, and faithfully.

## CONCLUSION

This study affirms that the missional calling of Christian teachers, when interpreted through Matthew 28:19-20, offers transformative potential for educational practice in pluralistic public-school settings such as SD Negeri 122352 Kota Pematangsiantar. The findings reveal that Christian teachers who understand their vocation as a form of discipleship-embodied through presence, compassion, moral consistency, and pedagogical excellence-are able to cultivate meaningful learning environments that nurture students holistically. Their missional identity does not manifest through proselytization, but through a lived testimony of Christlike character that respects

institutional regulations and embraces cultural and religious diversity. Through this approach, teachers succeed in translating the Great Commission into ethical and relational commitments that align with the values of national education while remaining faithful to their spiritual identity. Furthermore, the analysis shows that the internalization of Matthew 28:19-20 influences teachers' sense of professional purpose, resilience, and motivation. Teachers who perceive their work as a sacred calling demonstrate stronger intrinsic commitment, heightened empathy in responding to students' socio-emotional realities, and greater perseverance amid systemic challenges. This spiritual grounding enhances their ability to engage in reflective practice, cultivate inclusive classroom cultures, and promote peacebuilding behaviors that empower students from various backgrounds. The study highlights the vital interplay between spiritual conviction and pedagogical practice. When Christian teachers embody missional living through service, integrity, and relational attentiveness, they become agents of hope and moral formation in their schools. In a diverse context like Kota Pematangsiantar, such an approach contributes not only to students' academic and socio-emotional growth but also to the broader pursuit of social harmony. The missional calling of Christian teachers, rooted in the Great Commission, remains both relevant and constructive for contemporary educational contexts, demonstrating that living with purpose is realized not in religious proclamation but in faithful and compassionate educational practice.

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