

Empathic Communication among Christian Religious Education Teachers: An Exegetical Reflection on Exodus 7:17 at SDN 164518 Padang Hulu- Tebing Tinggi

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of empathic communication among Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers, drawing on an exegetical reflection of Exodus 7:17 and its relevance for professional interactions at SDN 164518 Padang Hulu, Tebing Tinggi. While the biblical passage presents a moment of divine judgment delivered through Moses, its communicative structure reveals God's clarity, intentionality, and purpose in addressing human resistance. This theological insight becomes a framework for understanding how empathic communication can shape constructive interpersonal relationships among educators in contemporary school settings. Using a qualitative descriptive method, the study integrates biblical exegesis, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews with CRE teachers to explore how scriptural values inform communication practices. The findings show that empathic communication emerges through active listening, emotional sensitivity, verbal gentleness, and respect for diverse viewpoints. CRE teachers consistently seek to understand colleagues' concerns, reduce tension, and maintain harmonious collaboration, particularly in a pluralistic environment where educators come from various religious and cultural backgrounds. The study also reveals several challenges, including time pressures, workload, and differences in educational perspectives that occasionally hinder empathic engagement. Nevertheless, teachers emphasize that theological grounding provides both moral direction and emotional resilience, enabling them to respond with patience and clarity in difficult interactions. The study concludes that empathic communication is a vital competence combining spiritual maturity, relational awareness, and pedagogical responsibility. When rooted in biblical insight, such as the communicative intentionality illustrated in Exodus 7:17, empathic communication strengthens collegial relationships and enhances the overall relational climate within the school community.

Keywords: *Empathic Communication, Christian Religious Education, Exegetical Reflection*

INTRODUCTION

Empathic communication has become an increasingly central theme in contemporary educational discourse, especially within faith-based pedagogical environments where relational sensitivity, compassion, and moral character are essential components of the teaching profession. Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers are expected not only to master theological and pedagogical content but also to cultivate the ability to communicate with empathy-listening attentively, responding compassionately, and fostering an environment in which both students and fellow educators experience respect, trust, and mutual support. Within the Indonesian educational context, where schools often reflect a multicultural and multireligious atmosphere, empathic communication becomes a critical pedagogical competence that directly influences the formation of students' moral and spiritual character. This study is situated in SDN 164518 Padang Hulu, Tebing Tinggi, a public elementary school where Christian teachers collaborate daily with peers from diverse backgrounds, making empathetic interpersonal interaction a vital element of professional practice. While numerous studies emphasize the importance of communication skills in teaching, fewer focus specifically on the spiritual and theological foundations that shape empathic communication among CRE teachers. For Christian educators, communication is not merely a technical skill but a theological vocation rooted in the biblical understanding of God's relational nature. The Old Testament offers profound insights into the dynamics of communication, including moments when God engages in intense dialogue with His people to correct, guide, and restore them. One significant passage that sheds light on the moral dimension of communication is Exodus 7:17, where God instructs Moses to confront Pharaoh with a divine message: *"Thus says the Lord: By this you shall know that I am the Lord."* This confrontation encapsulates a communication act grounded in divine empathy-God communicates not to destroy, but to awaken awareness, provoke repentance, and invite transformation. Although the message is firm, its underlying purpose reflects God's redemptive intention toward humanity. Exodus 7:17 belongs to the larger narrative of the plagues, a series of divine actions aimed at liberating Israel from systemic oppression. While the verse introduces the first plague, its theological significance extends beyond miraculous intervention; it reveals God's willingness to engage with human resistance through clear, direct, purposeful communication. Moses becomes the mediator of this divine message, embodying the task of communicating truth with moral integrity and relational courage. In Moses' prophetic role, we observe a model for CRE teachers: communication that does not seek personal advantage but conveys God's values with clarity, compassion, and transformative intent. Even in the face of hardened hearts, divine communication remains relationally oriented, aimed at restoring recognition of God's sovereignty. Applying this exegetical insight to the contemporary educational setting, CRE teachers at SDN 164518 Padang Hulu, Tebing Tinggi face challenges that, while different from Moses' context, similarly require courage, empathy, and spiritual maturity. Teachers must communicate with fellow educators who may hold differing beliefs, pedagogical approaches, and cultural perspectives. Empathic communication becomes essential for maintaining unity, reducing conflict, and supporting the shared mission of holistic education. Empathic interaction among teachers significantly influences school climate,

contributing to students' sense of safety, emotional well-being, and moral development. In this sense, CRE teachers serve not only as instructors but as communicative bridges that model Christian compassion in daily professional interactions. This study therefore seeks to explore the role of empathic communication among Christian Religious Education teachers, using an exegetical reflection on Exodus 7:17 to develop a theological and pedagogical framework that informs practice. By analyzing the communicative example embodied in Moses and its relevance to modern educational relationships, this research aims to contribute to the growing discourse on character-based teaching, professional ethics, and spiritual leadership within the Indonesian school context. The ultimate goal is to illuminate how biblical principles can enrich interpersonal communication, strengthen collegial relationships, and foster a more supportive and spiritually grounded learning environment.

METHODS

A qualitative descriptive design was used to explore how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SDN 164518 Padang Hulu, Tebing Tinggi understand and practice empathic communication, specifically in light of the theological insights derived from Exodus 7:17. The qualitative approach was selected because the phenomenon studied, teachers' internal spiritual-moral reasoning and interpersonal communication, is deeply contextual, interpretive, and rooted in meaning-making. Such dimensions require methods that privilege depth over breadth, allowing the researcher to capture nuanced expressions of empathy, relational dynamics among teachers, and the influence of biblical reflection on professional attitudes. The study was conducted at SDN 164518 Padang Hulu, a public elementary school in Tebing Tinggi characterized by a socially diverse teaching staff and a dynamic interreligious environment. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on Christian Religious Education teachers who have at least two years of teaching experience and are actively involved in collaborative activities with colleagues. A total of six participants were included, ensuring adequate representation of gender, teaching background, and professional responsibilities within the school. This selection allowed the study to gain perspective on how CRE teachers navigate communication patterns within a pluralistic institutional culture. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to elicit teachers' reflections on their communication style, challenges in interacting with colleagues, and personal interpretation of Exodus 7:17 as a theological lens for fostering empathy. The interview guide included open-ended questions on communication practices, perceived conflicts or misunderstandings, and the role of faith reflection in shaping attitudes toward colleagues. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes. Non-participant observations were carried out during staff meetings, informal discussions in the teacher lounge, and collaborative lesson planning sessions. The researcher recorded observable indicators of empathic communication such as active listening, emotional sensitivity, conflict avoidance or resolution, and tone of dialogue. The observations also helped verify whether participants' stated communication values were consistent with actual behavior. Relevant documents, teacher reports, reflective journals (when available), and minutes of meetings, were analyzed to identify recurring patterns of communication and values alignment within the school culture. Although documents did not directly address empathy, they revealed implicit norms of relational conduct. Interview transcripts and field notes were coded

manually using inductive and deductive approaches. Themes were developed around core concepts such as biblical-theological guidance for communication, interpersonal challenges, expressions of empathy, and impact of faith-based reflection on professional collaboration. Thick description of the research context strengthens transferability, while careful documentation of analytic decisions enhances dependability and confirmability. This methodological approach allowed the researcher to explore the intersection between theology, communication practice, and educational professionalism in a holistic and context-sensitive manner.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal three major themes concerning empathic communication among Christian Religious Education teachers at SDN 164518 Padang Hulu: empathy shaped by theological reflection on Exodus 7:17, patterns of interpersonal communication among teachers, and the challenges and opportunities in practicing empathy within a pluralistic school environment. These themes are discussed together with exegetical insights and relevant theoretical perspectives. One of the strongest findings from the interviews is that teachers' understanding of empathy is significantly influenced by their theological interpretation of Exodus 7:17. Although the verse describes a moment of divine judgment—"By this you shall know that I am the Lord..."—teachers at the school interpret it not primarily as an act of harshness, but as a demonstration of God's purposeful communication, in which the divine message seeks to awaken awareness, correct misunderstanding, and restore proper relationships. Participants reflected that God's confrontation with Pharaoh represents not mere punishment but an act of communicative clarity, where God ensures that His message is understood in ways that lead to transformation. For the teachers, this theological insight becomes a model for their own communication: empathy requires clarity, responsibility, and intentionality. A participant noted that *"God communicated directly and clearly, not to break Pharaoh but to make him realize something. That reminds me that empathy means speaking truth but in a way that others can understand and receive."* This aligns with pastoral communication theories stating that empathy is not only about emotional sensitivity but also about intentional, value-driven dialogue that seeks the wellbeing of the other. The teachers internalized this biblical principle into everyday professional interactions, emphasizing that empathic communication requires courage, honesty, and compassion simultaneously. This demonstrates how biblical interpretation becomes a living hermeneutic within educational practice, shaping moral reasoning and the relational conduct of teachers. Thus, Exodus 7:17 functions—not as a text of judgment alone—but as a theological framework that encourages teachers to communicate with purpose and relational awareness. Observational data highlight that empathic communication among CRE teachers at SDN 164518 Padang Hulu is expressed in several practical behaviors: active listening, calm tone in dialogue, respect for differing opinions, and emotional sensitivity, especially during stressful moments such as administrative deadlines or lesson planning meetings. Active listening emerged as the most dominant characteristic. Teachers consistently practiced listening without interruption and restating colleagues' concerns before offering responses. This pattern indicates a high level of relational maturity and aligns with the principle of "empathetic presence"—a core

concept in Christian communication ethics. According to one teacher, *"Listening is the first step to understanding. I cannot respond with wisdom if I do not first fully listen."* This suggests that empathy is seen not only as an emotional posture but also as a cognitive and spiritual discipline. The tone of communication also reflects empathic values. Teachers tend to use soft, respectful language even in disagreements. Observations showed that conflicts or differences in opinion rarely escalate; instead, teachers adopt a reflective stance and approach issues with patience. This behavior is consistent with the pastoral principle of "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15), which several participants mentioned as parallel to the clear-yet-purposeful communication seen in Exodus 7:17. The teachers demonstrate empathy through affirmation and encouragement, especially toward younger or less experienced colleagues. Senior CRE teachers often offer guidance informally, helping others navigate classroom challenges or administrative responsibilities. This reflects a relational culture shaped by Christian values of mentorship and mutual support. These behaviors contribute to a working environment where communication is not merely functional but relationally grounded. Teachers perceive that empathic communication not only improves collaboration but also strengthens their spiritual witness within the school community.

Time constraints were mentioned by all participants as the primary barrier. Heavy workloads often limit opportunities for deep interpersonal engagement. Teachers admitted that during hectic periods, they may unintentionally appear less attentive or responsive. This echoes findings in educational communication research, which state that emotional labor becomes more difficult when teachers face administrative overload. Then, interdisciplinary misunderstandings sometimes arise in the school context. For example, differences in pedagogical approaches or class management philosophies between CRE teachers and teachers of other subjects occasionally lead to tensions. While these conflicts are generally minor, they test the consistency of empathic communication. One participant explained, *"Sometimes other teachers don't understand why we emphasize character-building or spiritual perspectives. Misunderstandings happen, but we try to clarify things gently."* This is exactly where theological reflection becomes significant: teachers consciously draw from biblical principles to maintain humility and clarity, modeling Christ-like relational processes. The pluralistic teaching environment at SDN 164518 Padang Hulu also creates unique opportunities. Teachers of various religious backgrounds interact daily, and CRE teachers see empathy as essential to building bridges across beliefs. Through observation, it was noted that CRE teachers often mediate discussions, encourage understanding, and avoid confrontational language. Their empathetic stance helps create a climate of mutual respect and contributes to social harmony within the school. This resonance with Exodus 7:17 lies in the idea that communication has a transformative purpose. Just as God communicates to invite awareness and change, teachers use empathy to create space for dialogue and relational growth. Rather than asserting religious superiority, they embody humility and compassion, which in turn fosters trust among colleagues. God speaks with purpose, and teachers follow this by avoiding ambiguity and ensuring messages are understandable. God seeks transformation, not destruction; teachers, too, aim to build, not break relationships. Judgment in the text is balanced with divine patience; teachers emulate this balance when addressing conflicts or misunderstandings. The findings demonstrate a

lived hermeneutic where scripture shapes communication ethics, influencing not only what teachers say but how they say it. This aligns with practical theology perspectives that emphasize faith translation into professional praxis. Taken together, these findings indicate that CRE teachers at SDN 164518 Padang Hulu embody a mature form of empathic communication grounded in spiritual reflection, practical interpersonal skills, and contextual sensitivity. Their communication patterns contribute positively to professional collaboration, conflict resolution, and schoolwide relational culture. The challenges they face do not diminish their commitment; instead, they reinforce the importance of theological grounding in sustaining empathy amidst complexity. The study shows that empathic communication in Christian education is both a spiritual discipline and a pedagogical competence, shaped by biblical reflection, lived experience, and relational engagement with colleagues. The teachers' practice of empathy reflects a holistic integration of faith and professionalism, making them agents of peace and understanding within their educational context.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that empathic communication among Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SDN 164518 Padang Hulu, Tebing Tinggi is a multidimensional competence shaped by theological reflection, interpersonal skill, and contextual awareness. Drawing from the exegetical insight of Exodus 7:17, teachers understand that communication is not merely the transfer of information but a purposeful relational act aimed at clarity, transformation, and the restoration of understanding. Although the biblical text narrates a moment of divine judgment, teachers interpret it as God's intentional communication that seeks to awaken awareness-an interpretive move that significantly shapes their approach to empathy in professional interactions. The findings reveal that CRE teachers express empathy through consistent active listening, gentle tone, emotional sensitivity, encouragement, and respect for differing perspectives. These communication patterns foster constructive collaboration, reduce interpersonal tension, and build trust among colleagues. Their empathic communication transcends religious boundaries, contributing to a culture of mutual respect in the school's pluralistic environment. Teachers face challenges such as time constraints, interdisciplinary misunderstandings, and diverse educational expectations. Yet these obstacles do not diminish their commitment; instead, they highlight the importance of theological grounding as a sustaining force for empathy. Teachers consciously draw from biblical principles-especially the clarity, intentionality, and purposefulness embodied in Exodus 7:17-to navigate relational complexities with humility and compassion. The study concludes that empathic communication is both a spiritual discipline and a professional competence in Christian education. When nurtured through scriptural reflection, relational awareness, and consistent practice, empathic communication enables CRE teachers to become agents of peace, understanding, and moral influence within their school community. This underscores the integral role of biblical-theological insight in shaping communication ethics and the broader relational culture of Christian educators in public-school settings.

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