

Church Denominational Relations in the Perspective of Christian Conflict Management in Paret Village, Kotabunan District, East Bolaang Mongondow Regency

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Abstract

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This study aims to analyze the relationship between church denominations in Paret Village, Kotabunan District, East Bolaang Mongondow Regency, with a focus on the application of Christian conflict management. It also identifies supporting and inhibiting factors in building interdenominational relationships. The study uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach, involving observation, interviews, and document analysis. Findings show that relationships between churches in Paret Village are generally harmonious, supported by values of family, cooperation, and shared faith. However, internal tensions remain, especially regarding burial land disputes and denominational exclusivism. The application of Christian conflict management is reflected through dialogue, love in action, and Christ-centered principles. Supporting factors include inter-church activities, spiritual formation, and a culture of peaceful coexistence. Inhibiting factors include denominational fanaticism, weak communication among church leaders, and low participation in joint activities. This study concludes that Christian conflict management plays an essential role in building peaceful and sustainable inter-church relationships

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is widely recognized as a pluralistic nation, not only in terms of ethnicity and culture, but also religion and its denominations. Within Christianity itself, denominational diversity is a striking feature, especially in rural areas. In villages like Paret, located in Kotabunan District, East Bolaang Mongondow Regency, North Sulawesi, such diversity includes major Protestant denominations such as Gereja Pantekosta di Indonesia (GPdI), Gereja Masehi Injili di Bolaang Mongondow (GMIBM), Gereja Masehi Advent Hari Ketujuh, and KGPM. While united in the core belief in Jesus Christ as Savior, each denomination has distinct theological interpretations, liturgical styles, and governance systems. These differences, although enriching, can sometimes become sources of misunderstanding or tension if not managed properly.

In Paret Village, churches are not isolated from one another. Instead, they exist within a shared space geographically, socially, and culturally. Many of the church members are family, neighbors, or colleagues, creating daily opportunities for interaction across denominational lines. In such contexts, churches inevitably

influence not only the spiritual life of individuals but also the sociocultural fabric of the community. Churches serve as agents of socialization and centers for community development. However, this close proximity also opens the door to competition, particularly in terms of congregational growth, influence in community decisions, and access to shared resources.

One issue that frequently surfaces in this regard is the use and control of burial lands. The limited availability of public cemetery space in the village has triggered conflict between church denominations, especially when boundaries or usage protocols are unclear. These conflicts are not always openly discussed or resolved but are often simmering beneath the surface, leading to passive resistance, reduced cooperation, or even social alienation among congregants. Such conditions, if left unaddressed, could undermine the very witness of the Church as a body called to love and unity.

Apart from burial land disputes, differences in church policies regarding youth activities, evangelism styles, and public worship also affect the level of collaboration. Some denominations, for example, may prohibit participation in interchurch events or joint services due to doctrinal differences. Others may lack the initiative to engage with different denominations out of fear of theological compromise. These barriers highlight the need for a framework of understanding and cooperation based on mutual respect rather than forced uniformity.

Fisher (2022) asserts that conflict in pluralistic religious settings is inevitable; however, it does not necessarily have to be destructive. On the contrary, when properly managed, conflict can lead to new understanding, stronger relationships, and deeper spiritual maturity. Conflict can serve as a catalyst for transformation if addressed through intentional and biblically grounded processes. This is where the concept of Christian conflict management becomes relevant and necessary.

Christian conflict management emphasizes principles such as humility, forgiveness, love, and dialogue. These values are not merely theological ideals but practical tools for navigating differences within the body of Christ. As Anshari (2020) emphasizes, peace among believers is not the absence of disagreement but the presence of grace in handling them. When churches commit to these principles, denominational differences can become sources of enrichment rather than division.

Moreover, the existence of multiple denominations in one village does not have to be viewed negatively. It can instead be seen as a form of theological diversity that reflects the manifold wisdom of God. However, diversity requires intentional management. Without communication, collaboration, and shared vision, diversity can devolve into division. Churches must therefore be proactive in building bridges through interdenominational dialogue, shared mission activities, and community service initiatives.

This article seeks to examine the reality of interdenominational relations in Paret Village through the lens of Christian conflict management. It identifies the relational patterns among churches, highlights the main sources of tension, and evaluates the strategies already in use. Furthermore, it offers reflections and recommendations for church leaders, theologians, and policymakers who are committed to promoting unity without compromising doctrinal identity. By focusing on local realities and biblical foundations, this study hopes to contribute

to the ongoing discourse on peacebuilding within Christian communities in Indonesia.

METHODS

This study applied a qualitative research approach using the phenomenological method to explore the real experiences and perceptions of interdenominational relationships in Paret Village. The phenomenological approach was considered appropriate because it focuses on understanding the meaning of lived experiences—in this case, by church leaders and members across various Protestant denominations. Through this method, the study aimed to uncover how unity and conflict are experienced, interpreted, and managed within the Christian community in Paret.

Data collection was conducted using in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Fifteen informants were selected through purposive sampling, representing pastors, youth leaders, elders, and lay members from four major denominations: GPdI, GMIBM, Advent, and KGPM. These participants were chosen based on their involvement in interchurch cooperation or past denominational disputes. Interviews used semi-structured questions to allow for deeper exploration of personal insights. Observations were carried out during worship services, joint events, and informal gatherings, while supporting documents—such as church records and government letters on burial land—were analyzed to enrich and triangulate the data.

Data analysis followed thematic techniques using NVivo software, which categorized findings into themes such as harmony, tension, cooperation, and barriers. The use of digital tools helped ensure consistency in coding and interpretation. All data were analyzed through the lens of Christian conflict management, with attention to the values of love, humility, dialogue, and reconciliation. To maintain research validity, the study applied credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability criteria. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymization were also observed to protect participants' rights and strengthen the trustworthiness of the research.

RESULT AND DISSCUSSION

The findings of this study were derived through qualitative data analysis facilitated by the NVivo 12 software, a tool that allowed for the detailed coding, categorization, and synthesis of interview transcripts and observational data. This digital analysis process enabled the identification of two dominant thematic clusters that encapsulate the dynamics of interdenominational church relations in Paret Village: the first being “Good Interdenominational Relations” and the second “Cemetery Conflict.” These central themes are indicative of the complex dual reality experienced within the Christian community of Paret, which is characterized both by significant expressions of unity and moments of unresolved tension stemming from longstanding institutional boundaries.

The theme of “Good Interdenominational Relations” emerged from various data points and was notably defined by several consistent indicators, including mutual respect among congregants, active support across denominational events, ongoing interpersonal communication, and the absence of overt hostility or

antagonism. Interview data from representatives of different denominations—namely GPdI, GMIBM, Advent, and KGPM—consistently highlighted the high level of informal social interaction. Many respondents shared that members frequently attend one another's religious and community functions, such as weddings, funerals, and holiday celebrations, regardless of denominational lines. These patterns suggest that the Christian identity shared by villagers serves as a unifying force despite doctrinal and structural differences.

However, the findings also underscore persistent challenges that complicate this otherwise cooperative environment. A prominent issue frequently raised by participants is the ongoing tension related to the use and management of cemetery land. Several informants noted that there is no formal or written agreement that governs access to burial grounds, which has led to disputes—particularly when a family from one denomination seeks to bury a relative on land overseen by another church. The lack of a unified protocol or memorandum of understanding among churches continues to foster uncertainty and can strain relations when expectations are not met. In addition to land disputes, the study found that structured or institutional collaboration among the churches remains weak. While interpersonal relationships among congregants may be strong and cordial, organizational cooperation remains limited. This includes a lack of shared worship services, joint leadership meetings, or coordinated activities for youth and children. Many informants remarked that their respective churches operate independently and rarely engage in collective planning or theological dialogue, often due to fears of doctrinal compromise or institutional interference.

Further reinforcing this point, several interviews included repeated observations that there are currently no formal interchurch forums or regular meetings to address common concerns. One youth leader emphasized that although appreciation exists across denominational boundaries, there are no official joint programs in place. This points to an unfulfilled potential for deeper cooperation and highlights the need for intentional strategic initiatives to build sustainable and impactful unity among churches in the village.

When conflicts arise, such as those involving burial access or theological differences, they are generally addressed informally. Church leaders tend to pursue resolution through dialogue based on mutual understanding and brotherhood. Many of these efforts are familial or community-based rather than institutional, reflecting the reliance on personal relationships and shared cultural values. The Christian principles of humility, love, forgiveness, and reconciliation serve as the dominant tools used by leaders and members alike in navigating sensitive matters.

Importantly, participants confirmed that there have been no incidents of serious or violent conflict in recent history. Disputes, when they occur, are typically minor and are managed in ways that do not disturb the larger fabric of community harmony. Church members continue to participate in each other's ceremonies and social events, offering support that transcends institutional affiliations. This demonstrates the strong social bonds that undergird religious life in Paret Village.

Several sociocultural factors contribute to this harmonious dynamic. Kinship ties, intergenerational friendships, shared history, and geographic proximity all serve to nurture empathy and familiarity among residents. These elements create a foundation where denominational distinctions are softened by a

collective sense of Christian belonging. In such an environment, theological or liturgical differences are often subordinated to the higher value of community unity. Nevertheless, barriers to full cooperation remain. Interviewees highlighted concerns about theological divergence, fears of one denomination dominating the others, and reluctance to modify longstanding traditions as key obstacles to collaboration. As a result, many congregations opt to maintain independent ministry practices rather than engage in potentially contentious joint ventures. This preference for separation over integration hampers the potential for unified Christian witness in the village. Residual mistrust rooted in past disputes, particularly those involving burial land, continues to influence current attitudes toward interchurch collaboration. The absence of a formal mechanism or facilitation by external authorities—such as village government or a religious council—means that such issues are left to be resolved informally, often without sustainable long-term solutions. This lack of institutional support further reinforces the status quo of limited cooperation.

In conclusion, while the state of interdenominational relations in Paret Village is predominantly positive, especially at the interpersonal level, significant institutional and structural challenges remain. Christian values continue to play a central role in maintaining peace and civility, but their effectiveness is limited in the absence of formal frameworks that encourage dialogue, collaboration, and mutual planning. For unity among churches to thrive in a meaningful and sustainable way, it is imperative that structured interdenominational forums and agreements be developed to support and deepen the relational foundation that already exists among congregants..

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study conclude that interdenominational relations among churches in Paret Village including GPdI, GMIBM, Advent, and KGPM are generally harmonious, reflected in mutual respect, personal interactions, and social unity rooted in Christian values such as love, humility, and peace. However, challenges remain, especially concerning cemetery land disputes and limited institutional cooperation due to doctrinal and structural differences. Most conflicts are resolved informally through dialogue and mutual understanding, but the absence of formal agreements risks recurring tensions. Therefore, it is recommended that the churches establish an interchurch communication forum, develop written agreements regarding cemetery use, increase joint activities, strengthen leaders' conflict management skills, and involve local authorities to support structured cooperation and sustainable harmony.

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