Building the Faith of Nias Deanery Catholics by Maximising of Digital Catechesis

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Abstrak. *The development of digital technology has affected various aspects of life, including in the Catholic Church. The Church sees that it is time and must be brave to adapt to digital media. This study aims to explore the effectiveness of digital catechesis in building the faith of Catholics in Nias Deanery, Sibolga Diocese. Using descriptive qualitative research method, the informants consisted of catechists and pastoral personnel. The results showed that the use of digital media in the Nias Deanery is quite high, but the implementation of digital catechesis is still low. Although challenges such as unstable internet networks and lack of digital skills exist, there are great opportunities to maximise the use of digital media as a means of teaching the faith. Therefore, the Church needs to provide training and support in the use of digital media to increase the effectiveness of catechesis among parishioners.*

Keywords: Catholic faith, digital catechesis, digital media, nias deanery

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of science and technology is currently increasing rapidly. Various efforts are made by researchers and scientists, to find new things and be created in such a way. All these efforts are made to support business or to facilitate human work. One of the growing forms is the digitisation process. This digitalisation process all boils down to the tools and media used by humans that are increasingly simple and can be accessed anywhere. Until now, this development is characterised as the 'digital era' (A., 2023, p. 4).

The journey of this digital era is increasingly felt to have penetrated all aspects of human life in it. Humans have begun to have dependence on one another. The process of interaction and communication is more desirable through digital only because the process is hic et nunch and the distant becomes close (Kotan, 2020, p. 87). Besides being easy and fast, people can also repeat the content of the communication in other places and situations. In the end, digital development changed the culture of long-distance encounters into close ones, and gave birth to a generation often called the Net Generation or Generation Z (Sugiyono, Sugiyana, Adhi, & Kotan, 2015, p. 23).

The Catholic Church, which is a part of this development, is no exception. With the principle of 'aggiornamento' the Church tries to adapt to the existing developments, although there are certain things that must be maintained. From this situation, Stephen Bevans, SVD emphasises the new evangelisation, which seeks to find various forms of approaches (methods

and expressions) of the Church that compete with the social and cultural changes of its people. (Tauchner, 2015, p. 63).

The Church then sees that the development of digital media should be thanked as a blessing that helps the Church in carrying out its mission of proclamation (Sugiyono et al., 2015, p. 38). Rufino J. Cardinal Santos further emphasised that the presence of digital media is a tool that brings the Church to the world and vice versa (Samosir, 2019, p. 77). This view seems to represent what has been echoed in the Second Vatican Council, especially in the document Inter Mirifica, especially number 1, which emphasises human life and the spread of the Gospel (Hardawiryana, 1993, no. 1).

Apart from having a positive impact, the presence of digital media also has a negative side. Like a double-edged knife, this digital media also makes people who are close become distant, info that was originally only private consumption can become public consumption, the emergence of hoaxes and in the end, physical encounters become virtual encounters. (Samosir, 2019, p. 75). Therefore, the dissemination of information in digital media has become a shared responsibility with full care and ethics, as well as a selective process to process any existing information. This shared responsibility is then the affirmation of Wilfridus F. S. closing his writing about the ethics of digitalisation (Sarah, 2024, p. 180).

The Church is well aware of the above picture. For this reason, Pope John Paul II encouraged all levels of the Church not to be afraid of using digital media. In his apostolic letter, Pope John Paul II even called the media the 'First *Aeropagus* of the Modern Century' (Paus Yohanes Paulus II, 2005, no. 3). The Church's awareness of the other side of the presence of digital media, encourages it to provide instructions for the use of digital media properly and correctly in accordance with the purpose of proclamation. The use of digital media is only as a tool and is expected to maintain the communion process of physical encounter (Dewan Kepausan untuk Promosi Evangelisasi Baru, 2020, no. 372).

The Nias Deanery, which is part of the Diocese of Sibolga, continues to develop its preaching. One of the media that can be maximised is digital media. Although it is one of the outermost islands separated from the mainland of Sumatra, the island of Nias is almost entirely reached by telecommunications networks. In addition, almost every home has a digital-based communication device. For this reason, the author wants to know how effective digital catechesis is if it is to be used in the Nias Deanery? Of course, this effectiveness can be illustrated from the current results, namely the extent to which it has been implemented, and what obstacles are faced from all of them?

Another target of this research is the Diocese of Sibolga, which is currently strategising for Synod III. In two synods, the Diocese of Sibolga was still searching for a method of proclamation that was suitable for the local situation. In the evaluation of Synod II, the Diocese of Sibolga finally called itself a 'Church of Struggle' (Hasulie, 2017, pp. 3–6). It is not wrong, then, that one form and purpose of this research is to try to offer this digital catechesis model in Synod III of the Diocese of Sibolga.

2. METHOD

This research focuses on the process of implementing digital catechesis and not the influence of digital catechesis. For this reason, in this research, the author uses a descriptive qualitative research method. This method is used by the author to reveal what the data found is. It is intended that qualitative research is research that is carried out by collecting data, then analysing existing data, then interpreting it and writing it back in its own language. (Anggito & Setiawan, 2018, p. 9).

The process itself involves structured interviews with informants. The collected data was categorised and then interpreted by comparing it with the views or recommendations of previous researchers. The results were then drawn out and then written up in accordance with the aims and objectives of this research.

For the informants of this research, the author sought information from parish catechists in all parishes in the Nias Deanery, which consists of 19 parishes. In addition to the catechists, the author also involved representatives of priests, teachers, lecturers who supervise catechists who are domiciled in the Nias Deanery. With informants who are all in the Nias Deanery, this research ultimately aims to measure and see the opportunities and challenges of implementing digital catechesis in the Nias Deanery.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

After collecting the research data, a glimmer of hope then emerged as the things that had been described in the introduction began to appear. The data can be described as follows:

1) Use Of Digital Media.

As if to confirm the presence of digital media in the Nias Deanery, the author started by looking at the level of digital media usage. 66% stated that they always use it, 30% often use it, only 4% sometimes and 0% never use digital media. This figure shows that the use of digital

media in the Nias Deanery has become a habit. This data is enough to illustrate that the use or access to digital media in the Nias Deanery is quite high.

The above data further shows that the Nias Deanery has started to be considered a digital area. This was confirmed by a request for improved internet services in the Nias islands, to Ombudsman RI member Jemsly Hutabarat, during his inspection of Nias Regency (Perwakilan Sumatera Utara, 2022). With this, the first step towards using digital media as a tool for catechesis in the Nias Deanery has begun.

With the high rate of digital media usage, of course this is followed by interaction. People who use digital media also act as interactive. As many as 54% always interact, 36% often interact, 10% sometimes interact and 0% never interact. This data is enough to prove that the use of digital media itself is quite high.

The high number of interactions on digital media has truly become a culture of today. This culture makes the world only within our grasp. Data from the Ministry of Communication and Information recorded that Indonesians can last up to 9 hours in front of digital media, and this is ranked 5th in the world. This indicator then makes the level of interaction in digital media increase. (Devega, 2017).

The high number of interactions in digital media is both an opportunity and a challenge. It is an opportunity, because people are able to access and give feedback if there is catechesis. However, it is also a challenge because people with different perspectives can freely comment on whatever they want, and in the end, it becomes a distraction from the discussion.

2) Use of Books in the Preparation of Digital Catechesis Materials.

Talking about the use of books as the basic material for the preparation of digital catechesis materials is certainly very desirable. But with digital media that offers instant things, it is certainly a temptation. 36% always use, 32% often use, 30% sometimes and 2% never use books. This figure still shows the interest of catechists to compile catechetical materials using books.

The above figure is still very relatively good when compared to the level of literacy that still exists in the North Sumatra region which in 2022 is still at 51.69% (Tambusay & Harefa, 2023). However, the similarity in the numbers (always, often and sometimes) of those who use books is troubling. What's more, there is a growing number who no longer use books in preparing catechetical materials. The emergence of this number may be a sign of caution about the teachings shared on digital media. Catechesis books or teaching sources that have zero obstat and imprimatur on the teachings in the book, of course, are a guarantee of the suitability

of the teachings conveyed. However, if the book has been abandoned, then 'misguided thinking' or the door to heresy begins to open.

Instead of reading a long book to find the material you want to find, it is better to search directly on digital media. Searching for catechetical materials with Google is closer to fast and always close to the desired thing. This tendency is also evident from the data obtained. As many as 24% always access, 46% often access, 28% sometimes access, and 2% who never access.

The data above is really close to the same as the use of books. Catechists are now starting to switch from books to media. Books seem slow and boring, while with media in just seconds you can get what you want. This is supported by the first part about the increasing use of digital media.

3) Implementation of Digital Catechesis.

After looking at the implementation of digital catechesis, it is known that 2% always conduct catechesis, 20% often conduct catechesis, 62% sometimes conduct catechesis and 16% never conduct catechesis. From this data, it appears that currently, the implementation of digital catechesis is still far from expectations. People only prioritise the incidental or spontaneous.

This data confirms that the Nias archipelago has only recently begun to enter the era of digitalisation. The development of the internet, which only began to spread widely around the last decade (Fatimah, 2016). Therefore, digital media users are only able to follow or enjoy what appears. This also confirms that digital catechesis practitioners are just beginning to learn to carry out catechesis activities.

This is in line with the response to the implementation of digital catechesis. The data shows that 8% always respond, 22% often respond, 54% sometimes respond and 16% never respond. This data further shows that people only see the catechesis as if they were seeing another post. Users often get carried away with only the viral ones (Devega, 2017).

4) Tools used in Digital Catechesis.

The implementation of digital catechesis, currently in the Nias Deanery, only uses a few social media platforms. 40% use Facebook page, 40% use WhatsApp, 8% use YouTube, 6% use Website, 4% use TikTok and 2% use Snack Video. Facebook and WhatsApp pages are the dominant media used. The use of this media is very striking because through Facebook today, people want more income or payment. This is driven by the emergence of FB pro, which allows everyone to receive rewards from their posts if they meet predetermined conditions (SLT, 2024). In addition, the use of WhatsApp allows for quick messaging to known people, and can

also be restricted. These two dominant media have become very popular, especially among young people (Jimmy, Rahawarin, & Nugroho, 2023, p. 120).

The use of this media is supported by the targets of digital catechesis itself. The data shows that 22% of the suggestions are for parents, 76% are for young people and 2% are for children. This data shows that at present, young people control digital media. Parents, who are mostly tech-savvy, avoid being targeted for digital catechesis. Parents mostly prefer face-to-face catechesis or often termed 'offline'.

5) Challenges and opportunities of digital catechesis.

The main challenge when implementing digital catechesis is network and internet access. Although the network has almost reached remote areas, the stability is still not enough. Not to mention the internet access which is often said to be 'lola' (slow coding). This was said by 70% of informants. Another 30 per cent reported a lack of digital understanding and skills. This greatly affects the content of the digital catechesis to be delivered.

While the uneven condition of the net is a cause for complaint, it is certainly not a permanent and persistent reason. Access to the digital world, as revealed in the first part of this discussion, is truly an opportunity that must be maximised. The government itself is continuously fighting for the improvement of internet access. Another opportunity that should be maximised is that the catechetical kitchen, the Dian Mandala Pastoral College, should become a training ground for digital catechetical equipping activities.

4. CONCLUSION

Building the faith of the people is an effort of the Church in increasing the belief and awareness of the people in faith. The Church's effort in maximising all existing elements is certainly one of the strategies. Digital media is one of the promising tools, as well as being a strategic and relevant tool for this age. This research shows that the level of digital media usage in the Nias Deanery is very high. Although there are still challenges, especially in the area of network and access, it is not a problem because the current government is constantly trying to improve it. For this reason, the preparation of catechists to be skilled in carrying out digital catechesis is a priority. Young people who are in control of digital media today, they will surely be the ones who will interact in the future. Thus, the faith development of the people in the Nias Deanery in the future will already be effectively implemented through digital catechesis.

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