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Post-Worship Fellowship Meals: Building Community and Strengthening Christian Values in Indonesian Churches

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Abstract

This study examined post-worship fellowship meals in building community cohesion and strengthening Christian values based on Acts 2:42,46 at the Christian Assembly Church in Manokwari, West Papua. The research addressed the need to understand how early church fellowship practices (koinonia) could be implemented in contemporary church contexts, particularly in West Papua's strong communal culture. A qualitative approach was employed using participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. Data were collected from 26 informants including church leaders, active congregation members, and organizing committees, with direct observation of fellowship meal practices during April-May 2025. Thematic analysis with source and method triangulation ensured validity. Results revealed that early church fellowship meals in Acts 2:42,46 demonstrated deep communion (koinonia), informal home settings, joyful and sincere atmosphere, theologically-socially meaningful bread breaking, and high frequency (daily). These practices functioned to build social fellowship, strengthen faith, implement diakonia, witness to the world, and memorialize Christ's sacrifice. Contemporary implementation at Manokwari church showed adapted characteristics: organized yet flexible structure, high congregational participation (90.1% of worship attendees), meaningful liturgical integration, significant Papuan cultural influences, and rich social interaction dynamics. The practice served as concrete koinonia implementation, communal bond strengthening, spiritual growth facilitation, and resource-sharing mechanism. Comparative analysis identified fundamental similarities including fellowship emphasis, joy and sincerity expression, sharing practices, spiritual integration, and Christian value reinforcement. Significant differences emerged in frequency (weekly vs daily), location (church hall vs homes), formality level, socio-cultural context, and sacramental relationship. These differences reflected temporal factors, local Papuan culture, theological development, contemporary

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congregational needs, and institutional structures. The study concluded that despite significant contextual adaptations, fellowship meal practices at Manokwari church reflected the essence of early church communion. This practice possessed untapped potential for building congregational community and strengthening Christian values in contemporary Papuan church contexts.

1. Introduction

Fellowship meals represent a foundational practice in Christian tradition, originating from the early church's commitment to communal worship and shared life. According to Acts 2:42, the early believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. This practice transcended mere ritual, serving as a mechanism for strengthening Christian values and interpersonal relationships within the faith community. Contemporary churches worldwide continue to implement various forms of fellowship meals, recognizing their potential for community building and spiritual formation.

The biblical foundation for fellowship meals finds particular expression in Acts 2:46, which describes how early Christians "broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts." This passage illuminates the essential characteristics of early Christian fellowship: joy, sincerity, and genuine community engagement. Warren (2002) demonstrated that through fellowship meals, churches can realize their goal of building strong and healthy communities, thereby manifesting and implementing Christian values contained in Jesus Christ's teachings. Such practices served not merely as social gatherings but as concrete expressions of koinonia—the deep communion that characterized early Christian life.

Historical evidence suggests that fellowship meals constituted a central element of early Christian identity. Jeremias (1966) noted that communal eating practices served as identity markers for God's people in Jewish tradition and continued in Christian communities with deeper theological significance. Witherington (2007) observed that fellowship meals remained inseparable from the Lord's Supper in early Christian practice, though various historical and theological factors eventually led to their separation. Despite these changes, the fundamental purpose of fellowship meals—building community and strengthening faith—has persisted across denominational boundaries.

Contemporary scholarship recognizes the significant potential of fellowship meals for community formation. Gittoes (2008) demonstrated that communal eating practices within church contexts possess considerable capacity for building communal identity and reinforcing Christian values. Similarly, research conducted by Fung (2001) among Asian churches indicated that worship-related communal eating practices significantly strengthen social cohesion and congregational communal identity. However, the effectiveness of such practices depends heavily on their interpretation and contextualization within specific local contexts.

The Indonesian church context, particularly in Papua, presents unique opportunities for implementing meaningful fellowship meal practices. Papua's cultural heritage emphasizes communal values reflected in various traditional rituals, creating natural convergence with early Christian fellowship principles. The Christian Assembly Church (Gereja Sidang Jemaat Kristus - GSJK) in Manokwari, West Papua, has maintained regular post-worship fellowship meals as part of its ministry approach. However, despite the practice's regular implementation, comprehensive

research examining how these fellowship meals contribute to community building and Christian value reinforcement remains limited.

Preliminary observations suggest potential gaps between contemporary fellowship meal practices and the biblical model described in Acts 2:42,46. Issues such as coordination difficulties, selective participation patterns, and reduced emphasis on the "one heart" and "sincere heart" qualities mentioned in the biblical text raise questions about the authenticity of current practices. These challenges highlight the need for systematic examination of how contemporary fellowship meal implementation compares with early church models and how such practices might be enhanced to better reflect biblical principles while maintaining cultural relevance.

This study examined the implementation of post-worship fellowship meals at GSJK Manokwari through the lens of Acts 2:42,46. The research aimed to evaluate existing fellowship meal practices and develop a more authentic and meaningful model that reflects the richness of early Christian tradition while remaining contextually relevant. The primary objective focused on identifying how fellowship meal practices can serve as effective means for building congregational community and strengthening Christian values in contemporary Indonesian church contexts.

2. Materials and Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to examine post-worship fellowship meal practices at the Christian Assembly Church (GSJK) in Manokwari, West Papua. The phenomenological design was selected to capture the lived experiences and meanings that congregation members attributed to fellowship meal participation (Moustakas, 1994). A single-case study design focused on GSJK Manokwari was implemented to provide in-depth understanding of fellowship meal dynamics within a specific cultural and geographical context.

The research utilized a descriptive-analytical framework to systematically examine how contemporary fellowship meal practices compared with early church models described in Acts 2:42,46. This approach enabled comprehensive exploration of both practical implementation aspects and theological interpretation of fellowship meals in building community cohesion and strengthening Christian values.

Study Location and Period

The research was conducted at GSJK Manokwari, located in central Manokwari, West Papua, Indonesia. This location was selected based on several strategic factors: the church's established fellowship meal tradition spanning over two decades, its diverse congregational composition reflecting Papua's multicultural context, and accessibility for comprehensive data collection. The study period extended from April 14 to May 14, 2025, providing sufficient time for multiple fellowship meal observations and participant engagement.

Participants and Sampling

Twenty-six informants were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling identified key informants based on specific criteria: active participation in fellowship meals for minimum one year, diverse demographic representation (age, gender, church membership duration), and willingness to participate in interviews and focus group discussions. Snowball sampling complemented initial recruitment by leveraging existing congregational networks to identify additional relevant participants.

Participant categories included: (1) church leadership (2-3 pastors/elders), (2) fellowship meal organizing committee members (3-4 individuals), and (3) active congregation members (5-

6 regular participants). This stratified approach ensured comprehensive perspective representation across different church engagement levels and responsibilities.

Data Collection Methods

Participant Observation

Systematic participant observation was conducted during post-worship fellowship meals following established protocols adapted from Smith (2020). Observations focused on eight key aspects: physical setting arrangements, activity flow sequences, social interaction patterns, congregational participation levels, theological elements integration, symbolic and ritual practices, food sharing patterns, and behavioral expressions. Each observation session lasted approximately 2-3 hours, with detailed field notes recorded using structured observation matrices.

In-Depth Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all 26 participants following standardized protocols. Interview guides addressed five primary domains: background and history of fellowship meal practices, theological understanding and biblical interpretation, personal experiences and perceptions, community impact assessment, and suggestions for improvement. Interviews lasted 60-90 minutes each and were audio-recorded with participant consent for subsequent transcription and analysis.

Focus Group Discussions

Four focus group discussions were implemented with 3-5 participants each, organized by participant category (church leadership, organizing committee, active members, youth representatives). FGD protocols explored collective perspectives on fellowship meal effectiveness, comparison with early church practices, future development visions, and Christian value strengthening strategies. Each session lasted approximately 90-120 minutes and was facilitated using structured discussion guides.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed established qualitative analysis procedures using thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis process involved three sequential stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

Data Reduction

Initial analysis involved systematic coding of interview transcripts, observation notes, and FGD recordings. Data were organized using predetermined categories aligned with research objectives while allowing for emergent themes. NVivo software facilitated data organization and pattern identification.

Data Presentation

Analyzed data were presented through narrative descriptions, analytical matrices, and relationship diagrams. This multi-modal presentation approach enabled comprehensive understanding of complex fellowship meal dynamics and their impact on community building and Christian value reinforcement.

Conclusion Drawing

Final analysis stage involved triangulation of findings across different data sources and methods. Conclusions were verified through member checking procedures where preliminary findings were shared with participants for validation and additional input.

Data Validity and Reliability

Four complementary strategies ensured data validity and reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was established through extended engagement (four-week observation period), triangulation of data sources (multiple informant categories and data collection methods), and member checking (participant verification of findings). Transferability was addressed through detailed description of research context, participant characteristics, and methodological procedures, enabling readers to assess applicability to similar settings.

Dependability was maintained through comprehensive audit trails documenting all research procedures, decisions, and analyses, with consistent analytical approaches applied throughout the study. Confirmability was ensured through systematic documentation of data sources, analytical procedures, and interpretation processes, minimizing researcher bias through multiple validation strategies.

Ethical Considerations

The study received approval from the institutional research ethics committee. All participants provided informed written consent before participation. Confidentiality was maintained through pseudonym use and secure data storage. Participants retained rights to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Cultural sensitivity protocols were observed throughout data collection, respecting local customs and church practices.

3. Results and Discussions

Fellowship Meal Characteristics in Early Church and Contemporary Practice

Data analysis reveals distinct characteristics of fellowship meals in both early church practices (Acts 2:42,46) and contemporary implementation at GSJK Manokwari. Early church fellowship meals demonstrate five primary characteristics: deep communion (koinonia) where congregation persevered not merely in gathering but in genuine fellowship; informal home-based settings creating intimate family-like atmosphere; joyful and sincere expression ("agalliasis" - overflowing joy and "aphelotes" - genuine sincerity); daily frequency indicating intensive community engagement; and unified hearts (homothymadon) reflecting profound unity beyond mere coordinated activities.

Contemporary practice at GSJK Manokwari shows both continuity and adaptation. The church maintains structured yet flexible fellowship meal format with organized flow including opening prayer, communal eating, informal interaction, and closing fellowship. Participant observation documents high participation rates (90.1% of worship attendees) with significant

youth engagement (50% of total youth population). The practice occurs monthly on first Sundays, representing temporal adaptation from daily early church practice while preserving essential relational quality.

Comparative analysis identifies fundamental similarities including emphasis on fellowship, expressions of joy and sincerity, sharing practices, spiritual integration, and Christian value reinforcement. However, significant differences emerge in frequency (weekly versus daily), location (church hall versus homes), formality level, socio-cultural context, and relationship to sacramental practice. These differences reflect temporal factors, local Papuan culture, theological development, contemporary congregational needs, and institutional structures.

Community Building Impact and Christian Value Strengthening

Fellowship meals at GSJK Manokwari function as effective mechanisms for community building across multiple dimensions. Social cohesion data indicates the practice successfully facilitates cross-group interaction spanning generational, ethnic, socio-economic, and membership duration boundaries. Observational data records no segregation based on ethnicity, economic class, or membership length, with only minimal age-based clustering during specific activities.

Spiritual formation occurs through testimony sharing segments where congregation members strengthen each other through personal faith narratives. Joy and sincerity expressions observed include laughter, genuine smiles, enthusiastic participation, and heartfelt singing. Sincere heart manifestations encompass spontaneous food sharing, attentive listening, unprompted service acts, and meaningful conversations. These expressions align with Acts 2:46 descriptions of "glad and sincere hearts."

The practice serves as concrete koinonia implementation through structured sharing systems (rotational responsibility among church districts) and spontaneous individual contributions. Material sharing includes both formal mechanisms and voluntary additions of traditional foods, fruits, and snacks. This reflects early church sharing principles while adapting to contemporary resource management approaches.

Christian value analysis through qualitative coding identifies six core values with "joy" (sukacita) emerging as the dominant characteristic, reflecting the "agalliasis" described in Acts 2:46. Additional values include brotherly love, humility, simplicity, equality, unity, and service. These values manifest through concrete behaviors rather than abstract concepts, demonstrating embodied theological practice.

Theological and Practical Implications

Theological interpretation reveals sustained relevance of Acts 2:42,46 principles for contemporary church practice. The fellowship (koinonia) principle manifests through concrete community expressions rather than abstract concepts. High participation rates and dynamic social interaction demonstrate active implementation of unity in the body of Christ. Joy and sincerity principles translate into observable congregation behaviors including enthusiasm, genuine interaction, and spontaneous service.

Sharing principles find expression through both formal systems (district rotation for meal provision) and spontaneous contributions, reflecting Acts 2:44-45 community sharing spirit. However, contextual adaptation proves necessary for contemporary application. The "daily

gathering" principle receives reinterpretation emphasizing fellowship quality over meeting frequency, acknowledging modern life complexities while preserving relational essence.

Practical implications suggest several enhancement strategies for community strengthening. Inclusive approaches spanning all age groups require intentional design considering specific needs, multi-generational teams, and rotating leadership representing various demographic segments. Social interaction strengthening benefits from purposeful ice-breaking activities, strategic seating arrangements mixing usual groups, and conversation cards with reflective questions.

The practice demonstrates potential for missional expansion, with observational data recording three non-member families from surrounding neighborhoods joining fellowship meals. This organic attraction to community expression suggests missional possibilities beyond structured evangelistic programs.

Cultural Integration and Contextual Adaptation

Fellowship meal practice at GSJK Manokwari represents successful integration of Papuan cultural values with Christian theological principles. Local communal values reflected in traditional practices like stone burning ceremonies among Dani tribe or coastal community festivals harmonize with early Christian fellowship spirit. This creates constructive dialogue between local cultural values and biblically-rooted Christian practices.

Demographic composition includes approximately 10% indigenous Papuan members and 90% from various Indonesian ethnic groups (Toraja, Manado, Javanese, Batak, Ambonese), reflecting Manokwari's multicultural character as Papua Barat's governmental and educational center. This diversity provides unique context for implementing fellowship meals that transcend ethnic boundaries while respecting cultural distinctiveness.

Food sharing patterns incorporate both traditional Papuan dishes (papeda, yellow fish curry) and inter-regional Indonesian foods, creating culinary bridge between cultures. Local communal values emphasizing togetherness, sharing, and family-like relationships align naturally with Christian fellowship principles, facilitating meaningful contextualization without compromising theological essence.

However, challenges include tension between traditional collective values and emerging modern individualism affecting some congregation members. Resource limitations in meal provision create opportunities for authentic sharing value expression, where families voluntarily contribute additional food items. These constraints paradoxically enable more genuine manifestation of Christian sharing principles than abundance-based scenarios might produce.

Model Development and Future Directions

Research findings suggest an enhanced fellowship meal model for GSJK Manokwari that better reflects Acts 2:42,46 principles while maintaining cultural relevance. Core elements requiring preservation include communal eating as central fellowship-facilitating activity, informal opening and closing prayers providing spiritual framework, spontaneous interaction spaces for meaningful conversation, and collaborative meal provision through district rotation systems reflecting sharing principles.

Recommended contextual adaptations include brief biblical reflection connecting practice with Acts 2:42,46 passages, integration of meaningful Papuan cultural symbols (circular seating emphasizing equality), and location rotation between church building and member homes for smaller groups. Implementation format should maintain consistent scheduling while varying themes or emphases, combining church-wide monthly fellowship with more frequent small group gatherings, and preserving sufficient structure for direction while allowing spontaneity.

Enhancement strategies for community strengthening encompass buddy systems pairing established members with newcomers for integration support, responsibility rotation among

various congregation groups, and clear communication about fellowship meal meaning and benefits. Christian value strengthening approaches include experiential learning through collaborative activities, theological reflection integration within practice, and biblical narrative contextualization using local language and metaphors.

The study identifies significant potential for developing fellowship meals as starting points for broader diaconal service, including visitation ministry and practical assistance for needy members. Youth engagement strategies should build on existing high participation rates (50-60%) while creating relevant contemporary expressions maintaining theological essence. This research demonstrates how biblical practices can translate into contemporary contexts without losing theological integrity, offering a model for other churches seeking authentic community building through fellowship meals.

4. Conclusion

This study successfully examined post-worship fellowship meal implementation at GSJK Manokwari through the lens of Acts 2:42,46, achieving the research objectives outlined in the introduction. The investigation demonstrates how early church fellowship principles maintain relevance in contemporary contexts while requiring contextual adaptation for meaningful implementation.

Early church fellowship meals, as depicted in Acts 2:42,46, exhibit five fundamental characteristics: deep communion (koinonia) expressing body of Christ unity; informal home-based settings creating family-like atmosphere; joyful (agalliasis) and sincere heart (aphelotes) expressions reflecting spiritual joy and authenticity; theologically meaningful bread breaking; and high frequency (daily) indicating fellowship as integral to daily life. These practices served multidimensional functions including social cohesion building, faith strengthening, diaconal service implementation, world witnessing, and Christ's sacrifice memorialization.

Contemporary fellowship meal practice at GSJK Manokwari demonstrates successful contextualization of biblical principles within Papuan cultural framework. The practice maintains high participation rates (90.1% of worship attendees), facilitates cross-group interaction spanning generational, ethnic, and socio-economic boundaries, and effectively manifests Christian values including joy, brotherly love, humility, and unity. While temporal adaptations include reduced frequency (monthly versus daily) and formal venue usage (church hall versus homes), essential relational and spiritual qualities remain preserved.

Comparative analysis reveals fundamental theological continuity despite contextual differences. Both practices emphasize fellowship as core value, express authentic joy and sincerity, implement sharing mechanisms, integrate spiritual dimensions, and strengthen similar Christian values. Differences reflect temporal factors, local cultural influences, theological development, contemporary needs, and institutional structures rather than theological deviation.

The research confirms that contextual adaptation does not diminish theological value but enriches implementation within contemporary Papuan culture, demonstrating how biblical principles translate meaningfully into different contexts without losing essential character. This finding addresses the introduction's central question regarding fellowship meal effectiveness in community building and Christian value strengthening.

Development prospects emerging from this research include enhanced theological integration through structured biblical reflection, format diversification incorporating home-based gatherings, youth leadership development, and missional expansion leveraging observed

community attraction. The study provides a replicable model for churches seeking authentic community building through fellowship meals while respecting cultural contexts.

Future research applications should explore longitudinal impact assessment, comparative studies across different cultural contexts, gender dynamics investigation, and participatory action research approaches involving congregations as co-researchers. These directions will deepen understanding of fellowship meal practices and their transformative potential in diverse church settings.

This research contributes to practical theology scholarship by demonstrating successful integration of biblical principles with contemporary cultural contexts, offering both theoretical insights and practical implementation strategies for churches worldwide seeking meaningful community building through fellowship practices.

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