

The Role of Theological Pre-Marital Counselling in Preventing Interfaith Marriage: A Pastoral Case Study in Bekasi, Indonesia

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Received: 2021-02-17; Approved: 2025-07-02; Published: 2025-08-28

Abstract: This study aims to analyze the role of pre-marital counselling based on Christian values in preventing interfaith marriage and shaping Christian families grounded in the unity of faith. The research employs a qualitative approach with data collected through participant observation at the Pentecostal Church of Mangseng, North Bekasi, and at Taruna Kristen AMC Bekasi. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with pastors, counsellors, and participants, while theological and pastoral literature studies were carried out to strengthen the empirical findings with a biblical and academic conceptual framework concerning Christian marriage. The findings reveal that pre-marital counselling plays a significant role in strengthening the spiritual, emotional, and moral preparedness of couples to build Christ-centered households. Moreover, the youth formation program conducted at Taruna Kristen AMC Bekasi proved effective as an early preventive strategy to instill awareness of the dangers of interfaith relationships. These findings affirm that pre-marital counselling functions not merely as a technical preparation for marriage but also as an intergenerational faith-education medium that nurtures spiritual resilience and moral commitment among Christians. The implications of this research indicate that churches need to develop pastoral formation models that are empathetic, dialogical, and contextually relevant, ensuring that pre-marital counselling remains effective amid globalization and shifting social values. The originality of this study lies in the integration of theological teaching, pastoral practice, and youth faith education as a comprehensive strategy for preventing interfaith marriage. Thus, this research contributes to strengthening pastoral theology and developing a relevant pre-marital counselling model for churches in Indonesia.

Keywords: Christian marriage; faith formation; interfaith marriage; pastoral theology; pre-marital counselling.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran konseling pra-nikah berbasis nilai-nilai Kristiani dalam mencegah pernikahan beda iman dan membentuk keluarga Kristen yang berakar pada kesatuan iman. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan pengumpulan data melalui observasi partisipatif di Gereja Pentakosta Mangseng, Bekasi Utara dan di Taruna Kristen AMC Bekasi, wawancara semi-terstruktur dilakukan dengan pendeta, konselor, dan peserta, serta studi literatur teologis dan pastoral dilakukan untuk memperkuat data empiris dengan kerangka konseptual Alkitabiah dan kajian akademik terkait pernikahan Kristen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa konseling pra-nikah memiliki peran signifikan dalam memperkuat kesiapan spiritual, emosional, dan moral calon pasangan untuk membangun rumah tangga berpusat pada Kristus. Selain itu, kegiatan pembinaan remaja yang dilakukan di Taruna Kristen AMC Bekasi terbukti efektif sebagai strategi preventif sejak dini dalam menanamkan kesadaran akan bahaya hubungan lintas iman. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa bimbingan pra-nikah tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai persiapan teknis menuju pernikahan, tetapi juga sebagai sarana pendidikan iman lintas generasi yang membentuk keteguhan spiritual dan komitmen moral umat Kristen. Implikasi penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa gereja perlu mengembangkan model pembinaan pastoral yang empatik, dialogis, dan kontekstual agar bimbingan pra-nikah tetap relevan di tengah arus globalisasi dan perubahan nilai sosial. Keaslian penelitian ini terletak pada integrasi antara ajaran teologis, praktik pastoral, dan pendidikan iman bagi generasi muda sebagai strategi komprehensif pencegahan

pernikahan beda agama. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini berkontribusi pada penguatan teologi pastoral dan pengembangan model konseling pra-nikah yang relevan bagi gereja-gereja di Indonesia.

Kata kunci: Perkawinan Kristen; pembinaan iman; perkawinan antaragama; teologi pastoral; konseling pra-perkawinan.

1. Introduction

Interfaith marriage has increasingly become a visible and complex phenomenon in Indonesia's pluralistic society, including within Christian communities. The intensification of cross-cultural and interreligious interactions in the era of globalization has blurred the boundaries of social and religious life, resulting in growing encounters and relationships between individuals of different faiths. Although Indonesia's Marriage Law (Law No. 1 of 1974) does not explicitly regulate interfaith marriage, such unions continue to occur through legal petitions filed in district courts seeking approval for marriage registration. Based on data extracted from the Supreme Court Decision Directory (Mahkamah Agung, 2024), there were 183 recorded cases of interfaith marriage petitions between 2005 and 2024, with a significant increase observed after 2010 and consistent occurrences through 2023. This pattern demonstrates that interfaith marriage is not an isolated incident but a recurring legal and social reality that reflects both the dynamics of Indonesia's religious diversity and the ongoing tension between state legality, theological principles, and moral acceptance.

In a religious society where marriage holds profound theological and moral significance, such as Indonesia, interfaith unions raise complex spiritual challenges. Within the Christian community, marriage is regarded not merely as a civil contract but as a sacred covenant before God that demands unity of faith and spiritual harmony between husband and wife (Keller & Keller, 2011). When religious differences exist within the family, they often lead to value conflicts, spiritual tension, and a weakening of shared moral foundations. This phenomenon thus calls for deeper theological reflection and proactive pastoral measures to preserve faith unity and strengthen Christian families amid the social realities of increasing interreligious interactions.

Empirical research by Lehrer and Chiswick, as cited in Joanides (2004), reveals that the divorce rate among same-faith couples ranges from 13% to 27%, whereas among interfaith couples it reaches 24% to 42%. These data demonstrate that differences in faith within marriage significantly contribute to household instability. Similar findings were presented by Amalia (2018), who explored conflict management models in interfaith marriages and concluded that religious differences frequently create internal conflict, spiritual dilemmas, and challenges in making faith-based family decisions.

Therefore, this phenomenon underscores the need for proactive rather than reactive efforts—not merely addressing conflict after it occurs but preventing it through theological education and faith formation from an early stage. One preventive approach that the Church can implement is pre-marital counselling based on biblical principles, which not only provides couples with spiritual preparation but also helps prevent interfaith marriages by strengthening their understanding of faith unity as the foundation of Christian family life.

Research on interfaith marriage has evolved along three main trajectories. First, several studies emphasize the negative impact of interfaith marriage on family stability. Ciocan (2016) and Gomola (2014) argue that interfaith unions contradict the biblical principle of faith unity, creating theological and moral tension within Christian households. Empirical studies confirm that these marriages tend to experience higher levels of psychological stress and identity confusion, particularly among children who struggle to reconcile conflicting belief systems within the home (Hamdanah, 2018; Krausen, 2020). Religious differences also generate ongoing disputes concerning worship practices and the upbringing of children, which undermine marital harmony and spiritual cohesion (Faizal, Yasir Fauzi, Khairi Kamaruddin, & Qohar, 2025). Beyond the domestic sphere, interfaith couples frequently encounter social and institutional obstacles, as Indonesia's partial legal recognition of interfaith marriages forces some couples to seek court authorization for registration, a situation that exacerbates emotional strain

and uncertainty (Hamim, Iskandar, & Azizurrohman, 2022; Rosdiana, Zada, & Masayu Mashita Maisarah, 2020). Quantitative research likewise supports these findings: differences in religion have been identified as significant predictors of relationship instability and divorce (Boulis & Torgler, 2024). Moreover, sociological studies highlight that generational and gender differences further shape perceptions of interfaith marriage, with older generations expressing stronger disapproval, thereby intensifying intergenerational conflict within families (Cyriac, Mathew, & Rajan, 2024). Collectively, these findings indicate that interfaith marriage often results in emotional stress, weakened parental roles, and increased risk of separation, underscoring that faith unity serves as a critical foundation for maintaining Christian family stability and spiritual harmony (Sewenet, Tessagaye, & Tadele, 2017).

Second, a number of studies adopt a more optimistic view, suggesting that interfaith marriage may serve as a means of promoting tolerance, intercultural understanding, and social cohesion. Tridiatno (2023) argues that Christian–Muslim marriages in Indonesia do not necessarily lead to disharmony, as mutual respect and shared moral responsibility can become a foundation for harmony. Similar findings were reported by Wahyuni (2010), who observed that interfaith households often develop broader spiritual perspectives and empathy across belief systems. Recent socio-legal research supports these insights, showing that interfaith marriages can function as instruments of multicultural integration and religious coexistence, particularly in urban and plural contexts (Basid et al., 2024; Romadhon & Bahori, 2023). These marriages are also linked to positive intergroup attitudes and improved communication skills, aligning with the outcomes of interfaith education and dialogue programs that enhance mutual understanding between religious groups (Visser, Liebroer, & Schoonmade, 2024). From a cross-cultural perspective, Nolte (2020) demonstrates that interfaith marriages in Nigeria can foster productive Muslim–Christian relations, illustrating their potential role as social bridges rather than sources of division. Moreover, changing generational attitudes further contribute to this positive outlook: younger cohorts such as Millennials and Gen Z express greater openness toward interfaith unions compared to older generations, reflecting the influence of globalization and gender equity (Cyriac et al., 2024). In Indonesia, several scholars advocate for legal reform to reconcile the state’s restrictive marriage framework with the principles of justice, equality, and human rights, thereby acknowledging interfaith marriages as expressions of personal faith and civic freedom (Setiawan, Arifin, Saepullah, & Safei, 2024). Psychologically, while interfaith couples may face stress, studies show that mutual agreements on children’s religious upbringing can maintain household peace and stability (Hamdanah, 2018). Collectively, these findings suggest that interfaith marriages, when grounded in respect, dialogue, and shared ethical commitment, can become platforms for fostering social harmony and deepening interreligious understanding in diverse societies.

Third, a growing body of research underscores the vital role of pre-marital counselling in equipping couples with the emotional, relational, and spiritual competencies necessary for a stable and enduring marriage. Ginting and Purnama (2023) affirm that faith-based pre-marital guidance deepens couples’ understanding of spiritual responsibility within Christian marriage, while Chapman (2011) and Setyobekti (2017) emphasize that centering God in the marital relationship safeguards its sanctity. Broader psychological and pastoral studies confirm that pre-marital counselling enhances communication, empathy, and conflict-resolution skills—core factors in sustaining marital satisfaction and preventing early discord (Kashani, Khodabakhshi-Koolae, Davoodi, & Heidari, 2020; Skurtu, 2016; Tambling & Glebova, 2013). In practical terms, such programs help couples manage expectations, confront unrealistic ideals, and develop mutual emotional awareness that strengthens resilience against potential crises (Cobbinah & Osei-Tutu, 2020; Gingrich, 2003). Research also shows that addressing sensitive domains such as sexual education, financial management, and health communication, through pre-marital counselling significantly improves long-term relationship outcomes and reduces post-marital conflict (Farnam, Pakgohar, & Mir-Mohammadali, 2011; Halley, Durband, Bailey, & Gustafson, 2011; Sheikhi, Moghadam, & Navidian, 2021; Slater & Cummings Aholou, 2009). Moreover, inclusive counselling frameworks are increasingly recognized as essential, ensuring that all couples—heterosexual or same-sex—receive guidance tailored to their relational realities (Casquarelli & Fallon, 2011; Shurts, 2008). Although pre-marital counselling cannot guarantee the absence of marital conflict,

its preventive role remains substantial, serving not only to prepare couples for married life but also to cultivate moral maturity and faith-centered decision-making, thereby reducing the likelihood of spiritually incompatible or interfaith unions (Moeti, Koloï-Keaikitse, & Mokgolodi, 2017).

Despite the extensive body of literature examining the consequences of interfaith marriage and the general benefits of pre-marital counselling, there remains a notable gap in theological and pastoral scholarship addressing how faith-based pre-marital education can function as a preventive mechanism against interfaith unions within Christian communities. Most existing studies either focus on the sociological or psychological dimensions of interfaith marriage or discuss pre-marital counselling merely as a preparatory step for marital adjustment without exploring its preventive and doctrinal potential. Few studies have systematically analyzed how biblical and theological principles embedded in pre-marital counselling can strengthen faith formation, reinforce doctrinal awareness, and cultivate spiritual discernment among Christian youth in choosing a life partner of the same faith. Consequently, there is a pressing need for contextually grounded research that integrates pastoral theology with practical ecclesial experience to examine pre-marital counselling not only as relational education but also as a strategic pastoral intervention for safeguarding faith unity and preventing interfaith marriage within the Indonesian Christian context.

In response to the identified research gap, this study aims to analyze and explain the theological and pastoral role of pre-marital counselling in preventing interfaith marriage among Christians. The research seeks to demonstrate how faith-based pre-marital programs contribute not only to the spiritual and emotional preparedness of couples but also to the early formation of doctrinal awareness and moral responsibility among Christian youth. More specifically, this study has three interrelated objectives: first, to elaborate the theological foundations of pre-marital counselling grounded in biblical teaching that emphasizes faith unity as the cornerstone of Christian marriage; second, to describe the pastoral implementation of pre-marital counselling within the local church context and to assess its impact on couples' readiness to build a harmonious and Christ-centered family; and third, to analyze the preventive function of pre-marital counselling for Christian youth, exemplified by the Taruna Kristen AMC Bekasi community, as an early pastoral strategy to cultivate spiritual maturity and faith consciousness before marriage. Through these objectives, the research intends to contribute both theoretically to the enrichment of pastoral theology and practically to the development of effective church-based preventive frameworks that uphold faith unity within Christian family life.

Through these three objectives, this research contributes theoretically to the development of pastoral theology in the field of pre-marital education and practically to strengthening the Church's framework for preventing interfaith marriage through early faith formation. The study is founded on the argument that unity of faith is a fundamental prerequisite for the integrity and happiness of Christian family life. Therefore, pre-marital counselling rooted in Scripture is not merely an administrative requirement before marriage but a pastoral instrument of prevention that cultivates theological awareness, spiritual maturity, and emotional readiness among couples and the younger Christian generation.

The central argument of this study asserts that pre-marital counselling grounded in Christian theology functions simultaneously as a theological formation and a pastoral intervention designed to prevent interfaith marriage and strengthen the spiritual resilience of Christian families. Theologically, this argument draws upon *Pastoral Theology of Formation* (Lartey, 2013; Osmer, 2008), which emphasizes the integration of faith education, moral discernment, and spiritual guidance as the church's response to contemporary social challenges. Within this framework, pre-marital counselling operates as a process of *faith formation*—a transformative journey that cultivates spiritual maturity and equips believers to align personal decisions, including marriage, with biblical principles. According to Keller and Keller (Keller & Keller, 2011) and Swindoll (2010), marriage in Christian doctrine is a covenantal union reflecting the relationship between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:22–33); thus, unity of faith becomes not merely a moral preference but a theological necessity to preserve covenantal integrity. From a pastoral perspective, the study adopts the *Holistic Pastoral Care Model* (Lartey, 2013), which advocates an empathetic, dialogical, and context-sensitive approach to guiding believers.

Through such pastoral mentoring, pre-marital counselling enables individuals to internalize doctrinal truths about marriage, cultivate emotional and moral readiness, and develop spiritual discernment in choosing a life partner who shares their faith. Furthermore, grounded in the *Faith Development Theory* of Fowler (1981), this research posits that consistent theological education and mentoring deepen one's reflective faith, reinforcing resistance to relational choices that compromise spiritual integrity. Consequently, the stronger one's faith formation and pastoral accompaniment, the greater the capacity to reject interfaith relationships that threaten covenantal unity and to build a harmonious, Christ-centered family rooted in the biblical ideal of "two becoming one flesh" (Mark 10:6–9; 2 Corinthians 6:14).

2. Method

This research focuses on the role of pre-marital counselling in preventing interfaith marriage among Christians. The unit of analysis includes theological principles, pastoral practices, and the implementation of pre-marital counselling within church settings oriented toward nurturing unity of faith in Christian marriage. Specifically, the study examines three main aspects: (1) the theological foundation of pre-marital counselling derived from biblical teachings, (2) the practical implementation of pre-marital counselling at the Pentecostal Church of Mangseng, North Bekasi, and (3) the application of pre-marital counselling as a preventive strategy among the youth at Taruna Kristen AMC Bekasi. These three aspects were selected because, together, they illustrate the synergy between theological teaching and pastoral practice in preserving the purity of faith and preventing interfaith relationships within Christian communities.

This research employs a qualitative approach with a theological-pastoral design. This approach was chosen because the focus of the study lies in understanding meanings, values, and religious practices that cannot be quantified. A qualitative approach allows the researcher to gain a deep understanding of how Christian theological teachings are translated into counselling practices and how such processes influence believers' faith awareness. Meanwhile, the theological-pastoral design emphasizes the analysis of biblical texts, theological literature, and church ministry practices to achieve a holistic understanding of doctrine, spiritual formation, and congregational realities. Thus, this method is relevant for examining the role of pre-marital counselling as both an educational and preventive instrument against interfaith marriage.

The data sources consist of both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through direct observation and semi-structured interviews with pastors, counsellors, and participants in pre-marital counselling at the Pentecostal Church of Mangseng, North Bekasi, West Java, Indonesia, as well as with youth members of Taruna Kristen AMC Bekasi. The key informants included Pastor Siagian, three couples who participated in pre-marital counselling (Andi Dolok Saribu & Fretty Napitupulu, Johannes Nainggolan & Putri, and Isak & Ningsih), and three youth participants of discipleship sessions (Taruni Elen, Aldi, and Erlangga). Secondary data were collected from several sources, including biblical texts (2 Corinthians 6:14 and Mark 10:6–9), Christian theological works on marriage (K. Chapman, 2011; Ciocan, 2016; Ginting & Purnama, 2023; Gomola, 2014; Setyobekti, 2017; Swindoll, 2010), and ecclesiastical documents such as pre-marital counselling manuals, activity schedules, teaching materials, and photographic documentation.

Data collection was conducted through three primary steps. First, participant observation was carried out during pre-marital counselling sessions at the Pentecostal Church of Mangseng to understand patterns of interaction, methods of material delivery, and participants' responses. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with pastors, counsellors, and participants to explore their perceptions of the theological meaning of pre-marital counselling and its impact on marital decision-making. Third, theological and pastoral literature studies were undertaken to reinforce the empirical data with conceptual grounding drawn from Scripture, academic literature, and church documents. All procedures were carried out systematically, ensuring the validity and relevance of the data in relation to the research focus.

Data analysis was performed in two stages: thematic analysis and comparative analysis. Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes emerging from observations, interviews, and literature, such as unity of faith, spiritual responsibility, communication in marriage, and the church's role in preventing interfaith unions. Comparative analysis was then applied to examine the alignment between the theological foundations derived from Scripture and the pastoral practices observed in the field. This approach helps to uncover the relationship between doctrine and praxis in shaping the faith consciousness of the congregation. The results of the analysis were subsequently synthesized to answer the main research question: how pre-marital counselling functions as both a theological and pastoral strategy in preventing interfaith marriage and in building a harmonious, Christ-centered Christian family.

3. Results

The Theological Foundation of Pre-Marital Counselling in Preventing Interfaith Marriage

A review of the literature shows that the Bible emphasises the importance of spiritual unity as the main foundation of Christian marriage. One verse that is frequently used as a reference is 2 Corinthians 6:14, which states: "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers." This verse gives a stern warning that marriage with a partner of different faith can bring serious consequences to the spiritual unity of the household. Theologians such as Ciocan (2016) and Gomola (2014) likewise emphasise this point, noting that interfaith marriage is not merely a matter of personal choice but a threat to the stability of the Christian family as a whole. When the foundation of faith is not shared, it becomes difficult to build values, goals, and commitments rooted in Christ. Therefore, unity of faith is positioned as an absolute requirement that distinguishes Christian marriage from other forms of marital unions.

Beyond the warning in 2 Corinthians, the Word of God in Mark 10:6–9 affirms God's design for marriage. The passage states that from the beginning of creation, God created male and female to be united in a sacred bond, where the two become "one flesh." Christian marriage is thus regarded not merely as a social contract between two individuals but as a sacred and permanent spiritual union which should not be separated by human decision. This understanding reveals that Christian marriage demands full commitment, fidelity, and the involvement of God in every aspect of family life. With Christ at the centre, Christian marriage is able to stand firm against challenges, including the temptation to unite with a partner of different faith. Hence, the teaching of the Bible explicitly rejects the practice of interfaith marriage, as it is considered contrary to God's divine design for the Christian family.

Aligned with this theological foundation, the church plays a vital role in preparing couples through pre-marital counselling. The themes taught in pre-marital counselling address not only spiritual teachings but also practical preparation for building a strong Christian household. For instance, the theme *Dua menjadi Satu* (Two Become One) teaches the inseparable unity of marriage; *Kasih dalam Pernikahan Kristen* (Love in Christian Marriage) stresses the importance of Christ's love as the basis of the relationship; *Komunikasi dalam Pernikahan Kristen* (Communication in Christian Marriage) equips couples with the value of openness and trust; *Pernikahan yang Berpusat pada Kristus* (Christ-Centred Marriage) reminds couples that all household decisions must involve God; *Anak dalam Pernikahan Kristen* (Children in Christian Marriage) highlights the responsibility of raising the next generation in faith; *Mengelola Berkat dalam Keluarga Kristen* (Managing Blessings in the Christian Family) teaches principles of gratitude and stewardship; and *Meneladani Pernikahan Kristen di Sekitar Kita* (Learning from Christian Marriages Around Us) encourages couples to emulate families who have successfully preserved faith and harmony. All these themes are designed to strengthen awareness that Christian marriage is a sacred union, full of responsibility, and must not be compromised by the practice of interfaith marriage.

To clarify the relationship between the theological foundation, biblical teaching, and the themes of pre-marital counselling in preventing interfaith marriage, Table 1 summarises key quotations and their implications:

Table 1. Theological Foundation and Pre-Marital Counselling Themes in Preventing Interfaith Marriage

Source	Quotation / Theme	Implication
2 Corinthians 6:14	“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.”	Highlights the necessity of shared faith as a fundamental requirement of Christian marriage.
Mark 10:6–9	“So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.”	Christian marriage is understood as a sacred and permanent union that cannot be separated by human decision.
Ciocan (2016)	Interfaith marriage often produces spiritual value conflicts.	Risk of spiritual disharmony and division within the Christian family.
Gomola (2014)	Emphasises spiritual unity in the Christian family.	Unity of faith is regarded as the main foundation of a stable and resilient marriage.
Pre-Marital Counselling Themes	– <i>Dua menjadi Satu</i> (Two Become One) – <i>Kasih dalam Pernikahan Kristen</i> (Love in Christian Marriage) – <i>Komunikasi dalam Pernikahan Kristen</i> (Communication in Christian Marriage) – <i>Pernikahan yang Berpusat pada Kristus</i> (Christ-Centred Marriage) – <i>Anak dalam Pernikahan Kristen</i> (Children in Christian Marriage) – <i>Mengelola Berkat dalam Keluarga Kristen</i> (Managing Blessings in the Christian Family) – <i>Meneladani Pernikahan Kristen di Sekitar Kita</i> (Learning from Christian Marriages Around Us)	Shapes the awareness that Christian marriage requires love, communication, responsibility, and strong unity of faith in Christ.

Based on the data presented, it can be understood that both the Bible and theological literature emphasise the importance of *unity of faith* as the main foundation of Christian marriage. The verse in 2 *Corinthians 6:14* warns believers not to be bound together with those of different faiths, as such unions lead to spiritual imbalance. This principle is reaffirmed in *Mark 10:6–9*, which teaches that from the beginning, God designed marriage as a sacred and permanent union in which two individuals become one flesh. The views of theologians such as Ciocan (2016) and Gomola (2014) strengthen this teaching by asserting that interfaith marriage often gives rise to spiritual value conflicts and disharmony within the family. Therefore, *unity of faith* is not merely a moral ideal but an absolute requirement for Christian families to live in stability and faithfulness to God’s divine design.

Several key patterns emerge from these findings. First, there is a clear consistency between biblical teaching and theological perspectives regarding the spiritual danger of interfaith marriage; both position *unity of faith* as the foundation of a strong household. Second, the church plays an active role in translating this theological principle into practical pastoral formation through *pre-marital counselling* themes that integrate spiritual and practical dimensions—such as love, communication, responsibility, and a Christ-centred life. Third, this pattern indicates that pre-marital counselling is not merely dogmatic but also contextual; it helps couples apply faith-based values in daily marital life. Fourth, the integration between theological foundation and pastoral guidance forms a holistic system of spiritual

education—both doctrinal and emotional—that functions as a *preventive instrument* against interfaith marriage. From these four tendencies, it can be provisionally concluded that *unity of faith* is not only a normative doctrine but also a practical reality manifested through ecclesial education.

The reflection drawn from these findings shows that the theological foundation of Christian marriage carries a vital pastoral dimension. The teaching on *unity of faith* does not end at the doctrinal level but is realised through the church's active role in guiding believers to understand and practise faith principles in their life decisions. Pre-marital counselling becomes a concrete expression of the church's responsibility to preserve the holiness and spiritual unity of its members while directing couples to place Christ at the centre of their family life. With a proper understanding of God's design for marriage, engaged couples are empowered to make decisions aligned with the Word of God and to avoid the spiritual conflicts associated with interfaith unions. Therefore, the theological foundation and pastoral practice of pre-marital counselling complement one another as a comprehensive form of faith formation that not only prevents deviation but also strengthens the resilience of Christian families that remain centred on Christ.

The Practice of Pre-Marital Counselling in Building a Happy Christian Family

This study involved direct observation of pre-marital counselling activities conducted at the Pentecostal Church of Mangseng, North Bekasi, on January 17, 2025. The program was led by Pastor Siagian and the church's counselling team, attended by three couples preparing for marriage: Andi Dolok Saribu and Fretty Napitupulu, Johannes Nainggolan and Putri, and Isak and Ningsih. The researcher participated in the entire session as a participant-observer, following the counselling process from beginning to end to understand its dynamics and atmosphere firsthand.

The session began with an opening prayer and the reading of the Word of God from Mark 10:6–9, which affirms God's design for marriage as a sacred covenant between a man and a woman united as "one flesh" and not to be separated by human will. After the prayer, Pastor Siagian opened the session by presenting a theme titled "*Love in Christian Marriage*," focusing on the understanding that true love can only grow on the foundation of shared faith. In his explanation, Pastor Siagian emphasized that interfaith marriage can destabilize the spiritual unity between husband and wife because differences in belief inevitably influence family decisions, child-rearing, and the overall direction of household life. He likened love without faith unity to "a boat rowed in opposite directions," making it impossible to reach a common goal. Therefore, Christian couples were encouraged to understand that a true marriage is a communion of love rooted in Christ—not merely an emotional bond but a spiritual commitment submitted to God's will and lived out together in shared faith.

The counsellor then explained the importance of communication and honesty in building a harmonious household. Several interactive activities were conducted, such as role-playing exercises where couples practiced making household decisions together. Participants were also asked to write down their personal expectations for their partners and then read them aloud before the pastor and counsellor. The atmosphere was warm and joyful, filled with laughter and moments of reflection as participants realized the importance of openness and mutual understanding in marriage.

Pre-marital counselling is not merely a requirement before the wedding blessing but a process of spiritual character formation. We want every couple to understand that true love can only endure when Christ becomes the center of their home. That is why we do not only provide theories, but also exercises, discussions, and prayer sessions, so that they are truly prepared in both faith and emotion (Pastor Siagian, Personal Communication, January 17, 2025).

The participants' reactions throughout the session reflected a high level of enthusiasm and engagement. They listened attentively, took notes, and asked the pastor questions. Several participants also expressed deep impressions after completing the counselling.

At first, I thought this counselling was just a formality before the wedding blessing, but the message was really eye-opening and convicting. When Pastor Siagian explained the danger of interfaith marriage, I was deeply moved. He said that differences in faith are not merely about

worship practices but about life direction and the values we hold. From that, I felt very grateful that Fretty and I share the same faith. We can pray together, read the Word of God together, and keep Christ at the center of our relationship. I realized that if our faiths were different, this relationship might not be as strong as it is now (Andi Dolok Saribu, Personal Communication, January 17, 2025).

What touched me the most was when the pastor explained that unity of faith is the foundation of Christian marriage. I used to think that love could overcome all differences, but it turns out it's not that simple. From this counselling, I learned that when the foundation of faith is different, it becomes very difficult to build a family that walks in the same direction. I feel truly grateful that my fiancé shares the same faith—I know we can remind each other in prayer and in faith. I feel at peace knowing that we are walking in the same direction, under God's guidance (Fretty Napitupulu, Personal Communication, January 17, 2025).

The prayer session together was deeply moving. When we prayed for each other as couples, I cried because I remembered a friend of mine who used to be in an interfaith relationship and eventually couldn't continue to marriage due to many differences in principles. Through that prayer, I felt that God was affirming us—that having the same faith is not a coincidence, but a gift. I felt at peace knowing that we were united not only by feelings, but by shared faith that strengthens us to build our family in Christ (Ningsih, Personal Communication, January 17, 2025).

All sessions concluded with a short worship service and closing prayer. Each couple received a personal reflection sheet containing a Bible verse and a written commitment to be signed by their partner, symbolizing their spiritual readiness to enter into marriage. Figure 1 depicts one of the joyous moments following premarital counseling at the Mangseng Pentecostal Church in North Bekasi. The photo shows Pastor Siagian administering a holy marriage blessing to the participating couples. The atmosphere reflected the essence of the counseling process—joyful, participatory, and spiritually centered. Each couple held a reflection sheet representing their written commitment to building a Christ-centered marriage. The visual documentation illustrated the theological principle emphasized throughout the session: that true love in a Christian marriage must be rooted in shared faith and obedience to God's Word.



Figure 1. Engaged couples receiving pre-marital counselling (Pastor Siagian Leading a Counselling Session with Participating Couples During Discussion and Prayer

Source: Personal Documentation, January 17, 2025

In a follow-up interview, Pastor Siagian explained that the implementation of pre-marital counselling at the Pentecostal Church of Mangseng stemmed from the church's real-life experience in 2023, when a pair of congregants insisted on proceeding with marriage despite coming from different religious backgrounds. The church, through its board of elders and counselling team, had attempted to

provide pastoral guidance and advice, encouraging the couple to reconsider their decision. Pastor Siagian stated that although the church had no legal authority to enforce a cancellation, it carried a moral and spiritual responsibility to affirm that interfaith marriage contradicts biblical principles and the church's doctrine of faith unity in Christ. Nonetheless, the couple chose to marry outside the church's blessing. For administrative legitimacy, one of the individuals converted religions so that their marriage could be legally recognized by the state. Unfortunately, by mid-2024, the couple divorced due to persistent conflicts arising from their differing religious values.

This incident became a significant lesson for the church and the main impetus behind conducting pre-marital counselling regularly and more intensively. Pastor Siagian emphasized that this case demonstrated how fragile a relationship can be when it is not founded on unity of faith, while also reminding church leaders of their duty to spiritually prepare congregants early. Through counselling that emphasizes faith unity and Christ's love as the foundation, the church hopes that no young couples will repeat similar mistakes. Pre-marital counselling is now regarded not merely as an administrative step before marriage but as a pastoral preventive effort to ensure that every marriage blessed by the church is truly rooted in shared faith and centered on Christ.

These field findings align with relevant theological literature. Ginting and Purnama (2023) affirm that pre-marital counselling strengthens the mental and spiritual preparedness of couples. Chapman (2011) underscores the importance of maintaining relational holiness from the outset, while Setyobekti (2017) emphasizes that Christian family happiness can only be achieved when God is placed at the center of the household. Swindoll (2010) adds that pre-marital counselling functions to identify potential problems early and instill a long-term commitment to the Christian marital covenant.

Based on observations and interviews, pre-marital counselling at the Pentecostal Church of Mangseng, North Bekasi, demonstrates that the program is not a mere formality but a spiritually formative and transformative process for participants. The counselling is personally led by Pastor Siagian, employing a warm and participatory approach. Through prayer, teaching, communication exercises, and personal reflection, engaged couples are guided to realize that Christian marriage is not merely the union of two individuals but the union of two faiths in Christ. The primary message emphasized throughout the sessions is the danger of interfaith marriage, which can threaten spiritual unity and the direction of family life. Pastor Siagian stressed that differences in faith are not only matters of worship but also concern foundational values, decision-making, and child education. This message was reinforced by participants' testimonies, as many expressed gratitude for having partners who share their faith and a deeper understanding of love rooted in Christ. Moreover, the church's painful experience with the interfaith marriage case in 2023 served as an important reflection that without faith unity, a household easily becomes unstable and eventually breaks apart. Consequently, the church now regards pre-marital counselling as a preventive measure to avoid similar occurrences in the future.

From both field findings and theological literature, several key patterns can be identified in the practice of pre-marital counselling at the Pentecostal Church of Mangseng. First, the counselling sessions are conducted in a warm, participatory atmosphere with strong emotional engagement. The pastor and counselling team do not merely deliver lectures but engage participants in dialogue, prayer, and practical communication exercises. This approach encourages participants to be active, open, and reflective in their faith. Second, the counselling consistently emphasizes unity of faith as the cornerstone of Christian family life. Through biblical teaching based on Mark 10:6–9 and the theme "Love in Christian Marriage," participants are guided to understand that interfaith marriage can undermine spiritual unity and family values. This awareness is evident in participants' testimonies, expressing gratitude for sharing the same faith and committing to build families grounded in Christ. Third, the program demonstrates a strong dimension of spiritual character formation. The church not only provides doctrinal instruction but also internalizes Christian values through practical exercises, communal prayer, and faith commitment reflections. This process fosters both spiritual maturity and emotional preparedness among couples as they approach marriage. Fourth, there is clear consistency between field practice and theological-pastoral principles. In line with Ginting and Purnama (2023),

Chapman (2011), Setyobekti (2017), and Swindoll (2010), the practice of counselling at Mangseng proves that pre-marital formation effectively enhances spiritual readiness, nurtures faith-based commitment, and prevents future spiritual conflict. From these four tendencies, it can be provisionally concluded that pre-marital counselling at the Pentecostal Church of Mangseng has effectively served as a medium for shaping faith and spiritual character among engaged couples. The program not only strengthens unity of faith but also fosters spiritual awareness that Christian marriage is a divine calling to live in love, faithfulness, and unity under the guidance of Christ.

Pre-Marital Counselling for Youth as a Preventive Effort Against Interfaith Relationships

In addition to conducting pre-marital counselling for couples preparing for marriage, as previously discussed, the Pentecostal Church of Mangseng also undertakes other efforts to prevent interfaith marriage from the earliest possible stage—namely during adolescence. One of the church's concrete preventive measures is carried out in collaboration with Taruna Kristen AMC Bekasi, where teenagers receive regular spiritual mentoring. This initiative is based on the understanding that preventing interfaith marriage must begin with nurturing faith awareness from an early age, especially among adolescents who are in the stage of identity formation and beginning to engage in pre-marital relationships.

On February 2, 2025, Pastor Siagian led a spiritual formation program attended by dozens of students from Taruna Kristen AMC Bekasi after Sunday worship at the church. During the session, he delivered pastoral guidance specifically for youth under the theme “Guarding the Purity of Relationships and the Unity of Faith.” Unlike formal counselling sessions for engaged couples, this program adopted a communicative and relaxed approach tailored to the expressive nature of adolescents. Pastor Siagian used storytelling and light humor so that the spiritual message could be more easily understood and received by the students.

He began by reading the Word of God from Deuteronomy 7:3–4: “Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods.” This passage was used as the foundation for his teaching, explaining that God forbids His people from marrying or engaging in romantic relationships with those of different faiths because such relationships can draw a person away from God.

To help the students grasp the message, Pastor Siagian used a simple illustration. He said that an interfaith relationship is like two people running on different tracks—they may start from the same point but will eventually separate because their life goals differ. He also compared faith to a “moral compass” that determines life's direction; if the compasses are not aligned, the couple will ultimately get lost, heading toward different destinations. His simple yet meaningful explanations made the students highly engaged; some nodded and laughed when the pastor related his examples to the realities of modern youth, such as cross-faith friendships on social media that often lead to the temptation of interfaith dating.

Young people today live in a world without boundaries. They can easily interact across religions, and that is where major temptations arise. Therefore, the church has a responsibility to teach them early that God does not approve of relationships that lead them away from faith. I am not here to frighten them, but to make them aware that true love must align with obedience to God. If God is not at the center of the relationship, sooner or later it will fall apart (Pastor Siagian, Personal Communication, February 2, 2025).

Throughout the session, the students appeared to enjoy the atmosphere of learning. They listened attentively, took notes, and actively responded to the pastor's questions. After the sermon, a Q&A and personal reflection session was held. Some students courageously admitted that they had previously been involved in relationships with partners of different faiths, but after understanding God's Word, they felt compelled to reevaluate their decisions.

I really enjoyed this session because it was relaxed but the message was very clear. When Pastor said that God feels saddened when His children enter interfaith relationships, I felt deeply moved.

I realized that God wants me to preserve the purity of my faith. I also felt afraid that such relationships could lead me away from Him (Taruni Elen, Personal Communication, February 2, 2025).

At first, I thought it was fine to have a boyfriend or girlfriend of a different faith, especially if that person was kind. But after hearing the pastor's explanation, I understood that it's not about being kind—it's about faith. If the directions of life are different, sooner or later one of us will have to sacrifice our faith. I'm grateful for this warning before it's too late (Taruna Aldi, Personal Communication, February 2, 2025).

This session really opened my eyes. I realized that God truly cares about our relationships and doesn't want us to choose partners carelessly. Pastor Siagian said that God's anger isn't out of hatred but out of love—He wants to protect our faith. That made me rethink my previous interfaith relationship (Erlangga, Personal Communication, February 2, 2025).

The teenagers expressed feeling joyful, blessed, and grateful for receiving teachings that directly guided them toward the values of God's Word. They came to understand that interfaith relationships are not merely a social issue but also a violation of God's will. Many of them later committed to maintaining the purity of their faith and avoiding relationships that are not pleasing to God. The activity concluded with a communal prayer and a personal commitment exercise, where each student wrote a short statement on a reflection card—such as, "I will choose a partner who shares my faith because I want God to bless my relationship." This moment became an essential part of the church's effort to build faith awareness from an early stage, reinforcing the function of pre-marital counselling as a preventive pastoral intervention against interfaith relationships among Christian youth.

In a follow-up interview, Pastor Siagian emphasized that activities such as this are essential to be conducted continuously as a preventive effort against the growing trend of interfaith social interactions among the younger generation, particularly Generation Z. He expressed concern that many young people today are influenced by popular culture and social media, which normalize interfaith relationships—especially through public figures and celebrities who openly engage in or marry partners of different faiths. According to him, this phenomenon is dangerous because it fosters a misleading perception that love can replace faith, whereas in Christian theology, love and faith are inseparable. Pastor Siagian explained that when someone sacrifices their faith for the sake of a partner, they essentially wound themselves and open the door to disharmony, both within their household and in their social relationships with their extended family. He stressed, "Young people today often see examples from the entertainment world as if everything is fine, but behind the scenes, many end up losing direction because their foundations are not the same. The Church must be present to reaffirm the truth of God's Word so that they do not fall into misleading romances."

Pastor Siagian further stated that the moral and spiritual challenges of today's youth must be addressed seriously by the Church, as permissive attitudes toward interfaith relationships are becoming increasingly prevalent. He cited a survey conducted by *Kumparan.com* from February 2–17, 2023, involving 3,335 respondents, in which 72.8 percent stated that they disagreed with interfaith marriage, while 29.2 percent, or 908 respondents, agreed (Sayashi & Pratama, 2023). Although the majority of Indonesians still oppose such practices, the growing proportion of those who support interfaith marriage indicates a shift in values and faith interpretation among younger generations—one that potentially undermines the theological teachings of each religion in Indonesia. Therefore, according to Pastor Siagian, the Church must continue to strengthen faith education and pre-marital counselling from an early age so that young people develop a firm understanding and are not easily influenced by misleading cultural trends. He concluded by affirming that prevention is far more important than regret. If young people understand from an early stage that God disapproves of interfaith relationships, they will be wiser in guarding both themselves and their faith until marriage.

Based on observations and interviews, the spiritual guidance activity for youth at Taruna Kristen AMC Bekasi, led by Pastor Siagian, demonstrates that the Church is not only focused on counselling for engaged couples but also actively works on early prevention so that young Christians do not fall

into interfaith relationships. The approach employed was communicative, simple, and tailored to the characteristics of teenagers. Through the teaching of the Word of God from Deuteronomy 7:3–4, combined with accessible illustrations and relatable language, Pastor Siagian conveyed that interfaith relationships can distance a person from God and create moral and spiritual division within families. The participants responded enthusiastically, acknowledging that they had gained a new understanding that relationships with partners of different faiths are not merely social mistakes but violations of God's will. The testimonies of students such as Taruni Elen, Aldi, and Erlangga show that the activity had genuine spiritual and emotional impact, as they became aware of the importance of preserving the purity of faith and expressed fear of losing God's blessing by disobeying His will. Thus, this program stands as tangible evidence that faith-based counselling among youth can function as both a spiritual and moral stronghold, protecting younger generations from engaging in interfaith relationships.

From these findings, several key patterns can be identified. First, the youth counselling at Taruna Kristen AMC Bekasi emphasizes an educational-preventive approach, in which faith guidance is conducted long before individuals enter the stage of marriage. This marks a paradigm shift in the Church—from being reactive to becoming proactive in preserving the purity of young believers' faith. Second, the communication approach is interactive and contextual; the pastor uses simple analogies and examples relatable to teenagers' daily experiences—such as interfaith interactions on social media—so that theological messages are delivered more effectively. Third, the activity fosters both spiritual and emotional transformation among participants. They not only understand the teachings intellectually but also experience inner reflection that cultivates reverence for God and an awareness to maintain faith purity in their relationships. Fourth, this activity reflects the Church's active response to modern social and cultural changes that tend to normalize interfaith relationships. The Church plays a vital role as a moral institution that reorients the values of young people back to the teachings of God's Word. From these four tendencies, it can be provisionally concluded that pre-marital counselling for youth serves as an effective church strategy to prevent interfaith marriage. Through faith education initiated from an early age, the Church not only safeguards doctrinal integrity but also nurtures a generation committed to living faithfully in Christ and rejecting all forms of relationships that could weaken their faith.

4. Discussion

The findings revealed that pre-marital counselling functions as both a theological education and a preventive pastoral strategy designed to preserve faith unity within Christian marriage. Theologically, the study affirms that the Bible and Christian doctrine regard marriage as a sacred covenant grounded in spiritual oneness. Biblical passages such as 2 Corinthians 6:14 and Mark 10:6–9 clearly emphasize the necessity of shared faith as the foundation of marital unity. Supported by the views of theologians such as Ciocan (2016) and Gomola (2014), the research confirms that interfaith marriage is incompatible with Christian theology because it undermines the covenantal nature of the family and threatens the spiritual integrity of both partners. Within this theological framework, the Church's role is to translate doctrinal truth into practical formation through structured pre-marital counselling that integrates spiritual guidance, emotional preparedness, and moral responsibility.

In practice, the observation of pre-marital counselling at the Pentecostal Church of Mangseng, North Bekasi, demonstrates how pastoral education can be implemented concretely to build a Christ-centered family. The counselling sessions, led by Pastor Siagian, were not treated as administrative formalities but as formative processes that prepared couples spiritually and emotionally for marriage. Through prayer, interactive exercises, and scriptural teaching, participants were guided to understand that Christian marriage is not merely an emotional or social contract but a spiritual union grounded in shared faith. The testimonies of participants revealed increased awareness of the dangers of interfaith marriage, gratitude for having partners who share the same faith, and a renewed commitment to build families rooted in Christ. These findings illustrate that effective pre-marital counselling strengthens not only relational communication but also faith-based discernment—helping couples make marriage decisions consistent with biblical teaching.

Furthermore, the Church's collaboration with Taruna Kristen AMC Bekasi highlights a preventive pastoral approach that extends beyond engaged couples to include adolescents and youth. This early faith education program, themed "Guarding the Purity of Relationships and the Unity of Faith," aims to cultivate theological awareness and moral discipline long before individuals enter marriage. Through storytelling, relatable analogies, and interactive reflection, the program helps young people understand that interfaith relationships can lead them away from God's will. Testimonies from youth participants indicated spiritual conviction and a conscious commitment to preserve faith purity in their future relationships. These findings suggest that preventive pastoral education at the youth level is crucial for shaping a generation that upholds Christian values, resists secular trends normalizing interfaith unions, and remains faithful to the biblical ideal of marriage as a covenant rooted in shared faith and divine calling.

The effectiveness of pre-marital counselling in preventing interfaith marriage can be explained through the theological and pastoral frameworks that integrate faith formation, moral discernment, and spiritual mentoring as essential dimensions of Christian education. As proposed in the central argument of this study, pre-marital counselling grounded in Christian theology functions simultaneously as a form of *theological formation* and *pastoral intervention*. Within the *Pastoral Theology of Formation* (Lartey, 2013; Osmer, 2008), the Church's mission extends beyond doctrinal instruction to include holistic spiritual development that nurtures believers' ability to make life decisions consistent with biblical truth. From this perspective, the counselling process becomes a spiritual journey of transformation, in which engaged couples and young Christians internalize the principles of faith unity, covenantal fidelity, and Christ-centered love. By integrating theological reflection with practical guidance, the Church transforms counselling sessions into arenas of *faith praxis*—where the Word of God is not merely taught but lived and embodied through dialogue, prayer, and communal discernment.

The findings from the Pentecostal Church of Mangseng and Taruna Kristen AMC Bekasi exemplify how this pastoral-theological integration operates in practice. Theologically, participants' recognition of marriage as a divine covenant aligns with the biblical model described by Keller and Keller (2011), who view Christian marriage as a reflection of the relationship between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:22–33). This covenantal understanding demands unity of faith, since division in belief threatens the integrity of the marital bond and distorts the spiritual symbolism of that union. Swindoll (2010) further asserts that marriage grounded in faith unity manifests divine harmony—an indispensable element for spiritual endurance in family life. Therefore, pre-marital counselling effectively prevents interfaith marriage not by coercion, but by cultivating theological consciousness and moral conviction rooted in biblical truth. Participants in this study, both engaged couples and youth, demonstrated heightened awareness that differences in faith are not merely social distinctions but spiritual incompatibilities that endanger covenantal fidelity and family stability.

From a psychological-theological standpoint, Fowler's (1981) *Faith Development Theory* provides additional insight into why early and sustained faith education proves crucial in shaping relational decisions. According to Fowler, the maturity of faith evolves through distinct stages, beginning from intuitive faith in childhood to reflective and conjunctive faith in adulthood. When pastoral mentoring occurs consistently during adolescence—as in the youth program at Taruna Kristen AMC Bekasi—individuals are guided toward reflective faith capable of critical discernment and spiritual resilience. This developmental process explains why the church's preventive approach among teenagers is effective: it addresses faith formation at the stage where identity and relational values are being constructed. Consequently, the deeper one's exposure to theological education and pastoral accompaniment, the greater the capacity to resist interfaith romantic involvement and to uphold faith-based decision-making in choosing a life partner.

The reason pre-marital counselling functions effectively as a preventive mechanism against interfaith marriage lies in its dual nature: it unites theological instruction with pastoral care, forming believers who are not only doctrinally informed but also spiritually mature and emotionally grounded. Through the interplay of faith formation (Fowler, 1981), covenantal theology (Keller & Keller, 2011;

Swindoll, 2010), and pastoral praxis (Lartey, 2013; Osmer, 2008), counselling becomes a means of cultivating theological conviction, moral discipline, and communal accountability. These dynamics enable Christian couples and youth alike to embody the biblical command of 2 Corinthians 6:14 and the divine ideal of Mark 10:6–9—building families that reflect the unity, holiness, and love of Christ as the unbreakable foundation of Christian marriage.

The results of this study both affirm and extend the findings of previous research on interfaith marriage and pre-marital counselling. In line with the first trajectory emphasizing the negative impact of interfaith marriage on family stability, this study confirms that differences in faith generate significant spiritual, emotional, and relational tension within Christian households. As argued by Ciocan (2016) and Gomola (2014), interfaith unions contradict the biblical principle of faith unity and disrupt the covenantal nature of Christian marriage. This conclusion is consistent with empirical findings by Hamdanah (2018) and Krausen (2020), who observed that interfaith families often experience psychological stress and identity confusion among children. However, the present study goes beyond merely identifying conflict; it highlights why these conflicts persist. By demonstrating how theological education and pre-marital counselling nurture spiritual discernment, this research provides a preventive framework that addresses the root cause rather than only the consequences of interfaith marriage. Thus, while previous studies diagnose the problem of disharmony, the current study contributes a pastoral-theological remedy grounded in ecclesial praxis.

When compared to the second stream of literature that views interfaith marriage as a vehicle for tolerance and social cohesion, the present research acknowledges these sociocultural benefits but introduces a distinct theological critique. Studies such as those by Tridiatno (2023), Wahyuni (2010), and Romadhon and Bahori (2023) emphasize the potential of interfaith marriage to promote empathy and interreligious understanding. While these findings are valuable from a sociological perspective, this study reorients the discussion toward theological integrity and pastoral responsibility. From the standpoint of Christian doctrine, tolerance must never compromise spiritual truth or covenantal fidelity. Therefore, unlike the optimistic narratives that valorize interfaith marriage as a symbol of pluralism, the current study argues that genuine social harmony should arise from mutual respect between faith communities. This position aligns with Lartey's (2013) model of *contextual pastoral care*, which encourages engagement with cultural pluralism without surrendering theological distinctiveness. The findings from the Mangseng and AMC Bekasi contexts demonstrate that respectful interreligious relations can coexist with firm theological boundaries, where faith unity remains central to Christian identity and family formation.

Regarding the third line of research emphasizing the role of pre-marital counselling, the findings of this study strongly reinforce and deepen existing scholarly consensus on its importance. Similar to Ginting and Purnama (2023), Chapman (2011), and Setyobekti (2017), the present study confirms that pre-marital counselling enhances couples' emotional readiness, communication skills, and spiritual awareness. However, it diverges from previous research by situating counselling within a *preventive theological framework* rather than a purely relational or psychological one. Earlier studies (Farnam et al., 2011; Skurtu, 2016) generally treat counselling as preparation for post-marital adjustment. In contrast, this research conceptualizes counselling as a *formative ecclesial practice* aimed at fortifying faith identity and preventing spiritually incompatible unions before marriage occurs. This preventive dimension—supported by field evidence from both engaged couples and youth mentoring programs. It demonstrates that pre-marital counselling is not merely a remedial tool for marital health but a proactive ministry of faith formation that safeguards the theological integrity of the Christian family.

Collectively, this study extends the discourse beyond the sociological and psychological boundaries of earlier research by introducing a pastoral-theological paradigm that unites doctrinal fidelity, faith education, and preventive praxis. While previous literature has examined either the consequences of interfaith marriage or the benefits of counselling in general, this study integrates the two domains under a single theological lens. It reframes pre-marital counselling as a concrete expression of *pastoral theology of formation* (Lartey, 2013; Osmer, 2008), positioning the Church as both educator and guardian of faith unity. This synthesis not only enriches the academic understanding of

marriage and counselling in the Christian context but also offers practical guidance for church leaders seeking to address the growing challenges of interfaith relationships in Indonesia's plural society.

The findings of this study carry significant implications on social, historical, and ideological levels. Socially, the research demonstrates that pre-marital counselling is not only relevant for couples preparing for marriage but also serves as a spiritual safeguard for younger generations facing the temptation of interfaith relationships. The experiences of youths such as Elen, Aldi, and Erlangga reflect the Church's success in nurturing both spiritual awareness and moral courage to remain faithful to Christian teaching. This aligns with Tambling and Glebova (2013), who found that pre-marital counselling enhances communication and conflict resolution skills, and with Cobbinah and Osei-Tutu (2020), who emphasized its spiritual and emotional benefits. Within this context, faith-based guidance acts as *social support* (McKaughan, 2018; Onedera, 2007), reinforcing resilience in relational challenges. While Walsh (2010) highlights the need for a multifaith perspective in family therapy, the present study reaffirms that within Christian tradition, unity of faith remains a non-negotiable principle. Furthermore, barriers such as stigma and cost (Borowski & Tambling, 2015; Williamson, Trail, Bradbury, & Karney, 2014) can be mitigated through participatory church-based counselling, making the process both accessible and transformative for believers.

Historically, this study reaffirms the continuing relevance of biblical teachings—particularly 2 Corinthians 6:14 and Mark 10:6–9—as doctrinal foundations emphasizing faith unity and the sanctity of marriage. These passages align with Genesis 2:4–24, which presents marriage as a divine covenant established by God (Bao, 2017). The moral understanding of marriage in Western Christianity has been shaped since the fourth century, when the Church affirmed marriage as a sacred institution (Joksimović, 2021). Paul's teaching in Ephesians 5:22–33 portrays marriage as a reflection of Christ's love for the Church—grounded in fidelity, sacrifice, and spiritual leadership (Bulahar, Daliman, Stefanus, Windarti, & Parulian, 2024). Despite modern challenges such as *cohabitation* and *civil unions* (Cadwallader, 2019), this research shows that the doctrine of unity of faith remains vital and relevant in Indonesia's plural context, guiding the Church to preserve doctrinal integrity and moral stability amid social change (Barton, 2016).

Ideologically, the study asserts that unity of faith in Christian marriage is not a personal preference but a doctrinal mandate that sustains the spiritual integrity of the family. Marriage, as a sacrament, mirrors Christ's covenantal love for His Church, requiring faith unity to realize its spiritual fullness (Gilja & Vulić, 2018; Oliveras, 2013). This unity serves as both a *Christological* and *ecclesiological* experience that strengthens marital integrity, facilitates forgiveness, and ensures consistent faith transmission across generations (Kroff et al., 2018; Son et al., 2018). In the face of secularization and moral relativism, the sacredness of marriage reaffirms faith as the cornerstone of Christian family life (Verster, 2019). In Indonesia's plural society, these findings highlight the Church's responsibility to guide believers toward rejecting interfaith marriage and to position pre-marital counselling as both a theological and sociocultural strategy for preserving faith purity amid globalization and interreligious interaction.

The findings of this study reflect two interrelated dimensions: the positive function and the potential dysfunction of implementing pre-marital counselling in preventing interfaith marriage. On the positive side, pre-marital counselling has proven to function as a means of faith education that not only equips the younger generation with theological understanding but also with practical skills and moral courage to make decisions in accordance with the Word of God. This function aligns with the findings of Bruhn and Hill (2004) and Wilmoth (2015), who emphasize that pre-marital counselling in a religious context provides a theological framework for understanding marriage as God's design while also clarifying misconceptions about the roles and responsibilities within Christian families.

However, this study also reveals a potential dysfunction that requires serious attention, particularly when pre-marital counselling is conducted in a rigid or overly normative manner. Excessive emphasis on prohibiting interfaith marriage may create an impression of exclusivism and widen social distance between religious communities. In a modern society increasingly exposed to information flows and popular culture, traditional ecclesiastical values often conflict with social trends

that normalize interfaith relationships. Recent studies show that interfaith relationships among Christian youth are complex phenomena influenced by social, economic, and cultural changes. In some cases, interfaith relationships are even perceived as expressions of social tolerance or efforts to bridge religious differences (Connolly, 2009; Nolte, 2020). Yet, these relationships often lead to psychological and spiritual strain due to clashes in values and family expectations. Nasir (2020) notes that in Indonesia, interfaith marriage exists in tension between state law, religious norms, and individual freedom. When pre-marital counselling is delivered without pastoral sensitivity to this reality, it risks becoming an instrument of control that is rigid and judgmental rather than a loving and dialogical space for spiritual formation.

In the context of globalization and social media, narratives that glorify the idea that “love transcends religious differences” have become increasingly popular, potentially leading young people to disregard theological principles in favor of idealized notions of tolerance (Caffaro, 2011; Oderinde, 2013). Consequently, the protective function of pre-marital counselling may shift into social and theological dysfunction—creating distance between the Church and the younger generation while weakening the Church’s pastoral mission to guide believers toward spiritual maturity. Therefore, the Church must maintain a balance between doctrinal firmness and pastoral gentleness to ensure that pre-marital counselling continues to serve as a liberating, contextual, and spiritually nurturing space for faith development relevant to contemporary challenges.

As a response to the potential dysfunction identified, a pastoral and educational action plan is needed to preserve the balance between doctrinal integrity and social relevance in today’s Church. First, training for pastors and counsellors should focus on empathetic pastoral care approaches, enabling them to address interfaith relationship issues with compassion and wisdom rather than judgment. Second, the Church should expand its educational initiatives through youth faith formation classes and digital ministry, integrating interactive discussions, thematic Bible studies, and social media reflections to build critical awareness of cultural trends that normalize interfaith relationships. Third, collaboration with Christian educational institutions and church family communities should be strengthened to create a tiered ecosystem of faith formation—from youth to young couples to mature families—so that the value of unity of faith is instilled continuously. Ultimately, the Church is encouraged to establish a new pastoral framework that positions pre-marital counselling not merely as an administrative requirement before marriage but as a movement of faith formation that is socially relevant and theologically grounded, thus enabling believers to navigate changing times without losing their spiritual direction.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that pre-marital counselling grounded in Christian theology serves a dual function as both a pastoral instrument and an effective form of faith education in preventing interfaith marriage while nurturing Christian families firmly rooted in unity of faith. Based on the findings, three key lessons emerge. First, biblical teachings in 2 Corinthians 6:14 and Mark 10:6–9 affirm that unity of faith constitutes the theological and moral foundation inseparable from God’s design for Christian marriage. Second, the practice of pre-marital counselling at the Pentecostal Church of Mangseng has proven to be a formative process for the spiritual and emotional maturity of engaged couples, equipping them to build Christ-centered households and avoid the risks of interfaith relationships. Third, the youth formation program at Taruna Kristen AMC Bekasi demonstrates that effective prevention of interfaith marriage must begin early, through contextual, communicative, and continuous spiritual guidance. Thus, this study asserts that the success of pre-marital counselling should not be measured merely by administrative readiness for marriage, but by its capacity to instill theological and spiritual awareness across generations.

The main contribution of this research lies in the integration of three key dimensions: theological teaching, pastoral practice, and intergenerational faith education. Conceptually, the study expands the understanding of pre-marital counselling beyond a procedural step before marriage, positioning it as a theological preventive strategy for maintaining faith purity and spiritual integrity within Christian

families in plural societies. Empirically, the research provides evidence that an empathetic and participatory pastoral approach can foster spiritual maturity, moral courage, and resilience among believers in confronting the pressures of popular culture and social narratives that normalize interfaith relationships. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of a new pastoral framework that situates pre-marital counselling as an educational, preventive, and transformational instrument of spiritual formation within the context of the contemporary church.

Nevertheless, this study acknowledges several limitations in scope and approach. The research focuses on a local church context in Bekasi using a qualitative design, which limits generalization across other Christian denominations. Moreover, it does not deeply explore the psychological dynamics of individuals who choose or reject interfaith marriage within multicultural settings. Therefore, future research is encouraged to develop comparative studies across Christian denominations or integrate psychological and sociological approaches to enrich the understanding of how pre-marital counselling influences faith awareness in increasingly plural religious societies. Through such continued efforts, the Church is expected to strengthen its role as a relevant, adaptive, and faithful pastoral agent that guides believers toward unity of faith in Christ.

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