

Conscious and Active Participation: A Way to Transform Catholic Youth's Understanding of the Eucharist at Penfui Parish, Kupang

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore in depth the dynamics of the transformation of the internalization of the Eucharist at St. Joseph the Worker Parish, Penfui, Kupang, to understand how conscious and active participation acts as a catalyst for shifting meanings from mere ritual obligation to a dynamic personal relationship with Christ. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, this research involved six Catholic Youth informants selected purposively based on their active involvement in the life of the Church. Data were collected through structured interviews and literature studies of Church documents and relevant scientific articles, which were then analyzed through stages of reduction, data display, and verification. The results reveal that Catholic Youth in Penfui Parish undergo an internalization process that shifts their paradigm regarding the liturgy into an authentic personal encounter with the Divine. This transformation is deeply rooted in the dogmatic belief in the Real Presence (*Realis Praesentia*) of Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist through the event of transubstantiation. The impact of this active participation is holistic, internally yielding inner peace and spiritual strength, while externally fostering a missionary consciousness to strive for justice and peace as a concrete manifestation of faith in the public sphere. Despite internal barriers such as a crisis of self-confidence and structural obstacles like academic demands, strategies involving mystagogical catechesis and dialogic pastoral guidance have proven crucial in strengthening the maturity of faith. In conclusion, the Eucharist for young people has transformed from a weekly routine into the primary foundation for navigating the challenges of the modern era. Through fully conscious participation, Catholic Youth are prepared to become agents of change capable of integrating the mystery of faith into concrete social commitments for others.

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Introduction

The Eucharist is universally recognized within the Catholic Church as the source and summit of the entire life of the faithful, for within it Christ is substantially present as the locus of a personal encounter with the saving God (Candravin & Hartutik, 2024). As the heart of the Church's life, the Eucharist demands profound appropriation from all the faithful, including Catholic Youth, who are regarded as both the future generation and the primary driving force of the Church's future. However, this theological ideal frequently collides with the realities of an age marked by technological advancement and instant-gratification culture. This condition gives rise to religious formalism and ritualism, producing a fracture between liturgical practice and daily life among young people. Many young Catholics become trapped in meaningless routine, attending Mass merely as a social obligation, or even remaining absorbed in their devices amid the sacred celebration (Sinaga, 2024).

Theologically, the Eucharist contains the entire spiritual wealth of the Church, for within it Christ himself is present as the Bread of Life. As a source, this sacrament constitutes the starting point from which the grace of God flows, sanctifying the faithful and imparting missionary energy to the Church's entire mission (Supriyadi, 2012); every work of apostolate, service, and evangelization is rooted in the spiritual power radiating from the sacrifice of the altar for through the Eucharist, the work of Christ's redemption continues to be realized concretely for the assembled congregation (Pope John Paul II, 2003). As a summit, the Eucharist is the ultimate goal of all the Church's activity, the point at which the sanctification of humanity in Christ and the glorification of God reach their highest expression; the entire movement of Christian life—from the deepening of faith to social service—is oriented toward drawing the faithful into this sacramental communion as a foretaste of the eschatological banquet in heaven (Synod of Bishops, XI Ordinary General Assembly, 2006). The Eucharist also functions as a most intimate locus of personal encounter, the place where Christ is substantially present to address and dwell within each believer (Pope John Paul II, 2003)—a mysterious meeting between divine freedom and human freedom that gives the deepest meaning to human existence in the world and enables the faithful to "behold" the face of the Lord truly present (Synod of Bishops, XI Ordinary General Assembly, 2006).

For young people, this celebration becomes a space for faith to grow and develop in harmony with the dynamics of the age, provided there is an inner readiness to see the Eucharist as God's saving action rather than a mere symbol (Singal, 2023). The fundamental challenge is the tendency of Catholic Youth to fall into ritualism—worship regarded as a social routine devoid of inner meaning. Furthermore, technological advancement and an instant culture often turn young people into "mute spectators" more preoccupied with their devices than with living the mystery of faith (Sinaga, 2024). Consequently, the spiritual richness available to them fails to be absorbed, owing to a shallow understanding and a lack of faith formation.

The shift from ritual to living relationship begins through conscious and active participation—not merely external involvement in liturgical tasks, but full engagement of body and soul with genuinely understood intention and benefit. By

virtue of the dignity of baptism, Catholic Youth possess both the right and the duty to enter into the mystery of the liturgy with a fitting interior disposition, and this quality of participation becomes the primary means of drawing on the true Christian spirit needed to face life's challenges ([Second Vatican Council, 2019](#)). A profound understanding of the meaning of the Eucharist has also been shown to correlate positively with the faith development of young people, which in turn motivates their pursuit of justice and peace in the public sphere ([Oktavia & Wilhelmus, 2021](#)).

At the heart of this transformation lies faith's recognition of the real presence (*realis praesentia*) of Christ through the event of transubstantiation—the change of the entire substance of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of the Lord. This presence is unique and surpasses every other mode of Christ's presence in the Church. It is called "real" not to exclude his presence in prayer or the word, but because of the excellence of its substantial character, whereby Christ as God-Man is present wholly and entirely ([Synod of Bishops, XI Ordinary General Assembly, 2006](#)). This guarantees his abiding presence with the faithful until the end of time ([Pope Paul VI, 2022](#)).

This mystery transcends the senses and can be grasped only through the eyes of faith. What appears outwardly remains the form of bread and wine, yet its objective reality has been changed into the physically present Christ ([Martasudjita, 2005](#)). Consequently, through steadfast faith a kind of diaphany, or inward manifestation, occurs, in which the living warmth of Christ shines forth objectively from behind the sacramental species for those who believe ([Martasudjita, 2012](#)).

Awareness of this real presence transforms the perception of Catholic youth from merely attending a meal into a living, personal dialogue with Christ—an urgent need to be united with the Lord who offered himself for the salvation of humanity ([Singal, 2023](#)). Through communion, Christ enters into an intimate friendship and dwells within each young person, making them a living "tabernacle" and enabling them to experience the boundless love of his heart—a relationship that helps Catholic youth discover their true identity as well as an inner security and joy surpassing all worldly amusement ([Tedy & Manik, 2025](#)). As the source of life, the Eucharist also acts as a medicine of immortality and an antidote to sin amid a secularism that erodes the sense of the sacred, offering inner strength for the growth of young people's faith while also constituting an urgent necessity for absorbing the true Christian spirit ([Essy et al., 2021](#)).

The personal relationship built at the altar must ultimately bear concrete fruit in the social and missionary dimension. The Eucharist moves Catholic Youth not merely to be objects of catechesis but active subjects of evangelization and social renewal; the spirit of love received in communion impels young people to strive for justice, peace, and the common good as a tangible expression of their faith. The Eucharist functions as a "school of peace" that cultivates social concern and a spirit of sharing rooted in the bread broken for all, while also imparting an eschatological dimension—a hope-filled expectation of heavenly glory coupled with a commitment to transforming the order of the world in accordance with God's plan ([Martasudjita, 2005](#)). Thus, the real presence of Christ becomes the driving force enabling Catholic Youth to become agents of change who carry the leaven of the Gospel into society.

Although the theological framework outlined above is well established, the degree to which it is lived out in practice remains uneven. Studies conducted in the parishes of Karanganyar and Watutumou show that young Catholics are able to grasp the Mass as a personal encounter, whereas findings from the parish of Gedangan reveal instead a still very minimal level of engagement, resulting from a limited understanding of liturgical spirituality (Candravin & Hartutik, 2024). This gap between the theological ideal and actual practice points to the need for deeper study of the inner transformative process among young Catholics—specifically, how active participation can shift the meaning of the Eucharist from a mere ritual obligation into a living, personal relationship.

This study addresses this gap by focusing specifically on the dynamics of transformation in the appropriation of the Eucharist at the Parish of St. Joseph the Worker, Penfui, Kupang—a context not yet extensively examined in previous research. Through a qualitative approach combining a literature study of Church documents with structured interviews with active members of Catholic Youth, this study comprehensively outlines how active participation functions as a catalyst for the shift in meaning from mere ritual obligation toward a dynamic, personal relationship with the real presence of Christ. By tracing these various themes of transformation, this study aims to describe how Catholic Youth can overcome both internal and external obstacles in order to attain a holistic appropriation of faith—one that bears fruit not only in inner peace but also in social responsibility within the wider community.

Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach. A qualitative approach was chosen because it is capable of exploring and understanding phenomena in depth from the participants' perspective, thereby aligning with the aim of this study, namely to investigate the process of transformation in meaning-making and the dynamics of active participation of Catholic Youth in the celebration of the Eucharist (Creswell, 2014). This approach is further relevant given its characteristics as articulated by Sugiyono (2015), where the data collected consist of words, images, and actions rather than numbers, with a focus on process rather than outcome, and an emphasis on the meaning and context of a given phenomenon.

This study was conducted with the involvement of six Catholic youths from the Parish of St. Joseph the Worker, Penfui, Kupang. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on the criteria of being Catholic Youth actively engaged in youth activities and parish life, particularly those demonstrating awareness and active participation in the celebration of the Eucharist. The primary data source for this study consists of the results of structured interviews with the informants. Secondary data were subsequently obtained through a literature study (document study) of written sources such as Church documents, theological books, and scholarly articles relevant to the themes of the Eucharist, spirituality, and youth.

The data collection techniques employed were interviews and document study. The researcher served as the principal instrument in data collection, using a structured interview guide focused on understanding the informants' subjective

experiences, shifts in meaning, and forms of participation in the Eucharist. To safeguard the validity of the data, source triangulation was carried out by comparing interview data with data drawn from the literature study. In addition, member checking was conducted by confirming preliminary interpretations with the informants in order to ensure data accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The data obtained from the interviews were transcribed verbatim and subsequently analyzed through the processes of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). During the reduction stage, the data were selected and focused on the essential elements relevant to the research problem. The data were subsequently presented in the form of a descriptive narrative, organized systematically according to the themes that emerged, as identified in the interview results table. From this presentation, conclusions were finally drawn to address the aim of the study.

Results

The Transformation of Conscious and Active Participation of Catholic Youth in the Eucharistic Mystery

The celebration of the Eucharist for Catholic Youth (OMK) in Penfui Parish is understood as the source and summit of the whole of Christian life, demanding full interior engagement. Conscious and active participation here is not merely physical presence or the performance of external liturgical tasks, but an internal process in which the faithful attune their hearts to what is spoken. For actively engaged Catholic Youth, this process triggers a paradigm shift from understanding the Eucharist as a formal ritual or routine obligation toward a living appropriation of a dynamic personal relationship with Christ (Oktavia & Wilhelmus, 2021). This transformation is crucial for overcoming the symptoms of liturgical ritualism and religious formalism that often make young people feel like strangers within the liturgical celebration.

This process of appropriation involves a shift in meaning from external religious activity into a moment of authentic personal encounter with the Divine. Catholic youths who participate consciously begin to view the Eucharist as a living dialogue awaited with joy, no longer as a burden or a tedious routine. This inner awareness enables them to be present not as mute spectators or outsiders, but as subjects engaged in the saving work of God. Through this participation, the Eucharist is transformed into a locus of personal encounter with the saving Lord amid the dynamics of modern life (Tedy & Manik, 2025).

The primary foundation of the active participation of Catholic youths in Penfui Parish is a firm dogmatic conviction regarding the Real Presence (Realis Praesentia) of Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Catholic Youth believe that Christ is truly, really, and substantially present in the consecrated species of bread and wine through the event of transubstantiation. Awareness of the Lord's substantial presence, particularly during the Eucharistic Prayer and the Consecration, becomes the point of departure that validates their spiritual experience. This objective theological conviction (*lex credendi*) serves as an anchor that strengthens their subjective experience, so that each celebration is

understood as the living presence of the Lord accompanying them throughout their lives (Ardijanto, 2020).

In practice, this conscious and active participation is also understood as the realization of the dignity of baptism, which confers upon every believer both the right and the duty to share in the priestly office of Christ. The participation of Catholic youths include an interior disposition to approach with a fitting attitude and adequate self-preparation, including the desire to receive the Eucharist in a state of grace. This indicates that active participation demands an interior disposition uniting outward action with spiritual awareness (Hickey, 2021). Thus, their involvement in the liturgy, whether direct or indirect, becomes a means of deepening union with Christ, who is the Bread of Life.

Through the dynamics of this participation, the Eucharist for the Catholic Youth of Penfui Parish is ultimately appropriated as the foundation of faith and the basis of an integral life. They recognize that without conscious participation, liturgical celebration loses its transformative power and becomes merely a spectacle. Awareness of the real presence of Christ encountered in each celebration becomes the driving force for young people to continue deepening their Eucharistic spirituality. Active participation thus becomes a transformative path that shifts their outlook on the mystery of faith, from a distant doctrine into a deeply personal intimate and relational experience.

The Holistic Impact of Conscious and Active Participation in the Eucharistic Celebration for the Catholic Youth of Penfui

The conscious and active participation in the Eucharist produces a holistic impact that fundamentally transforms the personal spiritual quality and character of Catholic Youth. Internally, full participation in this mystery of faith bears fruit in inner peace, happiness, and spiritual strength, enabling young people to face life's various challenges with a sense of security. Relational closeness with Christ in the Eucharist also serves as a means of training spiritual discipline and self-control against worldly temptations, keeping their orientation in life centered on substantive matters. This impact extends into the realms of profession and education, where awareness of God's abiding presence fosters a sense of responsibility, perseverance, and calm in carrying out daily tasks.

Communally, the appropriation of the Eucharist as the sacrament of unity transforms ritual experience into a living and dynamic relationship within the Church community. Vertical union with God inherently implies horizontal union with one's neighbor, giving rise to a missionary spirit to share the love that has been received. Active involvement in liturgical service, whether direct or indirect, functions as a bridge that deepens faith while also honing social skills such as public speaking, leadership, and problem-solving. The Eucharist thus becomes a locus of self-development that shapes the identity of young people as active members of the Mystical Body of Christ.

The social impact of this Eucharistic spirituality is realized in a missionary awareness to engage in building a more just and humane world order. Genuine appropriation impels young people to become an extension of Christ's hand in the public sphere, championing the values of justice, peace, and the common good as a concrete expression of their faith. The Eucharist provides a transformative power

that connects worship at the altar with social responsibility, so that young people are not trapped in individualism but are instead impelled to contribute to humanity. Through this transformation, Catholic youths are positioned as agents of change capable of integrating the mystery they celebrate into a tangible social commitment.

Obstacles to Participation: Internal and Structural Dynamics among Catholic Youth

Obstacles to the conscious and active participation of Catholic youths in Penfui Parish include internal factors rooted in psychological conditions and group dynamics. Internally, many young people face a crisis of self-confidence and a lack of initiative in taking up liturgical roles. In addition, the emergence of exclusive groups or cliques within the body of Catholic youths create social divisions that hinder inclusivity and the meaningful involvement of other members. This problem is compounded by a low awareness of baptismal responsibility, causing service tasks to be regarded as an external burden or obligation rather than a voluntary offering of self.

Externally, structural and contextual challenges also constrain the scope of young people's appropriation of the Eucharist. Academic demands and work obligations, particularly for those employed as daily wage laborers, are a major obstacle to allocating time for church activities. From a pastoral standpoint, accompaniment that remains passive and a lack of support from the family as the "domestic Church" makes it difficult for the values of faith to be internalized. Furthermore, a mismatch between liturgical music and the sensibilities of young people, together with insufficient effective catechetical formation, sometimes makes the Eucharistic celebration feel unengaging and difficult to grasp at a deeper level.

Transformative Strategies for Addressing Obstacles to the Eucharist among Catholic Youth

Efforts to address the internal obstacles within Catholic Youth must focus on strengthening spirituality and providing intensive personal accompaniment, so that they do not become trapped in religious formalism or empty ritualism. Formators need to transmit knowledge through profound mystagogical catechesis, helping young people understand that the Eucharist is a spiritual necessity and a personal encounter, not merely an external routine. This approach includes efforts to draw near to them personally, encourage patient interior reflection, and motivate participation in daily Mass in order to strengthen the maturity of faith amid the challenges of instant-gratification culture and technological distraction. By fostering awareness of the real presence of Christ, Catholic youths are expected to overcome interior obstacles such as lack of self-confidence, laziness, and instability in setting life priorities (Candravín & Hartutik, 2024).

Structurally and externally, the Church must create a dynamic and inclusive working space for Catholic youths by fostering synergy among parents, parish leadership, and the surrounding community. Concrete steps such as organizing retreats, holding regular meetings to hear their aspirations, and providing adequate facilities for youth activities are essential to strengthening their

motivation for service. More popular and dialogical pastoral methods, such as the tradition of gathering and storytelling, can serve as effective means of faith communication in order to break down to barriers such as exclusive cliques or social prejudice. Through well-planned pastoral accompaniment and liturgical adaptation attentive to the cultural sensibilities of young people, structural obstacles such as academic and work commitments, as well as coordination limitations, can be minimized, enabling Catholic youths to become active agents of change in the Church's mission within the public sphere (Sinaga, 2024).

Discussion

The research findings show that the engagement of Catholic Youth (OMK) in Penfui Parish with the Eucharist moves beyond the confines of religious formalism. Through conscious and active participation, they experience a paradigm shift from merely fulfilling a weekly obligation toward an authentic personal encounter with Christ. This transformation signifies that the Eucharist is no longer viewed as a rigid or tedious sequence of rituals, but as a living dialogue that gives young people the space to align their inner selves with God's saving work amid the bustle of an instant-gratification culture and technological advancement.

The core of this interior transformation is rooted in a profound theological conviction regarding the real presence of Christ through the event of transubstantiation. Awareness of the Lord's substantial presence under the appearances of bread and wine becomes the driving force behind a holistic impact, both internal and external. Internally, this appropriation bears fruit in peace of soul and spiritual strength in facing life's struggles. Externally, this Eucharistic spirituality impels Catholic Youth toward a missionary awareness—namely, a commitment to championing justice and peace in the public sphere as a tangible expression of the faith they celebrate at the altar.

Nevertheless, this process of transformation is not without various challenges, both psychological and structural. Internal obstacles such as a crisis of self-confidence and the presence of exclusive groups within the organization, together with external constraints such as academic demands and a lack of community support, often become barriers to an optimal appropriation of faith. To address this, the present study emphasizes the importance of a dialogical pastoral strategy and mystagogical catechesis that engages more closely with the realities of young people's lives. Through a more inclusive and open approach, these obstacles can be minimized, enabling Catholic Youth to make the Eucharist the primary foundation for navigating the complex challenges of the modern era.

Overall, this discussion affirms that the Eucharist possesses an extraordinary transformative power for young people when appropriated with full awareness. The synergy between a strong doctrinal understanding and effective pastoral accompaniment is the key factor enabling Catholic youths to be transformed into resilient agents of change. Active participation in the liturgy, therefore, does not stop at personal spiritual satisfaction but must radiate outward in the form of social responsibility and a tangible witness of love for others within the wider community.

Conclusion

For young people in Penfui Parish, the Eucharist has undergone a shift in meaning from a mere weekly ceremonial obligation into a deeply personal space of interior encounter with the Redeemer. The core of this paradigm shift lies in a firm conviction in the real presence of the Lord, who substantially addresses His people, such that their engagement is no longer merely outward but encompasses the surrender of body and soul in their entirety. Through fully conscious participation, Catholic Youth are able to transform liturgical tasks into a dynamic expression of thanksgiving, positioning this sacrament as the primary foundation for navigating the increasingly complex challenges of faith in the modern era.

The impact of this renewed understanding does not stop within the walls of the church building but bears fruit in the strengthening of a resilient spiritual character and a missionary awareness to be witnesses of love within society. Although various psychological obstacles such as a lack of self-confidence, as well as structural obstacles such as worldly distractions, still remain, synergy between more communicative pastoral accompaniment and family support is key to breaking down the walls of exclusivity. Thus, through catechesis that engages the realities of life, young people are prepared to become agents of renewal who carry the spirit of Christ's self-sacrifice into the public sphere in order to realize justice and inclusive well-being for all.

Recommendations

Conscious and active participation has proven itself to be an essential transformative path in changing the reception of the Eucharist among Catholic Youth from a merely passive ritual into a profound personal encounter with the really present Christ. Through this engagement of body and soul in their entirety, young people are no longer present as mute spectators but as subjects engaged in a living dialogue with God. This transformation fundamentally produces a holistic impact encompassing inner peace, happiness, and spiritual discipline, which in turn fosters social engagement and a missionary spirit to share the love of Christ with others.

As a proposal for follow-up action, effective strategies of pastoral accompaniment and mystagogical catechesis are needed to address the various internal challenges facing Catholic Youth, such as a crisis of self-confidence and the emergence of exclusive groups that hinder inclusivity. This formation must ensure that young people understand the importance of receiving the Eucharist in a state of grace and must reaffirm the close sacramental relationship between the Eucharist and the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Penance as a single unity of Christian initiation. Through a more personal and dialogical approach, both psychological and structural obstacles can be minimized, enabling Catholic Youth to appropriate the Eucharist as their primary spiritual necessity.

Furthermore, faith formation for young people must reaffirm the dogmatic conviction of the Real Presence of Christ (*Realis Praesentia*) as the objective foundation of faith, in order to counter superficial views that reduce the Eucharist to a mere fraternal meal. Awareness of the Lord's substantial presence in the form of bread and wine becomes the driving force for Catholic youths to grow into active agents of transformation, both within the Church and in the wider society.

To support this, pastors bear a great responsibility in ensuring that liturgical celebrations are carried out with dignity and reverence, and in resolving various issues of liturgical adaptation or inculturation so that this sacred celebration increasingly engages the realities of life and the dynamics of young people in the modern era.

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