

Shaping the Spiritual Character of SEKAMI Children Through the Teaching of Love (Matthew 22:34–40)

Ema Eginta Peronika br Ginting*
Paulus Halek Bere

Saint Bonaventure Pastoral College of the Archdiocese of Medan, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This study examines the development of spiritual character in SEKAMI adolescents through the teaching of the doctrine of love based on Matthew 22:34-40. The study is motivated by the importance of contextual and participatory faith formation amid technological advancements and the increasing use of digital devices among adolescents, which can influence their engagement with and internalization of Christian values in daily life. This study aims to describe the steps involved in teaching the doctrine of love and to analyze the spiritual character formed through this teaching in SEKAMI (The Pontifical Society of Missionary Adolescents). This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach conducted at St. Elizabeth's Ecclesial Community in Kampung Dalam, St. Joseph's Parish in Delitua. Data collection involved observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, involving SEKAMI's mentors, members, and parents. The results of the study indicate that the teaching of the doctrine of love is carried out through three stages: planning, implementation, and evaluation of the mentoring process. In the planning stage, the mentors prepare themes based on the weekly Gospel, the objectives of the mentoring, Scripture materials, and interactive learning methods. In the implementation stage, mentoring is carried out in a contextual and participatory manner through Gospel stories, group discussions, faith games, communal prayer, and reflection. Evaluation is conducted through reflection, question-and-answer sessions, and observation of the children's behavioral development. This study also shows that the spiritual character of SEKAMI's members develops through a loving relationship with God, a loving relationship with others, and loving behaviors in daily life such as honesty, responsibility, cooperation, discipline, compassion, a spirit of forgiveness, and the habit of helping others. Thus, teaching the doctrine of love based on Matthew 22:34-40 makes an important contribution to their spiritual character formation.

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*Corresponding author : Ema Eginta Peronika br Ginting  egintaema25@gmail.com

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Introduction

The advance of technology and the currents of globalization have introduced new challenges for the formation of spiritual character among children and adolescents. The declining internalization of moral values, diminished social concern, and the growing use of digital devices among the young have become matters of pressing concern for the religious formation of children. Character is understood as a moral quality reflected in a person's attitudes and conduct (Lickona, 1991), while spirituality pertains to the relationship between the human person and God as it shapes daily life (Vanhoozer, 2014). Within the Catholic Church, the formation of children's spiritual character is understood as an integral part of faith education that emphasizes a relationship with God and neighbor through the living out of Christian love.

SEKAMI (The Pontifical Society of Missionary Adolescents). It is an official organization for Catholic adolescents worldwide. SEKAMI serves as a vehicle for the faith formation of children and adolescents, contributing to their spiritual character through prayer, catechesis, service, and active formation activities. Through these activities, a deeper relationship with God is expected to unfold alongside the practical application of love in daily life. Consequently, faith formation within SEKAMI is oriented not only toward growth in religious knowledge but also toward the shaping of Christian character and conduct of the Catholic adolescents.

A body of prior scholarship has examined the formation of the adolescents' character and spirituality from complementary angles. Sibarani (2020) affirms that Christian spirituality plays a vital role in shaping character through the lived appropriation of faith values in daily life; Christia and Hutabarat (2021) find that the example set by educators and the formative environment influence adolescents' character development; Katarina and Tarigan (2025) show that SEKAMI activities make a positive contribution to children's character formation; and Marbun and Bawamenewi (2025) highlight the importance of the companion's role in nurturing children's faith growth within the Church. These studies, however, tend to concentrate on children's character formation in general terms, on the role of family or companions, and on the conduct of formation activities as such. Consequently, a specific examination of how the teaching of love in Matthew 22:34–40 is applied step by step within SEKAMI activities—and its contribution to the formation of spiritual character—remains limited. This gap indicates that the relationship between the implementation of the teaching of love in Matthew 22:34–40 and the process of spiritual character formation among SEKAMI participants remains under-researched. has not yet been substantially addressed in existing research.

In light of this gap, the novelty of the present study lies in its examination of the implementation of the teaching of love in Matthew 22:34–40 through the stages of planning, execution, and evaluation of faith formation within adolescents' activities. Rather than confining itself to the outcomes of faith formation, the study analyzes the pedagogical process through which the teaching of love is employed in shaping spiritual character, thereby offering a more focused perspective on how spiritual character is formed through the teaching of love within the context of SEKAMI's formation.

Preliminary observations at Elizabeth's Ecclesial Community in Kampung Dalam indicated that SEKAMI's formation continues to face challenges in cultivating adolescents' active engagement with, and lived appropriation of, the teaching of love, underscoring the need for formation that is creative, participatory, and contextual, so that the value of love is not merely understood in theory but is realized in everyday life. This study accordingly aims to describe the steps by which the teaching of love in Matthew 22:34–40 is taught and to analyze the spiritual character formed among SEKAMI participants through such formation, with the expectation that its findings will contribute to the development of pastoral theology and children's faith education, while offering practical guidance for SEKAMI companions, the Church, and future research in developing an effective model of faith formation centered on Christian love.

The theoretical framework of this study centers on three principal variables: the love commandment in Matthew 22:34–40 as the foundational variable, faith formation within SEKAMI activities as the medium of its implementation, and the spiritual character of SEKAMI's participants as the anticipated outcome of that formative process. These three variables are interrelated, in that the teaching of love provides the foundation for faith formation, while faith formation in turn serves as the means by which children's spiritual character is shaped.

SEKAMI functions as a vehicle for the faith formation of children and adolescents within the Catholic Church, aiming to cultivate missionary zeal, deepen the life of faith, and shape Christian character from an early age. Formation within SEKAMI is carried out through the spirit of the "2D2K"—Prayer, Almsgiving, Sacrifice, and Witness—expressed through a range of spiritual, social, and educational activities. According to [Widya and X \(2021\)](#), SEKAMI's activities serve as a means of faith learning that helps children come to know God, live out Christian values, and cultivate concern for others. Faith formation during adolescence carries particular significance, since adolescence is a stage marked by the development of self-identity, moral development, and the search for meaning in life, all of which require appropriate spiritual accompaniment ([Hurlock, 1990](#)). SEKAMI thus functions not merely as a setting for religious activity but as an environment for the formation of character and spirituality.

The principal variable of this study is the teaching of love in Matthew 22:34–40. In this passage, Jesus affirms that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord God with all one's heart, soul, and mind, and to love one's neighbor as oneself. Theologically, these two commandments constitute the very core of the Law and the Prophets; love of God and love of neighbor form an inseparable unity and the foundation of Christian life. Love of God is expressed through a close relationship with the Lord in prayer, worship, and obedience to His will, while love of neighbor is expressed through respect, assistance, and cultivation of fraternity. Matthew 22:34–40 thus offers not merely a moral teaching but also a theological foundation for the formation of Christian spirituality and character.

Within the context of children's faith formation, the teaching of love needs to be imparted in a manner that is planned, participatory, and contextual, so that it may be understood and lived out in daily life. This teaching within SEKAMI activities is carried out through the stages of planning, execution, and evaluation of faith formation, in which companions assist participants in grasping the value of

love through Scripture stories, faith reflection, shared prayer, educational games, group discussion, and other activities suited to their developmental stage. [Halawa and Marulitua \(2025\)](#) observe that education grounded in love is capable of shaping character marked by responsibility and integrity, a finding echoed by [Paskalita and Wilhelmus \(2025\)](#), who affirm that the consistent practice of love within family and faith community shapes the development of social and spiritual attitudes. These findings together indicate that the teaching of love makes a significant contribution to the process of character formation.

Spiritual character constitutes the outcome variable of this study. It is understood as the integration of spiritual values and moral character reflected in a person's attitudes, conduct, and habits of life. [Suraji and Sastrodiharjo \(2021\)](#) explain that spirituality pertains not only to the human relationship with God but also shapes the manner in which one interacts with others in social life. Among SEKAMI participants, spiritual character is reflected in a vertical relationship with God expressed through habitual prayer, participation in spiritual activities, and the internalization of God's Word, together with a horizontal relationship with others expressed through care, cooperation, empathy, responsibility, honesty, and a readiness to help. [Tibo et al. \(2024\)](#) likewise affirm that sustained faith formation facilitates the internalization of Christian values reflected in everyday conduct. On the basis of these interrelationships, the teaching of love in Matthew 22:34–40, as carried out through SEKAMI faith formation, is understood as a contributing factor in the formation of adolescent spiritual character grounded in love of God and love of neighbor.

Method

This study adopted a qualitative approach of a descriptive type. The qualitative approach was chosen aimed to attain an in-depth understanding of the formation of spiritual character among SEKAMI's members through the teaching of the commandment of love based on Matthew 22:34–40, within the naturally occurring context of faith formation. According to [Moleong \(2017\)](#), qualitative research seeks to understand social phenomena from the perspective of the research subjects themselves, through the observation of behavior, experience, motivation, and action as they occur within particular situations.

The research was conducted at Elizabeth's Ecclesial Community, Kampung Dalam village, within the Parish of St. Joseph, Delitua, from January to March 2026. This location was selected because of its ongoing SEKAMI's formation activities, which regularly provide faith accompaniment centered on the teaching of love as part of children's character formation. The research subjects comprised SEKAMI's catechists, members and parents, who were selected through purposive sampling on the basis of their involvement in faith-formation activities and their capacity to provide information relevant to the study's focus.

The data sources consisted of both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly from informants through observation, interviews, and documentation, while secondary data were drawn from Church documents, SEKAMI's activity archives, guidelines for children's faith formation, works of pastoral theology, Scripture, and scholarly journals related to the formation of spiritual character and children's faith education.

Data collection was carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation. Non-participant observation was employed to directly observe the SEKAMI formation activities, the interaction between catechists and participants, and the children's behavior during these activities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with SEKAMI catechists, members, and parents in order to gather information on the process of teaching the commandment of love, the experience of faith formation, and the development of the adolescents' spiritual character. Documentation was carried out by collecting photographs of activities, formation records, activity schedules, Church archives, and other supporting documents.

Data analysis was conducted continuously from the data-collection stage through to the completion of the study, following the model of [Miles and Huberman \(1994\)](#), which comprises three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying the data relevant to the research objective; the reduced data were then presented in narrative form so that emerging patterns, relationships, and findings could be understood with greater clarity. The final stage involved drawing conclusions through the interpretation of the analyzed data, which provided a clear understanding of both the steps taken in teaching the commandment of love and the spiritual character formed among SEKAMI adolescents through this formation process.

The validity of the data was safeguarded through several techniques. Source triangulation was employed by comparing information obtained from SEKAMI catechists, children, and parents, while method triangulation was employed by comparing the results of observation, interviews, and documentation. In addition, the persistence of observation was strengthened through repeated observation of the formation activities in order to obtain more accurate data, and the validity of the data was further reinforced through member checking, whereby interview results and research findings were confirmed with informants to ensure their consistency with the experiences described. Through these measures, the research data is expected to attain an adequate degree of credibility, validity, and trustworthiness.

Results

Steps in Teaching the Commandment of Love to Adolescent SEKAMI Members Based on Matthew 22:34–40

The findings show that the teaching of the commandment of love within the SEKAMI Adolescents activities at St. Elizabeth Ecclesial Community in Kampung Dalam, was carried out through three principal stages—planning, implementation, and evaluation—which together served as the main indicators for analyzing the process of teaching this commandment on the basis of Matthew 22:34–40.

At the planning stage, the formation theme was drawn from the Sunday Gospel reading, after which the formation objectives were set, scriptural materials prepared, and learning methods selected in accordance with the age and developmental stage of the SEKAMI's members. A range of activities—including prayer, reflection, Gospel storytelling, group discussion, and faith-based games—was likewise designed so that the formation process would unfold actively and

enjoyably. As one facilitator explained, the theme for each session was always drawn from that Sunday's Gospel reading, with methods chosen to be readily grasped by the youth so that they would not merely listen but actively participate. This indicates that the teaching of love was not delivered spontaneously but planned systematically so that the formation objectives could be achieved, a finding consistent with Halawa and Marulitua (2025), who argue that love-based education requires careful planning if Christian values are to be effectively internalized by learners. Read through the lens of Matthew 22:34–40, this planning stage represents the initial step toward grasping Jesus' commandment to love God and neighbor as the foundation of Christian life.

The implementation stage followed, in which the teaching of love was conveyed through methods such as scriptural storytelling, group discussion, faith-based games, reflection, and shared prayer. The material presented was consistently linked to concrete experiences of daily life, such as honoring one's parents, helping friends, speaking truthfully, and refraining from behavior that harms others. As one SEKAMI's members recounted, hearing stories of the teaching of Jesus on love was regularly followed by discussion on how to help a friend or honor one's parents at home—an account indicating that the formation process was participatory and contextual, with material not merely received passively but connected to lived experience so as to be more readily understood and internalized. This finding supports [Paskalita and Wilhelmus \(2025\)](#), who contend that faith formation grounded in concrete experience is more effective in shaping children's attitudes and behavior. Within the framework of Matthew 22:34–40, this implementation stage helps the participants live out, in balanced measure, both the vertical dimension of love for God and the horizontal dimension of love for neighbor.

The final stage, evaluation, was conducted through shared reflection, question-and-answer sessions, observation of attitudinal development, and assessment of engagement throughout the formation activities. This process focused not only to comprehension of the material but also to observable changes in daily behavior. One parent reported noticing their child had become more diligent in prayer and more willing to help with household tasks without repeated prompting. Similarly, a facilitator similarly observed that the children had begun to show increased readiness to apologize, greater respect for their peers, and more active participation in communal prayer. These findings indicate that the evaluation of formation emphasized both cognitive understanding and development of attitude and spiritual character. This is in line with [Suraji and Sastrodiharjo \(2021\)](#), who maintain that spirituality-based character education must yield tangible behavioral change in daily life.

Taken together, these findings indicate that planning, implementation, and evaluation form an interconnected sequence in the process of teaching the commandment of love to SEKAMI adolescents, which enables them to understand, internalize, and practice the love Jesus taught in Matthew 22:34–40. The teaching of love thus not only deepens faith understanding but also serves as a means of forming a spiritual character reflected in one's relationship with both God and neighbor.

The Spiritual Character of Adolescent SEKAMI Members Shaped through the Teaching of Love

The findings show that formation in the commandment of love within SEKAMI adolescents' activities has exerted a positive influence on the development of spiritual character, evident in consistent attendance at formation sessions, active engagement throughout these activities, and a growing disposition toward patience, care, courtesy, and responsibility. This engagement is likewise reflected in active participation in shared prayer, hymn-singing, group discussion, and other formation activities.

One of the SEKAMI facilitators observed that the children had become more active participants—no longer simply attending but beginning to lead prayer, read Scripture, and take part in discussions during formation—indicating a positive development in their engagement with faith formation. Such regular engagement contributes to the internalization of the value of love in daily life, a finding consonant with [Halawa and Yulianto \(2024\)](#), who explain that sustained faith formation fosters spiritual character development through the habituation of Christian values.

The development of spiritual character is likewise evident in the participants' relationship of love with God. Observation and interview data reveal a growing habit of regular prayer, heightened attentiveness to scriptural stories, active participation in devotional activities, and a reverent disposition during formation sessions. Interviews with parents confirm that these changes extend into family life: one parent noted that since joining SEKAMI, their child had become more diligent in praying before sleep and before meals, and sometimes even invited the family to pray together at home—an account corroborated by a SEKAMI participant who expressed delight in hearing scriptural stories, from which they learned how Jesus taught love for all people. These data indicate that faith formation fosters a closer relationship with God through prayer, engagement with God's Word, and participation in devotional activities, a finding consistent with [Mukin \(2024\)](#), who explains that spiritual development is manifest through involvement in prayer, scriptural study, and other activities that nurture the growth of faith. Within the perspective of Matthew 22:34–40, this deepening relationship with God constitutes the concrete fulfillment of the first commandment—to love God with all one's heart, soul, and mind.

Beyond the relationship with God, the development of spiritual character is also evident in the participants' loving relationships with others. The findings point to an increase in courtesy, cooperation, and care, together with mutually supportive behavior, both during SEKAMI activities and in daily life at home and at school. One facilitator observed that the children now cooperate more readily, helping one another when a peer faces difficulty and showing greater mutual respect. This observation was collaborated by a parent who noted that their child had become more attentive to a younger sibling and more willing to help with household chores without being asked. These findings indicate that the value of love for neighbor taught through SEKAMI is beginning to be internalized and applied in everyday social life, consistent with [Suraji and Sastrodiharjo \(2021\)](#), who affirm that love-based character education is capable of shaping positive social behavior such as empathy, care, cooperation, and respect for others. Within

the framework of Matthew 22:34–40, such behavioral change reflects the implementation of the second commandment—to love one's neighbor as oneself.

These findings suggest that spiritual character develops along two principal dimensions—love for God and love for neighbor—which are mutually reinforcing and serve as key indicators in the formation of Christian spiritual character. Formation through the commandment of love within SEKAMI activities therefore not only deepens theoretical understanding of Jesus' teachings but also fosters their internalization and concrete expression in daily life.

The Loving Conduct of Adolescent SEKAMI Members in Daily Life

The findings show that the value of love taught through SEKAMI activities has begun to be translated into concrete conduct in daily life, as manifested in honesty, discipline, responsibility, care for others, the habit of helping without being asked, and a readiness to apologize and to forgive when wrongs occur. These indicators form the basis for analyzing how the teaching of love received through SEKAMI formation has been put into practice.

Observation reveals compliance with the rules governing activities, the responsible fulfillment of assigned tasks, and mutually supportive conduct throughout formation sessions. This account corroborated by a facilitator who noted that the children have become more responsible, striving to carry out assigned tasks well and to help one another. This indicates that sustained formation fosters discipline and responsibility as elements of Christian character, a finding in keeping with [Paskalita and Wilhelmus \(2025\)](#), who explain that habituating the value of love within a faith community can shape a character marked by greater responsibility and care for one's surroundings.

Loving conduct is likewise evident in relationships with family and peers. Interviews with parents point to behavioral change following active participation in SEKAMI: one parent remarked that their child now more frequently helps with household chores without being asked and speaks more courteously to parents and other family members. This indicates that the value of love taught through SEKAMI is not confined to the formation sessions themselves but carries over into family life - evidence that this value has been internalized part of the participants' daily habits.

A readiness to apologize and to forgive likewise emerges as a form of loving conduct among adolescent SEKAMI participants. One participant explained that when they wronged a friend, they made a point of apologizing, having been taught not to harbor anger but to be willing to forgive—an account reflecting an understanding of the importance of cultivating good relationships with others through humility, forgiveness, and respect, which stands as a concrete expression of the love Jesus taught.

From a theological perspective, conduct marked by helpfulness, care, respect, forgiveness, and service to others constitutes a living embodiment of the commandment of love that Jesus taught in Matthew 22:34–40. The command to love one's neighbor as oneself is thus understood not merely as a moral concept but as one realized through concrete action that builds harmonious relationships with others; the loving conduct evident in daily life, accordingly, reflects the tangible implementation of Christian teaching on love.

This finding is consistent with [Paskalita and Wilhelmus \(2025\)](#), who explain that habituating the value of love within family, Church, and faith community fosters a character marked by discipline, responsibility, and genuine social concern. The findings further indicate that SEKAMI activities play a significant role in helping to internalize the value of love so that it is reflected in daily conduct within the family, the school, and the Church alike. Taken together, these findings suggest that the development of loving conduct arises through a process of faith formation that is regular, participatory, and grounded in Scripture - a formation that not only deepens understanding of the commandment of love but also helps translate Christian values of love into concrete action, as a living expression of faith in God and in neighbor.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it may be concluded that the teaching of the commandment of love in Matthew 22:34–40 within the SEKAMI Remaja activities at Stasi St. Elisabet, Kampung Dalam, is carried out through three principal stages: planning, implementation, and evaluation of formation. These three stages were conducted in a directed and participatory manner, thereby helping SEKAMI Remaja participants to understand, internalize, and apply the commandment of love for God and neighbor in their daily lives.

The findings further indicate that formation in the teaching of love makes a positive contribution to the formation of spiritual character. This development is evident in an increasingly deepened relationship with God, expressed through the habit of prayer and involvement in spiritual activities, as well as in relationships with others, manifested through care, cooperation, mutual respect, and readiness to help. In addition, the values of love find expression in daily behavior, including honesty, discipline, responsibility, mutual assistance, the courage to ask for forgiveness, and the readiness to forgive.

Theologically, these findings affirm that the teaching of love in Matthew 22:34–40 constitutes a vital foundation for the formation of Christian spirituality, in that it directs believers toward a balanced and integrated living-out of love for God and love for neighbor. Pastorally, the findings demonstrate that SEKAMI activities can serve as an effective means of faith formation to shape spiritual character through the contextual, participatory, and sustained teaching of love, so that Christian values are not merely understood theoretically but are also embodied in daily life.

Recommendations

Based on these findings concerning the teaching of the commandment of love in Matthew 22:34–40 in the formation of spiritual character among SEKAMI Remaja at Stasi St. Elisabet, Kampung Dalam, the following recommendations may be offered.

For SEKAMI catechists, formation activities should be further developed through methods that are more creative, participatory, and contextual, making use of learning media suited to adolescent development, such as educational games, role-playing, group reflections, and faith-based digital media. A formation program should also be devised that specifically emphasizes the practice of love through

social service activities, visitation ministries, and various acts of concern for others, so that the teaching of love is not only understood theoretically but is also internalized and expressed in concrete action."

Within the Church, support for SEKAMI activities should be strengthened on an ongoing basis through training and mentoring for catechists, the provision of adequate formation facilities and infrastructure, and the development of children's pastoral programs focused on the formation of spiritual character. More intensive cooperation with parents should likewise be cultivated, so that the process of faith formation carried out within the Church may be continued and reinforced within family life.

For parents, active involvement in accompanying their children's faith development should be further encouraged through the habit of shared prayer, reading the Scripture, and providing a lived example that reflects Christian values of love. Consistent involvement of this kind will help reinforce the values acquired through SEKAMI activities, allowing the formation of spiritual character to proceed in a sustained and continuous manner.

For future researchers, studies on the formation of children's spiritual character might be expanded to cover a broader geographical scope and to involve a more diverse range of informants. Subsequent research could also employ a mixed-methods approach in order to attain a more comprehensive understanding. The development of a formation model grounded in the teaching of love -which can be practically applied within SEKAMI activities and children's pastoral ministry within the Church, likewise constitutes an important area for further study.

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