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ANALYSIS OF SPIRITUAL BURNOUT AMONG CATECHISTS IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF MEDAN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON ELIJAH IN 1 KINGS 18–19

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Abstract

Catechists carry demanding educational, liturgical, administrative, and relational responsibilities in Catholic communities. When these duties accumulate without adequate recovery, support, or boundaries, ministry may involve emotional exhaustion, spiritual dryness, and loss of meaning. This study explores how five catechists from parishes in the Archdiocese of Medan described such experiences and examines the Elijah narrative in 1 Kings 18-19 as a theological lens for pastoral reflection. The qualitative study has a phenomenological orientation and uses written WhatsApp interview responses concerning causes, feelings, signs, and responses to burnout. Analysis involved repeated reading, identification of meaning units, initial coding, cross-case comparison, and clustering into four themes: ministry overload and eroded boundaries; spiritual disconnection within continued service; emotional, cognitive, relational, and bodily spillover; and recovery through rest, support, renewed spiritual practice, and limits on ministry. Although experiences varied, the shared pattern concerned an imbalance between sustained pastoral demands and recovery resources. Elijah is used as a dialogical rather than diagnostic framework. The narrative illuminates exhaustion and restoration without treating Elijah and contemporary catechists as empirically identical. Because the small dataset does not establish saturation, prevalence, or clinical diagnosis, conclusions are limited to these five accounts. The study recommends workload review, protected rest, confidential accompaniment, peer support, and professional referral when distress persists.

Keywords: *Spiritual Burnout, Spiritual Distress, Catechists, Elijah, Pastoral Care*

Abstrak

Katekis menjalankan tanggung jawab pendidikan, liturgi, administrasi, dan relasional yang berat dalam komunitas Katolik. Ketika tanggung jawab tersebut terus bertambah tanpa pemulihan, dukungan, atau batas pelayanan yang memadai, pelayanan dapat dialami sebagai kelelahan emosional, kekeringan rohani, dan kehilangan makna. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi pengalaman lima katekis dari sejumlah paroki di Keuskupan Agung Medan dan mengkaji bagaimana kisah Elia dalam 1 Raja-Raja 18–19 dapat digunakan sebagai lensa teologis bagi refleksi pastoral. Penelitian menggunakan desain kualitatif dengan orientasi fenomenologis. Data terdiri atas jawaban wawancara tertulis melalui WhatsApp mengenai penyebab, perasaan, tanda-tanda, dan respons terhadap kelelahan pelayanan. Analisis dilakukan melalui pembacaan berulang, identifikasi unit makna, pengodean awal, perbandingan lintas kasus, dan pengelompokan tema. Empat tema dihasilkan: beban pelayanan dan terkikisnya batas pribadi; keterputusan spiritual di tengah pelayanan yang tetap berlangsung; dampak emosional,

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kognitif, relasional, dan fisik; serta pemulihan melalui istirahat, dukungan, pembaruan praktik rohani, dan pembatasan pelayanan. Kisah Elia digunakan sebagai kerangka dialogis, bukan diagnostik, sehingga persamaan dan perbedaan konteks tetap dipertahankan. Karena penelitian hanya melibatkan lima partisipan dan tidak membuktikan saturasi atau diagnosis klinis, kesimpulan dibatasi pada pengalaman mereka. Penelitian merekomendasikan evaluasi beban kerja, waktu istirahat yang terlindungi, pendampingan rahasia, dukungan sejawat, dan jalur rujukan profesional ketika tekanan berlangsung terus-menerus.
Kata Kunci: *Kelelahan Spiritual, Tekanan Spiritual, Katekis, Elia, Pendampingan Pastoral*

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A. Introduction

Catechists occupy a central position in Catholic pastoral life. They teach the faith, prepare catechetical materials, accompany children and adults, lead prayer, support sacramental preparation, and often mediate between parish leadership and local communities. Recent Indonesian studies describe catechists as educators, facilitators of encounters with God, partners in pastoral work, and interpreters of changing social and digital contexts (Banjarnahor & Pius X, 2024; Datu & Pius X, 2024). Their work therefore combines visible tasks with less visible emotional and spiritual labor. The *Directory for Catechesis* likewise places the catechist within the Church's evangelizing mission and stresses formation, communal support, and fidelity to the concrete circumstances of the people being served (Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, 2020). Pope Francis' establishment of the lay ministry of catechist reinforces that this vocation carries ecclesial responsibility and requires suitable formation rather than improvised availability (Francis, 2021).

The breadth of this role creates a pastoral tension. Commitment can sustain ministry, but commitment can also make it difficult to acknowledge limits. A catechist may continue teaching, organizing, and leading prayer while experiencing fatigue, irritability, diminished concentration, or spiritual dryness. The work remains visible, whereas the internal cost may remain hidden. Research on burnout consistently identifies exhaustion, distancing or cynicism, and reduced efficacy as central dimensions, although their expression varies across occupations and settings (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022). Maslach and Leiter emphasize that burnout is best understood in relation to the person's continuing relationship with work, including workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values (Maslach & Leiter, 2022). This relational view is important for pastoral ministry because it moves the analysis beyond personal weakness and asks how ministerial expectations, organizational arrangements, and available resources shape the experience.

The present article focuses on five catechists connected with parishes in the Archdiocese of Medan. Their written accounts describe heavy workloads, high expectations, sacrifice of rest and family time, internal conflict, lack of appreciation,

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emotional exhaustion, withdrawal, bodily symptoms, and difficulty sustaining prayer. These accounts raise a problem that previous writing on catechists has not fully addressed. Indonesian scholarship has examined catechists' roles in digital catechesis, contextual analysis, family catechesis, youth formation, and children's faith development (Banjarnahor & Pius X, 2024; Datu & Pius X, 2024; Wardana & Tarihoran, 2023). These studies clarify the value and scope of catechetical ministry, but they do not closely analyze how catechists experience the cumulative burden of service. Recent articles in *Abrahamic Religions* have also positioned Catholic catechesis within lived experience and institutional accompaniment. Halek et al. (2025) develop contextual ecological catechesis through phenomenological inquiry, while Tibo et al. (2025) connect catechetical practice with sustained pastoral support and community networks. This regional scholarship strengthens the case for experience-sensitive catechesis, but it does not examine catechists' own accounts of ministry-related exhaustion. International literature has examined burnout and spirituality among teachers, health professionals, clergy, and other caring professions. Pong found an association between spiritual well-being and dimensions of teacher burnout, while reviews among health professionals report that spirituality can function as a resource for meaning and coping, although findings differ by context and study design (De Diego-Cordero et al., 2022; Pong, 2022). These studies cannot be transferred directly to Indonesian catechists, but they show why occupational exhaustion and spiritual experience should be examined together without treating them as the same construct.

The phrase *spiritual burnout* requires particular care. It is widely used in pastoral conversation, but it lacks the same level of conceptual standardization as occupational burnout. When the phrase is used too broadly, physical tiredness, emotional exhaustion, loss of prayer, depression, spiritual struggle, and spiritual distress can be collapsed into a single condition. Such conflation weakens analysis and can encourage either over-spiritualization or inappropriate clinical language. This article therefore distinguishes occupational burnout, spiritual burnout as an interpretive pastoral construct, and spiritual distress. The distinction allows the participants' descriptions to remain close to their lived meaning while avoiding unsupported diagnoses.

The second contribution concerns the story of Elijah in 1 Kings 18--19. The source manuscript treated Elijah and the catechists as parallel cases. That formulation risked making the biblical narrative more dominant than the empirical material and implying an equivalence that the data cannot support. Recent exegetical and psychological studies show that 1 Kings 19 can illuminate fear, exhaustion, isolation, despair, bodily need, divine encounter, and renewed vocation. They also warn against turning a literary-theological narrative into a retrospective clinical diagnosis (Iwański & Plante, 2025). Accordingly, this revised article uses Elijah as a dialogical theological lens. The biblical story is brought into conversation with the themes only after the participants' accounts have been analyzed on their own terms.

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The study asks two questions. First, how do the five catechists describe the causes, manifestations, and responses associated with spiritual burnout? Second, how can 1 Kings 18--19 inform pastoral reflection on these experiences without erasing the differences between the biblical narrative and contemporary ministry? The article does not estimate prevalence, test causality, or diagnose a mental disorder. Its contribution is a transparent, small-sample interpretation of lived accounts and a bounded theological reflection directed toward pastoral care.

Burnout is an occupational phenomenon that develops in response to prolonged demands that exceed or deplete available resources. Contemporary reviews describe it through interconnected dimensions of exhaustion, psychological distancing or cynicism, and diminished professional efficacy (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022). Exhaustion refers to depleted emotional and physical energy. Distancing concerns a defensive detachment from work or the people served. Reduced efficacy concerns a declining sense that one's work is effective or meaningful. These dimensions are analytically useful, but they should not be used as a clinical diagnosis when no validated instrument or clinical assessment has been employed. In this study, the participants' expressions are treated as self-reported experiences that resemble aspects of burnout, not as proof that each participant meets a diagnostic threshold.

Pastoral ministry adds a distinctive layer because the work is linked to vocation, service, and a relationship with God. Studies of pastoral ministers show that burnout can be associated with workload, multiple roles, unrealistic expectations, inadequate support, conflict, and difficulty separating ministry time from personal life (Dias & Peixoto, 2023). Research on Catholic Church professionals similarly recommends attending to organizational conditions alongside personal coping, because prayer or resilience cannot compensate indefinitely for poorly managed demands (Plante, 2023). Christian contemplative practices may support reflection and emotional regulation, but they should not be presented as substitutes for changes in workload, supervision, boundaries, or access to professional care (Frederick et al., 2021).

In this article, *spiritual burnout* is used as a limited pastoral term for an experience in which sustained ministerial exhaustion is accompanied by spiritual dryness, mechanical religious activity, reduced felt connection with God, or loss of meaning in a vocation that had previously been spiritually sustaining. This definition does not claim that spiritual burnout is a separate medical disorder. It names the overlap between occupational strain and the participant's spiritual interpretation of that strain. Reviews on burnout and spirituality suggest that spiritual well-being may be associated with lower burnout in some groups, but the evidence is heterogeneous and does not justify a simple claim that stronger faith prevents burnout (Chirico et al., 2023; Whitehead et al., 2023). Spiritual practices can be resources, yet religious workers may still become exhausted precisely within activities understood as sacred.

Spiritual distress is narrower in a different direction. Concept analysis identifies it with disruption in meaning, belief, transcendence, connection, or the person's spiritual

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and religious system. It may overlap with hopelessness or depression, but it is not identical to either (Martins et al., 2024). This distinction matters in the present data. A participant who reports restless sleep and persistent work-related thinking describes features associated with occupational strain. A participant who says that prayer has become empty or that God feels distant describes spiritual disruption. A participant who reports sadness, loss of interest, withdrawal, or thoughts of giving up may require further mental-health assessment, but the interview material alone cannot establish depression. The categories can coexist, and the analyst should preserve their differences.

The choice of Elijah is justified by narrative structure rather than by a claim that Elijah had the same condition as modern catechists. Using the Indonesian Deuterocanonical Bible edition as the scriptural text (Lembaga Alkitab Indonesia, 2023), the analysis observes that in 1 Kings 18, Elijah's public ministry reaches a dramatic climax on Mount Carmel. In 1 Kings 19, Jezebel's threat is followed by fear, flight, isolation, a wish to die, sleep, food, journey, lament, encounter with God, and renewed commission. The sharp transition from public effectiveness to withdrawal makes the story pastorally relevant to people whose service appears successful while their internal resources are depleted.

Recent scholarship supports a cautious reading. Iwański and Plante examine possible mental-disorder symptoms in the Elijah narrative while explicitly recognizing the limits of applying contemporary psychological categories to an ancient text (Iwański & Plante, 2025). Afaradi interprets bodily care, spiritual encouragement, community, and renewed commission as elements of divine restoration (Afaradi, 2025). This reading helps identify theological motifs, but the biblical text must not be treated as an interview transcript or clinical case record (Afaradi, 2025; Iwański & Plante, 2025).

The comparison therefore follows three rules. First, the catechists' themes are developed before the biblical reflection. Second, similarities are described at the level of experience and pastoral meaning, such as exhaustion, withdrawal, nourishment, lament, and recommissioning. Third, differences remain explicit. Elijah faces royal violence within a prophetic conflict; the catechists describe contemporary workloads, expectations, family pressures, criticism, and organizational conditions. The biblical narrative can widen pastoral imagination, but it cannot verify the causes of participants' experiences or serve as evidence that a specific intervention will be effective.

B. Method

This study uses a qualitative design with a phenomenological orientation. Phenomenological inquiry seeks detailed descriptions of how people experience and make sense of a phenomenon (Frechette et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2022). The present dataset, however, is more limited than a full interpretative phenomenological analysis because it consists of written WhatsApp responses organized around four thematic questions rather than complete recorded interview transcripts with iterative probing. The term *phenomenological orientation* is therefore more accurate than claiming a fully

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developed phenomenological method. This qualification addresses the actual evidentiary basis and avoids overstating methodological depth.

The study is exploratory. It examines the meaning of spiritual burnout in five accounts and does not aim to generalize statistically to all catechists in the Archdiocese of Medan. Qualitative sample adequacy depends on the specificity of the sample, richness of dialogue, analytical aim, and intended claims rather than on a single numerical rule (Busetto et al., 2020). Reviews of saturation studies show that sample-size expectations vary by design and analytic purpose (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Because the available source record does not document a saturation assessment, the article does not claim data saturation.

The dataset contains responses from five catechists associated with five parishes in the Archdiocese of Medan. The source record includes catechists who were active and others who were no longer active at the time of data collection. Participants were selected purposively because they had catechetical experience and identified experiences relevant to exhaustion or spiritual crisis in ministry. To reduce the risk of deductive disclosure, the revised article reports them as P1 through P5 and removes names and parish affiliations from the findings and bibliography.

The available data consist of written WhatsApp responses to four areas: perceived causes of burnout, feelings during burnout, signs or manifestations, and ways of responding. Written messaging can support reflection and preserve the participant's own wording, but it limits observation of tone, pauses, nonverbal expression, and spontaneous follow-up. The source manuscript does not document interview dates, duration, repeated interviews, or a complete interview guide. These gaps restrict the study's auditability and are acknowledged rather than reconstructed.

The revised analysis used the existing interview responses and followed a transparent thematic process. Thematic analysis offers a structured way to move from individual statements to cross-case patterns while retaining differences among participants (Kiger & Varpio, 2020; Naeem et al., 2023). First, each response was read repeatedly as a complete account across the four question areas. Second, meaning units were marked using wording close to the data, such as "many tasks at once," "nothing is ever enough," "sacrifice rest and family time," "prayers are no longer alive," "withdrawing," "difficulty focusing," "reduce the amount of service," and "ask for prayer support." Third, these meaning units were assigned descriptive codes. Fourth, codes were compared across the five participants and clustered into candidate themes. Fifth, candidate themes were checked against every response to identify both convergence and variation. This produced four final themes.

The analysis did not count a statement as more important merely because it appeared in more than one account. A theme was retained when it clarified a meaningful pattern connected to the research question and remained traceable to participant language. This approach follows current guidance that themes should represent patterned meaning

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rather than topic labels alone (Braun & Clarke, 2021, 2022). The audit trail below provides a trace from selected excerpts to codes and themes.

Credibility is supported through direct excerpts, a visible coding trail, cross-case comparison, and explicit attention to differences. The analysis also distinguishes participant reports from the authors' interpretation and from the subsequent biblical reflection. Reflexive caution is necessary because a theological framework can encourage the analyst to see parallels too quickly. For that reason, the Elijah narrative was applied only after the empirical themes were finalized. Member checking can be useful, but it is not an automatic guarantee of validity and must be designed in relation to the study's epistemological assumptions (Motulsky, 2021). The available record does not show that participants reviewed the themes, so no member-checking claim is made.

The revision anonymizes participants because the topic includes emotional, relational, and spiritual vulnerability. The source manuscript does not provide a formal ethics approval number or sufficiently detailed consent procedure. The authors must confirm voluntary informed consent, permission to quote written responses, data protection, and any required institutional review before publication. The absence of this documentation is an ethical reporting limitation. The study is also non-clinical; statements involving hopelessness, withdrawal, or thoughts of giving up should not be converted into diagnoses.

C. Results

The four themes describe a movement from demanding ministry conditions to depleted internal resources and then to attempts at recovery. The themes overlap, but each captures a distinct part of the experience. The audit trail shows how selected statements were transformed into codes and themes.

Table 1. Participant-Level Interview Evidence and Analytic Trail

Participant	Interview Evidence	Initial Code	Final Theme
P1	"Many tasks at once with long working hours without adequate rest."	Workload accumulation and inadequate recovery	Ministry overload and eroded boundaries
P2	"Nothing you do is ever enough."	Unbounded external expectations	Ministry overload and eroded boundaries
P2	"Prayers are no longer alive, but merely a series of routines."	Mechanical prayer and spiritual emptiness	Spiritual disconnection within continued service
P1	"Difficulty focusing" and "lost interest in things I used to love."	Cognitive depletion and loss of interest	Emotional, cognitive, relational, and bodily spillover

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P4	"Reduce the amount of service and learn to say no."	Boundary setting and workload reduction	Recovery through rest, support, renewed practice, and limits

The table contains participant statements from the written WhatsApp interviews. The paragraphs that follow present the authors' cross-case interpretation. This separation is maintained so that empirical evidence is not conflated with the theological reflection.

1. Ministry Overload and Eroded Boundaries

All five accounts located distress partly within the organization of ministry, although they emphasized different pressures. P1 described "an extremely heavy workload" involving many simultaneous tasks and long working hours without adequate rest. P2 focused on expectations from the congregation and Church leaders, describing a sense that "nothing you do is ever enough." P3 reported sacrificing rest and family time to prepare materials or attend last-minute meetings, while also feeling pressure to perform well and serve as a spiritual example. P4 described neglecting personal needs because of an expectation of constant readiness. P5 emphasized internal conflict, criticism, and lack of appreciation.

These descriptions show more than busyness. The common pattern is the erosion of limits between ministry, family, rest, and personal spiritual life. Workload was experienced as open-ended because catechists could be called when needs arose, and the moral language of service made refusal difficult. P3's account is especially important because it connects task pressure with role exemplarity. The participant was expected to complete work and embody spiritual maturity at the same time. This combination can intensify emotional labor: the catechist must manage private exhaustion while remaining publicly available and spiritually reassuring.

The accounts also prevent a single-cause explanation. P5's reference to criticism and conflict differs from P1's emphasis on hours and task volume. P3 identifies family sacrifice, while P2 identifies perceived insufficiency in the eyes of others. The theme therefore concerns an imbalance between demands and recovery resources, not one uniform organizational failure. Research among pastoral ministers similarly links burnout risk with role overload, expectations, support, and the difficulty of maintaining boundaries (Dias & Peixoto, 2023). The data support identifying these as perceived contributors in this group, but they do not establish that pastoral work caused every reported symptom.

2. Spiritual Disconnection within Continued Service

The second theme concerns a gap between outward religious activity and inward spiritual experience. P2 said, "I feel empty, as if prayers are no longer alive, but merely a series of routines." The source manuscript also recorded the broader experience of working for God while feeling that God had become distant. P4 reported anger, frustration, and despair because service seemed to have little impact. P5 found it difficult

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to feel peace or joy in ministry. These accounts fit the study's limited use of *spiritual burnout*: occupational strain was interpreted through loss of spiritual vitality and meaning.

The distinctive feature is continuity of performance. Participants did not necessarily stop serving when spiritual connection weakened. Ministry could continue as routine while prayer became difficult or emotionally flat. This complicates the assumption that religious activity automatically protects spiritual well-being. Spirituality may offer meaning and coping resources, but studies across helping professions show that the relationship between spiritual well-being and burnout is contextual rather than uniformly protective (De Diego-Cordero et al., 2022; Pong, 2022). The participants' ministry was itself the setting in which both spiritual commitment and exhaustion were experienced.

This theme should not be equated automatically with spiritual distress or loss of faith. P2's mechanical prayer and P5's loss of peace indicate disruption in spiritual experience, but neither statement provides a complete account of belief, meaning, or relationship with God. Likewise, diminished desire to pray may arise from exhaustion, emotional distress, conflict, or several factors together. The term *spiritual disconnection* preserves what participants reported without claiming a permanent rupture or a clinical condition.

3. Emotional, Cognitive, Relational, and Bodily Spillover

The third theme captures how ministry-related strain extended into other areas of life. P1 described extreme mental and emotional fatigue, sensitivity to small matters, withdrawal, difficulty concentrating, sadness, rapid tiredness, and loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities. P2 reported emotional depletion, loss of hope, unexplained crying, and reduced desire to pray or read Scripture. P3 described loneliness, sensitivity, physical vulnerability, restless sleep, and continuing to think about work outside working hours. P4 reported anger, frustration, despair, and avoidance of church responsibilities. P5 described prolonged exhaustion, pessimistic thinking, and the feeling that responsibility had become too heavy to carry alone.

The range of manifestations is significant. Burnout was not described only as fatigue. It appeared in concentration, sleep, mood, interpersonal sensitivity, bodily vulnerability, spiritual practice, and avoidance. P1's report that irritability affected family relationships shows that the consequences of pastoral strain can extend beyond the parish. P3's restless sleep and persistent work-related thinking suggest difficulty achieving psychological detachment. P4's avoidance indicates that withdrawal may function as an attempt to reduce exposure to demands, even when it conflicts with the person's ministerial identity.

Some expressions, including unexplained crying, hopelessness, loss of interest, and considering giving up, overlap with signs that can occur in depression or other mental-health conditions. The study cannot determine their clinical significance. The

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interview did not use diagnostic criteria, severity scales, duration thresholds, or professional assessment. Current research distinguishes burnout from depression while acknowledging symptom overlap (Pakou et al., 2025). Pastoral responses should therefore avoid two errors: treating all distress as a spiritual failure, and treating every report of exhaustion as a psychiatric diagnosis. Persistent or severe symptoms require referral to qualified health professionals.

4. Recovery through Rest, Support, Renewed Practice, and Limits

Participants proposed several responses based on their own attempts to recover. P1 took several days away from ministry. P2 sought friends or fellow ministers for conversation and prayer support. P3 tried to restore personal prayer and Scripture reading and asked a priest for prayer. P4 reduced the amount of service and learned to decline new responsibilities when already overwhelmed. P5 sought advice from a priest and considered a short retreat. The theme contains both individual and relational resources. Rest interrupts continuous demand. Conversation reduces isolation. Prayer and Scripture reconnect ministry with its spiritual source. Boundary setting addresses workload directly. Guidance from a priest or retreat creates space for discernment. These responses should not be reduced to one universal recovery sequence. P4's emphasis on saying no addresses organizational limits, whereas P3's emphasis on prayer addresses spiritual rhythm. Both are relevant because the participants' experiences involved both ministerial conditions and spiritual meaning. The data do not demonstrate that these actions produced complete or lasting recovery. The study lacks follow-up interviews and outcome measures. It is therefore more accurate to describe them as participant-identified coping and recovery practices. Evidence from pastoral and healthcare literature supports combining personal practices with organizational changes and social support rather than placing responsibility entirely on the exhausted individual (Debnath et al., 2024; Korain, 2020).

D. Discussion

1. The Empirical Pattern

Across the five accounts, spiritual burnout emerged as a layered experience. Heavy and unbounded demands depleted emotional and bodily resources. Depletion then affected prayer, meaning, relationships, concentration, and willingness to continue. Participants sought recovery by reducing demands, resting, speaking with trusted people, and renewing spiritual practices. This pattern supports a relational understanding of burnout. The problem is not adequately explained by insufficient devotion, and it is not adequately addressed by asking catechists to become more resilient while expectations remain unchanged.

The findings also clarify why the concept of spiritual burnout is useful only when carefully bounded. Occupational burnout explains exhaustion and distancing in relation to work. Spiritual distress explains disruption in meaning, belief, or connection. The

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catechists' accounts sit partly at their intersection because ministry is both work and vocation. The phrase *spiritual burnout* captures this overlap, but it should not replace either concept. When P2 describes prayer as routine, the spiritual dimension is central. When P1 describes long hours without rest, the occupational dimension is central. When P3 reports restless sleep and persistent work-related thinking, the response may require psychological and health assessment beyond pastoral interpretation.

The study's contribution is therefore modest but specific. It shows how five catechists name exhaustion from within a religious vocation and how the sacred meaning of service can coexist with, and sometimes complicate, the recognition of limits. It also adds an experiential dimension to Indonesian literature that has mainly emphasized catechists' important roles and competencies (Banjarnahor & Pius X, 2024; Datu & Pius X, 2024). Recognizing that catechists are essential should lead to stronger systems of formation and care, not to unlimited availability.

2. Dialogue with Elijah in 1 Kings 18 and 19

The Elijah narrative offers a sequence that can deepen pastoral reflection. First, the transition from Carmel to the wilderness disrupts a triumphalist view of ministry. Public effectiveness does not guarantee internal stability. The catechists likewise described continuing or visibly successful service while feeling exhausted or spiritually empty. The parallel concerns the coexistence of public ministry and private depletion, not identical causes. Second, Elijah's withdrawal makes embodied need visible. Before a renewed commission, the narrative includes sleep, food, drink, and journey. This order resists responses that spiritualize distress while ignoring the body. P1's need for days away, P3's sleep disturbance, and P5's prolonged exhaustion make this motif pastorally relevant. Rest is not presented as abandonment of vocation; it can be part of responsible care. Yet the text does not provide a standardized treatment plan, and contemporary symptoms should still be assessed with appropriate professional resources.

Third, Elijah speaks his complaint rather than remaining silent. The narrative allows fear, perceived failure, loneliness, and despair to enter the encounter with God. Participants similarly identified conversation, prayer support, priestly guidance, and retreats as possible resources. The theological implication is that lament need not be treated as lack of faith. A pastoral culture that permits honest speech may detect distress earlier than a culture that rewards uninterrupted performance. Fourth, Elijah's perception that he is alone is answered by a wider reality and a renewed network of mission. The catechists' accounts of loneliness and carrying responsibility alone suggest the importance of peer and institutional support. Synodal language about walking together becomes concrete when communities share responsibility, listen to ministers' experiences, and build structures of accompaniment (Synod of Bishops, 2024). The 2024 Synod's emphasis on relationships, participation, and co-responsibility provides an ecclesial basis for reviewing how pastoral labor is distributed (Synod of Bishops, 2024).

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The differences remain decisive. Elijah's flight follows a death threat from Jezebel and a prophetic conflict involving Israel's covenantal fidelity. The catechists described contemporary parish demands, criticism, family pressures, lack of recognition, and overloaded schedules. The narrative should therefore illuminate questions rather than determine findings. It asks how the Church responds to exhausted servants, how bodily care relates to vocation, how lament can be heard, and how ministry can be renewed without returning people to the same harmful pattern.

3. Pastoral Implications

The first implication is workload review. Parish leaders should examine how many responsibilities each catechist carries, how often last-minute tasks occur, whether rest days are protected, and whether family commitments are respected. Program quantity should not be the sole indicator of pastoral effectiveness. A regular review can identify tasks that should be shared, postponed, simplified, or discontinued. The second implication is the normalization of boundaries. P4's decision to reduce service and decline additional work should not be interpreted automatically as reduced commitment. Catechists need clear permission to say that capacity has been reached. Boundary setting is more credible when leaders model it, distribute responsibilities fairly, and avoid relying repeatedly on the most dependable person.

The third implication is confidential accompaniment. Catechists should have access to a trained spiritual director, pastor, supervisor, or counselor who is not responsible for evaluating their performance. Spiritual direction can support discernment, but it should not be asked to manage every psychological or medical concern. Referral pathways are needed for persistent insomnia, hopelessness, loss of interest, severe anxiety, suicidal thoughts, or impairment in daily functioning. The fourth implication is peer support. Participants identified trusted colleagues and prayer partners as resources. Structured peer groups can provide listening, shared reflection, and practical exchange. Such groups require confidentiality and should not become additional compulsory programs that increase workload. The fifth implication concerns formation. Catechist formation should include the theology of vocation and service alongside education about burnout, spiritual distress, emotional regulation, conflict, family boundaries, rest, and help-seeking. The goal is not to make catechists solely responsible for preventing burnout. Formation should help them recognize early signs and know where support is available, while Church leadership remains responsible for sustainable structures.

This study has several limitations. The sample contains only five catechists and cannot represent all catechists in the Archdiocese of Medan or other dioceses. The available responses were organized around four questions and do not provide the depth of complete, iterative phenomenological interviews. The source record does not document interview dates, duration, saturation, member checking, or a formal ethics approval number. The data are self-reported, and no standardized burnout or spiritual-

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distress instrument was used. The study also lacks follow-up evidence about whether participant-identified coping practices led to sustained improvement.

The theological comparison introduces another limitation. Researchers may privilege similarities with Elijah and understate differences. The revised analysis reduces that risk by developing themes before the biblical reflection and by treating the narrative as a dialogical lens rather than empirical evidence. Future research should include a larger and more varied group of catechists, fuller semi-structured interviews, transparent ethics procedures, reflexive documentation, and longitudinal attention to recovery. Studies could also examine how parish organization, employment status, gender, family responsibilities, and years of service shape experience.

E. Conclusion

The five catechists described spiritual burnout through a combination of ministerial overload, eroded boundaries, emotional and bodily exhaustion, weakened concentration, relational spillover, spiritual dryness, and reduced meaning in service. Their experiences were not identical. Some emphasized long hours, others high expectations, family sacrifice, conflict, criticism, or lack of appreciation. The shared pattern was an imbalance between sustained demands and resources for recovery. The analysis supports a careful distinction among occupational burnout, spiritual burnout, and spiritual distress. Burnout concerns the relationship between prolonged work demands and exhaustion, distancing, or reduced efficacy. Spiritual distress concerns disruption in meaning, belief, or connection. Spiritual burnout is used here as a pastoral description of their overlap when ministry-related exhaustion is accompanied by mechanical prayer, distance from God, or loss of vocational meaning. None of these terms should be used to diagnose participants from limited written responses.

Elijah's movement from public victory to threat, withdrawal, bodily care, lament, encounter, and renewed commission provides a valuable theological conversation partner. It does not prove that Elijah and the catechists experienced the same condition. Its pastoral value lies in challenging communities to take exhaustion seriously, attend to bodily and spiritual needs, receive lament without judgment, and renew ministry through support and shared responsibility. The practical conclusion is that recovery cannot rest on private devotion alone. Personal prayer, Scripture, retreat, rest, and trusted conversation may help, but parish systems must also review workloads, protect time away, respect family life, provide confidential accompaniment, strengthen peer support, and establish routes to professional care. Sustainable catechetical ministry requires care for the person who serves as well as attention to the tasks performed.

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