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Easter Gift Packages as Grassroots Interreligious Engagement: Decolonial, Gender, and Intergenerational Perspectives from Kalimangli, Central Java

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ABSTRACT

Studies of interreligious relations in Indonesia have focused on institutional dialogue, giving limited attention to everyday grassroots practices and the power relations they involve. This study examines the distribution of Easter gift packages in Kalimangli, Central Java, a Muslim-majority agrarian hamlet where Christians make up about 7% of the population, as interreligious engagement through decolonial, gender, and intergenerational perspectives. This qualitative case study draws on participant observation on April 20, 2025, and interviews with two church representatives, and thus reflects primarily the organizers' perspective. The results indicate that distributing necessities to all 180 families, regardless of religion or economic status, appears to create space for encounter, solidarity, and neighborly relations without shared rituals. However, concerns about "Christianization" noted in previous research and potential giver–recipient power imbalances remain. The study concludes that a religious celebration can become an interreligious social practice without erasing distinct identities. Further research should incorporate recipients' perspectives.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Despite Indonesia's long tradition of religious coexistence, interreligious relations continue to face various challenges, including discrimination, suspicion, and social conflict. As a minority group within the national context, Christians are not exempt from these issues. One policy shaping interreligious relations is the 1979 Joint Decree (Surat Keputusan Bersama/SKB), which regulates the propagation of religion to individuals or groups who already adhere to another religion. This policy prohibits the use of various forms of material offerings, such as goods, money, clothing, food, beverages, medical services, or other types of aid, as a means to persuade someone to convert to another religion (DGI–MAWI, 1979). These regulations highlight the complex interplay between religious freedom, religious activity, and the management of diversity in Indonesia. Beyond policy issues, interreligious relations also faced communal conflict, as seen in Maluku, North Maluku, and Poso between 1999 and the early 2000s. These conflicts cannot be reduced to mere theological disputes between Islam and Christianity; they also involved social segregation, mobility restrictions, and the reinforcement of religious identities that created an "us" versus "them" divide (Liow, 2016). These issues underscore the importance of fostering interreligious relations that go beyond preventing conflict and instead focus on building a shared life. In this context, interreligious relations can be nurtured through neighborliness, social participation, and integrating individuals from diverse religious backgrounds, an approach understood as both an expression of personal care and a form of spiritual encounter (Ohrt & Kalender, 2018).

One emerging approach to fostering harmonious relationships amidst such diversity is interreligious dialogue. The literature describes interreligious dialogue as encompassing theological, spiritual, and diplomatic approaches (Moyaert, 2013). The concept of interreligious dialogue is also elaborated upon in the Vatican document Dialogue and Proclamation, which identifies four forms of dialogue: the dialogue of life, the dialogue of action, the dialogue of theological exchange, and the dialogue of religious experience (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 1991, para. 42). The dialogue of life appears in daily encounters where people from different religious backgrounds share their life experiences. In contrast, the dialogue of action emphasizes collaboration to support social development and human well-being. These four forms show that interreligious dialogue is not limited to exchanging theological ideas or holding formal meetings; it also includes social interaction and collective action within society. Thus, interreligious dialogue offers many ways to build understanding, strengthen social ties, and develop cooperation, without requiring any community to abandon its religious identity. In the Indonesian context, cultivating openness and constructive dialogue across faiths has been identified as essential for addressing the potential for horizontal conflict in a multireligious society (Pangalila & Rumbay, 2024).

In practice, interreligious dialogue has been developed by various actors, including the government and religious leaders. In Indonesia, its trajectory has been closely tied to

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political orientation and leadership: under Minister of Religious Affairs Mukti Ali (1971–1978), dialogue fostered mutual recognition, trust, and respect among religious groups, whereas under Alamsjah (1978–1983) the government shifted toward formally regulating religious life, notably through the 1979 Joint Ministerial Decree (Fuad, 2007). At the global level, the 2007 meeting between King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and Pope Benedict XVI likewise strengthened support for dialogue among religious leaders (Swidler, 2013). However, such institutional and leadership-level initiatives involve only a limited number of actors and do not automatically explain how ordinary people build and sustain interreligious relationships in daily life. Although the dialogue of life and the dialogue of action open space for broader participation, attention to public experience remains essential for understanding how interreligious relations are manifested through everyday social practices.

To capture these everyday dimensions, the concept of "interreligious engagement" developed by Lattu (2023) offers an analytical perspective for understanding interreligious relations through public interaction and collective action. This concept emphasizes that individuals from diverse religious backgrounds can build social ties without relinquishing their communal identities. Rather than replacing existing approaches to interreligious dialogue, interreligious engagement complements them by focusing on active public participation and the contextual dynamics that shape interreligious relations. From this perspective, harmony is not merely the outcome of formal agreements or the exchange of religious understandings, but a social process continuously constructed, negotiated, and nurtured through everyday encounters. Consequently, members of society are not merely passive beneficiaries of dialogue initiatives led by religious figures or specific institutions; instead, they actively contribute to the sustainability of interreligious relations within their social environments.

The significance of grassroots engagement has been highlighted by various studies on interreligious relations in Indonesia. Pajarianto (2022) examines women's role in strengthening ties between Christians and Muslims, while Firmansyah (2021) explores how women's groups contribute to maintaining interreligious harmony in the village of Sukoreno. In the same village, Umam and Barmawi (2023) show how a rural multireligious community draws on its local cultural resources to build social cohesion, while Harmakaputra and Rahman (2021) document grassroots Muslim–Christian cooperation during the COVID-19 pandemic as a shift from mere toleration toward solidarity. Meanwhile, Assidiqi et al. (2024) examine Muslim–Hindu relations within the Tengger community and find that interreligious harmony is sustained through daily social practices, such as Hindu residents distributing free takjil (iftar snacks) during Ramadan and reciprocal participation in religious celebrations. These studies illustrate that interreligious relations develop not only through institutional mechanisms but also through concrete actions involving community members from diverse religious backgrounds. These practices further show that differences in religious identity do not

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necessarily prevent the creation of spaces for encounter and social cooperation. This finding aligns with Lattu's (2023) perspective, which identifies public interaction and collective action as crucial dimensions for understanding how interreligious relationships are established and sustained within social life. However, these studies tend to treat acts of sharing and mutual assistance as evidence of harmony, paying less attention to the power relations between givers and recipients, the sensitivities that faith-based aid may provoke, and the differing roles of women and children in sustaining such practices. Moreover, few studies examine initiatives in which a religious minority extends its own religious celebration to a majority community.

In Kalimangli, previous research has helped explain interreligious relations at the local level. Pieter (2015) found that relationships between Christian and Muslim residents in Kalimangli are characterized by harmony, supported by various factors, including religious, social, cultural, familial, governance, and leadership aspects, as well as community awareness and church-related factors. Meanwhile, Oruh (2024) examined religious pluralism in the 2021 Statement of Faith of the GPIB (Protestant Church in Western Indonesia) and its implementation in the Kalimangli congregation, specifically addressing the challenges of maintaining a Christian identity in a religiously pluralistic society. Both studies provide an essential foundation for understanding the factors that foster harmony and the theological perspectives on pluralism within the local community. However, the existing research leaves room to explore, more specifically, how this harmony is actively realized and sustained through social interaction and collective action in daily life. In other words, attention should focus not only on the factors that support a harmonious relationship but also on the social processes that allow it to endure. This area of inquiry serves as the starting point for the present study.

One relevant practice to examine is the distribution of Easter gift packages in Kalimangli. This practice offers a context for understanding how Christian and Muslim residents can engage socially without necessarily participating in shared religious rituals. This study uses Lattu's (2023) concept of interreligious engagement to examine interreligious interaction through the distribution of Easter gift packages. The analysis integrates decolonial, gender, and intergenerational perspectives within a Christian community that exists as a minority group in an agrarian village. The novelty of this study lies in two aspects. Empirically, it examines a sharing practice initiated by a Christian minority for an entire Muslim-majority hamlet and sustained for over two decades, a case that sits within the sensitive regulatory context of material assistance across religious lines. Conceptually, it extends Lattu's (2023) concept of interreligious engagement by integrating decolonial, gender, and intergenerational perspectives, so that interreligious relations are assessed not only by the existence of shared activities but also by the power relations, participation, and dignity they involve. In doing so, this study deepens the understanding of how interreligious relations are constructed, negotiated, and sustained through shared social actions within specific local sociocultural contexts.

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Accordingly, this study has three objectives. First, drawing on the organizers' accounts and the researcher's observations, it examines how the 2025 distribution of Easter gift packages supported the relationship between Christian and Muslim residents in Kalimangli. Second, it analyzes how this practice helps address the challenges of interreligious relations within the local community. Third, it uses decolonial, gender, and intergenerational perspectives to assess the potential and risks of this practice, focusing on the power relations between givers and recipients and on the roles of women and children in building social solidarity.

2. METHODS

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative case study design (Yin, 2018) to critically examine the practice of distributing Easter gift packages as a form of interreligious engagement within the context of religious pluralism in Kalimangli. A qualitative approach was chosen because the study does not aim to measure interreligious relations through numerical data; rather, it seeks to understand the experiences, social interactions, actions, and meanings that emerge from encounters between Christian and Muslim residents. Through this approach, the distribution of Easter gift packages is understood as a socio-religious phenomenon occurring within a specific sociocultural context. Consequently, the analysis focuses not only on the activity itself but also on the processes and dynamics of the social relationships that accompany it.

This research focuses on the distribution of Easter gift packages on April 20, 2025, organized by the Christian community in Kalimangli for all residents, regardless of religious background. The study approaches this practice from the organizers' perspective and the researcher's direct observation; recipients' views were not examined directly and are represented only through observed responses and previous research (Oruh, 2024). This activity was selected because it is not merely part of the Christian community's Easter celebration; it also creates space for interaction with Muslim residents who share the same social environment. Thus, the distribution of these packages is not viewed solely as material aid, but as a social practice that brings together religious identities, neighborly relations, solidarity, and communal life. Specifically, this study seeks to understand how this practice shapes a space for interreligious engagement, without necessarily being interpreted as the performance of a shared religious ritual. The three objectives stated in the Introduction guide data collection and analysis, ensuring the research does not merely describe the activities themselves but also explores the social meanings embedded within them. Attention is focused on the interplay between collective action, community participation, and the dynamics of religious identity within a Christian community that exists as a minority group in an agrarian village.

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Data Collection

Research data were collected through two primary techniques, participant observation (Spradley, 1980) and interviews, supplemented by document study. The observation took place on April 20, 2025, coinciding with the distribution of Easter gift packages in Kalimangli. During this event, the researcher was directly involved, allowing the researcher to observe the distribution process and interactions between church representatives and recipients. The researcher's position during the event was that of a volunteer assisting the organizers, which facilitated access to the activity but also required reflexive awareness of a possible bias toward the organizers' perspective. To address this, the researcher maintained reflective field notes throughout the data collection process, systematically distinguished direct observations from personal interpretations, documented interactions with both organizers and participants, and critically reflected on how their dual role as a volunteer and researcher might have influenced the collection and interpretation of data. The observation focused on social interactions, community member involvement, distribution mechanisms, and recipients' responses throughout the event. This direct participation enabled the researcher to gain an empirical understanding of how interreligious relations are manifested through concrete actions. Furthermore, the observation provided an opportunity to examine social dynamics that cannot always be captured through verbal accounts, such as patterns of encounter, levels of participation, and the nature of the relationship between the organizers and the recipients. Consequently, the distribution event was viewed not merely as a process of providing necessities, but as a social space where individuals from diverse religious backgrounds could interact. In addition, a document study was conducted on previous research and church records related to Kalimangli, including Pieter (2015), Oruh (2024), and Zacharias et al. (2012), to provide historical and contextual background for the field data.

After the observation, the researcher interviewed two church representatives directly involved in the initiative: John Titaley and Sony Wicaksono. These interviews were intended to elicit deeper insights into the background, objectives, evolution, and operational mechanisms of the gift distribution. The interviews were semi-structured, conducted in Indonesian, with each interview lasting approximately one hour. With the informants' prior consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim to ensure an accurate and comprehensive record of their responses. Conducting the interviews after the observation allowed the researcher to use the observed experiences as a foundation for exploring further explanations regarding the actions and situations encountered during the event. Thus, observation and interviews served as complementary data sources for understanding the phenomenon under study.

Informants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement, responsibilities, and knowledge of the planning and execution of the Easter gift distribution. This selection strategy aimed to gather information relevant to the research focus, specifically the initiative's historical dimensions, social objectives, and operational

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aspects. The first informant, John Titaley, is a church representative and the initiator of the Easter gift distribution program, which has been ongoing for over twenty years. The interview aimed to gather information on the activity's origins, initial objectives, development and sustainability, and the meaning the church community ascribes to the practice in its relationship with the Kalimangli community.

The second informant, Sony Wicaksono, is a church representative responsible for coordinating the types and quantities of necessities included in the gift packages. He provided technical implementation details, including selecting items, assembling packages, calculating the total number of gifts, and managing distribution within the community. Both informants offer complementary perspectives: John Titaley provides insight into the initiative's history, objectives, and sustainability, while Sony Wicaksono explains the operational processes that make the activity possible. The study synthesizes information from both informants with observational data to provide a comprehensive understanding of distributing Easter gift packages as a form of social engagement within the local community.

Data Analysis

Data gathered through observation and interviews were analyzed using a qualitative-interpretative approach, following the stages of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), to identify patterns of interaction and themes related to interreligious engagement. The analysis focuses on connections among observed actions, informants' explanations, and the social context in which the activities take place. Lattu's (2023) concept of interreligious engagement provides a framework for understanding how public interactions and collective actions shape and maintain relationships between Christian and Muslim residents. I first transcribed and repeatedly were field notes and interview data to become familiar with the data. The data were then coded both inductively and deductively, with deductive codes derived from the concept of interreligious engagement and the three interpretive lenses. Related codes were grouped into categories, which were reviewed and refined into the themes presented in the Results section. Data trustworthiness was strengthened through source and method triangulation, by comparing observational data with the accounts of the two informants and with relevant documents, and through member checking with the informants.

The analysis centers on several themes, including interreligious encounters, solidarity, acceptance, neighborly relations, the challenges of interreligious engagement, decoloniality, women's agency, and intergenerational involvement. The study examines these themes in relation to one another to understand how the distribution of gift packages creates a social space that facilitates engagement among community members of different religious identities. The study employs decolonial, gender, and intergenerational perspectives simultaneously as interpretive lenses. It pays particular attention to the local context, the role of women, children's involvement, and participation dynamics within a minority Christian community in an agrarian village setting. Through this interpretation,

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the research seeks to understand interreligious engagement as a practice inseparable from individuals' experiences, social positions, and relationships within society.

Research Ethics and Scope

All informants were informed of the purpose of the study and gave oral consent to be interviewed and to be identified by their real names in this article. Regarding the use of visual documentation, consent has been obtained from all individuals featured in the photographs included in this article, including the parents of the children shown. This consent is part of the ethical considerations for presenting documentation of the activities. The research focuses on a single event, the distribution of Easter gift packages in 2025, and incorporates interviews with two informants from the organizing church. Consequently, the interpretation of the research is primarily based on direct observation and the perspectives of the organizers, rather than a comprehensive representation of the experiences of all the recipients. Given this scope, the research findings aim to provide a contextual understanding of how a socio-religious practice can serve as a space for interreligious engagement within the local community.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The Context and Practice of Distributing Easter Gift Packages in Kalimangli

Kalimangli is located in Karang Tengah Village, Tuntang District, Semarang Regency, about eight kilometers from the city of Salatiga. The hamlet has 180 families, most of whom rely on agriculture for their livelihoods. Religiously, Kalimangli is approximately 93% Muslim and 7% Christian (Pieter, 2015). The local Christian community carries out its religious activities through the Kalimangli Service and Witness Post (Pos Pelayanan dan Kesaksian, Pelkes), which is affiliated with the GPIB Tamansari congregation in Salatiga (Zacharias et al., 2012).

As a relatively small community, the Christians in Kalimangli receive support for their religious life from the GPIB Tamansari congregation in Salatiga. This support addresses the economic and educational limitations some members of the Kalimangli congregation still face; indeed, some members of the Christian community in Kalimangli, even in old age, remain unable to read or write. Despite these limitations, the community has sustained its religious life. Since the 1970s, the Christians of Kalimangli have consistently held worship activities. This continuity shows that neither a small membership nor socio-economic challenges have hindered the local Christian community's religious activities.

In their social life, the Christian and Muslim residents of Kalimangli share a relationship that has developed over generations. This connection is rooted not only in geographical proximity but also in kinship ties; most residents descend from common ancestors, creating familial bonds that persist despite religious differences. Decades of

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living side by side have shaped social interaction patterns that allow both communities to maintain strong neighborly relations. This is evident in residents' participation in various joint activities, from communal neighborhood cleanups to celebrations of major religious holidays. Christians and Muslims visit one another during Eid al-Fitr, help each other during Christmas celebrations, and share during Easter. These activities show that social relations between the two communities extend well beyond formal encounters, instead manifesting through daily interactions among people from diverse religious backgrounds.

History and Purpose of Distributing Easter Gift Packages

One practice embedded in the social fabric of the Kalimangli community is distributing Easter gift packages, a tradition that has continued since the 2000s (Oruh, 2024). Titaley states: "Christians must live in a way that is a blessing, not only to their fellow believers but to everyone" (Titaley, interview, April 20, 2025). According to Titaley, this initiative stems from the conviction that the Christian community and the church in Kalimangli should benefit society as a whole, not just church members. Consequently, from the start, the distribution of these gift packages has not been limited to Christian families; instead, it is intended for all families in Kalimangli, regardless of religious background. A key characteristic of this initiative is the scope of its recipients: the gifts go not only to families facing economic hardship but also to those who are relatively well-off. Thus, economic status is not the sole criterion for determining who receives a package. Every family has an equal opportunity to receive a gift as part of a sharing act organized by the Christian community.

Nevertheless, assisting families with limited economic means remains an integral part of the initiative. According to Titaley, "the distribution of Easter gift packages, consisting of necessities, is intended to help meet the household needs of the recipients, at least for one week" (Titaley, interview, April 20, 2025). This statement indicates that the initiative serves two interconnected purposes: providing material support to the community and maintaining social ties between the church congregation and all residents of Kalimangli. The fact that this activity has continued for over twenty years shows that distributing Easter gift packages is not merely a one-off event occurring only during the year of the study. Rather, it has become an established practice of sharing, consistently carried out by the Christian community in its engagement with the local population.

Funding and Composition of Easter Gift Packages

For the 2025 event, 180 gift packages were prepared for distribution to all families in Kalimangli. Wicaksono stated: "Each package contains one kilogram of sugar, one liter of cooking oil, half a kilogram of eggs, ten packs of instant noodles, six bars of laundry soap, one can of milk, one tube of toothpaste, four bars of bath soap, one toothbrush, and two bottles of soy sauce" (Wicaksono, interview, April 20, 2025). According to Wicaksono, each package is valued at Rp142,000. The item selection reflects the organizers' attention to households' consumption and hygiene needs. The packages

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include food staples and daily necessities rather than ready-to-eat meals, allowing each family to use and prepare the items according to their specific needs and household habits.

The initiative was funded through contributions from donors who wanted to share in the Easter celebration in Kalimangli (Wicaksono, interview, April 20, 2025). Not all of these donors are members of the congregation that worships at the Kalimangli church. In 2025, seven donors provided financial support totaling Rp31,000,000. These funds were used to cover the procurement of the 180 gift packages, provide refreshments during the event, and address logistical requirements related to packaging and distribution. Based on the value of each package, the total cost for procuring the gifts amounted to Rp25,560,000. Thus, the total funds collected were used not only to purchase necessities but also to support the event's operational requirements.

Implementation and Distribution Mechanism for Gift Packages

The Christian community, donors, and local community leaders helped distribute Easter gift packages on April 20, 2025. The hamlet head (Kepala Dusun) and the neighborhood association head (Ketua RW) attended the event, demonstrating their support for distributing gifts to Kalimangli residents (Figures 1 and 2). The handover ceremony took place at the church and began with a prayer as part of the Christian community's Easter celebration. Subsequently, the gifts were presented symbolically in several stages: donors first handed the packages to the church pastor, who then passed them on to the hamlet head and the neighborhood association head, acting as representatives of the community, before the packages were distributed to all families in Kalimangli. This symbolic handover illustrates the collaborative involvement of religious and local community representatives in facilitating the distribution of Easter gifts to the wider community.



Figure 1. The pastor hands over gifts to the hamlet head and the neighborhood association (RW) head (Source: Researcher's personal documentation from fieldwork, April 20, 2025)



Figure 2. Donors, the pastor, congregation members, the hamlet head, and the neighborhood association (RW) head (Source: Researcher's personal documentation from fieldwork, April 20, 2025)

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Figures 1 and 2 capture this symbolic handover inside the church, as the packages passed from the donors to the pastor and then to the hamlet head and the neighborhood association head before reaching residents. This sequence clearly illustrates the division of roles among the donors, the church organizers, and the local community leadership. Each party participated at a different stage, from providing aid and the symbolic handover to the final distribution to residents. The presence of the hamlet head and the neighborhood association head further signifies that local leadership supported the initiative. After the symbolic ceremony, the distribution continued with the delivery of gift packages directly to recipient families. Through this mechanism, the activity extended beyond the church gathering and reached households throughout the hamlet.

Participation of Women, Men, and Children

Observations indicate that members of the Kalimangli Christian community distributed the gift packages collectively. Men, women, and children all participated, each performing distinct yet complementary tasks (Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6). This collective participation highlights the collaborative nature of the activity and demonstrates how different community members contributed to its implementation.



Figure 3. Congregation members record the residents receiving gifts
(Source: Researcher's personal documentation from fieldwork, April 20, 2025)



Figure 4. Sunday school children hand gifts to residents
(Source: Researcher's personal documentation from fieldwork, April 20, 2025)

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Figure 5. Men, women, and children distribute gifts to residents
(Source: Researcher's personal documentation from fieldwork, April 20, 2025)



Figure 6. Gifts are distributed by cart
(Source: Researcher's personal documentation from fieldwork, April 20, 2025)

The women managed the distribution process. Some recorded family names to ensure every household received a package according to the recipient list, to prevent duplicate distributions or accidentally omitting any family (Figure 3). Other women prepared the food provided during the event. Meanwhile, the men helped distribute the packages by pushing carts loaded with them to residents' homes (Figures 5 and 6). Children also helped by handing the packages directly to recipients (Figure 4).

Read together, Figures 3–6 document a distribution that extended from the church into residents' homes and involved several generations of the congregation. This division of labor shows the activity did not rely solely on church leaders or a small committee; instead, it engaged community members across age groups. Women handled administrative tasks and prepared refreshments, while men transported and distributed the packages. Children's participation brought the younger generation into the Christian community's organized act of sharing. Through this involvement, the distribution of gift packages not only connected the organizers with the recipients but also created space for collective participation among members of the Christian community.

Observed Recipient Responses and Interreligious Relationship Dynamics

Based on the researcher's observations during the event, the distribution of Easter gift packages appeared to be met with a positive reception from the recipients, although such observations cannot capture recipients' own interpretations. This was evident in their smiles, expressions of gratitude, and prayers for the donors' well-being. The recipients understood that the packages originated from the church and were distributed as part of the Easter celebration. Accepting these gifts highlights social interaction between the Christian community (the organizers) and Kalimangli's predominantly Muslim population. This engagement occurred through the direct handover of aid, both during church events and through the delivery of packages to residents' homes. Nevertheless,

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this positive response does not mean the initiative was entirely free of religious sensitivities. Beyond the organizers' accounts, the only available source on how such packages have been perceived is previous research, which has noted concerns about potential attempts at proselytization (Christianization) in discussions about distributing such Easter packages (Oruh, 2024). These concerns show that the broader public can interpret charitable activities organized by a religious community in various ways.

In 2025, the initiative remained inclusive, reaching all families regardless of religious identity or economic status. The distributed packages included necessities and household supplies that recipients could use according to their individual needs. For the organizers, the distribution served both as a commemoration of Jesus Christ's resurrection and as an expression of care for the lives of the people of Kalimangli (Titaley, interview, April 20, 2025). Thus, while the initiative is rooted in a clear religious context, it aims to benefit all residents. These findings show that various stakeholders helped distribute Easter packages, including donors, the church community, local leaders, and recipient families. The implementation also reflects the participation of women, men, and children in the distribution process. Despite differences in religious identity and the potential for social sensitivities, the activity serves as a point of encounter between Christian and Muslim residents in the community of Kalimangli.

Discussion

Interreligious Engagement within a Minority Context and Local Social Capital

Christians' status as a minority group, comprising approximately 7% of Kalimangli's population, provides a crucial context for understanding the practice of distributing Easter gift packages (Pieter, 2015). In a religiously pluralistic society, disparities in population size and religious identity can shape social relations, potentially leading to prejudice or misunderstanding. Jhody et al. (2024) point out that the history of discrimination between majority and minority religious groups in Indonesia is linked to a limited understanding of diversity and challenges in interreligious relations. In Kalimangli, this situation must be viewed alongside the characteristics of an agrarian society that still faces economic and educational constraints. Nevertheless, minority status and socio-economic limitations do not automatically imply conflict. On the contrary, the research findings indicate that Christian and Muslim residents share kinship ties and a history of coexistence spanning several generations.

These kinship bonds constitute social capital that helps maintain interreligious relations through shared activities. Similar patterns have been observed elsewhere in Indonesia, where a sense of shared ancestry and local wisdom function as cultural capital that sustains harmony among Muslims, Hindus, and Christians (Agung et al., 2024), and where empathy nurtured within religiously mixed families supports tolerance (Pajarianto et al., 2022). Hafidz and Harjianto (2021) identify cooperation (gotong royong) as a defining characteristic of life in agrarian communities. In Kalimangli, residents express

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this spirit through communal work (kerja bakti), visits during religious celebrations, and participation in social activities (Oruh, 2024). The presence of the hamlet head, the neighborhood association (RW) head, and church leaders during the 2025 Easter gift distribution further illustrates how local leadership can support the continuity of activities involving people of different religions. While their involvement does not necessarily eliminate the potential for religious sensitivities, it provides the social support needed for such activities to take place. The distribution of Easter gift packages shows that interreligious relations are built not merely on shared beliefs, but also on a sense of social responsibility among fellow citizens. In this context, the status of Christians as a minority does not hinder them from participating actively in the life of the community. They do not limit themselves to sustaining their own religious community; instead, they develop initiatives that reach all families in Kalimangli. This practice shows how a relatively small religious community can maintain social ties through collective action rooted in the local context.

The Distribution of Easter Gift Packages as a Practice of Interreligious Engagement

The distribution of Easter gift packages can be understood through Lattu's (2023) concept of interreligious engagement, which emphasizes public interaction and collective action among individuals from diverse religious backgrounds, without requiring them to relinquish their respective communal identities. Although the activity originates from a Christian religious celebration, its execution extends beyond the confines of internal worship spaces by providing necessities to families, including those who are Muslim. Thus, this activity is not a shared religious ritual but a social practice that facilitates interreligious encounters. This resonates with Harmakaputra and Rahman's (2021) observation that grassroots Muslim–Christian relations in Indonesia increasingly move beyond toleration toward concrete solidarity.

This perspective aligns with Swidler's (2013) view that dialogue should not be limited to exchanging ideas; it must also encompass action and openness within human relationships. In the distribution of these gift packages, interaction is manifested through the act of handing over the packages, visiting residents, and receiving responses, such as smiles, expressions of gratitude, and prayers offered for the donors (researcher's observation, April 20, 2025). These simple interactions show how interreligious relationships can unfold through actions that provide tangible benefits to the community. Nevertheless, this practice should not be interpreted as evidence that all religious differences or tensions have been resolved. Concerns about the potential for "Christianization," as Oruh (2024) notes, show that acts of sharing can still be interpreted differently. Within the framework of interreligious engagement, these differences underscore the importance of viewing interreligious relations as an ongoing, negotiated process rather than an automatic state of harmony.

Cornille (2013) identifies humility, commitment, empathy, and hospitality as essential attitudes for interreligious encounters. These values can be used to interpret the

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practice of distributing gift packages as an act that creates space for social relations, without requiring a shared set of beliefs. Christians continue to celebrate Easter based on their religious identity, while Muslims may accept these packages as part of social interaction, without having to participate in Easter rituals. Such relationships show that people can maintain religious commitments while building solidarity in shared life. This understanding aligns with Eck's (2005) concept of pluralism, which emphasizes active engagement with differences rather than merely the coexistence of various religious groups in the same area. In Kalimangli, Christian–Muslim relations unfold through activities that let both communities encounter one another and sustain neighborly ties. However, the acceptance of these packages cannot be taken to imply that the recipients hold specific pluralist theological views. Rather, the findings point to interreligious social practices that foster mutual recognition and respect.

Interpreting the Distribution of Gift Packages through a Decolonial Perspective

A decolonial perspective provides space to critically examine the relationship between sharing, religious identity, and potential power imbalances. In Indonesian history, colonialism and the spread of Christianity have shaped social perceptions of religious activities. Arifianto (2009) discusses the Dutch colonial government's support for Christian missionary work. This history helps explain why faith-based social action is sometimes associated with concerns about "Christianization." However, not all suspicion directed toward church activities can be attributed solely to the legacy of colonialism. In the context of Kalimangli, concerns about Christianization may be linked to historical experiences, majority–minority relations, and the community's own interpretations of acts of sharing. This nuanced reading is essential to ensure that a decolonial perspective is not used to oversimplify the complexities of interreligious relations.

Religious exclusivism can also narrow the space for engagement when one community views another primarily through the lens of prejudice and distrust. Eck (2005) explores exclusivism in relation to claims of religious truth. One instance of tension in interreligious relations can be seen in the opposition to Easter celebrations in the village of Kabasiran, Parung Panjang, Bogor, a situation linked to issues surrounding permits (Fios et al., 2018). Although this context differs from Kalimangli, it shows how religious practices can become flashpoints for social tension. Consequently, the distribution of gift packages should be analyzed with careful consideration of potential differences in interpretation between organizers and recipients.

Mauss's (1950) theory of the "gift" deepens this analysis. According to Mauss, giving and receiving are never entirely detached from social relations, as they inevitably create expectations of reciprocity. In the context of distributing Easter gift packages, the provision of aid by the Christian community to all residents raises questions regarding the position of the recipients, particularly when some families face economic hardship. The good intentions of the organizers do not automatically ensure that recipients are free from potential social or religious pressure. Consequently, the distribution of these

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packages cannot be straightforwardly categorized as a decolonial practice simply because it is inclusive. Through the concept of epistemic disobedience, Mignolo (2018) invites readers to question established hierarchies of knowledge and power. In this study, this perspective is employed to examine the possibility of fostering more egalitarian relationships between givers and recipients, rather than to suggest that the distribution of gift packages has, in itself, dismantled colonial structures.

One relevant characteristic of such initiatives is providing necessities rather than ready-to-eat meals (Titaley, interview, April 20, 2025). This distribution model lets recipients decide how to prepare and use the items based on their household needs. Such flexibility can be seen as a space for recipients' agency. However, this practical freedom in using the provided goods should not be equated with the complete disappearance of all power imbalances between the provider and the recipient. In the context of Omer's (2020) concept of re-existence, distributing such aid can be a means of building social relationships that do not position the recipient merely as an object of assistance. This potential depends on how the initiative is implemented, how recipients interpret it, and how much their dignity and autonomy are respected. Thus, the decolonial contribution of this practice is best understood as a possibility to challenge paternalistic relationships through local solidarity, rather than as a fully realized success in decolonization.

Christian Theological Interpretation and Islamic Ethics in the Practice of Sharing

From a Christian theological perspective, distributing Easter gift packages can be understood as an expression of faith, manifested through care for others. This interpretation is linked to the incarnation: the belief that God is present within human reality through Jesus Christ, as stated in John 1:14. Parhusip (2019) connects the incarnation to God's love, which defends, liberates, and uplifts human dignity. In this sense, a life of faith is not merely about performing rituals; it also entails responsibility for the community's social conditions. Sijabat and Sinaga (2024) emphasize that God's solidarity with humanity can inspire Christians to strive for love, justice, and peace through concrete actions. The distribution of Easter gift packages in Kalimangli fits this framework, as the activity extends religious celebration from the space of worship into the life of the broader community. Providing necessities to all families demonstrates how religious motivation can be realized through social action that reaches individuals of different faiths.

A similar interpretation can be drawn from the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1–10. This narrative illustrates how an encounter with Jesus prompts a shift in an individual's relationship with others (Titaley, interview, April 20, 2025). Zacchaeus's transformation is evident in his commitment to give half his possessions to people experiencing poverty and to restore fourfold what he had obtained through extortion. Mandaru (2020) relates these actions to solidarity with those experiencing economic hardship. In the context of Kalimangli, the story of Zacchaeus offers a theological lens for understanding the distribution of gift packages as a social act of love. Christians

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commemorate the resurrection of Jesus not only through prayer, hymns, and sermons, but also by addressing the needs of the community. In this context, the story of Zacchaeus serves as an interpretive lens, not as evidence that everyone involved in such activities shares the same motivations or theological experiences.

This interpretation also underscores the significance of contextual ecclesiology. Nuban Timo (2017) emphasizes the need for church renewal, ensuring that the church's presence remains integrated with the life of the broader society. From this perspective, the church is understood not merely as a space for conducting rituals, but as a community that participates in social reality. Furthermore, Kärkkäinen (2021) identifies hospitality as a crucial dimension in engaging with those who hold different religious traditions and experiences. The distribution of Easter gifts illustrates how the church can bear witness through actions that embrace life within the wider community, without requiring recipients to abandon their own religious identities.

From an Islamic perspective, interreligious social relations are grounded in an ethical framework that helps explain the practice of mutual assistance in Kalimangli. The concept of ta'awun emphasizes the importance of helping one another in acts of goodness (Hassanusi, 2022). In the local community, this principle is reflected in the mutual support shown when Christian residents celebrate Christmas or when Muslim residents hold their own religious observances. This principle is linked to the concept of rahmatan lil'alamin (a mercy to all worlds), which underscores the values of compassion, peace, and the well-being of all existence (Koswara, 2024; Ulva et al., 2021). Furthermore, ukhuwah insaniyah (human brotherhood) frames relationships between people as kinship not restricted by shared religious identity (Hasibuan et al., 2024; Hutabalian et al., 2025; Sujono, 2021).

The acceptance of Easter gifts by Muslim residents can also be understood through the principles of al-birr (righteousness/kindness) and al-qist (justice), as found in the Qur'an (Surah Al-Mumtahanah [60]:8). These principles advocate for kindness and fairness toward those who neither harbor hostility nor engage in the expulsion of others based on religion. Within this framework, accepting a gift from a Christian neighbor does not necessarily imply an endorsement of the giver's theological beliefs. Instead, such an act can be interpreted as part of a social relationship that respects differences in religious identity (Zahid et al., 2024). Thus, while Christian theology and Islamic ethics offer distinct interpretive foundations, they converge on shared values of care, justice, and solidarity. This alignment in social values does not, however, imply that the two traditions possess identical theological understandings. Precisely because these differences are maintained, the distribution of Easter gift packages can be understood as a form of interreligious engagement that takes place without demanding uniformity of belief.

Women's Agency in Maintaining Interreligious Relations

Women's involvement is a crucial dimension of distributing Easter gift packages. Observations indicate that women participate by recording the recipient families and

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preparing refreshments. This contribution plays a practical role in ensuring the activity runs smoothly, specifically, by ensuring every family receives a package while preventing duplicate distributions or accidentally omitting any recipient (researcher's observation, April 20, 2025). This participation can be interpreted through Mahmood's (2005) definition of agency, which emphasizes that agency is not necessarily manifested through direct resistance to social norms; rather, it can also be expressed through an individual's capacity to internalize and enact norms within a specific life context. In the context of gift distribution, the women's contributions show how they help carry out social practices that bridge the church community and broader society. However, this involvement cannot be automatically construed as a shift in gender structures. The observed division of labor still reflects conventional social roles: women primarily handle administrative tasks and provide refreshments, while men assist with physically transporting the packages. Nevertheless, the women's contributions remain significant, as their work is essential to the activity's successful distribution and overall continuity.

Butler's (1999) perspective on gender performativity helps us understand that gender roles are shaped and sustained through repetitive social actions. In the context of Kalimangli, these women's involvement illustrates how activities often associated with domestic responsibilities can also have implications in a wider social sphere. Managing administrative tasks and preparing refreshments do more than support internal church activities; they also facilitate encounters between the Christian community and people of other faiths. Women's contributions also relate to studies by Pajarianto (2022) and Firmansyah (2021), which highlight women's role in maintaining interreligious relations in Indonesia. Through collective activities, women can help create spaces for social interaction that foster relationships between different communities. In the context of Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis, encounters between members of different groups can help reduce prejudice, provided they occur under favorable conditions. The distribution of gift packages offers an opportunity for interpersonal interaction through sharing and neighborly engagement. However, this study did not measure changes in prejudice before and after the activities. Therefore, women's contribution is best understood as a practice for maintaining social relations, rather than as direct evidence that these activities have eliminated religious prejudice or gender inequality.

The Involvement of Children and the Sustainability of Intergenerational Practices

Beyond adult men and women, children are also involved in the distribution of Easter gift packages. Observations indicate that they assist by handing the packages directly to residents. This participation adds an intergenerational dimension, as younger community members engage in social activities beyond the church. Children's involvement allows the practice of sharing to be introduced through direct experience, rather than solely through verbal instruction on the importance of love and neighborly relations. Through these activities, children take part in a collective action that brings them into contact with residents from different religious backgrounds. Thus, distributing

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gift packages provides a social space for people of different generations to engage in interreligious practices.

However, the presence of children cannot be taken as evidence that their understanding of religious diversity has shifted. This study did not conduct specific interviews to explore their personal experiences or perspectives. Consequently, the analysis is limited to observable participation and its potential role in sustaining community practices. This cross-generational involvement shows that the distribution of Easter gift packages does not rely solely on church leaders or the activity's initiators. The participation of fathers, mothers, and children reflects shared responsibility, turning sharing into a collective endeavor. In this context, the tradition's sustainability over twenty years can be seen as an indicator of the importance of community involvement, though further research is still needed to understand how the values of interreligious relations are passed on to, and interpreted by, the next generation.

The Contribution of the Gift-Giving Practice to the Study of Interreligious Engagement

Overall, the distribution of Easter gift packages in Kalimangli demonstrates that interreligious relations can be nurtured through social actions rooted in the local community's way of life. This practice brings together religious identities, kinship ties, economic solidarity, local leadership support, and participation across age groups into a single collective activity. This research contributes by interpreting this practice through the lens of interreligious engagement, integrating decolonial, gender, and intergenerational perspectives. The decolonial perspective helps examine potential power imbalances between givers and recipients; the gender perspective highlights women's contributions to organizing the activity; and the intergenerational perspective sheds light on children's involvement in the community's social practices. Together, these perspectives show that interreligious engagement is not merely about interaction between Christian and Muslim groups, but also about how such interactions are organized, who participates, and how distinct identities are maintained within a shared life. Thus, the distribution of Easter gift packages can be understood as a form of social engagement that can strengthen interreligious relations without erasing theological differences.

Nevertheless, the data's limitations should be noted. This study relies primarily on observations and interviews with two church representatives; therefore, it does not fully capture the experiences of the gift recipients, specifically Muslim residents, women, and children. Consequently, the research findings are best understood as a contextual insight into interreligious engagement in Kalimangli, rather than as evidence that all religious tensions, social inequalities, or power imbalances have been resolved. Future research could broaden the perspective by directly engaging these groups to understand how interreligious sharing practices are experienced, interpreted, and negotiated by the community more comprehensively.

CONCLUSION

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Based on the organizers' accounts and the researcher's observations, this study concludes that the distribution of Easter gift packages in Kalimangli can function as a form of grassroots interreligious engagement in a Muslim-majority agrarian community. By extending an Easter celebration beyond the church to every household, regardless of religion or economic status, the Christian minority appears to create a shared space for encounter, solidarity, and neighborly relations without requiring joint rituals or theological consensus. The practice is sustained by kinship ties, the support of local leaders, and the collective participation of men, women, and children. At the same time, concerns about Christianization show that interreligious harmony is not a fixed condition but an ongoing process that must be continually negotiated. Providing basic necessities rather than ready-to-eat meals grants recipients autonomy over their use, yet the relationship between givers and recipients still carries potential power imbalances. The practice is therefore best understood as an opening toward more egalitarian solidarity rather than as an accomplished decolonial practice.

Theoretically, this study extends the concept of interreligious engagement by showing that a celebration rooted in a specific religious identity can become a space for shared social life. Integrating decolonial, gender, and intergenerational perspectives demonstrates that interreligious engagement should be assessed not only by the existence of joint activities but also by how they are organized, who participates, and whether the dignity and identity of each party are respected. Women's administrative and organizational work appears vital to the continuity of the practice, even within conventional gender roles, while children's involvement introduces an intergenerational dimension that may help sustain the tradition.

Practically, churches and other religious communities that organize similar initiatives should design them to respect recipients' autonomy, remain sensitive to religious concerns, and foster reciprocal rather than one-way relationships, while local leaders and interreligious forums such as the Interreligious Harmony Forum (FKUB) can help ensure that such activities are understood as acts of neighborliness. This study is limited to a single event and to the perspectives of two church representatives. Future research should therefore directly include the voices of Muslim recipients, women, and children, and adopt longitudinal or comparative designs to examine how such grassroots practices shape interreligious relations over time.

DECLARATIONS

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Ethics Approval and Informed Consent: Informed consent was obtained from the informants who participated in the interviews. Consent for the publication of photographs was obtained from all individuals featured in them, including the parents of the children shown. Formal ethics approval was not obtained, as the study was conducted independently and was not affiliated with an institution or ethics committee responsible for issuing ethical clearance. Consequently, no ethics approval number was available. Nevertheless, ethical principles were observed throughout the research process, including voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants' privacy.

Data Availability: The data supporting the findings of this study, including observation notes and interview records, are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to the protection of informants' privacy.

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