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From Spiritual Formation to Social Transformation: Applying Philip Sheldrake's Transformative Spirituality to Basic Ecclesial Communities

Dari Pembinaan Spiritual Menuju Transformasi Sosial: Penerapan Spiritualitas Transformatif Philip Sheldrake pada Komunitas Basis Gerejawi (KBG)

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Abstract: *This article asks how Philip Sheldrake's account of spirituality can clarify a spiritually grounded model of Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) formation and social engagement in Indonesia. It argues that his contextual, embodied, historical, and relational approach offers a theological-pastoral framework for connecting personal renewal with communal life and public responsibility, without assuming that devotional practice automatically produces justice. The study is qualitative library research, using purposively selected theological writings, scholarship on BECs and small Christian communities, Indonesian pastoral publications, and official Church documents. A thematic synthesis identifies five interrelated themes informing dimensions of transformative BEC formation: shared spiritual formation, communal solidarity, social responsibility, participatory leadership, and ecclesial embedding. The article organizes Sheldrake's broader work through three analytical dimensions—self-transformation, relational transformation, and world-transformation—which are the authors' synthesis rather than a typology explicitly formulated by Sheldrake. The themes are operationally related through a cyclical pastoral process of contemplation, discernment, action, evaluation, and renewed contemplation. The model is conceptual, conditional, and open to empirical examination; it neither establishes causality nor claims programme effectiveness. Its contribution is a contextual theological-pastoral synthesis attentive to Indonesia's cultural and religious plurality, regional diversity, unequal resources, and parish structures. Comparative field research is needed to examine how participation, leadership, reflection–action cycles, social initiatives, and accountability operate in diverse Indonesian BECs.*

Keywords: Basic Ecclesial Communities; Philip Sheldrake; Transformative spirituality; Social transformation; Indonesia.

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Abstrak: *Artikel ini menanyakan bagaimana pemahaman Philip Sheldrake tentang spiritualitas dapat memperjelas model pembinaan dan keterlibatan sosial Komunitas Basis Gerejawi (KBG) yang berakar pada spiritualitas dalam konteks Indonesia. Artikel ini berpendapat bahwa pendekatan Sheldrake yang kontekstual, terwujud dalam kehidupan, historis, dan relasional menyediakan kerangka teologis-pastoral untuk menghubungkan pembaruan pribadi, kehidupan komunitas, dan tanggung jawab publik, tanpa menganggap praktik devosional dengan sendirinya menghasilkan keadilan. Penelitian ini merupakan studi kepustakaan kualitatif yang menggunakan secara purposif karya teologis, kajian tentang KBG dan komunitas Kristiani kecil, publikasi pastoral Indonesia, serta dokumen resmi Gereja. Sintesis tematik menghasilkan lima dimensi pembinaan KBG transformatif yang saling terkait: pembinaan spiritual bersama, solidaritas komunal, tanggung jawab sosial, kepemimpinan partisipatif, dan keterlekatan eklesial. Artikel ini mengorganisasikan karya Sheldrake yang lebih luas melalui tiga dimensi analitis—transformasi diri, transformasi relasional, dan transformasi dunia—yang merupakan sintesis penulis, bukan tipologi yang dirumuskan secara eksplisit oleh Sheldrake. Kelima tema tersebut dihubungkan melalui proses pastoral siklik: kontemplasi, penegasan rohani, tindakan, evaluasi, dan kontemplasi yang diperbarui. Model ini bersifat konseptual, bersyarat, dan terbuka untuk pemeriksaan empiris; model ini tidak membuktikan hubungan sebab-akibat ataupun efektivitas program. Sumbangannya adalah sintesis teologis-pastoral kontekstual yang memperhatikan kemajemukan budaya dan agama di Indonesia, keragaman regional, ketimpangan sumber daya, dan struktur paroki. Penelitian lapangan komparatif diperlukan untuk menelaah partisipasi, kepemimpinan, siklus refleksi–aksi, prakarsa sosial, dan akuntabilitas dalam KBG yang beragam di Indonesia.*

Kata Kunci: Komunitas Basis Gerejawi; Philip Sheldrake; Spiritualitas transformatif; Transformasi sosial; Indonesia.

Introduction

Christian spirituality is not adequately described as a private interior experience detached from the relationships, institutions, and places in which people live. In Christian traditions, prayer, conversion, worship, and ethical action are related practices through which people interpret their lives before God and learn forms of responsibility toward neighbours and the created world. Contemporary spirituality scholarship therefore asks how religious experience is embodied in everyday life and how it may shape social imaginaries, commitments, and practices. Yet this connection must be argued rather than presumed: a person may pray sincerely without challenging unjust relations, and a religious institution may proclaim solidarity while retaining exclusionary habits. The central theological question is how spiritual formation might orient people toward the common good while remaining attentive to the limits and ambiguities of religious action.[1]

The article takes Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) as a setting in which this question becomes concrete. BECs are locally rooted ecclesial groups, usually small enough for recurring relationships, shared prayer, engagement with Scripture, mutual support, and lay participation. Their theological significance does not derive from small size alone. They matter insofar as Christians recognize one another as members of the People of God, discern faith in lived circumstances, and connect the parish's sacramental and missionary life with neighbourhood concerns. Their community character can provide relational conditions for formation and action, but it can also reproduce familiar hierarchies or social exclusions. BECs should accordingly be treated neither as inherently emancipatory nor as merely administrative subdivisions of a parish.[2]

Historically, Latin American base communities became especially visible in contexts marked by poverty, political conflict, social inequality, and uneven access to clergy and institutional resources. Their growth was associated with pastoral experimentation, biblical reflection among lay people, liberation theology, and debates about the Church's relation to social change. This history is important, but it is not a universal template. Latin American communities developed within particular political and ecclesial conditions; Asian and Indonesian communities encounter different histories of colonialism, ethnic and linguistic plurality, religious majorities and minorities, local ritual worlds, and patterns of pastoral organization. The transfer of a Latin American vocabulary or programme without contextual interpretation risks obscuring these differences and treating communities as interchangeable.[3]

In Indonesia, Komunitas Basis Gerejawi (KBG) are situated within a nationally and locally diverse Catholic Church. They may gather around Scripture, prayer, catechesis, neighbourhood relations, and mutual assistance, but their forms differ according to diocese, parish, geography, community histories, leadership practices, and available pastoral resources. Indonesian catechetical publications have explicitly framed KBG as places where people share Scripture, reflect critically on everyday problems, and seek responses together. Local studies likewise indicate that the name, organization, and practical meaning of a KBG may intersect with existing parish units and regional pastoral idioms. These sources support contextual attention, not a claim that all KBG share one uniform structure or have already achieved social transformation.[4]

The social setting also requires qualification. Inequality, exclusion, individualism, secularization, environmental degradation, and religious polarization can affect communities, but their forms and salience differ across locations and periods. They should be investigated as local conditions rather than asserted as universal traits of Indonesian society or of Indonesian Catholics. Religious pluralism is likewise both

a lived reality and a field of ethical relationship: Christian identity can remain explicit while Christians cooperate with neighbours of other faiths on shared concerns, provided that dialogue respects difference, freedom, and the dignity of all. Such cooperation is not the erasure of ecclesial particularity; it is a way of inhabiting public life without making social solidarity conditional on religious sameness.[5]

Philip Sheldrake's work offers a relevant theological lens because it resists reducing spirituality either to timeless inner experience or to a specialist religious technique. He treats Christian spirituality as historically formed, embodied, and situated: ways of life take shape through particular traditions, relationships, places, social practices, and interpretations of the world. His analysis of the relationship between spirituality and social transformation invites attention to the public consequences of spiritual imagination while resisting a simplistic equation between religious language and ethical outcomes. For this study, Sheldrake provides the primary theological framework; liberation theology, communion ecclesiology, Catholic social teaching, and participatory pedagogy are used selectively as interlocutors rather than substituted as the governing theory.

For analytic clarity, the article synthesizes Sheldrake's broader writings through three dimensions: self-transformation, relational transformation, and world-transformation. These are not presented as a fixed three-part schema coined by Sheldrake. They name a heuristic developed by the authors to trace how interior renewal, relationships, and public action may be linked in BEC life. The distinction is useful because the dimensions are analytically separable but practically interdependent: self-renewal without relational accountability risks privatization; solidarity without reflection may reproduce paternalism; and public action without sustained formation may become instrumental or partisan. The analysis asks what each dimension contributes while recognizing that the categories overlap in actual practice.[6]

A qualified research gap motivates the study. Scholarship has explored the theology and history of BECs, the social implications of spirituality, Indonesian KBG practice, and participatory forms of community development. These literatures do not warrant a sweeping claim that prior studies have ignored the relation among formation, solidarity, lay leadership, and social responsibility. Rather, the present article identifies a need for a more explicit conceptual integration of these elements around Sheldrake's account of contextual and embodied spirituality, with special attention to Indonesian pastoral plurality. This gap is interpretive and programmatic: it concerns the articulation of a framework, not the absence of all previous empirical or theological work on any single theme.[7]

The need for integration also reflects a problem of conceptual translation. 'Formation,' 'community,' and 'transformation' can name different things across

theological and social-scientific writing. Formation may refer to catechetical learning, habituation, conversion, or discernment; community can mean a bounded organization or a network of relationships; transformation can mean personal change, institutional reform, or wider structural change. If these meanings remain implicit, a pastoral proposal may move too quickly from prayer to an expected social result. This study makes the levels explicit so that theological claims about vocation are not confused with empirical claims about an initiative's effects.[8]

A contextual synthesis must also retain the asymmetry between theological ideals and social realities. The Church's teaching on communion and human dignity offers a standard by which practice may be judged, not a description of how power is actually distributed in every parish. Conversely, contextual analysis can show how economic and cultural conditions constrain participation, but it does not by itself explain the theological meaning communities give to their practices. Bringing these modes of reasoning into conversation allows the article to ask both what BEC life ought to embody and what further evidence would be needed to know whether a given community does so.[9]

The research question is: How can Sheldrake's framework clarify a spiritually grounded model of BEC formation and social engagement in the Indonesian context? The argument is that transformative spirituality can connect personal spiritual formation, communal solidarity, and public responsibility when these are cultivated through five mutually supporting themes: shared spiritual formation, communal solidarity, social responsibility, participatory leadership, and ecclesial embedding. The article also proposes a pastoral cycle of contemplation, discernment, action, and evaluation, returning to renewed contemplation. This is a contextual theological-pastoral synthesis rather than a new model empirically validated in Indonesian communities.[10]

The contribution has three limits as well as three ambitions. First, it offers a conceptual map that makes explicit relationships among Sheldrake's spiritual theology, BEC ecclesiology, and pastoral practice. Second, it develops conditional proposals for practice while distinguishing them from existing findings about what KBG actually do. Third, it identifies questions for comparative research across communities with different social and ecclesial conditions. The framework does not claim to predict outcomes or establish that a particular devotional method causes measurable social change. Its value must ultimately be judged by theological coherence, contextual adequacy, ethical safeguards, and careful empirical inquiry.[11]

Method

This study uses qualitative library research because its principal task is interpretive: to clarify concepts, compare theological arguments, and construct a

contextual pastoral synthesis from published sources. The research question does not ask how often a practice occurs or whether an intervention has measurable effects. A library-based design is therefore suited to examining the conceptual relations among spirituality, ecclesial community, and social responsibility while preserving the distinction between normative theological claims and evidence about lived practice. It cannot, however, establish how BEC members themselves understand these terms, how pastoral processes unfold in particular parishes, or whether the proposed cycle produces the effects anticipated here.[12]

Philip Sheldrake's principal works on Christian spirituality, lived tradition, and social transformation function as the primary theoretical sources. The analysis draws especially on his overview of spirituality, his historical and practical explorations, and his essay on Christian spirituality and social transformation. These texts are read as a body of work rather than as a single closed system. The focus is on his accounts of spirituality as a contextual way of life, the formation of identity through history and place, and the relation between contemplative depth and public engagement. Where the present article formulates the three dimensions or the five BEC themes, it marks these as the authors' interpretive organization, not as direct quotations or categories explicitly listed by Sheldrake.[13]

A second body of literature concerns the history, ecclesiology, and pastoral organization of BECs and small Christian communities. Foundational theological accounts are read alongside official ecclesial texts that address basic communities, catechesis, mission, and the participation of the laity. A third body includes scholarship on spirituality and social transformation, community development, and reflective or participatory practice. A fourth body comprises Indonesian pastoral publications and studies on KBG, including material that describes contextual formation and local organizational practice. These materials are not treated as equivalent kinds of evidence: magisterial documents state normative ecclesial teaching; historical and scholarly studies interpret movements and concepts; local publications may illuminate particular practices but cannot represent every diocese or community.[14]

Sources were selected purposively on the basis of relevance to the research question, scholarly or ecclesial credibility, conceptual usefulness, and identifiable publication records. Priority was given to Sheldrake's published work; recognized scholarship on BECs; peer-reviewed studies directly concerning spiritual or social transformation; official Church documents; and Indonesian pastoral publications that speak to KBG formation. More recent scholarship was included where it substantively illuminated BEC economics, interreligious harmony, synodality, or the Indonesian context, rather than simply because it was recent. The source set is

documented in the bibliography. It does not constitute a systematic database review or a claim to have captured all literature in the field.[15]

The analytic process was informed by Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach to thematic analysis: familiarization with the material; initial coding; development of candidate themes; review of themes against the sources; definition and naming; and interpretive writing. Applied to documentary material, these phases were not a mechanical count of words or an inter-coder procedure. Repeated reading identified passages relevant to spirituality, personal renewal, communal relations, public action, leadership, and ecclesial structures. Initial codes were compared across the theoretical, ecclesial, and contextual source groups, with attention to differences in genre and authority.[16]

Candidate themes were then refined through comparison. Codes concerning prayer, Scripture, catechesis, and reflection on lived experience were synthesized as shared spiritual formation; codes on mutuality, inclusion, and trust as communal solidarity; and codes on justice, poverty, ecological concern, and the common good as social responsibility. References to lay agency, decision-making, and distributed responsibility informed participatory leadership, while pastoral accompaniment, parish relations, continuity, and accountability informed ecclesial embedding. Contextual discernment and integration of prayer with social mission—two recurrent findings in the source manuscript—are retained as cross-cutting processes that join these five themes rather than omitted as redundant categories.[17]

The final step was theological-pastoral synthesis: the authors related the five themes to the three analytical dimensions and proposed a cyclical process as a practical heuristic. Source-based findings are distinguished from the article's own propositions by explicit wording such as 'the literature describes,' 'this article interprets,' and 'we propose.' As an interpretive literature study, the research does not claim to provide an exhaustive review of all relevant publications or to measure the empirical effectiveness of the proposed pastoral framework. Its findings should therefore be understood as a conceptual synthesis grounded in selected theological, ecclesial, and pastoral literature, rather than as generalizable evidence of actual practices across BECs.

Because this is an interpretive literature study, the analysis also attends to the authority and limitations of each source type. Official documents are used to establish ecclesial teaching, not to demonstrate local implementation. Peer-reviewed theological or social research is used for its stated argument and setting, not as proof of a universal pattern. Indonesian pastoral publications supply context-specific descriptions and proposals, but their local reach is not generalized to all KBG. This source-sensitive reading helps prevent a conceptual synthesis from turning normative teaching into purported field evidence or treating a single case study as

representative of a diverse national church. The selection of literature was intended to provide complementary theological, ecclesial, and contextual perspectives necessary for addressing the research question, rather than statistical representativeness or comprehensive coverage of the field.

Findings and Discussion

The findings presented in this section take the form of a theological-pastoral synthesis of the selected literature rather than empirical observations of Basic Ecclesial Communities. The discussion proceeds from the ecclesial identity and historical development of BECs to their contextual expression in Asia and Indonesia, before examining Sheldrake's understanding of spirituality as a framework for interpreting personal, relational, and social transformation. On this basis, five interrelated themes are developed: shared spiritual formation, communal solidarity, social responsibility, participatory leadership, and ecclesial embedding. These themes represent the authors' interpretive organization of the literature and provide the basis for the pastoral framework proposed in the subsequent discussion.

1. Basic Ecclesial Communities: history, ecclesial identity, and mission

The synthesis first confirms that BECs are best understood through the interaction of grassroots practice and ecclesial communion. Their historical emergence cannot be reduced to one cause or one model. In Latin America, community-based pastoral forms took shape in multiple local settings, often amid poverty, political repression, social movements, changing patterns of lay participation, and shortages of ordained ministers. Biblical reflection and shared prayer could enable ordinary Christians to interpret their experience and articulate a sense of ecclesial agency. Liberation theology supplied important interpretive resources for attending to structural injustice, while pastoral renewal and liturgical change also mattered. The history is therefore plural and contested, not a single linear movement from clerical absence to social emancipation.[18]

Liberation theology illuminates why faith reflection may include economic and political realities rather than remain at the level of individual morality. It directs theological attention toward the lived conditions of impoverished and excluded people and asks how Christian praxis relates to justice. Yet liberation theology should not be used as a label that flattens the diversity of BECs or settles every dispute about strategy. Nor should a community's social engagement be mistaken for partisan alignment. In the present argument, liberationist attention to structural conditions complements Sheldrake's insistence that spirituality is embodied and public; Sheldrake remains the primary framework for integrating spiritual life and transformation.[19]

Communion ecclesiology contributes a different but related emphasis: the Church is not only an institutional structure but a people called into communion, with gifts and responsibilities distributed among its members. The Second Vatican Council's account of the People of God and the role of the laity provides an ecclesial grammar for participation; it does not imply that every local group is self-sufficient or detached from bishops, priests, sacramental life, and the wider Church. BECs become ecclesial insofar as their local life remains related to the Church's common faith and mission, while their grounded knowledge and charisms can enrich larger structures.[20]

Official teaching has repeatedly acknowledged small or basic communities while insisting on criteria of ecclesial communion. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* recognizes the variety of base communities and distinguishes groups that remain in solidarity with the Church and are nourished by its teaching from formations that become sectarian or reject ecclesial oversight. *Redemptoris Missio* describes ecclesial basic communities as centers of Christian formation and missionary life, especially where they are small, locally rooted, and marked by mutual responsibility. These documents establish a normative horizon, not an empirical claim that every community realizes the ideal or that all regions have adopted the same organization.[21]

The *General Directory for Catechesis* similarly links small communities with a more personal deepening of faith and a concrete experience of ecclesial communion. This matters because catechesis in a BEC need not be reduced to the delivery of content by an expert. It can include learning to interpret Scripture, tradition, and daily experience together. But it should not romanticize informality: sound formation requires theological resources, pastoral accompaniment, and a relationship to the parish's sacramental and teaching life. BECs are neither substitutes for catechesis nor merely venues for it; their communal practices can become a context in which faith is learned, tested, and enacted.[22]

The synthesis therefore defines a BEC functionally and relationally: it is a local ecclesial community where Christians gather around faith, prayer, mutual relationships, and participation in the Church's mission, with potential to engage the conditions of common life. 'Potential' is essential. Small scale may enable familiarity and reciprocal care, but it may also intensify social pressure or concentrate influence among a few leaders. Ecclesial recognition can support continuity, but bureaucratic control can limit local initiative. A theological account must hold both possibilities together rather than treating grassroots identity as a guarantee of justice or effectiveness.[23]

Evangelization and social responsibility are related but should not be collapsed into one another. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* presents evangelization as the Church's mission of witness and proclamation, attentive to the renewal of persons and social

life; it does not authorize reducing evangelization to development work. *Redemptoris Missio* situates basic communities within the Church's missionary life, while Catholic social teaching helps articulate duties toward dignity and the common good. For BECs, the implication is an integrated but non-instrumental practice: social service should not be a covert recruitment device, and proclamation should not ignore the conditions in which neighbours experience dignity, vulnerability, and hope.[24]

2. Asian and Indonesian contexts: contextualization and plural belonging

The Asian pastoral setting makes contextualization indispensable. The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences has emphasized a church that engages local cultures and religious traditions through dialogue and shared life. This orientation differs in emphasis from a direct replication of the Latin American experience, though it does not exclude learning from it. In many Asian settings, Christians live as a minority among neighbours of other faiths; local identities may be shaped by languages, kinship, customary practices, migration, and distinct political histories. BEC formation must therefore be attentive to the social world members inhabit and to the relationships that precede parish programmes.[25]

Indonesia's plural religious and cultural landscape sharpens the question of how Christian identity and civic cooperation can coexist. A KBG may draw its theological identity from Scripture, worship, and Catholic tradition while joining neighbours of other faiths in care for a shared environment, support for families in hardship, or local peacebuilding. Such cooperation requires discernment about purpose, language, power, and safety; it should not be instrumentalized as a strategy for proselytism or used to hide theological difference. Catholic teaching on interreligious dialogue and social friendship supports respectful encounter that neither relativizes truth nor diminishes the freedom and dignity of others.[26]

Recent work on BECs in the Philippines and India provides comparative insights, not direct evidence about Indonesian KBG. Macaraan's study of BECs in the Diocese of Boac examines the possibility of an economic alternative grounded in community practice. Rayappan discusses how BECs can contribute to religious and social harmony in a context of polarization. These studies indicate the range of public concerns that communities may address, while their distinct settings warn against transferring conclusions without local testing. A theological-pastoral synthesis can learn from their questions economic solidarity and interreligious relations—without presenting their findings as Indonesian outcomes.[27]

Indonesian KBG publications add more localized perspectives. Komkat KWI's catechetical materials frame community learning as a process of sharing, critical reflection, and generating ideas in relation to everyday life. Kawuwung's use of Appreciative Inquiry offers one contextual approach to empowerment, while Lando

and Pangemanan discuss KBG in a particular parish of the Manado diocese. These works are useful because they bring local pastoral vocabulary and organization into view. Their scope remains bounded by the locations and purposes of each publication; they do not justify claims that all Indonesian KBG function similarly or that a single model is nationally representative.[28]

Contextual application also requires resisting generalizations about individualism, secularization, inequality, and exclusion. Such forces may be salient in certain urban, rural, migrant, or economically precarious communities, but they do not affect every KBG in the same way. In one setting, the priority may be youth participation; in another, land or environmental pressure; elsewhere, the main concern may be access to pastoral accompaniment or the inclusion of newcomers. The model therefore begins with listening and locally grounded analysis rather than importing a preselected diagnosis. The category 'Indonesian context' names plurality and complexity, not a single cultural profile.[29]

Sheldrake's attention to place reinforces this contextual discipline. Place is more than geographical backdrop: memory, work, relationships, cultural practice, and social power shape what a community can perceive and do. A spiritual practice becomes contextual when members ask how the Gospel is encountered in their particular neighbourhood, not when a generic method is merely translated into local language. At the same time, place should not be essentialized as an unchanging tradition. Migration, digital communication, economic shifts, and generational differences reshape local life. A KBG's discernment needs both rootedness and the capacity to question inherited arrangements.[30]

Contextualization includes choices about language, symbols, meeting forms, and relationships with customary leaders, but it cannot be reduced to adapting external materials. A local form is not automatically inclusive merely because it is culturally familiar; inherited practices may carry exclusions that some members experience differently. Conversely, imported participatory methods may presume time, literacy, or individual speech styles not equally available to all. KBG leaders should therefore ask whose cultural knowledge informs decisions and whether less visible members can challenge a proposed adaptation. This is a reason for locally negotiated practice and comparative learning, not a reason to assume either cultural uniformity or cultural isolation.[31]

3. Sheldrake's transformative spirituality: an analytical synthesis

Sheldrake's contribution begins with a broad account of spirituality as a lived orientation rather than a detachable compartment of human existence. Christian spirituality involves historically shaped ways of inhabiting life before God, including practices, relationships, forms of attention, and patterns of action. It is embodied

because human beings experience meaning through bodies and material conditions; contextual because spiritual life is mediated by histories and places; relational because persons are formed with and through others; and potentially transformative because spiritual commitments can re-order identity, desire, and engagement with the world. This description resists both disembodied inwardness and simplistic instrumentalism in which spirituality is valued only for measurable social outputs.[32]

Sheldrake's historical approach also cautions against treating 'spirituality' as a timeless, self-evident term. Traditions of prayer and discipleship have developed in changing cultural circumstances, and spiritual language can be appropriated in different ways. For BECs, this historical awareness encourages dialogue between inherited Catholic practices and current local questions. It also asks communities to examine who has authority to define authentic spirituality, whose experiences are heard, and whether familiar devotions enable or inhibit attention to suffering. Continuity with tradition and critical renewal are not opposites; each can correct the other when interpreted through communal discernment.[33]

The first analytical dimension, self-transformation, refers to interior renewal and a changed pattern of living. It includes conversion, reflection, discernment, and the reorientation of desire toward God and neighbour. In a BEC, this does not mean that individuals must attain a private state of moral perfection before joining social action. Rather, shared prayer and examination of life may expose habits such as indifference, prejudice, or the desire to control decisions. Spiritual formation can create space to name such habits and to practice repentance and hope. These are theological possibilities, not measured psychological effects established by this study.[34]

The second dimension, relational transformation, names the renewal of relationships through solidarity, mutual responsibility, dialogue, reconciliation, and inclusion. *Spirituality* is tested in how community members treat one another, particularly where status, gender, age, education, ethnicity, or economic security shape influence. Relationships can be places of grace and mutual support, but they can also sustain dependency or silence. A spiritual account must therefore ask whether practices of listening and forgiveness are joined to truth-telling and accountability. Forgiveness cannot be demanded from those harmed as a substitute for protection or justice; reconciliation requires recognition of wrongs and conditions that make participation safe.

The third dimension, world-transformation, refers to the public embodiment of values such as human dignity, justice, care for creation, and the common good. Sheldrake's writing connects spiritual traditions with social change, but the article does not attribute to him a detailed economic or political programme. The phrase 'world-transformation' is the authors' analytical term for the outward horizon of the synthesis. Catholic social teaching and contextual social analysis help specify the

issues that may be considered, while Sheldrake's account helps ask how the community's spiritual practices form its attention and commitments. Neither source alone prescribes one universal BEC intervention.[35]

The three dimensions are distinguishable in analysis but mutually implicated in practice. Self-transformation can make a person more open to hearing others; changed relationships may enable a community to identify shared responsibilities; public action can in turn reveal habits and power relations that need further conversion. This is not a causal chain in which an inward stage reliably produces communal or structural change. It is a theological account of reciprocal formation: practice and reflection may alter one another, but social change also depends on political, economic, institutional, and cultural conditions beyond a BEC's control. The framework thus rejects both privatization and the promise that spirituality alone can overcome structural injustice.[36]

A further contribution in Sheldrake is the interdependence of contemplation and public engagement. Contemplation is not simply retreat from history; it can cultivate receptivity and moral attention. Public action, in turn, can expose where spiritual language is evasive or selective. The article interprets this relation as a 'mystical-prophetic' tension: contemplative depth sustains courageous witness, while prophetic action keeps spiritual interpretation answerable to people's actual conditions. This phrase describes the authors' synthesis rather than a complete formula attributed to Sheldrake. Its purpose is to prevent BECs from separating devotional intensity from ethical responsibility or treating activism as self-validating.

This account also has limits that matter for practical theology. A focus on spiritual dispositions can understate how unequal access to time, money, education, safety, or institutional authority shapes a member's capacity to participate. An appeal to conversion may inadvertently individualize a problem sustained by rules, markets, or state policies. Conversely, structural analysis can overlook the meaning people derive from worship and personal vocation. The framework must therefore hold spiritual interpretation and social analysis in reciprocal relation: members' moral formation matters, while adequate accounts of social conditions require evidence and may require collaboration beyond the parish.

4. Five themes of transformative BEC formation

1) Shared spiritual formation

Shared spiritual formation is the first theme because a community needs practices through which members learn to interpret faith and life together. Communal prayer, Scripture reflection, liturgical participation, theological learning, and reflection on lived experience can provide such a framework. Their value lies not merely in regular attendance but in the habits of attention they cultivate: listening to the biblical text,

listening to neighbours, noticing whose accounts are absent, and bringing ordinary concerns into theological conversation. These practices can support a common language for discernment without requiring members to agree in advance about every diagnosis or action.[37]

Formation that serves transformation cannot be reduced to transmitting religious information, though doctrinal learning remains important. It also includes learning how Christian convictions bear on work, family life, local relationships, public institutions, and ecological responsibilities. A BEC meeting might read a Gospel passage alongside a question raised by residents, distinguish what the text says from the group's interpretation, and identify what further knowledge is needed before choosing a response. Such a process can develop theological judgment and practical humility. The example is a proposal for formation, not a report of an observed programme or evidence of its effectiveness.[38]

A critical safeguard is to avoid using Scripture as a quick endorsement for a leader's preferred solution. Facilitators can invite multiple readings, make space for questions, and distinguish textual interpretation, moral principles, and empirical claims about local conditions. When the issue concerns poverty, safety, or environmental risk, spiritual reflection should not replace relevant technical or social knowledge. The purpose of integrating Scripture and experience is not to make the Bible function as a policy manual; it is to form a community able to discern responsibly, acknowledge uncertainty, and remain accountable to Gospel commitments.

2) Communal solidarity

Communal solidarity connects formation with mutual responsibility. It is more than the sentiment of belonging or a temporary response to crisis; it involves practices of reciprocity through which members recognize one another as agents with dignity and gifts. Shared meals, visits, practical support, and attentive listening may strengthen relationships, but solidarity becomes transformative when it crosses lines of status and includes people who are easily overlooked. In this article, solidarity is not a claim that KBG are free of conflict. It is a normative practice that names the work of sustaining trust while addressing disagreements and unequal influence.[39]

Participation by women, young people, lay members with limited formal authority, persons with disabilities, migrants, and economically vulnerable neighbours should be considered in the design of meetings and initiatives. These categories are not interchangeable and should not be treated as a checklist detached from local realities. The practical question is who can speak, whose time and care work are recognized, who controls information, and whose concerns shape decisions. Where participation is uneven, facilitators may need accessible meeting times, translation,

childcare, confidential channels for concerns, or rotating roles. These measures are proposals requiring adaptation, not presumptions about what every community lacks.[40]

Solidarity also requires resisting paternalism. Assistance may be necessary, but the people affected by a problem should help define it, decide what support is appropriate, and evaluate whether the response preserves their agency. A community that speaks on behalf of vulnerable families without listening to them can unintentionally reinforce dependency or stigma. Shared spiritual formation can challenge this risk by treating service as reciprocal encounter rather than benevolence from a superior group. Where direct participation is not safe or feasible, the community should explain why and seek consent and trusted representation rather than presume to know another person's needs.

3) Social responsibility

Social responsibility names a community's obligation to attend to the conditions that affect human dignity and shared life. BECs may discern concerns such as poverty, unequal access to education or health, environmental harm, social isolation, or exclusion, but the relevant issues must emerge from local listening and evidence. Theological reflection can bring Scripture and Catholic social teaching into conversation with residents' accounts and relevant knowledge. The result should be an informed judgment about possible responsibility, not a claim that every issue is within a community's competence or that moral concern alone supplies the expertise needed to address it.[41]

A useful distinction is between immediate charitable response and sustained attention to causes. Food, transport, emergency funds, or companionship may meet urgent needs and express neighbourly care. They do not necessarily change the conditions that repeatedly produce hardship. In some contexts, a BEC may have a constructive role in connecting families to existing services, supporting a local cooperative, advocating for safer shared spaces, or joining an ecological initiative. The choice between charity and structural engagement is not an either-or: immediate relief may be indispensable, while longer-term analysis asks whether policy, access, employment, land use, or social relations contribute to recurring vulnerability.[42]

Social responsibility also extends to care for creation and the common good. The link between ecological harm and social vulnerability can be explored through local experience: who bears the cost of pollution, flooding, unsafe water, or changing land use, and who participates in decisions? A KBG need not become an environmental organization to act responsibly. It may begin with prayerful attention, accurate information, cooperation with local actors, and a modest initiative suited to capacity. Theologically, care for creation belongs within an integral account of human

relationships; practically, proposals should be evaluated for feasibility, unintended burdens, and whether affected residents share authority.

4) Participatory leadership

Participatory leadership is the organizational theme that enables shared formation and solidarity to shape decisions. It includes listening, transparent deliberation, distributed responsibility, accountability, and processes for addressing conflict. Lay leadership can deepen ecclesial participation by drawing on the knowledge and gifts of members who are not ordained. But 'participatory' should not be used as a label for meetings in which a leader has already decided the outcome. Genuine participation entails access to relevant information, meaningful opportunity to propose alternatives, clarity about who has authority, and an account of how decisions were made.[43]

Leadership can be distributed through rotating facilitation, shared task groups, open reporting, agreed terms of service, and opportunities for members to develop skills in discernment and conflict resolution. Such arrangements may help limit overdependence on one coordinator, but formal rotation is not automatically equitable: confident or well-connected members may continue to dominate informally. Communities need to observe who speaks and who performs less visible work, invite dissent without retaliation, and create a clear route for raising concerns. These are criteria for future assessment, not proof that any proposed practice will resolve power differences.

Conflict is not necessarily evidence of failed communion. Disagreement can reveal different experiences, competing needs, or previously unspoken harm. Participatory leadership should therefore provide ways to distinguish factual dispute, theological disagreement, interpersonal conflict, and questions of safety or rights. Reconciliation should not be rushed to protect institutional reputation. Where there is serious harm, the community's response must respect safeguarding policies and appropriate civil or ecclesial processes; an informal pastoral conversation cannot replace them. Leadership accountability includes knowing when a local group should seek professional or institutional support.[44]

The role of pastoral leaders is consequently facilitative and accountable rather than either absent or dominant. Priests, religious, catechists, and lay coordinators may help members understand ecclesial teaching, convene reflection, protect fair process, and connect the group to wider expertise. Their responsibility is not to withdraw from leadership but to enable gifts across the community and to make the boundaries of authority clear. This is especially important where parish structures formally recognize one coordinator while informal influence rests elsewhere. Future

field studies should compare how formal roles, gendered expectations, age, and economic status shape actual decision-making.[45]

5) Ecclesial embedding

Ecclesial embedding links local initiative to the continuity, sacramental life, and mission of the wider Church. A BEC's social concern should not become an isolated project detached from parish accompaniment, nor should the parish regard grassroots communities only as channels for administrative tasks. A reciprocal relationship allows local knowledge and initiative to inform pastoral planning while enabling parish and diocesan structures to provide formation, resources, coordination, and access to wider networks. Official ecclesial teaching on basic communities emphasizes this relationship of solidarity with the Church and unity with pastors; the article interprets such communion as compatible with meaningful lay agency.[46]

Embedding can support continuity when local leaders change, volunteers tire, or a project requires resources beyond a single group. Parish accompaniment may include theological formation, safeguarding advice, conflict mediation, links to social services, and coordination with other communities. Yet institutional support must not eliminate local creativity or require every initiative to follow one centralized model. A subsidiarity-oriented approach asks which decisions are best made locally and which require diocesan or parish authority, specialist competence, or wider coordination. The balance is contextual and should be negotiated openly rather than assumed.[47]

Accountability operates in both directions. BEC leaders should communicate plans, use shared resources transparently, and explain how members' contributions are represented. Parish or diocesan leaders should clarify expectations, provide feedback, and recognize the limits of volunteers' capacity. Ecclesial embedding also requires attention to unequal parish resources: one community may have access to formation personnel and meeting space, while another depends on lay initiative and irregular support. A sustainable model cannot assume identical resources; it should make support needs visible and avoid judging communities solely by the number or scale of activities they can organize.[48]

5. Integrating the framework: themes and dimensions

The five themes clarify how the three analytical dimensions may be expressed in BEC life. Shared spiritual formation principally nurtures self-transformation by providing practices of reflection, conversion, and discernment. Communal solidarity gives relational transformation a practical form through reciprocity, inclusion, and mutual care. Participatory leadership extends relational transformation into the distribution of voice and responsibility. Social responsibility connects the community

to world-transformation by directing attention toward dignity, justice, creation, and the common good. Ecclesial embedding supports continuity and accountability across all three dimensions rather than belonging to only one.[49]

This mapping is a conceptual synthesis by the authors. It is not a matrix Sheldrake himself published, nor an empirical classification of communities. Its benefit is explanatory: it makes visible how a failure in one domain can weaken the whole. Formation without solidarity can remain intellectual or devotional; solidarity without leadership accountability may be selective; public action without discernment can become reactive; and ecclesial support without local agency can become bureaucratic. Conversely, no single theme guarantees transformation. The framework describes mutually reinforcing conditions that may make transformative practice more coherent and ethically answerable.[50]

Three assumptions underlie the synthesis. First, spiritual formation can shape attention and moral imagination, but does not mechanically produce a social outcome. Second, communal practices are ambivalent: they can enable belonging and action but can also reproduce hierarchy, exclusion, or conformity. Third, social transformation depends on relations and institutions beyond the BEC, including the parish, civil society, local government, and economic structures. These assumptions constrain the model's claims and guard against treating spirituality as a self-sufficient remedy for political or material problems.[51]

The framework yields propositions that can be examined in future field studies. Communities that regularly connect shared spiritual reflection with members' accounts of local life may describe clearer links between faith and social concerns; this is a research proposition, not a finding of this study. More inclusive decision-making may be associated with a broader distribution of initiative, although local power relations could mediate that association. Parish accompaniment that combines resources with respect for local agency may help sustain activities over time. Comparative research should test these possibilities, attend to counterexamples, and examine cases in which spiritual formation does not lead to collective action.[52]

6. The cyclical pastoral model

To translate the synthesis into a pastoral heuristic, the article proposes the cycle: contemplation → discernment → action → evaluation → renewed contemplation. 'Cycle' signals recurrence rather than a fixed sequence or guaranteed progression. Communities may return to earlier questions, pause action when risks emerge, or discover that a concern requires external expertise. Contemplation here refers to prayerful attention to God, Scripture, persons, and place; discernment interprets what has been noticed; action responds within available capacity; evaluation

examines consequences and process; and renewed contemplation allows experience to reshape spiritual understanding and priorities.[53]

Contemplation establishes the theological orientation of the cycle. A community might begin with a Gospel text, silent prayer, liturgy, or a shared story about a local concern. The aim is neither to force a social agenda into every devotional practice nor to insulate prayer from daily life. Facilitators can invite members to notice their own reactions, listen to affected persons, and name questions without rushing to a solution. Ethical safeguards include respect for privacy, voluntary sharing, sensitivity to trauma, and avoidance of using prayer meetings to pressure vulnerable members to disclose personal difficulties.[54]

Discernment then combines spiritual reflection with contextual inquiry. Members can identify whose experience is represented, distinguish observations from assumptions, and ask what additional information or expertise is needed. A group considering assistance to vulnerable families might listen to residents, identify existing services, and clarify whether the immediate need concerns food, transport, care, or access to rights. A community considering an environmental initiative might consult those affected and gather appropriate information about the issue before acting. These examples illustrate proposed practice; they do not report programmes already implemented by the study's authors or evidence of their impact.[55]

Discernment should include explicit ethical questions: Who defines the problem? Who benefits, bears the cost, or may be excluded? Is the response consistent with human dignity and religious freedom? Could the initiative expose participants to stigma, retaliation, or partisan appropriation? What competence and permissions are required? Such questions make the cycle slower at times, but they help prevent good intentions from overriding consent or local knowledge. When risks are beyond the group's capacity, referral, partnership, or non-action may be more responsible than proceeding alone.[56]

Action should be proportionate to the community's mandate and capacity. Possible actions include a time-limited solidarity effort, a referral network, a shared environmental activity, interreligious cooperation around a locally identified concern, or a participatory contribution to parish planning. The choice depends on what affected people identify as useful, what resources are available, and whether a suitable partner exists. A BEC should not claim to represent an entire neighbourhood without authorization, nor should it promise outcomes that depend on government or other institutions. Clear roles, transparent use of funds, and agreed communication support trust.[57]

Evaluation asks what happened, for whom, through whose participation, and with what unintended effects. It includes process and outcome questions. Process indicators might include whose voices shaped the plan, whether responsibilities were

shared, whether members could question decisions, and whether resources were used transparently. Outcome indicators must be tailored to the initiative: continuity of support, perceived accessibility, ecological change, or whether affected people judge the response useful. Such indicators are candidates for future empirical study; this library research has collected no measurements and cannot specify a universally valid metric.[58]

Renewed contemplation completes and reopens the cycle. The community returns to prayer and theological reflection not to declare success or failure prematurely but to interpret experience, acknowledge harm or limitation, give thanks, and discern what should change. Evaluation may reveal that a proposed action was poorly matched to need, that participants were unevenly heard, or that a wider institution must take responsibility. Renewed formation can then revise priorities, leadership arrangements, and future action. This return prevents evaluation from becoming merely managerial and helps keep social engagement answerable to the Gospel and to those affected.[59]

For empirical assessment, indicators should correspond to each phase and remain sensitive to context. Researchers might examine whether Scripture and prayer are explicitly connected to local reflection; whether discernment includes affected people and alternative interpretations; whether agreed actions have named responsibilities and transparent resources; whether evaluation includes participants' accounts and unintended consequences; and whether subsequent meetings revise priorities in light of that evaluation. These are candidate questions rather than validated scales. Numerical indicators, if used in later research, should be combined with qualitative accounts and should not reduce spiritual depth or communal trust to a proxy score.[60]

7. Challenges, risks, and safeguards

Different understandings of spirituality and transformation can create tension. Some members may prioritize devotion and sacramental practice; others may emphasize public justice or environmental responsibility. The framework does not ask communities to choose one at the expense of the other. It asks how prayer, conversion, relationships, and public commitment can be interpreted together, while allowing legitimate differences about means and priorities. Dialogue requires patient theological learning, clear distinctions between core commitments and optional methods, and a willingness to examine whether either devotionalism or activism has become detached from the community's wider vocation.[61]

Organizational resistance and limited resources may constrain change. Familiar routines can provide stability and should not be dismissed as mere conservatism; they may also protect members' sense of belonging. At the same time, habits can

exclude new voices or avoid difficult concerns. Human, financial, and pastoral resources vary greatly across parishes, and volunteers may lack training in social analysis, facilitation, or conflict resolution. A responsible framework recommends incremental experimentation, access to pastoral accompaniment, and realistic scope rather than equating activity volume with spiritual vitality.[62]

Unequal participation and leadership concentration are particularly serious risks because they can hide behind the language of community. Older or more educated members, office-holders, or people with greater social status may dominate discussion, while women, youth, migrants, poorer households, or people with disabilities are treated as beneficiaries rather than contributors. Safeguards include transparent agendas, deliberate invitation, accessible formats, rotating responsibilities where appropriate, confidential feedback channels, and explicit review of who speaks and whose proposals are adopted. No procedure can eliminate power asymmetry by itself; it can make it more visible and contestable.[63]

Social initiatives may also be politicized or captured by partisan interests. Public advocacy is not inherently inappropriate, but a BEC should be clear about its ecclesial purpose, its relationship to political actors, and the evidence supporting its claims. Transparent deliberation, disclosure of relevant interests, appropriate consultation with parish leadership, and protection for members who disagree can reduce the risk of coercion. Communities must not use religious authority to compel political affiliation or portray a particular party as identical with the Gospel. Where public engagement creates credible safety risks, careful assessment and institutional guidance are essential.[64]

Finally, solidarity can become paternalistic, interreligious engagement can be instrumentalized, and community identity can be used to exclude. Safeguards include consent, shared problem definition, recognition of human dignity regardless of religious identity, honest dialogue about difference, and accountability to people directly affected. Conflicts should not be silenced for the sake of an idealized image of communion. The article's central caution is therefore methodological and theological: communities are sites of both grace and contestation. Their practices must be evaluated by participation, justice, truthfulness, and respect, not by religious labels alone.

Conclusion

The research question asked how Sheldrake's framework can clarify a spiritually grounded model of BEC formation and social engagement in Indonesia. The answer is that his contextual, embodied, historical, and relational account of spirituality provides a theological orientation for connecting spiritual formation with communal life and public responsibility. Organized here through the authors' analytical dimensions of self-transformation, relational transformation, and world-transformation, this

approach helps explain how prayer and conversion may be related to solidarity, shared agency, justice, and the common good without reducing spirituality to private devotion or claiming that religious practice automatically changes society.

The five themes translate that orientation into a conceptual pastoral synthesis. Shared spiritual formation develops common practices of attention and interpretation; communal solidarity places mutual responsibility and inclusion at the centre; social responsibility directs discernment toward local conditions affecting dignity and common life; participatory leadership distributes voice and accountability; and ecclesial embedding connects local initiative to the wider Church's formation, resources, and mission. Together, they are linked by contemplation, discernment, action, evaluation, and renewed contemplation. The cycle is a heuristic for ongoing practice, not a linear recipe or proof of effectiveness.

The study's contribution is conceptual and contextual. It brings together literature on Sheldrake, BEC ecclesiology, Indonesian KBG, and social transformation to make their relationships explicit and to propose questions for practice and research. Its method is limited to qualitative library research and a purposively selected, non-exhaustive source set. It includes no interviews, field observations, programme assessments, or participant accounts. The article therefore does not establish how KBG currently enact the themes, whether the cycle improves outcomes, or whether its proposed safeguards work equally well in different settings.

Future research should undertake comparative field studies of KBG across Indonesian regions and parish contexts with different cultural, religious, economic, and institutional conditions. Such studies could examine who participates in discernment, how leadership is shared, whether reflection and action recur in practice, what social initiatives are sustained, how affected people evaluate them, and how accountability is maintained. They should also investigate counterexamples, conflict, exclusion, and initiatives that do not achieve their aims. Until such research is undertaken, transformative spirituality should be treated as a plausible theological-pastoral framework for inquiry and practice, not as an empirically validated model of social transformation.

For pastoral use, the proposed framework is best approached as a set of guiding questions rather than a prescribed programme: What is the community discerning? Whose experience informs its understanding? What spiritual and social resources are available? Who is accountable for action? How will those affected assess the response? These questions encourage BECs to relate spiritual formation to concrete social responsibilities while remaining attentive to local capacities, participatory decision-making, and accountability. In this way, the framework offers a practical orientation for pastoral reflection without prescribing uniform outcomes across diverse community settings.

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