Educatum: Jurnal Dunia Pendidikan
Vol.4, No.1, December 2026, hal.49-62
e-ISSN: 3031-1209
DOI: 10.62282/je.v4i1.49-62
https://jurnal.yayasanyutapendidikancerdas.com/index.php/educatum

Submitted on 22/09/2026;
Revised on 07/10/2026;
Accepted on 24/10/2026;

Sunday School as a Mini Church: Reading the Ecclesiological Dimension behind the Children's Class

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Abstract
Sunday School has generally been regarded merely as a learning space for children, so its ecclesial dimension has rarely been examined seriously in Christian Religious Education scholarship. This study explores the ecclesiological dimension inherent in the theology of Sunday School. It argues that the nature of the church as the Body of Christ and the people of God underlies the church's calling, commonly referred to among Indonesian Protestants as the Threefold Task of the Church: *koinonia* (fellowship), *marturia* (witness and proclamation of the gospel), and *diakonia* (ministry of love). This calling can serve as a conceptual foundation for Sunday School ministry. Employing a qualitative library research design, the study examines biblical texts, theological books, and recent journal articles through thematic content analysis and cross-source comparative reading. Findings show that Sunday School is not an activity supplementary to the main worship service but a concrete expression of the church as the Body of Christ and the people of God forming its youngest members. Through Sunday School, children are introduced to fellowship, trained to bear witness, taught the Word, and accustomed to serving others. The study contributes a framework of Sunday School as a mini church, namely the full presence of the church at the scale and in the language of children while remaining integrated into the congregation. Therefore, Sunday School ministry should rely not only on pedagogical-psychological approaches but also on a comprehensive ecclesiological awareness so that children are formed as members of the Body of Christ from an early age.

Keywords: christian education; ecclesiology; mini church; sunday school; threefold task of the church

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INTRODUCTION

Sunday School is a form of children's ministry commonly found in Protestant churches in Indonesia, including mainline, evangelical, and Pentecostal churches. Recent studies document its presence across diverse denominational contexts, such as the Indonesian Methodist Church (Hutagaol et al., 2021) and the Indonesian Christian Church (Prastika, 2022). Its origins can be traced to the initiative of Robert Raikes in eighteenth-century England, which was initially motivated by concern for the children of factory workers who had no access to formal education. From that starting point, Sunday School developed into a setting for the faith instruction of children that has almost always been integrated into the life of the local congregation (Boehlke, 2003).

However, in everyday ministry practice, Sunday School is often treated as a supplementary activity separate from the main worship service. Hutagaol et al. (2021) note that churches frequently marginalize children in their ministry and in the fulfillment of their calling.

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A similar pattern appears in other contexts. Chiroma's (2019) study of children's and youth ministers across several denominations in Nigeria found that many ministers regard children's ministry and youth ministry as entirely separate domains, even though both are integral to the ministry of the church. Mans and Rosseau (2024) argue that segregation in ministry results in the separation of age groups, limited involvement of all members in church life, and a low regard for children as part of the church. In such circumstances, Sunday School planning tends to be driven by pedagogical considerations and children's stages of psychological development, while its theological foundation, particularly its ecclesial content, often fails to receive serious attention.

Yet, when examined more closely from a theological perspective, the existence of Sunday School cannot be separated from the very nature of the church. The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed describes the church as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic (De Jonge & Aritonang, 2009). The New Testament portrays the church as the assembly of believers who are "called out" (*ekklesia*) to become the Body of Christ (*Alkitab Terjemahan Baru*, 1974/2011, 1 Corinthians 12:27), the people of God (1 Peter 2:9-10), and the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22). As a living fellowship, the church is called to carry out its mission in the world. Among Indonesian Protestant churches, this calling is generally summarized as the Threefold Task of the Church (*Tri Tugas Gereja*): *koinonia* (fellowship), *marturia* (witness, including the proclamation and teaching of the gospel), and *diakonia* (ministry of love) (Silitonga & Simatupang, 2023). All three are rooted in the pattern of life of the early church (Acts 2:41-47; 6:1-6) and in Christ's Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).

The existing literature reveals several tendencies. First, among the studies reviewed, Christian Religious Education (CRE) scholarship on Sunday School has typically focused on methods, curriculum, and child development (Homrighausen & Enklaar, 2008; Nuhamara, 2007), character formation (Nuhamara, 2018), practical-theological approaches (Panggabean, 2018), and teacher readiness and stewardship (Nikijuluw, 2022; Prastika, 2022). Second, studies addressing the mission and calling of the church through Sunday School remain limited to single-congregation case studies (Hutagaol et al., 2021). Third, the discussion of the place of children in the church has advanced further in the international literature through the notion of intergenerational ministry (Chiroma, 2019; Mans & Rosseau, 2024; Weber & de Beer, 2016), but it has not yet been linked to the formulation of the Threefold Task of the Church commonly used in Indonesia. Fourth, the ecclesiological studies reviewed generally focus on the congregation as a whole (De Jonge & Aritonang, 2009; Putra & Santo, 2024; Repaningrum & Santo, 2023) and seldom position children as ecclesial subjects. To the author's knowledge, no study has specifically read Sunday School as an embodiment of the nature and calling of the church in its entirety. This study seeks to fill this gap.

Building on this mapping, the study addresses the following questions: How does the nature of the church as the Body of Christ and the people of God position children within the church? How can the three dimensions of the Threefold Task of the Church be read in the practice of Sunday School? What implications follow for contemporary Sunday School

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curriculum and ministry?

The key term “mini church” is used in this study as an analytical concept, not to denote a stand-alone church. It refers to the full presence of the church, with its nature and calling, at a scale and in a language appropriate to the world of children, while remaining integrated into the body of the congregation as a whole. Defined in this way, the mini church differs from *children's church*, which is generally understood as a children's worship service or program running parallel to adult worship, and from the notion of the family as a small church (*ecclesia domestica*) in the Catholic tradition (Second Vatican Council, 1993, *Lumen Gentium* 11).

This study aims to formulate an ecclesiological foundation for Sunday School using the Threefold Task of the Church as an analytical framework and to propose the concept of Sunday School as a mini church. Its novelty lies in three aspects. First, the Threefold Task of the Church is employed systematically as a framework for reading Sunday School rather than merely as a general formulation of the church's tasks. Second, the concept of the mini church is defined and distinguished from related concepts such as *children's church* and intergenerational ministry. Third, the study brings Protestant and Catholic sources into an explicit synthesis, including a justification for subsuming *leitourgia* under *koinonia* and *kerygma* under *marturia*. Theoretically, the study contributes to strengthening the ecclesiological dimension of CRE scholarship and to broadening ecclesiology so that it takes children into account as members of the church. Practically, it offers guidance for churches, church councils, teachers, and parents in designing Sunday School curricula and governance that are integrated with congregational life.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical library research design. The data consisted of texts, namely biblical texts, theological books, church documents, and scholarly journal articles. No field data were collected.

The literature search was conducted online through academic search engines, Portal Garuda, the *Directory of Open Access Journals* (DOAJ), and official journal websites. The keywords used, in both Indonesian and English, included “Sekolah Minggu” (Sunday School), “eklesiologi” (ecclesiology), “tri tugas panggilan gereja” (threefold calling of the church), “koinonia marturia diakonia,” “anak dalam gereja” (children in the church), “shared praxis,” “children's ministry,” “intergenerational ministry,” and “ecclesiology.” Journal articles were limited to those published between 2016 and 2026. Exceptions were made for classic works that serve as foundational references for the concepts discussed (e.g., Calvin, Richards, and Groome) and for one article published in 2015 that was needed to document the formulation of the five tasks of the church in Indonesian Catholic pastoral literature.

The inclusion criteria were (a) peer-reviewed journal articles, (b) addressing the nature or tasks of the church, the place of children in the church, Sunday School or children's ministry, intergenerational ministry, or shared praxis, and (c) available in Indonesian or English. The exclusion criteria were undergraduate and graduate theses, popular writings or non-academic

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websites, and articles that did not discuss the church or children's ministry theologically. Selection was carried out by screening titles and abstracts and then examining the content of relevant articles. The final corpus comprised 28 sources: 13 journal articles, 13 books (including biblical commentaries), and 2 primary sources (the Bible and *Lumen Gentium*).

Biblical texts were selected purposively because they portray the nature of the church and the place of children among the people of God, namely 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Ephesians 2:19-22; Ephesians 5:25-27; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Deuteronomy 31:12-13; and Mark 10:13-16. Texts underlying the three tasks of the church were also selected, namely Acts 1:8; 2:41-47; 6:1-6; Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 10:45; and 1 John 3:18. These texts were interpreted using a grammatical-historical hermeneutical approach, followed by a thematic-theological synthesis. The literary and historical context of each pericope was read first, and its theme was then related to the research questions. The interpretation was supported by biblical commentaries (Craigie, 1976; Thiselton, 2000) and theological literature.

The data were analyzed using thematic content analysis in four steps: first, mapping the basic concepts of ecclesiology together with the Threefold Task of the Church and coding each source according to four themes, namely the nature of the church, the tasks of the church, the place of children in the church, and Sunday School practice; second, tracing the theology and history of Sunday School as a form of church ministry; third, examining the relationship between the three tasks of the church's calling and Sunday School practice; and fourth, drawing theological-practical implications for contemporary Sunday School ministry.

To ensure trustworthiness, the author employed cross-source comparative synthesis (cross-checking) rather than triangulation in the sense used in field research. Sources were compared on three aspects: the formulation of the church's tasks adopted, the way each source positions children in the church, and the type of grounding used (biblical, dogmatic, or empirical). The comparison covered sources from several traditions, namely Indonesian Protestant, Reformed (Calvin), evangelical (Richards and Pazmiño, as presented by Harjanto, 2016), and Catholic (*Lumen Gentium*, Groome, and Indonesian Catholic pastoral literature). The credibility of the sources was assessed based on peer-review status, proximity to primary sources, and currency. The results of the comparison are presented in the Results and Discussion section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The synthesis of the reviewed sources yielded four patterns of findings. First, the sources agree that children belong to the people of God and are members of the Body of Christ, although ministry practice often separates them. Second, the formulation of the church's tasks differs across traditions, with three tasks in Indonesian Protestant churches and five tasks in Indonesian Catholic pastoral literature, yet their elements converge. Third, previous research on Sunday School has focused more on teachers and methods than on its ecclesial dimension. Fourth, the literature on intergenerational ministry supports the view that children are active participants in church life. These four patterns are interpreted in the following subsections.

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Sunday School as an Integral Part of the Church's Ministry

The history of Sunday School outlined in the Introduction contains an important lesson: Sunday School arose from pastoral concern and was subsequently adopted by the church as a means of teaching the Bible to children (Boehlke, 2003). This development continued in Indonesia alongside evangelization and the development of CRE (Boehlke, 2003). Homrighausen and Enklaar (2008) emphasize that CRE, including Sunday School, is essentially the church's endeavor to help all its members, children included, grow in the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ while living as responsible members of the church. In other words, Sunday School was never intended from the outset to stand apart from the church; rather, it was meant to be one face of the church's own ministry to children, who are part of the people of God.

This view needs to be reaffirmed because previous research reveals a pattern of separation. Hutagaol et al. (2021) note the tendency of churches to marginalize children in ministry, and Chiroma (2019) found that children's and youth ministers often view their ministries as separate from one another. Mans and Rosseau (2024) take this issue to the ecclesiological level: age segregation in ministry gives rise to a low regard for children as part of the church. In such a pattern, activities are held in separate spaces and led by separate ministers, with little intersection with the worship and fellowship of the adult congregation.

Such separation risks obscuring the fact that children, from the time they are baptized or brought into the care of the church, have in fact become part of the Body of Christ. Calvin (1989, Book IV, chapter 16) grounds infant baptism in the idea that children are included in God's covenant with his people and are therefore entitled to receive the sign of that covenant. Jesus himself welcomed children and declared that the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these (Mark 10:13-16). Therefore, children are not prospective members who will be recognized only later, upon reaching adulthood or completing confirmation catechesis. This affirmation proceeds from the Reformed tradition; church traditions that do not practice infant baptism interpret the status of children differently, and this is acknowledged as a limitation of the study.

The Nature of the Church: The Body of Christ and the People of God as the Theological Foundation of Sunday School

The New Testament offers several richly meaningful images (metaphors) of the church, namely the church as the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-27), the people of God (1 Peter 2:9-10), the temple of God or dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22), and the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:25-27). De Jonge and Aritonang (2009) explain that this diversity of images underscores that the church is, first and foremost, not an organization or institution but an organic fellowship that lives from, through, and for Christ.

The image of the Body of Christ is elaborated most clearly in 1 Corinthians 12. There, Paul affirms that the body consists of many members with different gifts who need and complement one another (1 Corinthians 12:14-26). Thiselton (2000) reads this passage with an emphasis on the unity and diversity of members within one body, and Repaningrum and Santo

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(2023) apply it to managing diversity among congregation members. The text does not speak explicitly about children; its application to the position of children is the author's theological inference. This inference rests on the logic of the text itself: if the members that seem weaker are in fact treated with greater honor (1 Corinthians 12:22-24), children cannot be regarded as incomplete or not-yet-functioning members of the body. Children are members who have been part of that body from the beginning, with callings and gifts that begin to be recognized and nurtured through Sunday School.

The image of the church as the people of God (*laos tou Theou*) also provides a strong foundation in both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, children were included in the assembly of the people to hear and learn to fear the LORD (Deuteronomy 31:12-13), and Deuteronomy 6:4-9 commands the people to teach God's word to their children "diligently" throughout all of life's activities. Craigie (1976) interprets this command within a covenantal framework, so that teaching the next generation is part of the people's faithfulness to God rather than merely a household matter. Thus, the faith formation of children is a shared responsibility of the covenant community, not solely the private concern of parents. When the church institutionalizes this responsibility through Sunday School, it is in essence carrying out one of its most fundamental ecclesial callings, namely introducing and forming a new generation of the people of God.

The application of ecclesiology to the spiritual formation of the congregation is also affirmed in a study of 1 Peter 2, in which believers are called to be a royal priesthood and a holy nation (Putra & Santo, 2024). Because this image applies to the whole people of God, the author concludes that the ecclesial status of children is not a status "deferred" until adulthood but one that is already active from the time they become part of the faith community through Sunday School. This conclusion is consistent with Weber and de Beer (2016), who regard children as collaborators in intergenerational ministry rather than mere objects of ministry, and with Mans and Rosseau (2024), who reject age segregation in the understanding of the church. The present study complements both by showing how this nature of the church can be operationalized through the Threefold Task of the Church.

The Threefold Task of the Church as an Ecclesiological Framework for the Theology of Sunday School

Formulations of the church's tasks vary across traditions, so the terminology requires clarification. In Indonesian Catholic pastoral literature, the tasks of the church are commonly formulated as the Fivefold Task of the Church (*Panca Tugas Gereja*), namely *kerygma*, *koinonia*, *diakonia*, *martyria*, and *leitourgia* (Nugroho, 2015). This fivefold formulation is not stated explicitly in *Lumen Gentium*. The constitution provides its ecclesiological basis, namely the church as the people of God and the participation of all the faithful in Christ's priestly, prophetic, and kingly office (Second Vatican Council, 1993, *Lumen Gentium* 31). Among Indonesian Protestants, the church's calling is generally summarized more simply in three dimensions, namely *koinonia*, *marturia* (written as *martyria* in some literature), and *diakonia*

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(Silitonga & Simatupang, 2023), which some authors describe as the church's calling to fellowship, to witness, and to serve (Hutagaol et al., 2021). This study uses the term Threefold Task of the Church consistently and understands it as a summary of the church's calling.

A cross-traditional comparison shows that, although the number of tasks differs, the recurring elements are fellowship, proclamation or witness, and service. Groome (1980, as cited in Harjanto, 2016), writing from a Catholic context, formulates the mission of the church in three elements, namely *kerygma*, *koinonia*, and *diakonia*. Pazmiño (2008, as cited in Harjanto, 2016), from an evangelical perspective, identifies five functions of the church in faith formation, namely *koinonia*, *kerygma*, *propheteia*, *diakonia*, and *leitourgia*. These three formulations can serve as a framework for rereading the theology and practice of Sunday School more comprehensively.

This study makes a conceptual decision that requires justification: *leitourgia* is subsumed under *koinonia*, and *kerygma* and *didache* are subsumed under *marturia*. There are three justifications. First, biblically, the portrayal of the early church in Acts 2:41-47 unites teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer within a single shared life, so that worship appears as an expression of fellowship rather than as a separate institution. Second, comparatively, a three-element formulation has already been used by Groome, albeit with a different composition, and by churches in Indonesia (Hutagaol et al., 2021; Silitonga & Simatupang, 2023), so this subsumption does not stand alone. Third, practically, in the world of children, worship, teaching, and friendship take place within a single continuum of experience, so a rigid separation into five domains risks turning Sunday School into a mere replica of the adult church structure. This subsumption does not mean that the elements of worship and teaching are eliminated; rather, they are positioned as expressions of fellowship and witness. This decision remains open to debate, and readers from traditions that treat *leitourgia* as a distinct task may regard it as a simplification.

Koinonia (fellowship)

Sunday School offers children a dedicated space of fellowship in which they experience togetherness as the family of God with fellow believers, teachers, and children's ministers. This dimension of *koinonia* also encompasses elements of communal worship, such as prayer, praise, and offerings celebrated within the Sunday School group, because the fellowship of believers is always centered on the shared worship of God rather than on mere social interaction (see Grenz, 2000). This early experience of *koinonia* lays the foundation for children's understanding of the church as a community of love rather than merely a building or a weekly worship schedule. This view is consistent with Hutagaol et al. (2021), who emphasize that children need to feel accepted and included in the church, and it complements Prastika (2022), who highlights teachers' collaboration in lesson preparation, by shifting the focus to the fellowship of the children themselves. Fellowship confined to peer groups risks becoming detached from the congregation. Therefore, Sunday School *koinonia* needs points of encounter with the adult congregation, as emphasized in the literature on intergenerational ministry (Allen

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& Ross, 2012; Mans & Rosseau, 2024).

Marturia (witness and proclamation of the gospel)

The most visible function of Sunday School is to convey the gospel message and teach God's word to children, while also training them to have the courage to share their faith with peers and family members. This function accords with Christ's commission in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples of all nations and to teach them to obey everything he has commanded, as well as with the calling to be witnesses (Acts 1:8). Uniting teaching (inward proclamation) and witness (outward proclamation) within a single dimension of *marturia* shows that children are not merely passive objects of instruction but also active subjects who participate in the church's mission of witness in the world. This view is consistent with Hutagaol et al. (2021), who regard Sunday School children as part of the body of believers who share in carrying out the church's calling, and with Weber and de Beer (2016), who regard children as collaborators. Unlike formulations that separate *didache* and *kerygma* from *marturia*, this study unites them for the reasons outlined above. Consequently, the quality of teaching in Sunday School classes is assessed not only by children's mastery of the material but also by their readiness to bear witness in their own words.

Diakonia (service)

A healthy Sunday School does not stop at the mere transfer of biblical knowledge; it also trains children to share, help their friends, care for those in need, and take part in simple, age-appropriate social action. Authentic *diakonia* is always Christological in character, following the example of Christ himself, who came not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45; Noordegraaf, 2003). In this way, children are trained from an early age to embrace the church's diaconal calling as a tangible expression of love (1 John 3:18). Hutagaol et al. (2021) provide a concrete example from one congregation, namely a sharing program for people in need, which demonstrates that children can live out this dimension. Silitonga and Simatupang (2023) add a caution that the implementation of the three tasks in Indonesian churches is often weighted toward *koinonia* and underdeveloped in *marturia* and *diakonia*. This finding suggests that Sunday School, too, risks stopping at fellowship if it is not designed to cultivate the other two dimensions.

These three dimensions sustain and complete one another: *koinonia* without *marturia* and *diakonia* shrinks into an inward-looking fellowship; *marturia* without *koinonia* and *diakonia* becomes proclamation without a tangible embodiment of love; and *diakonia* without *koinonia* and *marturia* is reduced to mere social activity without clear roots in faith. Together, they show that Sunday School, when conducted with a comprehensive ecclesiological awareness, is in fact a mini church that embodies the entire calling of the church at a scale and in a language appropriate to the world of children.

The concept of the mini church is distinctive when compared with related concepts. *Children's church* is generally understood as a children's worship service or program running

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parallel to adult worship. Its focus is on the suitability of form, and it therefore risks reinforcing the age segregation criticized by Mans and Rosseau (2024). Intergenerational ministry (Allen & Ross, 2012) emphasizes the encounter of all ages in congregational life; it is thus strong on integration but does not by itself explain what takes place in the children's class. The notion of *ecclesia domestica* positions the family as a small church (Second Vatican Council, 1993, *Lumen Gentium* 11), whereas the mini church concerns children's ministry within the church. The mini church brings together the strengths of both: it maintains a space appropriate to the world of children while preserving its connection with the whole body of the congregation through the three tasks of the church. Thus, the mini church is neither a rival church nor an isolated "church within the church" but the same church manifested at the scale of children. A summary of this framework is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Synthesis of the Threefold Task of the Church as a Framework for Sunday School as a Mini Church

Dimension	Biblical basis	Expression in Sunday School	Comparative literature
Koinonia (fellowship, including communal worship)	Acts 2:41-47; 1 Cor. 12:12-27	Children's togetherness with peers, teachers, and ministers; shared prayer, praise, and offerings; points of encounter with the adult congregation	Hutagaol et al. (2021); Prastika (2022); Allen & Ross (2012); Mans & Rosseau (2024)
Marturia (witness and proclamation of the gospel, including teaching)	Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8	Teaching of the Word; practice in sharing faith with friends and family; children as subjects of witness	Hutagaol et al. (2021); Weber & de Beer (2016)
Diakonia (ministry of love)	Mark 10:45; 1 John 3:18	Sharing, helping friends, and simple age-appropriate social action	Noordegraaf (2003); Hutagaol et al. (2021); Silitonga & Simatupang (2023)

Source: Author's synthesis based on the reviewed sources.

Sunday School as a Space for Forming Children's Ecclesial Identity

In addition to carrying out the Threefold Task of the Church, Sunday School plays an important role in forming children's ecclesial identity, that is, children's self-awareness as genuine members of the church rather than mere participants in a weekly activity. Groome (1980) emphasizes the importance of a "shared praxis" approach in Christian religious education, which positions learners not merely as recipients of information but as participants in the faith praxis of the believing community. Applied to the Sunday School context, this approach underscores that children need to be actively involved in congregational life, such as singing together, offering intercessory prayer, and giving offerings, and even in simple acts of service such as welcoming congregants or distributing bulletins, so that they experience themselves as agents rather than as passive recipients of the church's ministry.

The application of shared praxis in Indonesian Sunday Schools has so far been studied mostly from the teachers' perspective. Prastika (2022) found that this approach helps Sunday School teachers maintain consistency in joint preparation, improve their teaching, and share experiences. The present study extends the focus of this approach from teachers to children as

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agents of faith praxis. Harjanto (2016) also cautions that Groome's approach requires critical appraisal, partly because of its excessive emphasis on freedom and the potentially dominant role of the educator in presenting the Story and Vision of faith. This critique is relevant to Sunday School because children depend heavily on their teachers' interpretation, so their involvement needs to be accompanied by clear guidance.

Richards (1975) likewise cautions that genuine Christian education must not be reduced to the mere transfer of religious information but must foster a living relationship between learners and God and between learners and the community of faith. Within this framework, the success of Sunday School is measured not merely by the number of verses memorized or the amount of biblical knowledge children acquire, but by the extent to which children experience and embrace themselves as beloved and valued members of the Body of Christ. Such ecclesial awareness is presumed to be an important foundation for children's perseverance in faith as they enter adolescence and adulthood, a period that some studies regard as a critical point for backsliding among the church's younger generation. Powell and Clark (2011), for example, emphasize the importance of intergenerational relationships within the congregation for the resilience of young people's faith, and Chiroma (2019) underscores that children's and youth ministries need to be connected for the sake of faith formation. Because this study did not examine faith perseverance empirically, this relationship is proposed as a working hypothesis for further research rather than as a finding.

Theoretical and Practical Implications for Contemporary Sunday School Curriculum and Ministry

Theoretically, this study has two implications. For CRE scholarship, the ecclesiological dimension should be used as an analytical lens alongside the pedagogical and psychological lenses that have so far been dominant, so that the question “how should children be taught?” is complemented by the question “what kind of church members are children being formed into?” For ecclesiology, the study encourages that children be regarded as ecclesial subjects, not merely as objects of pastoral care, and that the Threefold Task of the Church be examined at the level of categorial (age- or group-specific) ministries, not only at the congregational and synodal levels.

Practically, an awareness of the ecclesiological dimension of Sunday School carries several implications. First, the Sunday School curriculum should be designed not only around discrete Bible stories but also to introduce children to an understanding of the church itself, such as what the church is, why the faithful gather, and how children can take part in it. Second, Sunday School ministry should be woven more closely into the life of the congregation as a whole, for example through joint family worship services, the involvement of children in particular liturgical moments, and good communication between Sunday School teachers and the church council and pastor, so that Sunday School does not operate as an isolated “church within the church.” This direction is consistent with proposals for intergenerational ministry (Allen & Ross, 2012; Chiroma, 2019; Mans & Rosseau, 2024). Third, Sunday School teachers

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need to be equipped not only with pedagogical skills for teaching children but also with adequate theological-ecclesiological understanding, so that they recognize their ministry as a full ecclesial ministry, equal to other ministries in the congregation (Nikijuluw, 2022; Panggabean, 2018). Fourth, parents should be embraced as the church's primary partners in children's faith formation, given that the family and the church are both covenant communities called to nurture children in the knowledge of the Lord (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Mans & Rosseau, 2024).

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First, it is conceptual and library-based, without empirical data from particular congregations or Sunday Schools; therefore, statements about field practice rely on a limited body of previous research, most of which consists of case studies. Second, the study focuses on the Indonesian Protestant context, whereas readings from the Catholic and other traditions are used as points of comparison rather than as primary objects of study. Third, the literature search was limited to Indonesian- and English-language sources and to databases accessible to the author, so relevant studies may have been missed. Fourth, the application of 1 Corinthians 12 to the status of children is the author's theological inference, and readers from traditions that understand children's membership differently may interpret it otherwise. These limitations open opportunities for further research.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Sunday School cannot be adequately understood solely from pedagogical and psychological perspectives but must be situated within a comprehensive ecclesiological framework. As a concrete expression of the church as the Body of Christ and the people of God, Sunday School carries out the Threefold Task of the Church, namely *koinonia*, *marturia*, and *diakonia*, in a language and approach appropriate to the world of children. The research questions are thus answered: children are members of the Body of Christ from the beginning, and the three tasks of the church can be read and lived out in Sunday School.

The novelty of this study lies in the concept of Sunday School as a mini church, that is, the full presence of the church at the scale of children that remains integrated with the congregation, formulated through the Threefold Task of the Church and distinguished from *children's church* and intergenerational ministry. Its theoretical contribution is the strengthening of the ecclesiological dimension in CRE scholarship and the broadening of ecclesiology to account for children as subjects. Its practical contribution is a direction for churches to redesign their curricula, governance, teacher equipping, and partnerships with parents.

This study is limited to a literature review within the Indonesian Protestant context and has not yet tested its findings empirically. Future research is recommended to examine the extent to which this ecclesiological awareness has been implemented in Sunday School practice

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across various local church contexts in Indonesia, including the relationship between children's ecclesial identity and perseverance in faith.

The added value of this study lies in a shift in how the children's class is viewed: from a space for childcare and instruction to a place where the church is truly present. With this shift, Sunday School is no longer a supplement but part of the church's response to its own calling, which is significant both for the development of CRE as a discipline and for ministry practice in local churches.

Funding
This research received no external funding.

Author Contributions
Kerin Crisyofani: Conceptualization, methodology, literature search, analysis, and writing, original draft preparation. Jelita Sihite: Supervision, validation, and writing, review and editing.

Conflict of Interest
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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