

Peer Pastoral Accompaniment in Special Needs Education: A Theology of Vulnerability Perspective

Lilis Suryani Sihombing¹, Sartika Dewi Simanjuntak², Ellyda Destiar Emelia Tambun³, Samsudin Sembiring⁴

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Injili Bethsaida Medan, Indonesia

Email Correspondence: sihombinglilis331@gmail.com¹

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Abstract: Disability in educational and pastoral practices is often perceived through a deficit paradigm, positioning persons with disabilities as objects of pastoral care and recipients of assistance. This article aims to challenge such perception by employing the theology of vulnerability as a conceptual foundation for developing an inclusive Christian Religious Education approach within Special Education Schools. This study employs a qualitative method with a systematic literature review approach by critically examining relevant works on pastoral theology, disability theology, and inclusive education. The findings reveal that students with disabilities are not merely individuals who require support but also active subjects capable of participating in and contributing to supportive relationships. This article proposes a peer pastoral accompaniment model as an inclusive Christian Religious Education approach based on three fundamental principles: mutuality, solidarity, and participation. The study concludes that true inclusion emerges when vulnerability becomes a space of shared humanity, not a reason for exclusion.

Keywords: Christian Religious Education; Disability; Mutuality; Theology of Vulnerability

INTRODUCTION

“Children with disabilities cannot possibly be empowered as pastoral companions because they are still vulnerable and constantly require assistance from others.” If such stigma is allowed to persist, it will trap society within a form of social disability. Throughout the long history of understandings of disability, individuals with disabilities have often been positioned within a paradigm that emphasizes limitations (the deficit paradigm), namely a perspective that views disability primarily as a personal deficiency requiring correction, protection, or assistance from those perceived as more capable. This paradigm has not only developed within social and educational domains but may also emerge in religious and pastoral practices, where persons with disabilities are more frequently positioned as recipients of compassion rather than as individuals who possess capacities, voices, and meaningful roles within their communities. Data from the World Health Organization (WHO) indicate that approximately 1.3 billion people, or 16% of the world’s population, live with various forms of disability (World Health Organization, 2022), making disability an inseparable part of human diversity rather than a

marginal condition that should be viewed exclusively. However, the report by the World Health Organization and the World Bank in the *World Report on Disability* demonstrates that persons with disabilities continue to encounter various barriers to social participation, education, and community life due to stigma, discrimination, and environments that are not yet fully inclusive (World Health Organization & World Bank, 2011). In the context of education, UNESCO also emphasizes that children with disabilities belong to a group at higher risk of experiencing exclusion from education systems due to structural barriers and societal attitudes that continue to perceive them based on their limitations rather than their potential (UNESCO, 2020). This condition demonstrates that the fundamental issue of disability does not lie solely in the individual's condition, but also in how communities understand, relate to, and engage with them. Therefore, a paradigm shift is needed from an approach that views persons with disabilities as objects of service toward an approach that recognizes them as subjects who possess dignity, the capacity for participation, and the ability to contribute to the development of shared communal life.

To address the issue above, the development of contemporary theological discourse appears to demonstrate a shift from theological approaches that focus solely on doctrines and institutions toward theological reflections that emerge from human experiences, including the experiences of marginalized and vulnerable groups. Within this development, various approaches have emerged, such as liberation theology, feminist theology, and disability theology, which seek to critically examine social and religious structures that generate exclusion toward certain groups. One significant development within this stream of thought is the emergence of the theology of vulnerability, which understands vulnerability not as a sign of human weakness or failure, but as a fundamental aspect of human existence that creates space for relationships, solidarity, and encounters with God. One influential figure in the development of this perspective is Thomas E. Reynolds through his concept of *vulnerable communion*, which emphasizes that human life is always characterized by interconnectedness and mutual dependence. Therefore, authentic community is not built by eliminating differences and limitations, but by embracing vulnerability as a space where love and acceptance can be manifested. This perspective is rooted in the biblical testimony that God is present with humanity in conditions of vulnerability, particularly through the incarnation of Christ, who took human form and entered into the experience of suffering (Phil. 2:6–8), as well as through Jesus' ministry that consistently demonstrated acceptance toward those who were marginalized, sick, poor, and socially powerless (Luke 4:18–19; Matt. 25:40).

Thus, the theology of vulnerability becomes an important analytical framework in contemporary theology because it challenges understandings that position marginalized groups as deficient or incomplete, while simultaneously offering a perspective that recognizes every human being as possessing dignity and the capacity to contribute to the faith community. In pastoral practice, this perspective brings about a fundamental transformation from a one-directional model of ministry—where the pastoral caregiver functions as the provider of assistance and vulnerable individuals are positioned as recipients—toward a pastoral relationship that is dialogical, reciprocal, and mutually empowering. Therefore, the theology of vulnerability provides a conceptual foundation for developing inclusive pastoral practices, including within the context of education for children with disabilities, by viewing them not

merely as individuals who require accompaniment, but as subjects who are capable of participating in the formation of communities characterized by solidarity.

Research on the involvement of students with disabilities in mentoring relationships has developed significantly in recent years, particularly through inclusive education approaches that have increasingly recognized students with disabilities as active members of learning communities. Wilt and Morningstar, through a qualitative study examining the experiences of college students with intellectual disabilities in inclusive higher education programs, demonstrated that students with disabilities are not merely recipients of support but also possess valuable perspectives and experiences in developing peer mentoring systems (Wilt, 2017). This study provides an important contribution by affirming the position of students with disabilities as partners within supportive relationships. However, the study remains focused on the context of higher education and does not explain how relational values such as solidarity, acceptance, and mutuality can be developed within a theological framework. Furthermore, Carter and McCabe, through a systematic review of peer involvement in inclusive education movements, demonstrated that peer support contributes to increased social acceptance, shifts in attitudes toward disability, and the strengthening of educational communities (Carter, 2020). Although this research highlights the importance of peer roles, its primary focus remains on the perspective of inclusive education and program effectiveness, without addressing the spiritual and pastoral dimensions involved in developing mentoring relationships.

The research conducted by Van der Meulen, Granizo, and del Barrio further strengthens the significance of peer emotional support for students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Through a systematic review of various peer support interventions, this study found that relationships among students can enhance social interaction, feelings of acceptance, empathy, and students' engagement within school communities (Meulen et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the study also indicates that most peer support models are still understood primarily as educational intervention strategies designed to assist students with disabilities, rather than as reciprocal relationships that enable students with disabilities to become individuals who also provide support to others. These three studies demonstrate that the discourse on peer mentoring has developed significantly within the field of inclusive education; however, there remains a research gap concerning how the vulnerability experiences of students with disabilities can be theologically understood as sources of solidarity and participation within educational communities.

Based on this gap, this study proposes a new perspective by integrating the theology of vulnerability into the development of inclusive Christian Religious Education in Special Schools through the concept of peer pastoral accompaniment. Unlike previous studies that tend to view peer support as a strategy for enhancing social engagement or educational adaptation, this study understands mentoring relationships as theological practices rooted in mutuality, solidarity, and participation. Through this perspective, children with disabilities are no longer positioned as objects of pastoral care, but as subjects who possess the capacity to express care, contribute, and build communities of mutual support. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following question: How can the theology of vulnerability serve as a foundation for developing

the concept of peer pastoral accompaniment as an inclusive Christian Religious Education model within the context of Special Schools?

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research method using a systematic literature review approach to establish a conceptual foundation for peer pastoral accompaniment within inclusive Christian Religious Education in Special Schools. This approach was conducted through the identification, critical reading, and synthesis of relevant literature concerning the theology of vulnerability, disability theology, pastoral accompaniment, inclusive education, and peer support. The methodological process of this study was carried out through several stages.

First, the researcher established the focus of the study, namely to critically examine the paradigm that positions children with disabilities as objects of pastoral care and to formulate the possibility of recognizing them as subjects of accompaniment. Second, the researcher identified and collected relevant academic sources, particularly major theological works and recent scholarly journal articles addressing disability, vulnerability, pastoral care, and peer support. Third, these sources were selected based on thematic relevance, academic authority, and their applicability to the context of Christian education in Special Schools. Fourth, the researcher conducted a critical content analysis to identify key concepts, research gaps, and points of intersection between the theology of vulnerability and inclusive educational practices. Fifth, the findings from the analysis were synthesized to formulate a concept of peer pastoral accompaniment grounded in three fundamental principles: mutuality, solidarity, and participation. Through this process, the study seeks to develop a conceptual framework that may serve as an alternative model of inclusive Christian Religious Education for children with disabilities within Special School settings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the perspective of the theology of vulnerability enables a paradigm shift in inclusive Christian Religious Education, moving from an understanding of children with disabilities as objects of pastoral care toward the recognition of them as subjects who are capable of participating in accompaniment relationships. This paradigm shift is realized through the concept of peer pastoral accompaniment grounded in the principles of mutuality, solidarity, and participation.

The Paradigm Misconceptions Regarding Disability

The understanding of disability has often been constructed through paradigms that position limitation as the central aspect of an individual's identity. Within such paradigms, persons with disabilities tend to be perceived based on what they are unable to do rather than on who they are as individuals possessing dignity, experiences, and potential. The perspective of the theology of vulnerability offers a fundamental redefinition by asserting that vulnerability is not a sign of human failure, but rather an essential aspect of human existence that enables relationships, dependence, and community. From this perspective, human beings are never

completely independent, because every person exists within a network of relationships with God and others. This understanding is rooted in the biblical testimony that humanity is created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:27), meaning that a person's value is never determined by physical ability, intellectual capacity, or productivity, but by their identity as God's creation endowed with dignity. Even in the ministry of Jesus, those considered weak and marginalized were never treated as social burdens, but rather as persons who hold a place within the Kingdom of God (Luke 4:18–19). Therefore, disability cannot be reduced to a condition of deficiency but must be understood as one form of the diversity of human experience that possesses theological and social significance.

Misconceptions within disability paradigms do not only exist at the level of thought but also produce social and religious practices that are often inappropriate. In many contexts, persons with disabilities continue to be positioned as objects of compassion, recipients of assistance, or individuals who require continuous protection. Responses such as providing assistance without involving their voices, services that focus solely on special needs, or educational approaches centered on “correcting deficiencies” may instead reinforce dependency and limit opportunities for participation. Global data indicate that persons with disabilities continue to experience various barriers in education, employment, and social life, not merely because of their individual conditions, but due to environmental barriers, social structures, and societal attitudes that remain insufficiently inclusive. The World Health Organization emphasizes that disability results from the interaction between an individual's health condition and environmental and social factors that restrict participation in society (World Health Organization, 2022); (World Health Organization & World Bank, 2011). Therefore, the fundamental question is not merely “what are persons with disabilities unable to do,” but rather “what barriers are created by environments that prevent individuals from fully participating.” This shift in perspective becomes an essential foundation for developing a more humane and inclusive understanding of disability.

If so, an important question must be raised: have educational communities and churches truly been accompanying children with disabilities, or have they unintentionally continued to reinforce their position as individuals who are always dependent on assistance? This question becomes significant because even well-intentioned approaches may produce exclusion when they continue to operate from the assumption that children with disabilities possess only limitations and lack the capacity to contribute. The theology of vulnerability challenges this perspective by affirming that every human being possesses both vulnerability and the capacity to express love toward others (Reynolds, 2008). Within Christian communities, those who are considered weak are not placed outside the community, for Paul affirms that “those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable” (1 Cor. 12:22). This passage provides a theological foundation that a person's value is not determined by socially constructed measures of ability, but by their existence as an inseparable part of the body of Christ. Therefore, children with disabilities are not merely individuals who need to be embraced, but also individuals who are capable of embracing others; they are not only recipients of care, but also bearers of experience, empathy, and contributions to their communities (Swinton, 2012).

Based on this understanding, the redefinition of disability carries significant implications for Christian Religious Education, particularly within the context of Special Schools. Christian

education can no longer remain within a charity-based paradigm that positions students with disabilities as objects of service, but must move toward a paradigm of friendship-based relationships and empowerment. Christian love is not expressed merely through acts of giving to those perceived as lacking, but through the creation of spaces where every person can participate in shared life. Children with disabilities possess unique life experiences, the ability to build relationships, and the capacity to provide support to others (Creamer, 2009). From this perspective, inclusive education is not merely concerned with physical access or learning opportunities, but with transforming the way communities understand human existence. Schools are not only places where children with disabilities are assisted in adapting to the existing world, but also spaces where a world that is more capable of embracing human diversity can be constructed. Thus, inclusion is not merely an educational strategy, but a theological calling to establish communities that value every human being as created in the image of God (Shakespeare, 2018).

Therefore, the attitude that needs to be cultivated through the redefinition of disability is a transformation from viewing limitations toward recognizing possibilities, from offering compassion toward building solidarity, and from one-directional assistance toward creating mutually strengthening relationships. Children with disabilities must no longer be understood as individuals who merely wait to be helped, because they possess the capacity to become active participants in building more humane communities. Christian Religious Education is called to embody a new paradigm that recognizes vulnerability not as a barrier preventing individuals from contributing, but as a space where God's love can be revealed through human relationships (Loupatty, 2020). Accordingly, the ultimate goal of education and pastoral care for children with disabilities is not to make them conform to others, but to ensure that they are accepted as whole persons, possessing voices, dignity, and a rightful place within the community.

Vulnerability, Pastoral Care, and Peer Support

The concept of vulnerability within the context of disability needs to be understood more deeply in order to avoid returning to the traditional paradigm that positions individuals with disabilities merely as a group characterized by weakness. From the perspective of the theology of vulnerability, vulnerability is not a person's sole identity, but rather a human experience that emerges through relationships with the surrounding social, cultural, and environmental conditions. Children with disabilities experience complex forms of vulnerability because they often occupy a position described as a *double minority*, namely experiencing certain limitations or barriers as individuals while simultaneously encountering social stigma as members of a minority group. Such vulnerability is not only related to physical, intellectual, sensory, or developmental aspects, but also arises from societal attitudes that restrict their opportunities to participate fully. Children with disabilities may encounter barriers in accessing equal education, developing social relationships, expressing themselves, and even receiving recognition of their capacities. Nevertheless, the theology of vulnerability rejects the notion that vulnerable conditions are synonymous with powerlessness. Rather, vulnerability becomes a space of encounter that reveals humanity's inherent need for relationships and demonstrates that communal life is not built solely upon individual strength, but through the ability to be present, accept, and sustain one another. From a Christian perspective, God Himself enters into human

vulnerability through the incarnation of Christ, who embraced human limitations and suffering (John 1:14; Phil. 2:6–8), thus vulnerability can never become a reason for excluding someone from the community.

Within this context, the concept of pastoral care needs to be reconsidered through an inclusive perspective. Pastoral care cannot be reduced to the act of providing assistance to those perceived as being in need, because such an understanding may unconsciously maintain an unequal relationship between “those who help” and “those who are helped.” Inclusive pastoral care is grounded in the conviction that every human being possesses equal dignity before God and that every person has meaningful experiences worthy of being heard. As developed within modern pastoral traditions, pastoral care is a practice of presence that embodies acceptance, strengthening, accompaniment, and holistic human growth. In the context of disability, pastoral care does not aim to eliminate differences or force individuals with disabilities to achieve certain standards considered normal, but rather to create spaces where they can experience acceptance and develop their own capacities. The caregiver does not function as someone who possesses all the answers, but as a companion on the journey who builds relationships based on appreciation and respect for the lived experiences of those being accompanied. Therefore, inclusive pastoral care moves from a model of ministry **to** persons with disabilities toward ministry **with** persons with disabilities, in which they are also recognized as individuals capable of contributing meaningfully to the community.

However, the recognition of the capacities of children with disabilities must not be misunderstood as a reason to eliminate their need for accompaniment. There is a risk of creating a new extreme when empowerment efforts are interpreted as a demand that persons with disabilities must always be independent and should no longer receive assistance. Such a perspective is as problematic as the previous paradigm that viewed them solely as powerless individuals. The theology of vulnerability does not seek to eliminate the need for care, but rather to transform the way care itself is understood. Every human being, whether with or without disabilities, exists within conditions of mutual dependence. Therefore, accompaniment remains an essential part of the lives of children with disabilities, particularly when they encounter challenges that require emotional, social, and spiritual support. The difference lies in how accompaniment is practiced: not as an act of domination from those perceived as stronger toward those considered weaker, but as a relationship that respects the existence, voice, and capacities of the person being accompanied. From this perspective, helping does not mean taking control over another person’s life, but creating conditions that enable individuals to grow and participate according to their own potential.

The concept of peer support then becomes significant because it offers a form of accompaniment rooted in horizontal relationships among individuals who share experiences of belonging to the same community. Within the context of disability education, peer support is not merely an activity of assisting friends in completing academic tasks or adapting to the school environment, but rather a process of building social relationships that enables students to provide one another with emotional support, acceptance, motivation, and a sense of belonging (Carter, 2020). Unlike professional support models that operate through specialized functions, peer support emerges from shared experiences and everyday life together. Children with disabilities who have experienced particular forms of barriers may become individuals who

understand their peers' struggles more deeply, thereby offering authentic forms of support. From the perspective of Christian Religious Education, such relationships carry theological significance because they reflect the calling to "carry each other's burdens" (Gal. 6:2). Thus, peer support does not replace the roles of teachers, caregivers, or professional personnel, but rather complements the accompaniment ecosystem through more participatory relationships among students that are rooted in shared experiences.

The intersection between the theology of vulnerability, pastoral care, and peer support opens new possibilities for understanding accompaniment for children with disabilities. These three perspectives converge on the understanding that human beings do not live in absolute independence (Purwoko, 2023), but within networks of relationships that enable every person both to give and receive support. Within the context of Special Schools, this approach challenges the traditional paradigm that views students with disabilities merely as recipients of services while simultaneously avoiding the opposite misconception that they no longer require accompaniment. What is needed is not the elimination of accompaniment, but rather the transformation of its meaning. Genuine accompaniment is accompaniment that empowers without abandoning, supports without diminishing, and accepts without restricting. Therefore, the concept of peer pastoral accompaniment becomes an approach that enables children with disabilities to experience themselves not as objects of service, but as active members of communities that sustain one another through relationships of mutuality, solidarity, and participation.

Embracing Vulnerability and Empowering Children with Disabilities

Embracing vulnerability from a theological perspective does not mean maintaining individuals in a state of weakness, but rather acknowledging the fullness of human existence and creating spaces where every person can grow through meaningful relationships. In the context of children with disabilities, this approach is essential because vulnerability has often been negatively understood as something that must be eliminated or corrected. However, the theology of vulnerability recognizes that experiences of limitation can become spaces where God's love is revealed and where more humane communities are formed. Jesus Himself demonstrated a pattern of ministry that did not treat vulnerable groups merely as objects of compassion, but as persons with identity, voices, and roles within the work of God's Kingdom. The healing narratives in the Gospels do not merely portray physical restoration, but also describe the process of restoring individuals into social relationships and communities that had previously excluded them. In the account of the man born blind (John 9:1–41), for example, Jesus rejected the assumption that an individual's condition was the result of sin or punishment, but instead viewed human existence as an opportunity for God's works to be revealed. This perspective provides a theological foundation that children with disabilities should not be understood as individuals with diminished value, but as persons who continue to bear the image of God and have a place within the community of faith (Darius dan Filia Amelia Kasinda, 2022). Thus, embracing vulnerability means transforming the perspective from an attempt to "fix individuals who are different" toward an effort to "build communities that are capable of embracing differences."

The empowerment of children with disabilities from a Christian perspective cannot be understood merely as a process of enhancing their abilities so that they can conform to the standards of the majority, but rather as the recognition that they already possess inherent value and capacities. Empowerment begins with the conviction that every person possesses gifts and contributions that can be offered for the sake of communal life. The Apostle Paul describes the community as one body with many members who possess different functions, emphasizing that those members considered weaker are, in fact, indispensable parts of the body (1 Cor. 12:12–27). This text provides an important theological foundation that differences in ability are not reasons to place individuals in a lower position. Within the context of Christian Religious Education in Special Schools, empowerment means creating environments that enable children with disabilities to develop confidence, share their experiences, take meaningful roles, and build relationships with others. This requires a transformation of educational paradigms from an approach focused on deficiencies (*deficit-oriented approach*) toward an approach centered on potential and participation (*strength-based approach*). Children with disabilities are not merely learners who must receive teaching about love, but also persons who can practice love through concrete actions within their surrounding communities.

The implications of this understanding bring significant transformation to Christian pastoral and educational practices. If ministry toward children with disabilities has traditionally been shaped by patterns of protection and assistance, then an approach grounded in the theology of vulnerability calls communities to develop more equal and participatory relationships. Churches and educational institutions are not called merely to provide spaces where children with disabilities are accepted, but also to create opportunities for them to contribute to the development of communal life (Yong, 2011). In this context, pastoral accompaniment does not end with accompanying children with disabilities in facing their challenges, but develops into a process of creating spaces where they can also become sources of encouragement and strength for others. This approach represents the essence of inclusive Christian education: not merely inviting children with disabilities into an existing community, but enabling them to participate in shaping that community. Therefore, embracing vulnerability is not a lowering of expectations toward children with disabilities, but rather a recognition that even through limitations, God can reveal value, love, and contributions that enrich shared life.

Peer Pastoral Accompaniment in the Context of Special School Education

The concept of peer pastoral accompaniment within the context of Christian Religious Education in Special Schools represents a conceptual development that emerges from the intersection of the theology of vulnerability, pastoral care, and inclusive education (Brock, M. E., Biggs, E. E., Carter, E. W., Cattey, G., & Raley, 2016). This approach seeks to address the limitations of existing accompaniment paradigms that have tended to position children with disabilities as recipients of care, by introducing a new understanding that they can also become subjects who actively contribute to the development of accompaniment relationships. Within the framework of the theology of vulnerability, human relationships are not constructed upon notions of superiority and inferiority, but rather upon the awareness that every person possesses limitations as well as the capacity to give and receive support. Therefore, peer pastoral accompaniment is not intended to replace the roles of teachers, professional caregivers, or

specialists, but rather to provide a relational space where students can experience acceptance, encouragement, and mutual growth through interactions with their peers. In the context of Special Schools, this approach holds particular significance because students are part of a community characterized by diverse life experiences while also sharing common challenges arising from social stigma and limited access to opportunities. Relationships among students can become pastoral spaces where love, care, and solidarity are concretely expressed within everyday life.

Peer pastoral accompaniment in this study is developed upon three fundamental principles: mutuality, solidarity, and participation. These three principles do not exist independently but are interconnected as the foundation for the formation of an inclusive Christian educational community. Mutuality emphasizes that accompaniment is not a one-directional relationship between those who are strong and those who are weak, but rather a reciprocal relationship in which every individual has the opportunity both to give and to receive. Solidarity highlights that accompaniment emerges from the ability to be present with others in experiences of vulnerability, rather than merely expressing concern from a certain distance. Meanwhile, participation affirms that children with disabilities possess both the right and the capacity to actively engage in communal life, including providing support to their peers. These three principles become the foundation for transforming pastoral understanding, moving from a ministry oriented toward “helping those who are vulnerable” toward a ministry that builds community “with those who experience vulnerability.”

From the perspective of Christian Religious Education, peer pastoral accompaniment carries significant pedagogical and theological implications. Christian education is not merely intended to transfer religious knowledge, but to form communities that reflect the values of God’s Kingdom, such as love, acceptance, respect for human dignity, and mutually supportive communal life. Therefore, children with disabilities are not only taught about the values of love and care, but are also given opportunities to experience and practice these values through genuine relationships with their peers. This model of accompaniment offers a paradigm in which the presence of children with disabilities is not merely an opportunity for communities to demonstrate compassion, but rather an opportunity for communities to learn about love as a relational and transformative reality. Thus, peer pastoral accompaniment in Special Schools becomes a concrete expression of inclusive Christian education because it creates spaces where every student is recognized as a person of value, capable of contributing, and called to participate in building communities of mutual support.

1. Mutuality

The first principle of peer pastoral accompaniment is mutuality, which refers to the understanding that accompaniment relationships are not constructed through a one-directional pattern between those considered capable and those perceived as needing assistance, but rather through reciprocal relationships that enable every person to both give and receive. Within the traditional paradigm, children with disabilities have often been positioned as recipients of pastoral care because they are assumed to possess limitations that make them dependent on others. The theology of vulnerability offers a correction to this understanding by affirming that all human beings exist within conditions of mutual dependence and that no person is entirely

self-sufficient. Vulnerability is not a condition exclusively attached to certain groups, but a shared human reality that connects individuals within social relationships. Therefore, children with disabilities should not only be understood as individuals who require accompaniment, but also as persons who possess experiences, abilities, and sensitivities that can become sources of support for others.

Within the context of Special Schools, the principle of mutuality means creating spaces where students can exist as companions on one another's journeys. A child who has experienced certain barriers may possess the capacity to understand, encourage, or accompany peers who face similar struggles. Support that emerges from shared experiences often carries strong pastoral significance because it arises from emotional closeness and authentic understanding. This does not mean that all children with disabilities must assume the role of primary caregivers or replace the functions of teachers and professional personnel; rather, it demonstrates that they possess the capacity to contribute to social relationships. From a Christian perspective, this principle reflects Paul's teaching regarding the body of Christ, which affirms that every member possesses a function and value, including those who are often considered weaker (1 Cor. 12:22). Thus, mutuality transforms the orientation of accompaniment from "helping those who are lacking" toward "building a community of mutual dependence."

2. Solidarity

The second principle is solidarity, which refers to the ability to be present with another person within their lived experiences without positioning oneself as superior or stronger. In the context of disability, solidarity has a fundamental distinction from pity. Pity often emerges from a certain distance, when one person views another as an object of deficiency who requires assistance. In contrast, solidarity emerges from the awareness that human beings are interconnected and that another person's experience of vulnerability is part of a shared human reality. The theology of vulnerability emphasizes that God is not distant from human suffering, but enters into and participates in human experiences through the incarnation of Christ. Therefore, pastoral action rooted in solidarity does not merely provide assistance, but embodies presence, listening, understanding, and walking alongside those who experience vulnerability.

Within educational life in Special Schools, solidarity is manifested through a community culture that not only accepts the existence of children with disabilities but also recognizes their lived experiences as sources of shared learning. Children with disabilities should not be viewed as individuals who deserve pity because of their limitations, but as persons who possess valuable experiences of perseverance, struggle, and courage in facing challenges. When the school community cultivates solidarity, relationships among students are no longer based on differences in ability, but on respect for the dignity of every person. This principle has significant implications for Christian Religious Education because love is not merely taught as a moral concept, but embodied through genuine relationships that express acceptance and care as partners or companions (Wilt, 2017). Solidarity transforms the educational community into a space where children with disabilities are not only accepted in their existence, but also accompanied and valued throughout their life journeys.

3. Participation

The third principle is participation, which refers to the recognition that children with disabilities possess the rights, abilities, and opportunities to actively take part in community life (UNICEF, 2013). Thus far, approaches to disability have often focused primarily on the provision of services and protection, while the dimension of participation has received insufficient attention. Children with disabilities certainly require support, but the need for support does not imply that they lose their ability to contribute. From the perspective of the theology of vulnerability, every human being is understood as a person who possesses inherent value and a calling to participate in shared life. Participation becomes a concrete expression of the recognition of human dignity because a person is not considered valuable only when they are able to receive care, but also when they are given opportunities to contribute and build community (Lundy, 2007).

Within the context of Christian Religious Education in Special Schools, the principle of participation means creating spaces where students with disabilities have voices, roles, and involvement in the process of forming the school community (Meulen et al., 2021). They can participate through simple actions such as supporting friends, sharing experiences, helping to create a positive atmosphere, and engaging in communal activities (Lundy, 2007). These actions demonstrate that inclusive education is not merely about integrating children with disabilities into an educational system, but ensuring that they truly become meaningful members of that community. Within this framework, peer pastoral accompaniment becomes a practice that enables children with disabilities to experience themselves as valuable persons who are capable of making an impact on others. Therefore, participation represents the culmination of a paradigm transformation: children with disabilities are no longer positioned as objects of care, but as agents who actively contribute to expressing love, solidarity, and shared life within educational communities (Santoso & Apsari, 2017).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the theology of vulnerability can serve as a strong conceptual foundation for developing an inclusive model of Christian Religious Education through peer pastoral accompaniment in Special Schools. Departing from the question of how the theology of vulnerability can be developed as a basis for peer pastoral accompaniment, this study finds that vulnerability should not be understood as a reason to position children with disabilities as objects of care, but rather as a theological space that enables the emergence of relationships, solidarity, and participation. The novelty of this study lies in the formulation of the concept of peer pastoral accompaniment, which shifts the paradigm of accompaniment from a one-directional model toward a reciprocal relationship in which children with disabilities are recognized as active subjects capable of both receiving and providing support. This model is constructed through three fundamental principles: mutuality, which emphasizes two-way relationships; solidarity, which replaces compassion-based approaches with shared presence; and participation, which provides space for children with disabilities to actively engage in educational communities. Thus, this study affirms that inclusive Christian education should not merely provide access and services for children with disabilities, but must create communities that recognize them as whole persons who possess dignity, value, and the capacity to contribute.

True inclusion occurs when those who experience vulnerability are not only embraced, but are also given opportunities to embrace and strengthen one another.

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