

Friday Spiritual Pabaon: a Soul-Nurturing Provision for a Restful Weekend

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ABSTRACT

The outbreak of Covid-19 left teachers unprepared. To address the psycho-emotional concerns of teachers, and to survive and thrive in the new normal, a spiritual activity called Friday Spiritual Pabaon (take-away) facilitated by a Jesuit priest was enacted. This study aims to evaluate spiritual activity through the lived experiences of the teachers and identify their (1) perceptions on the activity, (2) spiritual development, and (3) possible concerns and suggestions to improve the activity. Colaizzi's Descriptive Phenomenological research design was employed, and data was obtained through focus group discussion using semi-structured interviews. Through the narration of teachers' experiences the themes Spiritual-Human Experiences & Hopes for Deeper Involvement. The teachers find the activity an opportunity to reconnect to the divine, to express their needs, and to get them by in the upcoming weeks. Based on the findings, the activity heightened spirituality due to the release of work stress & spiritual renewal that have led to better work attitude and behavior.

INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 has changed the face of education. Teachers and pupils are left with no choice but to adapt to this rapid change. This instant change has brought about emotional and psychological birth pangs (Singh, et.al, 2020). Among the usual activities and preparations teachers have as part of their job that are made even more challenging by the new modality (Jain, Lall, & Singh, 2020), they also have to be more understanding and patient to their pupils to support them of their pains and concerns in order to survive and thrive in this new normal (Racabal, Oducado, & Tamdang, 2020). They must become sponges who absorb the pain coming from pupils and their surroundings as well. But just like the learners, teachers also have their fair share of struggles in the new normal, may it be professional or personal ones (Flores, 2020). Thus, the need to have programs that care for the teachers, in the spirit of *cura-personalis* is important.

Spiritual development of the employees-teachers is one of the most important factors in cultivating positive organizational commitment (Dehaghi, Goodarzi, & Arazi, 2012) as it inculcates among them the sense of responsibility and loyalty that increases their effectiveness in their work. This explains that teachers' spiritual needs affect their work dynamics. In fact, a study describing spirituality at work has found that employees with well-developed spiritual values have high organizational commitment, and work and life satisfaction which in turn positively affects work excellence (Fry, et.al, 2017). This suggests that the spiritual development and growth of teachers must be included in the school's faculty development programs. Another study has also found out that regardless of the level of professional competence of the teachers, the lack of emotional and spiritual roundedness limits their abilities and competence (Korazija, Sarotar, & Mumel, 2016). Hence, it is necessary that programs are provided and evaluated that assist the spiritual development of the faculty.

To address such concern, since the beginning of SY 2020-2021, a spiritual activity called Friday Spiritual Pabaon (take-away) facilitated by a Jesuit priest was enacted. Every Friday during the afternoon online check-out, the priest introduces to the gathered faculty and staff the Sunday Gospel and briefly explains its significance and relation to one's experiences amid all the difficulties around us. It then proceeds with a short reflection with guided questions which the attendees ponder and reflect on. This short spiritual activity ends with the priest giving blessing to the attendees for the two-day break from classes in preparation for the next week.

Studies towards spirituality of teachers are focused on exploring their spiritual needs (Yocum, 2016), level of spirituality (Madelo, 2015), factors affecting their spirituality (Nasrollahi, et al., 2020), understanding of spirituality and integration of it in teaching (Rahman, 2023), and the importance of developing spirituality towards the implementation of culturally responsive teaching-learning processes (Michalec, 2022). These studies have explained the importance of developing spirituality among teachers and its positive effects towards their professional effectiveness and efficiency. However, there were limited studies that were focused primarily on the well-being of the teachers

and their personal concerns. A related study on exploring and developing spirituality among teachers were done in New Zealand but it was a self-directed approach focused mainly on personal fear and insecurity (Gibson, 2014). On the other hand, Friday Spiritual Pabaon is a directed spiritual done weekly for an entire year. It addresses multiple areas in the life of the teacher that include both their personal and professional aspects.

With the implementation of the Friday Spiritual Pabaon, the need to evaluate its effectiveness is important to understand and develop more spiritual programs for the teachers. As such, this study aims to evaluate spiritual activity through the lived experiences of the teachers and identify their (1) perceptions on the activity, (2) spiritual development, and (3) possible concerns and suggestions to improve the activity.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Spirituality in education has emerged as a critical theme in shaping students' character and moral development. Dehaghi et al. (2012) emphasize that spiritual values positively influence organizational commitment, a principle that also applies in educational settings, where both teachers and students demonstrate stronger dedication to school values. Research by Koražija et al. (2016) and Hassan et al. (2016) supports this view, showing that spirituality in the workplace enhances job satisfaction, including in educational environments where teachers feel a deeper sense of purpose and commitment.

Fryar (2015) and Gibson (2014) argue that spiritual growth can be nurtured in religious learning environments, particularly through collaborative learning and reflective practices. Nasrollahi et al. (2020) similarly found that spirituality plays a vital role in educational effectiveness, especially in fostering values and moral awareness among learners.

Madelo (2015) points out that teachers' spirituality has a direct impact on students' moral values and the development of 21st-century skills. Rahman (2023) highlights the importance of integrating spiritual concepts into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms within pesantren-based madrasas, where teachers serve as spiritual role models.

The COVID-19 pandemic introduced new challenges to the education sector. Flores and Swennen (2020), along with Jain et al. (2021), note significant changes in teacher training and instructional practices, which have impacted the overall effectiveness of education. Rabacal et al. (2020) and Singh et al. (2020) report considerable effects on the psychological well-being of both teachers and students, highlighting the need for a holistic educational approach that includes spiritual dimensions. Michalec (2022) advocates for a more integrative model of teacher preparation that includes spiritual development as a way to address today's complex educational challenges.

The concept of spiritual leadership, as explored by Wang et al. (2018), is also considered a strategic approach to fostering intrinsic motivation and improving teacher performance, ultimately influencing student character development. Yocum et al. (2016) emphasize the importance of addressing students' spiritual needs in the classroom to make learning more meaningful.

This aligns with Goldammer's (2020) discussion of religious symbolism in education, which reflects the deeper meanings and values embedded in educational practices.

Finally, Yoon et al. (2021) highlight the importance of visual representation in facilitating collaborative reasoning in science classrooms—an approach that can also be adapted to express spiritual values in various educational contexts.

METHODOLOGY

The experiences of the participants of the spiritual activity are essential data that will illustrate the aims of the study. The participants are limited to the Grade School faculty and staff since the activity is unique to the department. Consequently, Colaizzi's Descriptive Phenomenological research design will be employed in identifying perceptions, spiritual development, and concerns on the Friday Spiritual Pabaon. This research design is composed of seven processes of data analysis which, in sequence, include (1) Familiarization, (2) Identifying significant statement, (3) Formulating meanings, (4) Clustering themes, (5) Developing exhaustive descriptions, (6) Producing the fundamental structure, and (7) Seeking verification of the fundamental structure (Morrow, Rodriguez, & King, 2015).

Data will be obtained through focus group discussion using semi-structured interviews. Teacher-participants are grouped into the disciplines that they are teaching (subject area). Interviews will be administered during the subject area meetings through an online video correspondence application. Prior to the interview, consent will be solicited from the teacher-participants and upon confirmation will be informed on the rationale and purpose of the study to ensure that their personal information will not be collected, and their statements will be kept confidential. To ensure its validity and reliability, member checking was performed. The codes were returned to the teacher-participants to review and evaluate the correctness of the interpretation of their responses. Collected statements will be stored in one shared folder between researchers and are saved in codes to keep the anonymity of the teacher-participants in accordance with Data Privacy Act of 2012 and other laws and regulations involved in the conduct of the study. Furthermore, raw data will be kept confidential and will not be disclosed to the public.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study explored the experiences of the Grade School teachers in the spiritual activity conducted every Friday of the week. Through the narration of their experiences in an in-depth focus group discussions per subject area, results are categorized into themes. The themes express the effects of spiritual activity to them and their suggestions on the improvement of the flow of the activity. The two super-ordinate themes are the (1) spiritual-human experiences and hopes for deeper involvement. The subthemes included within the superordinate themes are detailed in the table below.

Table 1. Superordinate themes and subthemes of the salient online teaching experience.

Superordinate Theme	Subtheme
Superordinate Theme 1: Spiritual-human experiences	- Spiritual disposition - Openness to God's Grace - Connection to the Sacred
Superordinate Theme 2: Hopes for deeper involvement	- Guided Contemplation - Adding the Ignatian Flavor

Spiritual-Human Experiences

In a hectic week, establishing connection to oneself and God is a constant challenge. The frequency of work and deadlines that have to be met limits the teachers' opportunity to pause and to reflect and review the experiences of the day or the week. Unless given an avenue, relating one's human experiences to spiritual directions is at the last of the priorities of the teachers. For them, it is the Friday Spiritual Pabaon that provides the opportunity to reconnect to the divine.

Spiritual Disposition

Teachers continue to work on their assigned tasks to meet the deadlines. Thus, the mood of the week is set on the completion of work. The appearance of the Friday Spiritual Pabaon schedule is seen as a reminder to the teachers to slow down and take a moment to think and reflect. They perceive it as a breathing space amidst the heavy work within the week for them to review their experiences and take time to identify the struggles and the successes that they had for the week. As they revisit every moment of the work week, they actively look and realize for the divine interventions that they have missed to appreciate.

"I am not really a reflective person but the spiritual pabaon is one of the highlights as we end our week. It allows me to go back to the week that it has been and find the joy even with the work we had. It's like leaving the stress behind because finally it's the weekend and that we can put our hearts at ease knowing that grace of the bible and most of all the blessing is coming from a priest. The moment he says, the lord be with you, I can really feel that God is tapping my shoulders for me and telling me that I did great for the week." (#5)

"It allows me to reflect on how my week is, how my work is in that week, how I have interacted with people, how I approach things that would come my way. For me, somehow, it is really a reflection on how my week went." (#2)

For some, it is mood setter for the weekend, to start letting go of the stresses and focus on self-love and relaxation. The activity sets the disposition of the teachers to continue one's spiritual journey until the Sunday mass.

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"Sometimes on Sundays, honestly, I am busy and sometimes I deserve to rest and I cannot attend to mass. Also, the online mass has different impact compared to the physical one. So, at least through the Spiritual pabaon, I get to know what's the Gospel for that Sunday and I am able to reflect on my own with the reflection points given by Father." (#6)

"It's more of personal cause it's making me feel good and that I have to be good to myself. I could really say that its asking me to slow down like with the many things to do before the upcoming weekend. But it allows me to slowdown and pause and recollect everything that has happened and to really reflect on how I can find God in all of them." (#10)

Openness to God's Grace

The routine of the Friday Spiritual Pabaon has been perceived as an invitation for the teachers to go back to the Lord. It gives a yearning-effect to some that they are excited to get to the end of the Friday work because they will be able to hear the gospel from the priest. They feel enliven after the end of a busy week hearing the message that the Lord is expressing for them.

"This spiritual pabaon has a different effect on me. I find myself catching up the spiritual cooldown every Friday for it. It is a good closure for the week especially if the week is so hectic and you are so busy. So, the spiritual pabaon is just like preparaing you're for the next week or for the days ahead." (#1)

"It allows her to have an idea ahead of time what the gospel will be in the coming Sunday. Aside from the special graces that is extend to us like for example the remission of our sins, especially that in this time it might be difficult for some of us to receive the sacrament." (#2)

"Actually, this is something that I really look forward. I think some of you will agree with because every time the emcee will forget to mention, in our end we could say to ourselves, why is there no spiritual pabaon. It's part of our routine already. And, in the application, it is on a case-to-case basis. Every week there are challenges. There are some spiritual pabaon that we really need for a particular week. But there are times that it is just a lesson to reflect on or just an experience that we need to remember, somehow, to make our life better. There are reflections, that you have experienced already but there are some lessons that we really need for the week." (#8)

Connection to the Sacred

The Spiritual Pabaon became a bridge for the teachers to once again get in-touch with their inner and spiritual self and an opportunity with them to reconnect to God. For some, they have felt their relationship with God being rebuilt, while others have been strengthened. The spiritual enrichment that they have received from the activity has given them the feeling renewal and recommitment to their vows and promises before the sacred. Even further, the others feel the urge to apply their learning from the gospel and reflection to their way of leaving and have expressed that by doing so, it has heightened their sense of spirituality.

"Depending on what the pabaon is all about. If ever I am faced with a particular situation that is suited to that particular pabaon of father., I would always go back

to what he said. Then, I will reflect. Is my action benefiting me and the other person? Is my action good? Its more on reflection on how I response to things.” (#4)

“It is a constant challenge for me as a worker in the vineyard on how I can exercise my spirituality better as I introspect and retrospect my life into my dealings with other people, personal concerns, and work problems.” (#3)

“The pabaon really leaves me speechless because of its great effect in my heart and in my spiritual life. We are reminded that God is always with us in whatever we do and it’s also one way of reminding us to be grateful of what we have accomplished for that week and all the graces that we have received for that week. So, it’s a time for us especially listening to Father and how he shares his inputs with us. It enriches us spiritually.” (#11)

“It is making me so conscious as you continue to the Saturday and Sunday and towards the next week, I get a heightened consciousness level. It is also an affirmation that I am not alone. I am not the only one that is tired, who needs the extra charge from the gospel, and this and that. It is one way that has been inculcated and left a mark in me in the spiritual pabaon.” (#6)

It is necessary that each individual should take ownership of their own spiritual growth and development. However, the environment for such is an important factor that has to be considered (Fryar, 2015). Thus, it is empirical that avenues be provided among individuals to practice ones’ spirituality. In fact, teachers have expressed to continue providing a protected time for the Friday Spiritual Pabaon. Furthermore, workplace spirituality is an important factor in the job satisfaction of the employees (Hassan, et.al, 2016). As expressed by the teachers, provision for spiritual development positively affects performance, knowledge, behavior, and innovation (Wang, et.al, 2019).

Hopes for Deeper Involvement

The teachers have appreciated the reflections and the sharing provided by the facilitating priest for the Spiritual Pabaon activity. Regardless of the deep and relatable explanations and input of the priest, the teachers are looking for interactions and visual guidance.

Guided Contemplation

Teachers, as social beings, feel the need to belong in a group. Although the elaboration of the facilitating priest impacts greatly their reflection and their realization, teachers are also yearning to hear from the reflection and realization of their colleagues. They feel the need to validate the experiences that they are having and to empathically and realistically relate further into the sharing.

“One thing I can suggest, is to make the spiritual pabaon a conversation. I remember before, there are teachers who were invited to share in the mass. So, you really feel that you are part of the community. If maybe we can have 3-5 minutes of sharing from a teacher in a week, then Father will process it.” (#12)

“The activity would also improve if we can ask a teacher to provide his/her reflection of the entire week for just a minute or two as it allows others to empathize and know more of their colleagues better in this type of set-up.” (#3)

Even further, a visual representation of the reflection points is highly requested from the teachers in order for them to focus on something in particular. They would also feel that it sets the mood and it helps them go back to the process when they get disturb in the middle of it.

"There are also times that we are rattled with the week's activities. So, if there are visual attachments with the spiritual attachments with it, then I could dedicate my time to it. Although it is sensible and Father has a soothing voice that can attract us for the prayer, but I am a visually engaged person so it would be better to have a visual representation." (#6)

"Maybe we can think of some reflection points. It is nice if it is short and if we could also have like to end the day with worship songs as springboard as it relaxes us. Or inspirational song or video." (#2)

"If possible, the reflection points will just be 2 to 3 reflection points that we can write on and include during our prayer time in the weekend. I think it's also good if it is flashed on the screen so that there is a screenshot because we are visual learners." (#9)

It has to be noted that visual representation is an important aspect to establish connections with the audience and the concept (Yoon, Kim, Lee, 2021). The use of words, symbols and pictures help mediate the presence and relationship of human beings to the realm of the sacred (Goldammer, 2020). Thus, teachers will be able to deepen their reflection if guided with visual aids.

Adding the Ignatian Flavor

Establishing structure is one of the guidelines that teacher adheres to in all activities. Looking into the Friday Spiritual Pabaon as one of the school's important activities, teachers are hoping to perceive a structure with its implementation. Although others admire the unexpected elements, having a clear flow of the process is much more appreciated by many.

"Actually Father was able to share but maybe he needs it to be more regular on every Friday." (#9)

"It makes me say that it should be like an IPP. Like within the week we have context. Then before we proceed with other life roles in the weekend, there will be reflection, and then application." (#3)

"It is nice if it is short and if we could also have like to end the day with worship songs as springboard as it relaxes us. Or inspirational song or video." (#5)

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In a fast-paced environment in an online teaching set-up, teachers are absorbed into their work and in accomplishing their task. In most cases, their psycho-emotional and spiritual self are set aside to focus on other aspects of the job. Thus, the spiritual provision of the Friday Spiritual Pabaon is well-welcomed by the grade schoolteachers as they see it as a break and a breather from all the work-week hassle and struggle. Through the activity, a feeling of heightened spirituality has been expressed due to the release of work stress & spiritual renewal that have led to better work attitude and behavior. Though the activity needs to improve on structure, such as the flow of the different parts and ensure

engagement and participation, and presentation strategies to involve all the senses, teachers have found this as good opportunity for spiritual enrichment.

FURTHER STUDY

Future research may explore the long-term impact of regular spiritual interventions such as the Friday Spiritual Pabaon on teachers' overall well-being, job satisfaction, and teaching performance. It is also recommended to investigate how structured and sensory-rich spiritual activities can be designed to maximize engagement and inclusivity among teachers with diverse spiritual backgrounds. In addition, comparative studies between online and in-person implementations of spiritual programs could provide deeper insights into their effectiveness in different teaching environments.

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