

Marian Devotion in the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) in The Diocese of Ruteng

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Abstract. This article examines the forms, practices, and functions of Marian devotion among Catholics in the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) within the Diocese of Ruteng. Employing a qualitative research method, data was collected through interviews and active observation. The study reveals that devotion to Mary is a highly popular expression of personal and communal faith. The most significant form of this devotion is the Rosary prayer. The BEC serves as a vital space for practicing Marian devotion, with a particular focus on various forms of veneration centered on Mary. Mary plays a crucial role in the faith experience of the BEC members, acting as both a unifying figure and a source of inspiration. The BECs are characterized by their devotional, social, and cultural dimensions.

Keywords: Marian Devotion; BEC; Catholicism; Parish; Rosary

1 Introduction

In the Catholic Church, the sanctification of the faithful is pursued not only through liturgical celebrations but also through popular religiosity, which flourishes among the believers. In the Christian tradition, popular religiosity is deeply connected to Jesus' practice of praying to His Father [1]. It is crucial to remember that all forms of popular religiosity or piety must originate from and culminate in the liturgy (SC 12-13) [2] [3] [4]. This religiosity, expressed individually or collectively, is inspired not primarily by the liturgy but by forms inherited from their nation or culture. Forms of popular piety include the veneration of relics, visits to holy places, pilgrimages and processions, the Stations of the Cross, religious dances, medals (CCC 1674), and devotions (CCC 1676) [5].

Devotion is often directed toward particular saints. In the lives of believers, devotion to Mary holds a special place and is frequently practiced both individually and collectively [6]. Marian devotion is not only a common religious practice but has also become a significant topic for scientific research. Academic studies on Marian devotion assess its influence on faith and the practical pastoral life of believers [7]. These studies appreciate efforts to build a world of simple believers and foster solidarity among them.

Marian devotion, in particular, sustains hope in seemingly hopeless situations, as reflected in scriptures like Romans 4:18 ("Hope even though there is no reason to hope") and Isaiah 42:3 ("A bruised reed he will not break, and a faded wick he will not quench"). These

practices bring joy, peace, and a sense of God's presence to the faithful, emphasizing the enduring role of Marian devotion in the spiritual life of Catholics [8].

Devotion plays a pivotal role in the lives of believers [9], becoming increasingly significant as it embodies a form of popular piety intimately connected to the daily lives of the faithful. The practice of strong devotion impacts both personal and church life [10]. According to Synod III (2013-2015) of Ruteng Diocese, the practice of devotion yields joy, peace of mind, and a continuous sense of God's presence. This devotion engenders pride and wisdom, affirming the Catholic identity of believers, boosting self-confidence, fostering empathy and compassion, and encouraging metanoia. Moreover, within the church context, devotional practices enhance the aspects of *koinonia* (communion), *kerygma* (preaching), liturgy (sanctification), and *diakonia* (service) among the faithful [11]. These practices not only fortify personal piety but also strengthen communal bonds and the overall spiritual life of the church, ensuring that devotion remains a central and transformative element in the religious experience of believers [12].

In practical pastoral terms, the implementation of devotion typically occurs within groups that are part of a Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC). Believers who are members of a BEC agree on the time and location for their devotional practices. Beyond striving for personal piety, these practices foster feelings of brotherhood and create a spirit of synodality within church life [13]. Such practices enrich the life of the Church and reinforce the model of the Church as the People of God. In the spirit of Christ, all BEC members actively participate in building the Church [14]. The Church belongs to all believers, not just the hierarchy, and its life and progress are determined from below by the faithful as well as from above by the clergy.

In this context, the practice of devotion within the BEC is a valuable opportunity to strengthen the Church's identity, which grows and develops from the faith experience of the People of God. This faith experience provides a solid foundation for living out the call to faith in everyday life. It is hoped that a strong faith will enhance the ability to understand and interpret life's context, as context is both the source and target in theological practice (pastoralism) [15].

This research explores the rich forms of Marian devotion practiced at BCE in the Ruteng Diocese. Marian devotion is popular within BCEs, where Mary serves as both an object of devotion and an inspiration for daily life. The study aims to explain Mary's identity and role in the eyes of the faithful and assess the implications of Marian devotion for resilience in challenging times. Discussions on the Mary-centered BEC model are particularly relevant in this context. By examining these devotional practices, the research contributes to understanding how Marian devotion impacts the faith and pastoral life of the community.

2 Method and Materials

This research employs a qualitative approach, using interviews and observations for data collection. Interviews were conducted with parishioners, Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) administrators, and church leaders across seven parishes in Ruteng Diocese. The study conducted open-ended interviews as the primary method of data collection. Respondents were purposively selected based on the research interests to ensure relevant and rich data. The sample comprised three priests, providing clerical perspectives, five leaders of church-based communities, eight administrators of Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), and six lay individuals. The diversity of respondents allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The interview data were analyzed using triangulation methods to enhance the

credibility and validity of the findings. Observations were both active and passive, involving direct participation in the BEC activities or simply observing. Data analysis involved identifying themes and patterns, interpreting, and reporting them.

Ruteng Diocese, located on Flores Island in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT-*Nusa Tenggara Timur*) Province, is part of the only province in Indonesia with a Catholic majority. In this province, Catholics make up 56% of the population, followed by other Christians at 35%, Muslims at 8%, and the rest consisting of Hindus, Buddhists, Confucians, and traditional beliefs. The province hosts eight dioceses: Kupang, Atambua, Weetabula, Larantuka, Maumere, Ende, Ruteng, and the newest, Labuan Bajo. Kupang and Ende are Archdioceses.

The Diocese of Ruteng was recently divided, creating the Diocese of Labuan Bajo. Previously, Ruteng was Indonesia's largest diocese, known for its substantial Catholic population and numerous church institutions and nuns. The province of NTT is notable for producing many priests, who have been sent as missionaries to Europe and other continents. Despite Catholicism being introduced by European missionaries only in the early 20th century, it has grown rapidly in this region [16] [17].

Catholicism on Flores Island is a strong identity, with the church being a significant institution [18]. Devotion to Mary holds a special place, with notable Marian processions such as *Semana Santa* in East Flores and large-scale processions in Labuan Bajo. This study describes how Marian devotion is practiced within the Basic Ecclesial Community.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Findings

3.1.1 BEC in Ruteng Diocese

This research commenced by identifying the model and practice of the Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) within Ruteng Diocese. While BEC is a term used universally in the Catholic Church, its local context in Ruteng Diocese exhibits variations. Different terms such as "group," "community," "basic community," or "*kombas*" (short for *basic community*) are used, but they all refer to the same entity. Despite the differing names, the fundamental concept remains consistent across the diocese.

The BEC in Ruteng Diocese is a territorial entity rather than a categorical one, meaning groups are formed based on residential areas that unite neighbors into a single community. Structurally, BECs are integral to the parish, functioning at the grassroots level. Each parish is divided into multiple BECs, coordinated within regions. Larger parishes may further divide into sub-parish/stations (*stasi*), each encompassing several regions and BECs. This organizational structure ensures that each BEC, consisting of a group of families, is connected to the broader parish framework [19].

The size of the BEC is typically situational, depending on agreements or local conditions. Generally, a BEC consists of 10-40 neighboring families. It is noteworthy that the size of a BEC is often adjusted to correspond to the number of days in May or October. In Catholic tradition, May is the month of Mary, and October is the month of the Rosary. During these months, all BECs perform devotions to Mary by praying the Rosary, rotating from one house to another each day. Ideally, a BEC consists of about 30 families. If a BEC exceeds this number, it may be divided into two to ensure each house is visited once a month for the Rosary prayers in May or October.

BECs in Ruteng Diocese have specific names, usually derived from the names of saints who served as their protectors or patronage. For example, there are BECs named Saint Joseph, Saint Faustine, Saint Francis of Assisi, and Saint Mary, etc. Additionally, BECs can be named after titles or attributes of Jesus Christ or Mother Mary, biblical regions, or other religious aspects. Examples include "Trinity," "Holy Hull," "Sacred Heart," "Ecclesia," "Mount Tabor," "Galilee," and "Nazareth." The choice of name is generally a result of mutual agreement among group members. Interestingly, in Saint Francis of Assisi Parish in Ruteng, several BECs have erected statues of their protectors along roadsides as area markers, enhancing their sacred presence and reinforcing group identity (Interview with two people from St. Francis Assisi Parish, October 2024).

Given the predominantly Catholic context of Ruteng Diocese, the term BEC is widely recognized even in non-Ecclesial matters. Often, the name BEC is more commonly known than the official street names within the country's cultural nomenclature. This recognition extends to the leaders and managers of the BECs, who are well-known figures within their communities. They typically know all BEC members and the surrounding community, highlighting their popularity and influence (Interview with several people in Ruteng, October 2024).

As territorial, not categorical, entities, BECs exhibit diversity among their members in terms of age, gender, social status, economic background, occupation, ethnicity, race, and religion. Members range from children to the elderly. In urban areas, BECs may include a mix of entrepreneurs, employees, self-employed individuals, farmers, laborers, and drivers, while in elite areas, residents are often upper class. In rural areas, members are predominantly farmers or laborers. The movement of people for work creates ethnically and culturally diverse BECs. Moreover, while most members are Catholic, there may also be individuals from other religions. This inclusivity fosters a spirit of cooperation and dialogue, with non-Catholics participating in both religious and social activities, exemplifying the openness and collaborative nature of BECs.

The Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) plays a pivotal role in parish life within the Ruteng Diocese. It serves as a foundation for active parish members, undertaking tasks such as organizing liturgy for weekly Eucharist celebrations, managing choirs, lectors, acolytes, and security officers. At a fundamental level, BECs conduct catechesis, outreach for diocesan programs, and disseminate church teachings. They also facilitate administrative services, such as wedding preparations, where residents are required to register with the BEC before approaching the parish. This system reinforces the interconnectedness between parishioners and the parish, with BEC leaders issuing introductory letters and making recommendations (Interview with Mr. Petrus, a catechist, October, 2024).

Moreover, the BEC plays a crucial role in collecting donations from its members for the church or parish. Every parish in Ruteng Diocese requires its congregation to pay dues, which are collected monthly, annually, or at specific times as determined by the parish council. These contributions are collected by the BEC and then distributed to the parishes. Similarly, any parish donations for BEC residents are channeled through the BEC leadership, effectively making BECs function as extensions of the parish (Interview with Ms. Mia, Ms. Ani, October, 2004).

Given the variety of tasks they perform, Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) typically have an organizational structure that includes a chairman, deputy, treasurer, and various sections. This structure depends on the agreement of BEC residents and parish provisions. Common sections include the liturgical section, responsible for organizing liturgies and prayers, especially for Marian devotions in May and October, and the catechesis section, which handles catechetical activities (Interview with three people from Ketang Parish, November 2024)

Beyond church-related tasks, many BECs engage in socio-cultural activities, fostering a sense of community among residents who feel like an extended family. In communal societies, BEC strengthens social solidarity by assisting residents with matters such as funerals, weddings, and celebrations. They provide material support, traditional and religious rituals, and cultivate close, supportive relationships within the community (The witness of Ms. Flori, Ms. Edel, November 2024).

Unofficially, BECs can also support government programs and are sometimes used by politicians and parties to promote their agendas, particularly during election periods. Assistance from political entities often includes cooperative savings and loans, livestock, or seeds, aimed at garnering electoral support. Due to the sensitivity of political involvement, these activities are often framed as community rather than explicit BEC activities, even though they are based within the BEC framework (Talk with Ms. N, Mr. G, Ms. V, October, 2004).

3.1.2 Practice of Devotion to Mary in BEC

From our exploration, several forms of Marian devotion are practiced within the BECs in Ruteng Diocese.

Regular Rosary prayers in May and October is common practices. Our findings indicate that all BECs in Ruteng Diocese consistently pray the Rosary together during May (the month of Mary) and October (the month of the Rosary). A 70-year-old religious leader recounted that this habit has persisted since his childhood, with Rosary prayers conducted in his village and continued in other places he moved to school. Wherever he goes in this diocese, the Rosary is a constant practice among all BECs. Numerous testimonies corroborate that the initial formation of BECs was primarily to facilitate the Rosary (Interview with Mr. Stanis and Mr. Pius, October, 2024). Thus, devotion to Mary through the Rosary is a foundational, binding, and defining characteristic of a BEC.

As previously mentioned, the size of a BEC is primarily adjusted to accommodate the Rosary prayers in May and October, with the ideal size being 20-30 houses or families. With approximately 30 families, prayers are held each evening in a different family's home, rotating throughout the month. If the number of families exceeds the days in the month, prayer times may extend into the following month (June/November), but this typically involves only a few homes. Some believe that the Rosary month should be exclusively fulfilled within May and October due to its special significance. Therefore, policies such as praying in two houses in one night—half the prayer in one house and then continuing in another—have been adopted to ensure completion within the month. If there are fewer than 30 families, some houses may host prayers twice, or alternative activities such as pilgrimages to Marian grottos may be organized to maintain the full prayer schedule within the dedicated months.

Marian devotion in the form of the Rosary during May and October in BECs is practiced through various methods and models. The prayer structure often includes the full five decades of the Rosary, complemented by readings from the Holy Bible and reflections. These reflections are sometimes prepared by group members on a rotating basis, while others may use texts provided by the parish or published by specific publishers, available online. Regularly gathering in BECs, participants aim to study the Holy Bible from both scholarly biblical texts and the context of their daily lives. This approach raises questions about how ordinary readers interact with Scripture and how Scripture influences their lives. The content of homilies typically relates to the character and example of Mary, illustrating her inspiration for the faith and life of the community. Some groups may only recite the Rosary without additional readings or homilies, with prayer leaders rotating among the residents. Devotion to Mary is consistently accompanied by songs praising her in both national Indonesian and regional languages,

reflecting the community's familiarity with Marian hymns (Talk with the Leader of two BEC's in Ruteng Diocese, November 2024).

Rosary prayers are primarily held in the afternoon or evening, either before or after dinner, depending on the community's preference. Some BECs conduct a parade or procession of a statue of Mary from one house to another. Typically, the statue is kept at the BEC chairman's house when not in active use. At the beginning of the devotional month, the statue is moved daily to different homes for prayer sessions. Some BECs conduct this transfer with a simple procession, including prayers and songs of praise to Mary, while others may move the statue without ceremony.

When a statue of Mary is present in a home, the family believes Mary lives with them as a special guest for that day. Consequently, the family decorates the area where the statue is placed, always keeping candles lit. The presence of the statue brings joy to the family, symbolizing a spiritual visit that enriches their devotional practice (Witness of Ms. Mey, Ms. En, October, 2024).

The Rosary prayer involves children, teenagers, and adults, especially during May and October. During these months, children are often joyful, not only participating in prayers but also using the time before or after prayers to play and share experiences. Similarly, BEC members engage in discussions before and after prayers, planning BEC programs, discussing solutions to issues, or simply sharing life information. Typically, the host family provides drinks and snacks for the congregation, with some families offering dinner. On May 31 or October 31, the final day of the Rosary month, the congregation often closes with a communal dinner, music, and dancing, where all families contribute food, fostering community brotherhood, mutual concern, and collective life.

Marian devotion also plays a significant role in catechetical activities, faith sharing, and Holy Scriptures study, particularly during Lent and Advent. Dioceses and parishes organize catechesis and faith education programs for BEC residents to prepare for Easter or Christmas. These sessions can be led by the BEC chairman, capable members, or trained catechists from other BECs. Although the primary focus is on studying the Holy Scriptures and sharing faith experiences, these activities are integrated with Rosary prayers, ensuring that Marian devotion remains central to catechesis and faith formation.

Marian devotion is also evident in death worship practices. When a BEC resident passes away, it is customary for the community to gather and pray together from the day of death until three to five nights after the burial. These nightly prayers, typically in the form of the Rosary, are offered for the soul's safety, the strength of the bereaved family, and other intentions. Alongside songs about death, hymns of praise to Mary are sung. It is common to place a statue of Mary, a cross, and candles near the deceased. The role of BEC residents is prominent in organizing liturgies, devotions, traditional rituals, and providing financial, food, and other assistance during such times.

Marian devotion among BEC members in Ruteng Diocese includes pilgrimages to Marian grottos or shrines, either within the parish or beyond. During these pilgrimages, participants pray the Rosary and sometimes incorporate other services such as the Stations of the Cross or the Prayer of the Word. Occasionally, these pilgrimages are combined with the celebration of the Eucharist. Pilgrimages outside the parish often include picnic events, with highland residents choosing beach locations and vice versa. Numerous pilgrimage sites are scattered across the diocese, with the most common pilgrimages occurring in May and October, although they can occur at other times as well. Vehicles carrying BEC pilgrims are typically decorated with banners featuring large images of the Virgin Mary.

Apart from the BEC level, devotion to Mary is also very popular within families. Almost all respondents indicated that the Rosary prayer is their main family devotion. Each household usually has a spiritual corner decorated with a statue of the Virgin Mary, often decorated with flowers, crosses, and sometimes additional statues such as those of Jesus, Saint Joseph, or the Holy Family. Observations reveal that the statue of Mary is the most prominent and central in these spiritual corners. Families may pray the Rosary daily or on special occasions, such as birthdays, wedding anniversaries, death anniversaries, or when a family member is ill. In addition to the family Rosary, novenas to Mary for special and urgent requests are very popular, practiced both collectively and individually (Interview with Mr. Yu, Mr. Dami, Ms. Del, October, 2024).

At the parish level, Marian devotion remains prominent. On May 1 and October 1, parishes held an opening Mass for the Rosary, and on May 31 and October 31, a closing Mass. These Masses may take place in the church or at the parish's grotto. Every parish has a Marian grotto for parish, BEC, or personal pilgrimages. Parishes also organize Rosary prayer programs at the Marian grotto and sometimes recite the Rosary before weekly Mass begins. Additionally, some parishes include prayers of praise to Mary before the Mass concludes. Pilgrimage programs to various Marian grottos are established, and there are processions of Mary statues from one area to another within and between parishes. During these processions, congregants prepare tables with a statue of Mary, a cross, candles, and flowers in front of their houses.

3.1.3 Mary for the People of BEC

Beyond identifying models and forms of devotion to Mary, this research explores the significance of Mary for individuals within the BEC, investigating how they define and interpret this devotion in their daily lives, particularly within the BEC context. Mary is a prominent figure in religious services and a crucial aspect shaping the piety and religious identity of Catholics in Ruteng Diocese. When asked about their most frequently recited prayers, all respondents indicated the Hail Mary prayer. This prayer is more commonly recited than any other in the daily lives of the people. Many individuals wear the Rosary around their necks daily, and it is a vital item for long journeys. The Rosary prayer is also a staple during travel.

Observations of Eucharistic celebrations reveal that many individuals personally recite the Rosary before the Eucharist and even after receiving communion—the Body of Christ. This devotion is evident as people are seen praying while holding Rosary beads. Although the Eucharist theologically and liturgically centers on the banquet and sacrifice of Christ, Marian devotion remains integral. Some priests have attempted to discourage Rosary prayers during the Eucharist, yet many individuals persist in their devotion despite reminders.

When asked how they view Mary, many respondents described a deep personal connection, feeling that Mary was very close to them. The most popular image of Mary is as both a mother and helper. Mary is not just the mother of Jesus but also the mother of the faithful, embodying qualities such as patience, generosity, and acceptance. Mary faithfully listens to the prayers and complaints of the people and conveys their hopes to Jesus. Although many people also pray directly to Jesus, they often feel more comfortable making requests through Mary, whom they see as a helpful mother. This image is reinforced by numerous songs praising Mary, which emphasizes her role as the mother of the faithful and an eternal helper (interview with Ms. Ani, Ms. Siska, Mr. Primus, October, 2024)..

However, there are also devotional practices and erroneous beliefs that place Mary on a par with the Triune God, with some people viewing Mary as the ultimate recipient of all prayers. The local church attempts to educate the faithful to place Mary appropriately within the context of their faith. Nevertheless, individuals' belief in Mary's omnipotence is sometimes

based on personal experiences of answered prayers, leading to excessive devotion. People feel that Mary's humanity resonates with their own experiences, making her a relatable figure. For many, devotion to Mary is a means of connecting with her, providing a sense of safety, calm, peace, and happiness. Parishioners have testified that their love for Mary stems from her sensitivity to their needs as a mother.

In addition to being seen as a helper, Mary is also venerated under various titles such as Mother of God, Queen of Heaven, Morning Star, Nirmala, Virgin, Intercessor, Immaculate, and Glorious Mother. These titles are prevalent in prayers and designations among the people, influenced by the image of Mary found in Ecclesial prayers and songs. The Catholic Church's dogmas regarding Mary, including the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of Mary into heaven, significantly shape people's views of who Mary is to them.

Devotion in groups, especially within BECs, holds significant value. One parishioner mentioned finding it difficult to complete the five decades of the Rosary when praying alone, but within the BEC, the combined prayers of the Rosary, Holy Bible readings, and reflections are not perceived as overly long. Some believe that praying together provides a blessed experience, offering an opportunity to pray for one another and for broader interests such as the universal Church, the nation, and wider goals. In contrast to private prayer, which often focuses on personal interests, collective devotion within the BEC supports communal interests and fosters solidarity with others' needs.

In addition, shared devotion within the BEC not only strengthens one's relationship with God or Mother Mary but also with neighbors. Many people today are preoccupied with work, leaving little time for visiting or conversing with neighbors. However, by praying the Rosary from house to house, the congregation fosters closeness among residents. This practice creates a sense of family and community as individuals visit each other's homes and participate in prayers together (Interview with Ms. Else, Ms. Albina, Ms. Heny, October 2024).

When asked whether Marian devotion makes BECs more sensitive to fighting for justice or transforms them into a more activist community, responses were varied. Some believe their BECs are more socio-cultural and religious rather than transformative. Many BECs do not prioritize discussing social injustices or providing social control over societal injustices, focusing instead on maintaining social harmony and avoiding contentious discussions. Some members argue that issues of injustice are better suited to political rather than religious discussions (Discussion with Mr. Maks and Mr. Pice, October 2024).

Others argue that transformative tasks are more appropriate for NGOs or secular groups, believing that transformation does not necessarily require social protest. They view the BEC's role in fostering harmony, peace, mutual help, and prayer as highly meaningful. In this context, some see Mary as a calm and silent mother who works quietly to assist others. Praying the Rosary for public good and societal change is seen as a significant contribution to both the state and the Church. However, there are also voices within the community calling for the BECs to be more active in the struggle for justice, recognizing that this function is currently insufficient in existing BECs (Discussion with four people, October 2024).

3.2 Discussion

From the data presented, several important aspects emerge. *Firstly*, Marian devotion has become an integral tradition for the people in Ruteng Diocese, both personally and as members of the BCE. This aligns with the long-standing tradition within the history of the

Catholic Church globally [20] [21]. Marian devotion involves various forms of praise, prayer, respect, love, making requests through Mary, and emulating Mary's nature and character [22].

Theologically, Catholics do not worship the Virgin Mary [23]. Instead, they respect and love her because she is the mother of God and has been given a special role in God's work of salvation. This respect is in accordance with God's will. While Mary is a creation of God, she is considered His most beautiful work, the greatest of all His creations [24]. Therefore, devotion to Mary does not equate her with God. Placing Mary on the same level as God and worshipping her is a misguided practice that needs correction.

Excessive devotion actually diminishes and distorts the Catholic Church's teachings regarding Mary. The Second Vatican Council affirmed that Mary holds a place of honor.

“Placed by the grace of God, as God's Mother, next to her Son, and exalted above all angels and men, Mary intervened in the mysteries of Christ and was justly honored by a special cult in the Church. Clearly from earliest times the Blessed Virgin was honored under the title of Mother of God, under whose protection the faithful took refuge in all their dangers and necessities ... This cult, as it always has been existed, although it is altogether singular, differs essentially from the cult of adoration which is offered to the Incarnate Word, as well as to the Father and the Holy Spirit, and it is most favorable to it (LG 66)”

Excessive devotion can diminish and distort the Catholic Church's teachings regarding Mary. The Second Vatican Council confirmed that while Mary holds a place of honor, such devotion should not equate her with God [25]. Since ancient times, the Holy Virgin has been honored with the title 'Mother of God,' and the faithful have sought her protection in times of need. The Council emphasized that true devotion should be distinct from the worship due to the incarnate Word, the Father, and the Holy Spirit, while also reinforcing such worship.

Veneration of Mary is deeply rooted in Scripture, where she is described as a woman of faith. Her acceptance to become the mother of God, as described in Luke 1:26-38, is a pivotal event in salvation history. Mary's willingness to be God's mother serves as an inspiration of faith for Catholics, embodying courage, sacrifice, and divine favor. In the Bible, Mary is also depicted as a helper, particularly at the Wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11), reinforcing the belief that her prayers to Jesus can transform sorrow into joy [26].

The devotion to Mary in Ruteng Diocese is evident in the regular Rosary prayers during May and October, with the Rosary serving as a cornerstone of Marian devotion. This practice, deeply ingrained in the community, highlights Mary's role as mother and helper, reinforcing her significance in the spiritual lives of the faithful. The structured prayers and reflections during these months foster a sense of communal piety and connection to Mary, supporting a shared spiritual experience.

Despite the popularity of Marian devotion, it is essential to maintain a balanced perspective, ensuring that respect for Mary does not overshadow the centrality of God in worship. Educating the faithful about the proper place of Mary in their spiritual lives helps prevent misinterpretations and promotes a devotion that complements rather than detracts from the core tenets of the Catholic faith. Through proper guidance and practice, Marian devotion can continue to enrich the spiritual journey of believers without compromising the foundational doctrines of the Church.

Moreover, the data research reveals that the Rosary is the most popular form of devotion to Mary. The origins of the Rosary are rooted in the ancient practice of using prayer beads and meditative prayer recitation. The use of prayer beads to count prayers dates back to ancient times and spans various cultures, including non-Christian ones. In the 3rd and 4th centuries, Christian monks in the desert used knotted ropes to count prayers such as the Jesus Prayer. During the Middle Ages, strings of prayer beads were used to count the “Our Fathers”

(Pater Nosters), which led to the term “Paternosters.” From the 12th to 15th centuries, the structure of the Rosary gradually evolved, incorporating Hail Marys and meditations on Biblical events [27].

The Dominican Order, founded by St. Dominic in the 13th century, played a significant role in popularizing the Rosary. Tradition holds that Mary gave the Rosary to St. Dominic in a vision. By the 15th century, the structure of the Rosary had stabilized with 50 Hail Marys grouped into decades, often accompanied by psalms or Bible verses [28]. Today, the Rosary is usually prayed while contemplating specific mysteries, such as the Joyful Mysteries, the Sorrowful Mysteries, the Glorious Mysteries, and the Light Mysteries. The Rosary remains a popular form of prayer for many Catholics, often recited daily or weekly. Moreover, many popes have encouraged the recitation of the Rosary, recognizing its spiritual benefits.

It is unsurprising that this devotion is immensely popular. Devotions in May are associated with spring, a season symbolizing renewal and life. Mary is fittingly described as a spring flower that brings hope. Additionally, several Marian apparitions, such as those at Lourdes and Fatima, occurred in May. Thus, May is designated as the month of Mary, and devotion to her receives special attention during this time.

October is dedicated as the month of the Rosary. The Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, celebrated on October 7, was established by Pope Pius V in 1571 to commemorate the significant victory at the Battle of Lepanto, where the prayer of the Rosary is credited with aiding the Christian fleet's triumph against the Ottomans fleet [29] [30]. The month of October often coincides with the harvest season in many countries, and devotion to Mary through the Rosary is frequently associated with seeking protection and blessings for a good harvest. Therefore, October has become a significant time for Catholics to deepen their faith through the fervent and devoted prayer of the Rosary.

Secondly, the centrality of devotion to Mary within the BCE in Ruteng Diocese underscores the community's strong Ecclesial character, emphasizing Mary as a unifying and bonding figure. Mary's importance in self-expression as Catholics motivates the community's main communion, encouraging members to share, help, care for, and stand in solidarity with one another. They share both joy and sorrow, effectively becoming each other's family. Moreover, the BCE also fulfills social, cultural, and even political functions.

In Christian tradition, the most original community for all Christians is reflected in the Trinitarian relationship of God, who communicates and engages in intimate relationships (1 John 1:3) [31] [32]. This model informs the Christian community's life, mirroring the early congregation's practices of living with one heart and soul, praying, sharing, and assisting each other, especially caring for the poor and suffering. This familial model is widely implemented in many BECs in Ruteng Diocese, where residents act as a supportive family.

Ecclesial development has seen the BCE understood as relatively small groups, typically consisting of 10-20 families. According to Kirchberger [33], BECs were formed to enable Christians to live together as a community. The BCE movement is linked to liberation theology, envisioning BECs as spaces for justice and truth. However, in Ruteng Diocese, this aspect is limited. Most BCEs remain centered on prayer and devotion rather than becoming liberation communities, focusing more on charitable social work than on challenging unjust policies or destructive power. Research by the Pastoral Center of Ruteng Diocese confirms that the churches in the diocese are predominantly liturgical in nature.

From a transformative liturgy perspective, it is essential that devotional celebrations have social implications in daily life [34]. Transformative liturgy aims to encourage repentance and change, aligning what is prayed for (*lex orandi*) with what is believed (*lex credendi*) and

truly lived (*lex vivendi*). This includes embodying faith through actions such as defending justice, truth, and performing good deeds [35].

Building transformative liturgy is not about creating popular liturgy with current symbols but celebrating it from an eschatological perspective. The liturgy celebrated on earth mirrors the heavenly liturgy, and this eschatological dimension naturally leads to social implications from the Church's liturgy. In Marian devotion, Catholics are taught that "ritual devotion" must extend into "life devotion," meaning that Christians are invited to realize the Kingdom of God's values in their lives. This task highlights the Church's political nature and role in realizing the Kingdom of God.

Catholics celebrating Marian devotion must be ready to embody compassion for those who suffer, as God is an involved deity who moves closer to humans to demonstrate His love and goodness. Mary's active involvement in this movement is crucial, making Marian devotion a bridge from individual piety to social piety. Marian devotion fosters individual piety, which must evolve into social piety, ensuring that the community's spiritual practices translate into tangible acts of compassion and justice in daily life.

4 Conclusion

This research concludes that devotion to Mary within the Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) in Ruteng Diocese is both significant and widespread. Mary holds a vital place for all BEC members, both collectively and individually. Among the numerous forms and expressions of Marian devotion, the Rosary prayer stands out as the most popular practice. Believers of all ages, from children to the elderly, actively engage in praying the Rosary, both individually and in groups within the BEC. This practice, passed down through generations, has become an integral part of the spiritual life of the faithful.

In their devotion, Mary is predominantly depicted as Mother and Helper, aligning with the universal Catholic tradition of honoring Mary. This depiction is derived not only from biblical testimony and liturgical chants but also from daily life experiences. The faithful view themselves as children who approach Mary as their Mother and faithful Helper in both joyous and sorrowful times. They feel a closer connection to Mary as the intercessor of their prayers to Jesus, believing that praying together and through Mary leads to fulfillment and transformation. Additionally, other titles of Mary common in Church tradition are also well-known among BEC members.

In Ruteng Diocese, the BECs are essentially Marian-centered communities. Mary serves as a unifying figure and an inspiration for community life. However, it is concerning that most BECs remain focused on prayer and devotion, rather than evolving into liberation communities inspired by their devotion. Currently, BECs primarily function as social, familial, and devotional entities. The next challenge is to ensure that BECs also become liberation communities that contribute to the discourse and practice of justice. In this context, Marian devotion can provide a spiritual foundation for liberation praxis.

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