

INTERFAITH PREMARITAL EDUCATION IN CIREBON AND ITS IMPACTS ON FAMILY RESILIENCE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Muhammad Hilmi & Muhammad Najib Asyrof*
Universitas Islam Indonesia, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
*muhammad.najib.asyrof@uii.ac.id

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Abstract

This study comparatively examines the design, implementation, and impacts of interfaith marriage guidance in Cirebon Regency, filling the gap related to the different approaches to premarital education in a multireligious environment. This study compares Marriage Guidance (Bimbingan Perkawinan/Bimwin) at KUA Sumber and KUA Kedawung, Marriage Preparation Coaching at St. Joseph Church (Catholic), and Premarital Counseling at Indonesian Christian Church/GKI Pengampon (Protestant). The study aims to: 1) compare premarital counseling methods across institutions; 2) identify the benefits couples experience after following guidance; and 3) explore the bride-to-be's perception of the concept of a harmonious family. This study employs a qualitative- descriptive-comparative approach, utilizing in-depth interviews, observations, and document reviews, with informants selected purposively. The results of the study show: (1) there are differences in design and governance: KUA's Bimwin is short-intensive with standardized modules, Catholic Marriage Preparation Coaching combines structured courses and canonical investigation, while GKI implements 3–6 months of tiered counseling; (2) the benefits felt by interfaith couples are relatively similar, in the form of improved communication, conflict management, financial literacy, and strengthening spirituality, although the specific nuances vary according to the institution's traditions; and (3) the perception of a harmonious family converges on three main dimensions: healthy

communication, acceptance of the spouse, and long-term commitment, with different accents on each religion. These findings confirm that premarital guidance, although different in terms of curriculum and methods, plays a significant role in equipping couples practically, emotionally, and spiritually to build harmonious families.

Keywords: *Premarital Guidance, Interfaith Counseling, Harmonious Family*

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a universal social institution and is a natural as well as a basic need of human. As a bond, marriage serves as a social and legal legitimacy in legitimately channeling human biological instincts, as well as an important mechanism to prevent deviant behavior, such as immorality. More than that, marriage is also the main foundation in the formation of the family, which is the first and most important social unit in the process of reproduction, character building, and inheritance of cultural and moral values. In a multidisciplinary context, marriage is not only concerned with biological aspects, but also has social, legal, and spiritual dimensions that complement each other (Waite & Lehrer, 2003; Girgis et al., 2010).

Within the framework of religions, whether Islamic, Protestantism, or Catholicism, marriage is seen as a sacred bond and has very essential value in the lives of its people, despite the differences in theological and ritual approaches that are typical of each religion. In Islam, marriage is established through a marriage contract, which is binding according to sharia and is a manifestation of obedience to the commands of Allah. Marriage in Islam is not only considered a social contract, but also a worship that aims to form a family of *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah*, which is a family full of peace, affection, and divine grace (Kompilasi Hukum Islam, 1991). In contrast, in the Protestant Christian tradition, marriage is seen as a sacred covenant involving Christ as its center, in which married couples are required to respect and love each other selflessly, according to the example that Jesus Christ taught his people.

Marriage is a sacred event in which two individuals who love and cherish each other are united in the bond of life, blessed by God. In this bond, the two people no longer stand as two separate entities, but become a whole unit until death separates them. This is in line with the belief that what has been united by God should not be divided by man (Kather, 2023). Meanwhile, in Catholicism, according to the Book of Canon Law (KHK), more precisely in KHK1983 can.1055, marriage is a sacrament that has a very high status, understood as a covenant that binds a man and a woman in eternal life together. Nevertheless, Catholic marriage emphasizes the ultimate goal of not only biological reproduction, but also the well-being of husband and wife and the education of children as an integral part of a harmonious family (Pope Yohanes Paulus II, 1983).

In addition to these religious aspects, the national legal aspect also provides a firm regulation regarding the meaning and purpose of marriage. Law Number 1 of 1974 clearly defines marriage as a bond of birth and mind between a man and a woman that aims to form an eternal and happy family based on the provisions of God Almighty. In the context of national Islamic law, the Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI) emphasizes that marriage is a solid contract and is a form of worship in carrying out the commands of Allah SWT, so that it is sacred and has binding legal force (Kompilasi Hukum Islam, 1991).

Although normatively marriage is seen as a means of forming a harmonious family, social realities in the field often show the existence of conflict dynamics that cause divorce. Significant divorce cases, especially in Cirebon Regency, show that many marriages fail due to immature preparation, both in terms of understanding of married life and the emotional readiness of couples (Riana et al., 2024). Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the divorce rate in Indonesia in 2022 reached 516,344 cases and decreased to 463,654 cases in 2023, although it is still relatively high. The

main factors of divorce are economic problems (23.39%) and disputes or quarrels (54.31%). West Java Province recorded the highest divorce rate in 2023 with 102,280 cases (22.06% of the national average), while Cirebon Regency recorded 7,737 divorce cases in 2022 (37.66% of the number of marriages) and 6,636 cases in 2023 (35.49%). In Cirebon, the economy was the main cause with 72.48% of cases, followed by disputes of 19.80%. Divorces outside the Islamic religion in Cirebon Regency, based on District Court data, are also significant, with 919 cases in 2022 and 825 cases in 2023, a fairly high figure considering that the non-Muslim population in this region is only about 0.43% of the total Muslim-dominated population (99.55%). This phenomenon shows the importance of effective preventive efforts to reduce the divorce rate (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Cirebon, 2024).

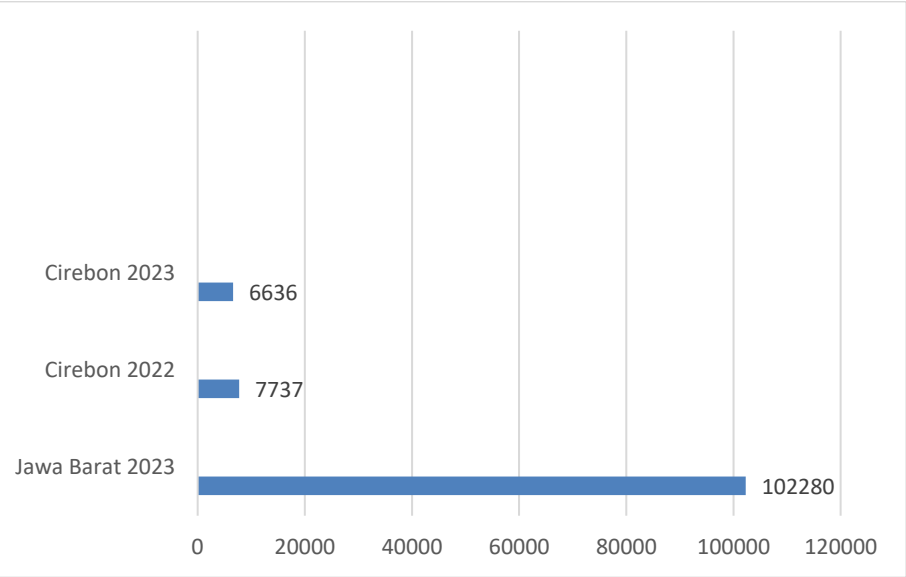


Figure 1. Comparison of Number of Divorce Cases in Cirebon 2022-2023

In line with these challenges, various parties, including the government and religious institutions, have implemented various programs to reduce divorce rates and strengthen family institutions. Mediation and marriage advice carried out by mediators in the Religious Court, District Court, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Religious Affairs Office (KUA), and the

church, is one of the strategic efforts in supporting the continuity of marriage. More specifically, premarital guidance or marriage counseling before marriage is an important method in equipping prospective couples with knowledge, skills, and emotional readiness to face family life. This approach not only prioritizes strengthening theory and knowledge but also conflict management and mental readiness in facing increasingly complex global challenges (Jalil, 2019; Silvi et al., 2018).

Previous literature has shown the effectiveness of premarital guidance in improving family harmony and lowering divorce rates. Research by Silvia (2018) proves that premarital counseling has a significant effect on the bride-to-be's understanding of living a married life. Furthermore, Abdul Jalil (2019) emphasizes the importance of the role of human resources, the right materials, and adequate facilities in supporting the success of the premarital guidance program. Thus, the premarital guidance program has a role in significantly reducing the divorce rate in one of the Sidoarjo areas of East Java. In addition, pastoral assistance and marriage enrichment in the Christian context are also identified as important methods to enrich and maintain the quality of marriage (Sirait, 2022).

However, although there have been many studies that discuss the implementation and benefits of premarital counseling, there is a gap in studies that comparatively compare the methods of premarital counseling between religions in certain areas, especially between Islam and Christianity in Cirebon Regency. This gap is an important foundation for this study to examine how the counseling methods applied in the two religions have an impact on the formation of harmonious families and whether there are significant differences that need to be considered in the practice of marriage guidance.

The purpose of this study is to compare the interfaith marriage guidance counseling methods applied by Islam and Christianity in Cirebon Regency,

identify the benefits felt by married couples after following the guidance, and explore the perception of the bride-to-be about the concept of a harmonious family. This research is expected to make a theoretical and practical contribution by providing a comprehensive understanding of the role of premarital guidance in forming a stable and harmonious family, as well as a reference for the development of similar programs in the future.

The scope of the study was limited to the analysis of premarital guidance methods carried out in Islamic and Christian religious institutions, as well as the evaluation of the results and perceptions of the community related to the harmonious family after guidance. Thus, this research not only fills the existing literature gap but also provides a scientific justification for the practice of premarital guidance as one of the effective solutions to reduce the divorce rate and strengthen family resilience in Cirebon Regency.

METHOD

This research is field research with a qualitative-comparative approach. This approach was chosen to understand in depth the implementation of marriage guidance in two religious communities—Islam and Christianity—and to compare the methods used in each institution. The normative-judicial approach is used to relate the findings to the applicable legal framework, both Islamic family law sourced from the Qur'an and Hadith, and marriage law in the Christian tradition, which is sourced from the Bible.

Data was collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were made to observe firsthand the guidance process at the Kedawung District Religious Affairs Office, Sumber District Religious Affairs Office, Saint Joseph Church, and Pengampon Indonesian Christian Church. Structured and semi-structured interviews were conducted with KUA officials, church leaders, and married couples participating in the guidance, who were selected using purposive sampling techniques. The

informants of this research are 14 informants with details of 2 KUA (Islamic) officials, 2 church leaders (1 Catholic, 1 Protestant), and 10 family couples (5 Muslim, 3 Catholic, 2 Protestant). The duration of interviews with the informants in this study varied, ranging from 45 minutes to 1 hour and 45 minutes, depending on the availability and context of each source.

Documentation is used to collect archives, guidance materials, and related regulations. The validity of the data was checked through triangulation, which is comparing the results of the three data collection techniques. Data were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive method with an interactive model by Miles and Huberman (1994). The analysis process is carried out cyclically and includes three stages. First, data reduction, namely the selection and simplification of raw data into information that is relevant to the focus of research, especially related to the technique of implementing guidance and its impact on participants. Second, data display, in the form of narrative descriptions, comparative tables, and thematic matrices, to identify patterns, relationships, and differences in methods between institutions. Third, drawing conclusions and verification, namely formulating the main findings that answer the research questions and verifying them through cross-checking with field data and confirmation from key informants. This method is designed to produce a comprehensive understanding of the differences and similarities of marriage guidance methods in Islamic and Christian environments, as well as to assess the contribution of each in realizing a harmonious family.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Comparison of Interfaith Premarital Education Methods

This research produced findings regarding the implementation of marriage guidance in Cirebon Regency, which was carried out in two different religious domains, namely in the Muslim environment through the Religious Affairs

Office (KUA) and in the Christian environment through the church. Both forms of implementation aim to equip the bride-to-be with the knowledge, skills, and understanding needed to build a harmonious household. However, there are quite prominent differences in terms of duration, materials, methods, and means used, in line with the characteristics, regulations, and traditions of each religion.

Based on the results of the research, KUA Sumber District and KUA Kedawung District both carry out marriage guidance as part of premarital services, but both have different characteristics and challenges. KUA Sumber District, located on Jl. Raden Dewi Sartika No. 11, Tukmudal, Sumber District, the capital of Cirebon Regency, serves an area of 29.50 km² with a population of 100,212 people, the majority of whom are Muslims (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Cirebon, 2024). Based on the results of an interview with Abdullah Musannif (Head of KUA Sumber District), the implementation of marriage guidance at KUA follows the technical instructions of the Ministry of Religion and is divided into two methods, namely classical and independent. The classical method is followed by a minimum of 15 pairs and lasts two days (Tuesday and Thursday) with a total of 16 hours of lessons covering eight subjects. Meanwhile, the independent method is followed by one couple or one bride-to-be with a short duration of 1-2 hours. Although premarital guidance is required by regulation, KUA Sumber cannot fully follow the guidelines because of the limited budget funds from the central government, which are only sufficient for 4-5 activities a year, while guidance activities are carried out almost every week. In addition, the full attendance rate of the bride-to-be is often constrained by work, so sometimes only one party attends. Despite this, the turnout remains high, around 80% of the total 700– 800 brides-to-be per year (Interview, 9 November 2023).

Meanwhile, Kedawung District has an area of 10.77 km² with a population of 62,408 people. Directly adjacent to Cirebon City, the people have a relatively high level of education and economy, and tend to be more critical and responsive. KUA Kedawung is one of the revitalized KUA that not only serve marriage and referral, but also other religious affairs such as waqf, zakat, and religious consultation. The implementation of marriage guidance here is mandatory for all brides-to-be and is also used for data validation. The activity is carried out twice a week (Monday and Thursday, at 08.00–16.00) with a total duration of 16 hours of lessons per class attended by a minimum of 15 couples. If the quota is not met, the guidance is carried out independently with the same material, and a certificate of fitness for marriage is still given. The success of guidance at KUA Kedawung can be seen from the attendance of participants, which reached 100% and the low divorce rate of less than 10% of the total 400-800 marriages per year, which, according to the report of the Sumber Religious Court, is the lowest in Cirebon Regency. This is associated with interactive delivery of materials, including two-way communication and family game simulations, which make participants more engaged and understand the material (Interview, 26 September 2023).

In general, although the two KUAs have a similar implementation structure according to the Ministry of Religion's guidelines, the differences arise from the level of participant involvement and the effectiveness of the results. KUA Kedawung showed more consistent achievements in full attendance and post-marriage results, while KUA Sumber faced budget and attendance constraints, but still tried to maintain the quality of material and the high frequency of guidance. The two KUA show that marriage guidance has an important role not only as an administrative requirement, but also as a means of equipping prospective brides to build harmonious and resilient households.

Based on the results of the research, the Church of Saint Joseph Cirebon is the first Catholic church in the Diocese of Bandung, which was inaugurated on November 10, 1880, and is located on Jalan Yos Sudarso No. 20 Lemahwungkuk, Cirebon. This church is served by a priest from the Order of the Holy Cross with Parish Priest Julius Himawan Christanto, and has 24 wards and one parish with a total of about 3,000 people spread across Cirebon City, Cirebon Regency, and Indramayu Regency. One of the important programs in this church is the Marriage Preparation Coaching (3P), which must be followed by every Catholic bride-to-be couple. Father Ignatius Lingga Dihadja (Pastoral of St. Joseph Catholic Church Cirebon) explained that this program is held three times a year, namely in March, July, and October, for three consecutive days (Friday and Saturday at 17.00–21.00, and Sunday at 07.00–16.00) with a minimum of ten pairs of participants. The material provided includes 10 (ten) modules covering aspects of the teachings of the Catholic faith, family relations, household economics, marriage law, pregnancy and sexuality arrangements, and future planning, with speakers consisting of priests and professionals such as doctors and psychologists (Interview November 9, 2023).

After passing the 3P and obtaining a certificate valid for six months, the bride-to-be must take part in the stage of canonical investigation carried out behind closed doors by the priest, for a minimum of fifteen hours, generally three months before the wedding. This stage aims to examine the bride-to-be's freedom of status, spiritual readiness, and understanding of Catholic marriage. The identity of the candidate was also announced in the church for three months to give the faithful the opportunity to express their objections if there were obstacles to marriage. According to Father Lingga, the success of 3P is highly determined by two-way interaction, the activeness of the participants, and a full understanding of the material provided. Data for 2023 shows that there are 25 couples who participated in the 3P and got married

at the Church of Saint Joseph Cirebon, with a divorce rate of zero or 0%. This shows that a structured marriage development program, accompanied by spiritual guidance and professional support, contributes significantly to the readiness and resilience of the Catholic household in this parish (Interview November 9, 2023).

The Indonesian Christian Church (GKI) Pengampon Cirebon, as one of the largest Protestant churches in region III of Cirebon under the auspices of the West Java Synod, organizes a Premarital Counseling program that must be followed by prospective brides. According to the High Priest Prasetya Susanto, this counseling is carried out for 3-6 months before the wedding, with weekly meetings lasting two hours. The goal is to build commitment, maturity, and readiness to face the challenges of marriage. The counseling material covers ten main topics, including marriage as an agreement, healthy communication, family unity, the role of husband and wife, children's education, and financial management (Interview, September 26, 2023).

The implementation is carried out classically in two formats, namely large classes and small classes, with an alternating pattern between formal and non-formal meetings. Each pair of coaches accompanied five pairs of participants. The findings of the study show that small group sessions are considered the most effective because they allow for personal interaction, deepening of the material, and the creation of new social networks. Participants felt real benefits in the form of increased communication, strengthening commitment, and the formation of social support from fellow couples, which is important capital for readiness to build a household (Interview, September 26, 2023).

In general, the findings of the study show that marriage guidance at KUA is intensive, with a short duration, which is only two days, but is packed with material that has been determined in the official guidelines. The delivery method is relatively formal with the dominance of lectures, but it is still

equipped with discussion sessions to provide a space for interaction. Meanwhile, marriage guidance in the church lasts for a longer period of time, allowing for the gradual deepening of the material. The material in the church also emphasizes the theological and faith-building aspects, in addition to practical discussions of home life.

Comparisons between institutions can be seen in terms of duration, frequency, materials, facilitators, methods, and facilities. In KUA, the duration is only two days with a full schedule, while in the church, it lasts three to six months with a weekly or bi-weekly schedule. The participants in the KUA are all Muslim couples who have registered for marriage, while in the church are Catholic or Protestant couples who are preparing to receive a blessing or the sacrament of marriage. The material in the KUA refers to the guidelines of the Ministry of Religion, while in the church, it is arranged based on the doctrine and traditions of the respective church.

Table 1. Comparison of Premarital Guidance Implementation Methods

No.	Aspects	Islam (KUA of Sumber District and KUA of Kedawung District)	Catholicism (Santo Yusuf Church Cirebon)	Protestantism (Indonesian Christian Church/GKI Pengampon Cirebon)
1.	Name	Marriage Guidance	Wedding Preparation Coaching	Premarital Counseling
2.	Purpose	Creating a family that is <i>sakinah</i> <i>mawaddah</i> <i>warahmah</i> (full of love, love and affection)	Creating a strong and permanent family according to the expectations of the church	Creating a good and happy family

No.	Aspects	Islam (KUA of Sumber District and KUA of Kedawung District)	Catholicism (Santo Yusuf Church Cirebon)	Protestantism (Indonesian Christian Church/GKI Pengampon Cirebon)
3.	Nature	Mandatory but it is enough to be attended by one of the prospective brides	Must be attended by prospective brides	Must be attended by prospective brides
4.	Legal Basis	Decree of the Director General of Islamic Guidance Number 189 of 2021 as amended by Number 172 of 2022	Guidelines from the Diocese (Diocese of Bandung)	Guidelines from the Working Body of the Synod of the Indonesian Christian Church Assembly (West Java Regional Synod)
5.	Methods	In-person (classical or self-supported), virtual	Face-to-face (classical)	Face-to-face (classical)
6.	Materials	7 main materials from the facilitator module, plus pretest and evaluation	10 modules	10 modules
7.	Duration	2 days (16 hours of lessons) + 1 day (independent study)	3 days plus 1 day for canonical research	1-2 months or more
8.	Number of activities	2 times a week (Monday/Tuesday, and Thursday)	3 times a year in March, July and October	1-3 times a year
9.	Venues/facilities	Unair-conditioned wedding hall	Church hall and specialized, air-conditioned counseling room	Church hall and specialized, air-conditioned counseling room

No.	Aspects	Islam (KUA of Sumber District and KUA of Kedawung District)	Catholicism (Santo Yusuf Church Cirebon)	Protestantism (Indonesian Christian Church/GKI Pengampon Cirebon)
10.	Accommodation	Provided only by some KUAs	provided	provided
11.	Source of funds	the government budget, participants are free of charge	Participants are charged Rp. 350,000 per pair	Participants are charged Rp. 350,000 per pair

Marriage Guidance (*Bimwin*) of KUA

The Marriage Guidance (*Bimwin*) organized by KUA Sumber District and KUA Kedawung District is basically designed as a preventive intervention to equip brides-to-be with knowledge and life skills that are relevant to household dynamics, while suppressing the potential for divorce. This orientation is relegated to practical goals: to prepare couples to understand the role and relationship between husband and wife according to Islamic teachings, to manage differences in character, and to foster respectful communication. The field results indicate that couples who follow *Bimwin* have a more concrete picture of the practice of married life, with clear normative references, so that they are better prepared to identify problems and explore solutions based on the material that has been learned.

The implementation refers to the Decree of the Director General of Islamic Guidance No. 169 of 2021 (updated No. 172 of 2022), which stipulates the material structure and learning objectives. The learning package includes five main sessions (a total of 10 Lesson Hours) which include family preparation, psychology and family dynamics, needs and financial management, reproductive health, and preparation for quality generations. Two complementary sessions (pre-test/learning contract and evaluation/reflection) are mandated as an early final assessment instrument. The division of

facilitator roles is collaborative across agencies of the Ministry of Religion for sessions 1-3, the Ministry of Health for session 4, and BKKBN for session 5, with the support of independent reading (Sakinah Family Foundation), so that cognitive strengthening and skill training do not solely depend on face-to-face in the classroom. At the process level, the guidelines allow for face-to-face, virtual, and self-paced modes, with capacity limitations (face-to-face 5-15 pairs; virtual 10-40 pairs) to maintain the effectiveness of facilitation (Muslifah & Busriyanti, 2024).

An important finding of the study is that there is a gap between normative design and implementation practices due to limited funding. Budget support is only adequate for about 4-5 events per year with a quota of ± 15 couples (± 75 couples/year), while the number of annual weddings is much larger (KUA Source: 832 [2022] and 778 [2023]; KUA Kedawung: 442 [2022] and 368 [2023]). This need-capacity imbalance drives the ‘as much as KUA can’ model: activities are condensed into one day of face- to-face, rely more on internal speakers, and are often without pre-tests or final evaluations. Pedagogically, this compaction has the potential to cut the quality of diagnostic and summative assessments, reduce the space for internalizing the material, and weaken the interdisciplinary perspective when the involvement of the Ministry of Health and BKKBN cannot be presented optimally (Interview, November 9, 2023).

Variations in participation achievements also appeared. KUA Kedawung reported 100% completeness, while KUA Sumber was around 80%. This difference is mainly influenced by employment factors (work permits) and domicile outside the city, which hinders full attendance. These findings confirm that successful participation is not only a matter of participant commitment, but also the compatibility of the process design with the rhythm of adult learners’ lives. In this context, modal flexibility (e.g., maximizing virtual options for groups of 10-40 couples) and scheduling arrangements

(afternoon/weekend classes, or a 2-5- day gradual pattern) are logically sought so that the 10 JP (Lesson Hours) curriculum and complementary sessions are not forced to be congested in one day (Interview, September 26, 2023).

Practically, this activity has two-layer implications. *First*, at the process layer, KUA can maintain minimum assessment standards even if the duration is short, such as simple pre-quiz and reflective exit tickets, so that there is documented learning feedback. Pre-reading/post-reading assignments from the Sakinah Family Foundation module can shift some of the cognitive load outside the classroom, so that face-to-face hours are prioritized for communication exercises, financial decision-making simulations, and conflict case studies. *Second*, at the institutional level, strengthening networks with local health centers and BKKBN is important to ensure that reproductive health and family planning materials are delivered by competent authorities, even with a selective attendance scheme. An inter-district clustering strategy or cross-schedule batching can also be considered to expand the scope without lowering the quality of facilitation (Farianita et al., 2020; Farianita et al., 2020).

Conceptually, the quality of *Bimwin* is a function of balance between substance (what is taught in accordance with No. 169/2021) and process (how its delivery is regulated in the guidelines and practices of KUA). Budget and time constraints tend to push the process to be compressed; As a result, some substances, especially the assessment component and the depth of the topic, are vulnerable to being reduced. Therefore, an adaptive process design (gradual pacing, mixed mode, minimal assessment) is the key so that *Bimwin*'s initial goal of equipping life skills and strengthening family resilience is still achieved in the midst of operational constraints. This finding places *Bimwin* not just in a pre-contract administrative stage, but an adult learning instrument that requires flexible delivery, evidence of achievements, and

cross-agency synergy so that its impact on household readiness is truly measurable.

Marriage Preparation Coaching (3P) at the Church of Saint Joseph Cirebon

The findings describe a well-organized architecture of premarital formation: a parish with a long history (founded November 10, 1880), a parish of ±3,000 people in 24 wards, and a governance supported by the Order of the Holy Cross with a clear ministry structure. This institutional context is relevant because organizational capacity, pastoral traditions, and clergyman–lay networks affect the continuity of the 3P program, administrative order (six-month certification), and procedural discipline (canonical investigation and announcement of candidate identity). In other words, ‘institutional carrying capacity’ is a prerequisite for coaching to run consistently and measurably (Vatican, 1996).

In terms of design, 3P applies a two-tier model: (1) a structured premarital course (three times a year, three consecutive days, a minimum of ten couples), and (2) intensive canonical investigation (≥ 15 hours, typically three months before the wedding), accompanied by a public announcement of the candidate's identity for three months. The first layer (course) performs an educational–formative function; The second layer (canonical) performs a verifiable-disciplinary function. This combination provides a balance between strengthening competencies (knowledge, attitudes, skills) and norm enforcement (barrier-free status, spiritual readiness, commitment to the sacramental nature of marriage). Theoretically, this kind of governance reduces information asymmetry between couples and minimizes moral hazards (e.g., marrying without adequate understanding or with canonical barriers) (Rillyanugraha & Endi, 2024).

The 3P curriculum features a multidisciplinary approach: ten modules that summarize the teachings of the Catholic faith, marriage law, marital

relations and communication, household economics, pregnancy arrangement and sexuality (Dabiri et al., 2024), children's education, to future planning. The involvement of priests and professionals (doctors, psychologists) expands the horizon of learning from the theological domain to the medical and psychosocial realms. Pedagogically, it activates three domains of achievement—cognitive (understanding of scientific norms and information), affective (formation of attitudes and values), and psychomotor/performance (communication skills, role negotiation, and financial planning). Father Lingga's emphasis on two-way interaction and participant activity is in line with the principle of adult learning: adult learning is more effective when it is participatory, contextual, and problem-solving oriented (McGrath, 2009).

The setting of the block schedule (Friday-Sunday) and the minimum threshold of participants (≥ 10 pairs) also had an impact on class dynamics. *First*, the three-day intensive format allows for material immersion, class norm formation, and peer learning across pairs. *Second*, the participant threshold encourages economies of scale without sacrificing interaction; the class is not too small (so there is minimal diversity of cases) and not too large (thus inhibiting individual feedback). *Third*, closing with Mass on Sunday ties the learning experience with a liturgical dimension, strengthening the integration between learned knowledge and the appreciation of faith.

The stage of canonical inquiry serves as a gatekeeping mechanism that examines barrier-free status, quality of intention, and spiritual-psychological readiness. The minimum duration (≥ 15 hours) provides room for in-depth dialogue, clarification of potential obstacles, and personalized counseling. While the three-month identity announcement increases social accountability, it gives the parish community the opportunity to raise legitimate objections. These two practices, spiritual-canonical due diligence and community scrutiny, conceptually reduce the probability of a mismatch which often triggers severe post-marital conflicts (Larantukan & Latumahina, 2025).

Outcome indicators reported that 25 couples took the 3Ps and married in 2023, with a 0% divorce rate, appear to be in line with the hypothesis that structured coaching plus canonical verification and professional support contribute to household readiness and resilience (Carroll & Doherty, 2003) (Stanley et al., 2006). However, from a methodological perspective, this relationship needs to be read carefully. First, the 0% figure may reflect a short time horizon (not long enough to observe divorce), as well as a parish-based database (e.g., divorces in the future may be recorded in the judicial system, rather than in the parochial administration, or handled through other canonical mechanisms such as nullity proceedings). Second, there may be selection bias: couples who enrol and complete 3P to obtain a certificate and pass canonical are those who have a higher commitment and conformity from the beginning, which in turn is indeed at lower risk of disintegration. Thus, the findings of these results are consistent with the program's alleged contributions, but have not proven causality without a corresponding comparator or longitudinal tracking.

Nevertheless, some reasonable mediation mechanisms can be proposed. First, standardization of expectations through modules on the role of husband and wife, financial management, and sexuality has the potential to reduce the expectation gap that often triggers initial conflicts. Second, the increase in the couple's self-efficacy in communicating and solving problems, the result of psychology sessions and relationship exercises, serves as a cushion when dealing with transitional stress. Third, support networks (priests, professionals, environmental communities) provide a referral path when symptoms of conflict arise (Carroll & Doherty, 2003). Fourth, moral-communal accountability through identity publishing builds social norms towards loyalty and responsibility.

Implicitly, the 3P practice at St. Joseph's Church has several replication strengths, namely a multidisciplinary curriculum, a professional spiritual

teaching team, a planned block format, a term certification (valid for six months) that maintains the proximity of the material to the date of the blessing, and consistent canonical protocols. For future strengthening, two evaluative agendas should be considered. First, longitudinal tracking ($\geq 3-5$ years) with intermediate indicators (communication quality, marital satisfaction, conflict management, household economic stability) and final indicators (bed separation, divorce, or nullity petition), so that the influence of the program can be estimated more strongly. Second, comparative comparisons (e.g., between parishes or before the policy) to reduce selection bias and increase external validity.

Overall, the 3P pattern in the parish demonstrates a coherence between purpose, content, and process: the pastoral purpose of family resilience is translated into the content of a module that brings faith and science together, and then carried out through a process that balances formation (course) and discernment (canonical). Preliminary results (0% divorce in the 2023 cohort) are in line with the design, although they still require long-term confirmation and adequate comparisons. These findings suggest that procedural order, relevant curriculum, and professional support of the community are strategic combinations to strengthen the readiness of Catholics in Cirebon.

Premarital Counseling at GKI Pengampon

The results of the study show that marriage guidance at GKI Pengampon is arranged as a tiered learning process that lasts three to six months before the blessing, with the rhythm of weekly or bi-weekly meetings. From the perspective of adult pedagogy, such time spans and rhythms provide two main advantages: (1) spaced learning that allows material to be absorbed, tested in the couple's daily experience, and then reflected on at subsequent meetings; and (2) a gradual scaffolding from concept recognition to thematic theme deepening, so that relational competencies are

not only understood cognitively, but also practiced progressively (Merriam, 2001).

The curricular structure that begins with the theological foundation of marriage places the relationship between husband and wife in the horizon of the call of faith. This initial emphasis is strategic because it equates the couple's vision and expectations with the meaning of the 'covenant' of the theme marriage that is often a source of expectation gaps in the early years of marriage before moving on to practical themes such as fidelity, communication, household finances, and family spiritual practices. This connection is important; without practical processing, theological values tend to stop at the declarative level. Conversely, relational skills without a horizon of meaning are vulnerable to being reduced to short-term techniques (Petch et al., 2012).

A combination of Bible-based teaching methods, group discussions, couples counseling, and group worship mapped out a variety of learning needs. Bible-based teaching provides a conceptual and ethical framework for relationships; Group discussions open up space for peer learning and normalization of experiences (couples realize that the problems they face are not unique), as well as expanding problem-solving strategies. Private couples counseling allows sensitive issues (family history, power relations, emotional wounds, or dysfunctional communication patterns) to be addressed in a safe and ethical setting.

Worship together strengthens the spiritual dimension as a resource for coping and commitment (Mahoney et al., 2001). In the process, the four methods complement each other: classes form shared knowledge, groups facilitate the exchange of experiences, counseling transforms the unique dynamics of each couple, and worship enables the internalization of values (McGrath, 2009).

Another strength appears in governance and resources. The involvement of the congregation pastor and the guidance team adds substantive accountability and continuity of assistance before the blessing. The availability of infrastructure (space/hall, multimedia) and official modules from the Synod minimizes quality variations due to different facilitators, while facilitating evaluation because there are documented content standards. Thus, fidelity to the curriculum is more likely to be maintained than a program that relies entirely on teaching style (Campbell et al., 2007).

Nevertheless, there are some critical notes. First, the duration of three to six months has the potential to leave attrition (decreased attendance) if the schedule is not sufficiently adaptive to the work rhythm of the participants; this demands flexibility (e.g., variation of hours, make-up sessions, or hybrid sessions) without sacrificing the interaction that is a strong hallmark of the program. Second, the quality of the learning experience is highly dependent on the competence of the facilitator in managing group dynamics and counseling. A good curriculum does not automatically produce good outcomes if facilitators are not adequately trained in facilitation techniques, confidentiality ethics, risk detection (e.g., dating violence, coercive control, or addiction problems), and professional referral when needed (Yalom & Crouch, 1990; York, 2015). Third, without a systematic assessment mechanism, it is difficult to measure learning outcomes. Many premarital programs stop at process indicators (attendance, module completion), even though outcome indicators (changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior) and post-marriage follow-up (e.g., booster sessions 3–6 months after blessing) are important to assess the impact (Falletta, 1998).

By practical implication, some reinforcement can be considered. At the assessment level, a brief pre-post-test application of key themes (communication, faithfulness, financial management, and spiritual practice) will provide evidence of measurable change. At the process level, simple

home assignments (structured conversation exercises, family budget planning, or weekly family prayer) can bridge the classroom with daily practice. At the service level, risk screening protocols (e.g., standard questions related to violence or over-control) need to be ensured to be present in private sessions, with clear referral pathways to clinical counseling services or advanced pastoral mentoring. Additionally, adding a post-marriage booster session will help couples integrate lessons when household realities begin to test initial commitment (Halford, 2011).

From the evaluation side of the program, simple longitudinal tracking (e.g., 6 and 12 months post-blessing surveys) on communication quality, relationship satisfaction, financial discipline practices, and frequency of family prayer will enrich understanding of effectiveness. The data is also useful for curriculum improvement (which themes need to be deepened, which methods have the most impact) and post-marriage coaching (young family groups, mentoring senior-junior couples).

Overall, the guidance design at GKI Pengampon shows coherence between theological vision, intended relational competence, and the choice of methods that support internalization. Its main strength lies in sufficient time for spaced learning, classroom– group–counseling–worship integration, as well as institutional support and synodal modules. The challenges are mainly to maintain participant involvement throughout three to six months, ensure equitable facilitator competence, and build an assessment-follow-up ecosystem so that the impact of the program does not stop at premarital graduation. By strengthening these three aspects, the program has a greater chance of producing measurable and sustainable household readiness.

Couple's Experience and Benefits after Coaching

Interviews with five Muslim couples, three Catholic couples, and two Protestant couples show that premarital guidance in KUA, the Catholic

Church, and GKI provides relatively similar benefits, albeit with varying forms and intensities. In general, couples emphasize improving communication skills, conflict management skills, and understanding of household financial literacy. The spiritual dimension is also strengthened, characterized by the awareness of placing the value of faith as the foundation in family decision-making. These findings confirm that premarital guidance, regardless of differences in duration, curriculum, and methods, plays a significant role in providing practical and emotional provisions for brides-to-be (Interview, September- November 2023).

More specifically, Muslim couples stated that they gained a clearer understanding of the roles and responsibilities of husband and wife from an Islamic perspective, despite the time constraints making the material dense. Catholic couples emphasize that the combination of premarital courses and canonical inquiry provides a sense of security and spiritual confidence, while broadening insights into health, marriage law, and family relationships. Meanwhile, Protestant couples benefit from a 3–6- month premarital counseling process, which allows them to practice communication skills, manage household finances, and strengthen family worship discipline. Thus, premarital guidance is not only seen as an administrative formality but also as a real instrument in the formation of the mental, spiritual, and social readiness of couples to build a harmonious family (Interview, September-November 2023).

Perceptions of Harmonious Interfaith Families

The perception of a harmonious family based on the results of interviews shows that the perception of a harmonious family among Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant couples has similarities in emphasizing the importance of communication, acceptance, and commitment, although there are different nuances according to their respective faith frameworks. Muslim couples

emphasized that a harmonious family is achieved through the principles of *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, *warahmah*, good communication, and the ability to place oneself according to roles. Catholic couples define harmony as a relationship based on acceptance of the strengths and weaknesses of the couple, respect for the dignity of husband and wife, and the willingness to forgive, in line with the sacramental nature of marriage that demands a lifelong commitment. Meanwhile, Protestant couples emphasize the importance of effective communication, a balance of roles between husband and wife, as well as long-term commitment, which is likened to musical harmony that requires continuous practice. Thus, despite the differences in pressure points, interfaith perceptions of a harmonious family converge on three main dimensions: healthy communication, acceptance and appreciation between couples, and commitment to relationship sustainability (Interview, September-November 2023).

Thus, each religious community has a different emphasis on the concept of a harmonious family, even though there is basically a common thread in the form of acceptance, appreciation, and commitment to maintaining relationships. To clarify these differences and similarities, key findings regarding the perceptions of Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant families are presented in the following Table.

Table 2. Perception of Harmonious Interfaith Family in Cirebon Regency

Religion	Perception of a Harmonious Family	Stressed Key Elements
Islam	A harmonious family is supported by the ability to accept each other's shortcomings, understand each other, respect each other, and the ability to place oneself according to his/her role.	Acceptance, appreciation, solutions based on Islamic values, love and affection (<i>sakinah</i> , <i>mawaddah</i> , <i>rahmah</i>).

Catholicism	A harmonious family is perceived as an awareness and acceptance of the strengths and weaknesses of each member.	Respect for the dignity of husband and wife, willingness to forgive, and maintain healthy relationships.
Protestantism	Harmony is achieved through effective communication between family members.	Husbands must appreciate & love, Wives respond with responsible obedience, balance of roles.

All informants, regardless of religious background, agreed that marriage guidance has an important role as an initial provision to enter family life. The program is seen as helping to foster mutual understanding, strengthen communication, and strengthen the prerequisite commitment needed to create a harmonious and happy family.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the method of interfaith marriage guidance in Cirebon shows a similar goal, which is to equip prospective couples with the skills, attitudes, and knowledge to build a harmonious family, even though the design and governance are different. In the Islamic realm, Marriage Guidance (Bimwin) at KUA Sumber and Kedawung is carried out in a short-intensive manner (± 16 hours of lessons for two days) with standardized modules from the Ministry of Religion, but its implementation is often constrained by attendance and budget limitations. Meanwhile, Saint Joseph's Catholic Church, through its Marriage Preparation Coaching (3P) program, combines structured courses and canonical inquiry, supported by a spiritual and professional team, that strikes a balance between practical competence and sacramental verification. The Indonesian Christian Church (GKI) Pengampon adopts a tiered pattern for 3-6 months with weekly meetings, which emphasizes the process of spaced learning and deep interaction between couples and with coaches. These differences show the existence of methodological diversity that is adapted to the theological framework, institutional traditions, and capacities of each institution.

In terms of benefits, the ten interfaith informant pairs consistently reported improving communication skills, conflict management, financial literacy, and strengthening aspects of spirituality that are the foundation of family decision-making. Variations emerged in the nuances of benefits: Muslim participants placed more emphasis on understanding the role of husband and wife according to Islam, Catholic participants emphasized spiritual safety and comprehensive professional counseling, while Protestant participants emphasized long-term communication practices, financial management, and family worship discipline.

Furthermore, the bride-to-be's perception of a harmonious family shows a convergent pattern even with different accents. Muslim couples define harmony through the values of *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah* that are supported by the acceptance and suitability of roles. Catholic couples emphasize respect for dignity, willingness to forgive, and lifelong commitment as a form of the sacrament of marriage. Protestant couples likened harmony to music, which is achieved through effective communication, balance of roles, and long-term commitment. Thus, the three formulations of this research problem can be answered that (i) there are variations of interfaith counseling methods that remain oriented towards similar goals, (ii) all couples feel practical and spiritual benefits from guidance, and (iii) the perception of a harmonious interfaith family meets on three main axes: healthy communication, acceptance and appreciation of the couple, and commitment to relationship sustainability.

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