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# TEACHERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WELL-BEING AND BASIC ECCLESIAL COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

Teachers' well-being is shaped by professional demands, personal circumstances, emotional experiences, relationships, and sources of meaning. This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of six teachers who participated in a school-based Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC), focusing on their well-being before and during participation and the meanings they attributed to the experience. The study employed a qualitative phenomenological design and purposive sampling. Participants were full-time teachers with at least three years of teaching experience who were actively involved in the school's BEC, and this study conducted from January to May 2026. Data were gathered through a series of in-depth interviews guided by Seidman's (2006) interview approach. Interview accounts were transcribed, reviewed, coded, and organized into themes and categories. The findings generated three themes: (1) Struggling Toward Holistic Well-Being, comprising psycho-emotional distress and spiritual disconnection needs; (2) Renewed Sense of Being, comprising spiritual renewal and strengthened emotional-relational well-being; and (3) Living Through a Purpose-Driven Life in the Academe, comprising anchoring in the faith-life dimension and enabling personal growth. Before BEC participation, teachers described stress, emotional burdens, self-doubt, work pressure, and difficulty sustaining spiritual connection. During participation, they described peace, calmness, spiritual refreshment, acceptance, encouragement, and connection with others. They also associated BEC with renewed faith, a stronger sense of vocation, self-awareness, self-compassion, and efforts to maintain life balance. The findings suggest that teachers experienced BEC as a setting where spiritual reflection and supportive relationships were intertwined with their understanding of well-being. The study does not establish a causal effect or represent all teachers; rather, it provides context-specific descriptions that may inform holistic teacher-support initiatives.

***Keywords:*** *teacher well-being, Basic Ecclesial Community, spirituality, lived experiences, phenomenology, teacher support*

## INTRODUCTION

Teaching is a profession that requires not only intellectual competence but also emotional commitment, patience, compassion, and personal dedication. Beyond classroom instruction, teachers perform various responsibilities, including lesson preparation, classroom management, assessment, communication with parents, administrative tasks, and participation in institutional activities. These multiple responsibilities may affect their emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual well-being. Consequently, understanding teachers' well-being requires examining not only their professional responsibilities but also their personal experiences, relationships, and sources of meaning and support.

Teacher well-being has increasingly been recognized as an important concern in educational institutions. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020) reported that teachers experience considerable work-related stress associated with administrative responsibilities, accountability for student achievement, and changing educational requirements. Similarly, Ozturk et al. (2024) emphasized that teacher well-being is a multidimensional concept involving both negative experiences, such as stress and burnout, and positive dimensions associated with personal flourishing and professional fulfillment. These perspectives suggest that teachers' well-being should be understood holistically, considering their emotional, psychological, social, and professional experiences.

In the Philippine context, teachers encounter various challenges associated with increasing professional and administrative responsibilities. Lasco et al. (2024) highlighted how Filipino teachers perform responsibilities beyond classroom instruction, including student health monitoring, first aid, feeding programs, and addressing learners' psychological needs. These additional responsibilities may affect teachers' personal lives, health, and relationships. Furthermore, Orines et al. (2023) found an inverse relationship between work-related burnout and psychological well-being among public elementary school teachers in the Philippines. Their findings emphasize the importance of addressing teachers' psychological well-being and providing appropriate support mechanisms.

Although these studies establish the significance of teacher well-being, spirituality also provides an important perspective for understanding how teachers experience meaning, purpose, and personal renewal. Molino and Baring (2024) explored the meanings of work and workplace spirituality among Filipino public-school teachers, highlighting the significance of spirituality in understanding teachers' professional experiences. Similarly, Cena et al. (2025) investigated the spiritual well-being and work-related stressors of teachers in Central Philippines. Their findings reported moderate levels of professional stress and high levels of spiritual well-being, demonstrating the relevance of spirituality in examining teachers' experiences.

Spirituality may provide individuals with opportunities for reflection, personal growth, connection with God, and meaningful relationships with others. In the educational setting, spiritual activities may serve as opportunities for teachers to pause from their professional responsibilities, reflect on their experiences, and strengthen their personal and spiritual resources. Pong (2022) examined the relationship between spiritual well-being and teacher burnout, emphasizing the relevance of spiritual well-being in understanding teachers' experiences of emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment. Likewise, Paul and Jena (2022) found a positive relationship between workplace spirituality and teachers' professional well-being, with positive psychological capital playing a mediating role.

One form of spiritual activity is the Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC). BEC provides opportunities for members to participate in fellowship, prayer, worship, reflection, dialogue, and sharing of personal experiences. Mutia et al. (2023) emphasized the participatory nature of BEC, particularly its principles of listening, dialogue, shared responsibility, and community involvement. Macaraan (2022) likewise highlighted the importance of compassion, solidarity, and community responsibility within Basic Ecclesial Communities. These characteristics provide a meaningful context for examining how participation in a faith-based community may influence individuals' experiences of belongingness, spiritual development, and interpersonal relationships.

Despite the growing literature on teacher well-being, workplace spirituality, and community participation, limited attention has been given to the lived experiences of Filipino teachers participating in school-based Basic Ecclesial Communities. Previous studies have primarily examined teacher burnout, workplace spirituality, spiritual well-being, and professional stress through quantitative approaches or broader discussions of spirituality. There remains a need to understand how teachers personally experience their well-being before and during BEC participation and what meanings they attribute to their involvement.

This research gap provides the rationale for the present phenomenological study. Rather than measuring the effectiveness of BEC or assuming that spiritual participation automatically improves well-being, this study explores the actual experiences and meanings described by teachers themselves. By examining their emotional struggles, spiritual experiences, relationships, and personal reflections, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between teachers' well-being and participation in faith-based communities. The findings may provide insights for educational institutions seeking to develop supportive programs that recognize the holistic needs of teachers.

## Research Questions

This study explored and described teachers' lived experiences of well-being in relation to their participation in the Basic Ecclesial Community. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do teachers describe their lived experiences of well-being before participating in the Basic Ecclesial Community within the educational context?
2. How do teachers describe their experiences of well-being during the Basic Ecclesial Community sessions?
3. What meanings do teachers attribute to their participation in the Basic Ecclesial Community in relation to their well-being?

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore and describe teachers' lived experiences of well-being in relation to their participation in the Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC). The study sought to understand how teachers experienced their well-being before and during BEC participation and how they understood the significance of these experiences in their personal and professional lives.

### Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in a private educational institution in Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines, involving six (6) full-time teachers selected through purposive sampling. Participants had at least three years of teaching experience and were actively involved in the school's Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) activities. Their ages ranged from 28 to 51 years, with teaching experience of three to twelve years. The institution conducts monthly BEC sessions involving fellowship, prayer, worship, reflection, and group discussions. Pseudonyms were assigned to ensure participants' confidentiality.

### Research Instrument

Data were gathered using a researcher-developed semi-structured interview protocol consisting of 27 open-ended questions guided by Seidman's (2006) three-interview series approach. The interviews explored participants' experiences before BEC participation, their experiences during BEC sessions, and the meanings they attributed to their involvement in relation to their personal and professional well-being. Follow-up questions were used to encourage detailed responses.

### Data Collection Procedure.

Data collection commenced after securing ethical approval and institutional permission. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before conducting three rounds of individual in-depth interviews, approximately 90 minutes each. Interviews were scheduled three days to one week apart to allow participants time for reflection. The researcher established a comfortable and respectful interview environment, allowing participants to express their experiences freely and without pressure. With their consent, interviews were audio- and video-recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis.

### Data Analysis Procedure

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis through transcription, repeated reading, identification of significant statements, initial coding, categorization, and theme development Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, (2006). The resulting themes reflected participants' experiences before and during BEC participation and the meanings they attributed to their involvement. Verbatim statements supported the presentation of findings. Trustworthiness was established using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability through member checking, supervisory review, detailed descriptions, documentation of research procedures, bracketing, and reflective journaling.

### Scope and Limitations

The study focused on the lived experiences of six teachers participating in a school-based BEC in a private educational institution in Cagayan de Oro City. It examined their well-being before and during BEC participation and the meanings they attributed to their experiences. Given its phenomenological design and purposive sampling, the findings are context-specific and are not intended for statistical generalization. Furthermore, the study relied on participants' self-reported experiences and personal recollections.

## RESULTS

The analysis of the six teachers' interview narratives generated three major themes and six categories. These themes represent the participants' experiences of well-being before BEC participation, during their involvement, and the meanings they attributed to their experiences.

| Major Themes | Categories |
|---|---|
| Theme 1: Struggling Toward Holistic Well-Being | 1. Psycho-emotional Distress<br>2. Spiritual Disconnection Needs |
| Theme 2: Renewed Sense of Being | 3. Spiritual Renewal<br>4. Strengthened Emotional-Relational Wellbeing |
| Theme 3: Living Through a Purpose-Driven Life in the Academe | 5. Anchoring in the Faith-life Dimension<br>6. Enabling Personal Growth |

## Theme 1: Struggling Toward Holistic Well-Being

This theme describes the participants' emotional, psychological, and spiritual struggles before their participation in the Basic Ecclesial Community. Their narratives revealed experiences of work-related pressure, emotional exhaustion, self-doubt, uncertainty, and difficulties maintaining their spiritual lives.

### Category 1: Psycho-emotional Distress

Participants described experiencing emotional and psychological difficulties associated with their teaching responsibilities and personal circumstances. Their accounts included adjustment problems, comparison with colleagues, emotional burdens, fear of judgment, feelings of being down, uncertainty about career decisions, pressure, and work-related stress.

Maymay shared, “Minsan nakakaramdam ako ng stress and exhaustion” [Sometimes, I feel stressed and exhausted] (Maymay, Transcript 1, Line 33). Similarly, Amariah expressed the emotional burden she experienced, stating, “Daghan pa kaayo kog gina-carry emotionally” [I’m still carrying a lot of emotional burdens] (Amariah, Transcript 6, Line 120). Adele also described her emotional condition before joining BEC: “Before joining BEC, I often felt down because of the challenges I experienced at work” (Adele, Transcript 5, Line 39).

These accounts demonstrate the emotional difficulties participants experienced while managing their professional and personal responsibilities.

### Category 2: Spiritual Disconnection Needs

This category describes participants' experiences of spiritual distance, longing for spiritual nourishment, and the need for renewal and reconnection with God.

Paul expressed his desire to deepen his understanding of Scripture but explained that his responsibilities sometimes limited his energy: “I wanted to deepen my understanding of my Bible reading, but sometimes my energy was already limited because of my responsibilities” (Paul, Transcript 2, Lines 71–72). Sarah also described her experience of spiritual disconnection, stating, “Wala nakoy personal connection kay God og nabalaka ko” [I no longer felt a personal connection with God, and I felt worried] (Sarah, Transcript 3, Line 70).

These narratives demonstrate the participants' desire to strengthen their spiritual lives despite the competing demands of their professional and personal responsibilities.

## Theme 2: Renewed Sense of Being

The second theme captures participants' experiences of spiritual, emotional, and relational renewal during their participation in BEC. Their accounts described opportunities for prayer, reflection, fellowship, and sharing that were associated with feelings of peace, comfort, encouragement, and connection.

### Category 3: Spiritual Renewal

Participants described BEC as an opportunity to reconnect with God, reflect on their lives, and experience inner peace despite continuing professional challenges.

Sarah expressed the personal significance of her participation, stating, “It is life changing for me” (Sarah, Transcript 3, Line 106). Paul similarly shared, “Being part of BEC has changed the way I see life and tackle my challenges” (Paul, Transcript 2, Line 166). Adele described experiencing peace despite the difficulties she encountered at work: “I feel a sense of peace despite the challenges I face at work” (Adele, Transcript 5, Line 70).

These statements reflect the participants' descriptions of spiritual refreshment, calmness, inner peace, and renewed perspectives through BEC participation.

### Category 4: Strengthened Emotional-Relational Wellbeing

This category describes the emotional and relational experiences associated with fellowship and sharing within the BEC community. Participants identified appreciation, acceptance, encouragement, comfort, happiness, gratitude, and connectedness as meaningful aspects of their experiences.

Adele shared, “I was welcomed for who I was” (Adele, Transcript 5, Line 53), while Amariah stated, “I felt accepted and understood” (Amariah, Transcript 6, Line 34). Sarah also described the encouragement she received through the sharing activities: “The sharing also became a source of encouragement for me” (Sarah, Transcript 3, Line 61). Maymay expressed how the experience provided emotional comfort: “I felt comforted because I realized that it is okay to feel tired and struggle sometimes” (Maymay, Transcript 1, Line 137).

These accounts highlight the participants' experiences of acceptance, mutual understanding, emotional reassurance, and meaningful relationships within the BEC community.

## Theme 3: Living Through a Purpose-Driven Life in the Academe

The third theme represents the meanings participants attributed to their involvement in BEC, particularly in relation to their faith, teaching vocation, personal growth, and understanding of their responsibilities.

### Category 5: Anchoring in the Faith-life Dimension

Participants described how BEC strengthened their awareness of God's presence and encouraged them to integrate their faith into their personal and professional lives.

Christian expressed, “The BEC reminds me to talk to God first, lay everything to Him, and trust His process” (Christian, Transcript 4, Line 180). Sarah also explained how her understanding of teaching was connected to her faith: “Teaching is not just a

profession but also a vocation. I see it now as a calling of God, who entrusted me to take care of young people" (Sarah, Transcript 3, Lines 167–168). Amariah similarly stated that BEC "Helped me see my work not only as a profession but as a mission entrusted by God" (Amariah, Transcript 6, Line 281).

These accounts illustrate how participants associated their BEC experiences with faith, spiritual reflection, a sense of belonging, and an understanding of teaching as a vocation.

### Category 6: Enabling Personal Growth

Participants also described personal development through increased self-awareness, self-compassion, intentional communication, and efforts to maintain a healthier balance between professional and personal responsibilities.

Amariah shared: "Through BEC, I became more aware of my feelings, my weaknesses, and the things I need to improve in myself" (Amariah, Transcript 6, Lines 27–28). Adele also described how her experience influenced her approach to balancing responsibilities: "Helped me create a healthier balance between my professional duties and personal life" (Adele, Transcript 5, Line 86). Furthermore, Amariah stated, "I learned to be more compassionate and patient with myself" (Amariah, Transcript 6, Line 66).

These accounts demonstrate participants' descriptions of personal reflection, greater self-understanding, self-compassion, and a renewed perspective on their responsibilities.

## DISCUSSION

The findings provide an understanding of teachers' lived experiences of well-being in relation to their participation in the Basic Ecclesial Community. The three themes reveal the participants' experiences of emotional and spiritual struggles, renewed spiritual and relational experiences, and the development of a purpose-driven understanding of their personal and professional lives.

The first theme, Struggling Toward Holistic Well-Being, reveals the emotional, psychological, and spiritual difficulties participants experienced before BEC participation. Their accounts of stress, emotional exhaustion, self-doubt, work pressure, and uncertainty reflect the demanding nature of the teaching profession. These experiences are consistent with the findings of Orines et al. (2023), who identified a negative relationship between work-related burnout and psychological well-being among Filipino public elementary teachers. Similarly, Ozturk et al. (2024) emphasized that teachers' well-being involves both negative experiences and positive aspects of personal and professional functioning.

The participants' accounts of additional responsibilities and emotional burdens also reflect the challenges identified by Lasco et al. (2024), who discussed how Filipino

teachers undertake responsibilities beyond classroom instruction. Moreover, the participants' experiences of spiritual disconnection and longing for spiritual nourishment demonstrate that their well-being concerns extended beyond professional stress. This supports the importance of examining spiritual well-being alongside teachers' emotional and psychological experiences. Cena et al. (2025) likewise demonstrated the relevance of understanding spiritual well-being in relation to teachers' work-related stressors.

The second theme, Renewed Sense of Being, highlights participants' experiences of spiritual renewal and strengthened emotional-relational well-being during BEC participation. Through prayer, reflection, listening to the Word of God, and sharing personal experiences, participants described opportunities to reconnect with their faith and experience inner peace. These accounts are consistent with Pong (2022), who examined the relationship between spiritual well-being and teacher burnout. Similarly, Paul and Jena (2022) emphasized the positive relationship between workplace spirituality and teachers' professional well-being.

An important finding under this theme is the significance of acceptance, encouragement, and emotional support within the BEC community. Participants described feeling welcomed, understood, comforted, and connected with fellow members. These experiences indicate that the relational dimension of BEC was an important part of how participants described their well-being. Hascher and Waber (2021) identified social relationships as an important factor associated with teacher well-being. Likewise, Mutia et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of listening, dialogue, participation, and shared responsibility within Basic Ecclesial Communities. Thus, the findings suggest that BEC participation was experienced not only as a spiritual activity but also as an opportunity for meaningful interpersonal relationships.

The third theme, Living Through a Purpose-Driven Life in the Academe, illustrates the meanings participants attributed to their BEC experiences. Their narratives reflected strengthened faith, recognition of God's presence, and a deeper understanding of teaching as a vocation rather than merely a profession. This finding is consistent with Molino and Baring (2024), who explored the spiritual meanings Filipino teachers attached to their work and workplace. It also corresponds with the findings of Prasanna and Palanivelu (2022), which highlighted the relationship between workplace spirituality, meaning in life, and teachers' psychological well-being.

Furthermore, participants described increased self-awareness, self-compassion, intentional communication, and a greater appreciation of work-life balance. These experiences indicate that BEC participation was associated with personal reflection and a reconsideration of their responsibilities and relationships. Macaraan (2022) emphasized the importance of compassion and community responsibility within BECs, while Del Castillo (2022) highlighted the significance of community participation, Christian service, and relationships in the lives of Catholic women servant leaders.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that teachers' experiences of well-being in relation to BEC participation encompass interconnected emotional, spiritual, social, and

personal dimensions. The participants' narratives reveal that BEC provided opportunities for spiritual reflection, emotional reassurance, community connection, and a renewed understanding of their teaching vocation. However, these findings represent the participants' own accounts and should not be interpreted as evidence that BEC alone eliminates work-related stress or guarantees improved well-being.

## Conclusions

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were drawn in response to the research questions.

Teachers' lived experiences of well-being before BEC participation were characterized by emotional, psychological, and spiritual struggles. Participants experienced work-related stress, emotional exhaustion, pressure, self-doubt, uncertainty, and difficulties maintaining their spiritual lives. Their accounts revealed the challenges of balancing professional responsibilities with personal and spiritual needs.

Teachers' experiences of well-being during BEC participation involved spiritual renewal and strengthened emotional-relational experiences. Through prayer, reflection, fellowship, and sharing, participants described experiencing inner peace, calmness, acceptance, encouragement, comfort, and a sense of belonging. The community provided opportunities to express personal experiences and recognize the shared struggles of fellow teachers.

The meanings teachers attributed to BEC participation in relation to their well-being centered on strengthening their faith, recognizing teaching as a vocation, and developing greater self-awareness and self-compassion. Participants associated their experiences with a deeper understanding of their personal and professional responsibilities and the importance of maintaining meaningful relationships and a balanced life.

Overall, the study concludes that teachers' lived experiences of well-being through BEC participation involve interconnected spiritual, emotional, relational, and personal dimensions. BEC served as a meaningful setting where participants could reflect on their experiences, connect with others, strengthen their faith, and reconsider the purpose of their teaching vocation.

## Recommendations

1. For school administrators: Educational institutions may consider sustaining supportive spiritual and community-building activities that provide teachers with opportunities for reflection, fellowship, and meaningful interaction. Such activities should complement, rather than replace, institutional efforts to address workload, professional demands, and teachers’ welfare.
2. For teachers: Teachers may be encouraged to participate in activities that nurture their spiritual, emotional, and social well-being. They may also practice self-reflection,

self-compassion, and healthy work-life balance while recognizing the importance of supportive relationships.

3. For future researchers: Further studies may explore the lived experiences of teachers participating in BEC across different educational institutions and geographical locations. Research involving a larger and more diverse group of participants may provide additional perspectives. Future researchers may also employ longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to examine teachers' well-being over time and investigate how participation in spiritual communities relates to their professional experiences.

## Compliance with Ethical Standards

The study observed ethical principles in conducting research involving human participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the appropriate research ethics committee, and institutional permission was secured before data collection. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after explaining the purpose, procedures, and nature of their involvement. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to refuse to answer questions or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or negative consequences. Pseudonyms were used to maintain anonymity, and identifying information was excluded from the presentation of findings. The researcher followed the principles of the Data Privacy Act of 2012 in handling participants' information and maintained the confidentiality of recorded interviews and research documents. Interviews were conducted in a respectful and accommodating environment to safeguard participants' emotional well-being. The researcher also practiced bracketing and reflective journaling to minimize personal bias in the analysis and interpretation of findings. The study was conducted for academic and research purposes, and no financial compensation was provided to participants. The researcher declares no known conflict of interest in the conduct of the study. Proper acknowledgment of the works of other researchers was observed to avoid plagiarism. Transparency was maintained throughout the research process, including disclosure of any AI-assisted tools used in the study.

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