

PROMOTING RELIGIOUS MODERATION THROUGH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: INSIGHTS FROM RELIGIOUS COUNSELORS IN CINTA DAMAI VILLAGE



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Article History:

Submission: August 06, 2024

Revised: November 24, 2024

Accepted: December 20, 2024

Published: December 31, 2024

Keywords: Religious
Counselors, Religious
Moderation, Community
Engagement, Cinta Damai
Village, Religious Affairs
Office.

Kata Kunci: Penyuluh
Agama, Moderasi Beragama,
Keterlibatan Masyarakat,
Desa Cinta Damai, Kantor
Urusan Agama.

Abstract

This study seeks to determine the role of religious counselors in strengthening religious moderation in Cinta Damai Village, Deli Serdang North Sumatra. As part of the *da'wah* (preaching) movement, religious counselors are in charge of providing religious understanding and resolving community issues. This study uses a qualitative method with a field study approach and descriptive design. This approach allows in-depth data mining related to the views, experiences, and understanding of the community toward the role of religious counselors. Field studies were conducted to obtain contextual and relevant data on the conditions of Cinta Damai Village. The findings reveal that religious counselors have a crucial role in strengthening religious moderation through three main functions: informative, consultative and advocative. Messages about tolerance, interfaith dialog, and legal awareness have proven to be important elements in building a peaceful society. However, religious counselors faced challenges, such as a public misunderstanding of the concept of religious moderation. To address this issue, religious counselors must actively educate people to respect differences and live a harmonious religious life. Eventually, this study confirms that religious counselors play an important role in fostering a peaceful environment.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui peran penyuluh agama dalam memperkuat moderasi beragama di Desa Cinta Damai, Deli Serdang Sumatera Utara. Sebagai bagian dari gerakan dakwah, penyuluh agama bertugas memberikan pemahaman agama dan menyelesaikan berbagai permasalahan masyarakat. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi lapangan dan desain deskriptif. Pendekatan ini memungkinkan penggalan data yang mendalam terkait pandangan, pengalaman, dan pemahaman masyarakat terhadap peran penyuluh agama. Studi lapangan dilakukan untuk memperoleh data kontekstual dan relevan mengenai kondisi Desa Cinta Damai. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penyuluh agama memiliki peran krusial dalam memperkuat moderasi beragama melalui tiga fungsi utama, yaitu informatif, konsultatif, dan advokatif. Pesan-pesan tentang toleransi, dialog antaragama, dan kesadaran hukum terbukti menjadi elemen penting dalam membangun masyarakat yang damai. Namun, penyuluh agama menghadapi berbagai tantangan, seperti kesalahpahaman masyarakat terhadap konsep moderasi beragama. Untuk mengatasi masalah tersebut, penyuluh agama harus secara aktif mendidik masyarakat untuk menghargai perbedaan dan menjalani kehidupan beragama yang harmonis. Pada akhirnya, penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa penyuluh agama memegang peranan penting dalam membina lingkungan yang damai.



INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly complex global era, religious moderation is a significant problem to address. A restrictive and intolerant understanding of religious teachings can lead to various conflicts and extremism that frequently arise in society, both locally and globally. In many cases, misinterpretation or manipulation of religious texts can lead to exclusive and prejudiced attitudes toward people or groups with different beliefs. Lack of understanding and inability to appreciate differences often result in discrimination, hatred, and violence (Huda, 2021).

In the era of fast – paced information, the diffusion of extreme ideas through social media and other digital platforms facilitates radicalization, particularly among the younger generation. Individuals who lack a solid understanding of the fundamental values of their religion and the principles of moderation are vulnerable to being indoctrinated by radical groups. Therefore, religious moderation that prioritizes tolerance, mutual respect, and balance in religion is a must to create a peaceful and harmonious society. Religious moderation entails not only tolerance but also an active attitude that involves understanding and respecting the beliefs of others. It includes accepting diversity and developing constructive interfaith dialogue (Huda, 2021).

In this context, religious counselors play a strategic role in strengthening religious moderation. They are at the forefront of providing the community guidance, understanding, and explanation of religious teachings (Julianto, 2024). Religious counselors can help contextualize religious teachings and clarify the values of moderation and tolerance in religion. They are responsible for demonstrating that religion can be a source of peace, unity, and progress rather than a trigger for division. In this case, religious counselors act as educators who transfer knowledge and shape the attitudes and behavior of the community (Wahid, 2021).

Religious counselors can use various methods to convey messages of religious moderation. For instance, they can establish a dialogical atmosphere that allows people to ask questions and explore different views through lectures, discussions, and interactive activities. This approach helps to reduce misunderstandings and stereotypes that often lead to conflict. Religious counselors also play an important role in developing educational programs that emphasize the importance of tolerance and interfaith cooperation.

The transmission of information in today's digital age is rapid, but it frequently involves disinformation. Religious counselors in Cinta Damai Village must be able to utilize technology and social media to spread messages of religious moderation effectively. In this way, they can reach a wider audience and provide accurate information about moderate religious teachings. In light of Cinta Damai Village, which upholds the values of peace, religious counselors must strive to instill a sense of love and mutual respect among residents. The messages must focus on the importance of harmony, not only in a religious context but also in daily social interactions.

However, religious counselors in Cinta Damai Village encountered difficult obstacles. They must address broader social issues like poverty, education, and injustice. Religious counselors need to link the message of religious moderation to these issues so that the community can see the relevance and actual application of the values of moderation in daily life. In facing these challenges, religious counselors must effectively and persuasively communicate moderation messages to various groups, including the younger generation, who are particularly susceptible to the influence of radical ideology.

Regarding the role of religious counselors in increasing the understanding of religious moderation, several literatures are relevant to this study. The study "*Peran Penyuluh Agama dalam Peningkatan Moderasi Beragama di KUA Nanggalo*" discloses that the Nanggalo KUA (Religious Affairs Office) had implemented religious moderation counseling to establish a sense of peace amidst the diversity of society, mainly since the Nanggalo region is the closest route to the center of Padang (Hadrian, 2019).

The article "*Peran Penyuluh Agama Islam dalam Memberikan Pemahaman Moderasi Agama pada masyarakat di Kabupaten Bone*" shows that the existence of Islamic Religious Counselors in this community is crucial and necessary. Islamic Religious Counselors become inspirators, motivators, stabilizers, and dynamicators of development amid society with the language of Islam. This is because the development of the Indonesian nation must include physical–material dimensions and mental–spiritual development (Abubakar & Husna, 2022).

The study "*Eksistensi Penyuluh Agama sebagai Agen Moderasi Beragama di Era Kemajemukan Masyarakat Indonesia*" by Ayu Aspila and Baharuddin demonstrates that amiable, tolerant, accessible, and flexible religious moderation can be the solution to concerns about rife conflicts in a multicultural society. Religious moderation does not imply mixing the truth and erasing each other's identities. A moderate attitude does not desecrate the truth; we still have an apparent attitude on an issue, the truth, the law of a problem, but in religious moderation, we are more willing to accept that outside of ourselves, some fellow countrymen have the same rights as us as a sovereign society within the framework of nationality (Ayu Aspila, 2022).

Overall, these studies suggest that religious educators and good education substantially impact people's understanding of religious moderation and tolerance (Ayu Aspila, 2022), highlighting the significance of this study in Cinta Damai Village. Thus, strengthening the role of religious instructors in improving understanding of religious moderation is not only an individual responsibility but also part of a collective effort to create a harmonious, tolerant, and civilized society. It aligns with the shared ideals of achieving peace and prosperity amid diversity.

This study employs a qualitative method with a field study approach. The rationale behind selecting this approach was to enable an in–depth exploration of the phenomena in the field, especially related to the role and messages conveyed by religious counselors in supporting religious moderation in a pluralistic society. The qualitative method used in this study involves observation, in–depth interviews, and documentation as the primary data collection techniques. Those interviewed were religious figures, such as Protestants, Catholics, Muslims, and residents. Observations were carried out to observe the interaction of religious counselors with the community, both in formal activities such as religious studies and in informal situations. Interviews were conducted with religious counselors, community leaders, and residents to obtain various perspectives on the implementation of religious moderation. Documentation includes collecting official documents, such as reports on religious instructor activities and lectures or educational materials used.

The results of the analysis show that religious counselors have an important role as communicators of the values of tolerance and diversity. The messages conveyed include the importance of interfaith dialogue, respect for differences, and the importance of law in maintaining harmony. The main obstacles were the lack of public understanding of religious moderation and resistance to change. With an inclusive and dialogical

approach, religious counselors are expected to be able to overcome these challenges and strengthen religious moderation in Cinta Damai Village.

THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS COUNSELORS IN STRENGTHENING RELIGIOUS MODERATION

Role is a concept of what an individual can do in a community as an individual (Soekanto, 2001). It is a dynamic aspect of status. If someone exercises their rights and obligations according to their position, they carry out a role. The difference between role and position is for the sake of science. Both cannot be separated. Because there is no position without a role and a role without a position, both are interdependent (Mustaqim, 2022). Counselors come from the word "torch," which means one who gives light. With counseling, it is expected that there will be an increase in knowledge, skills, and attitudes. In comparison, religion can be interpreted as teachings (Iqbal et al., 2024). Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia: Religious counselors are employees appointed by the government to provide counseling, guidance, and religious education to the community and play a role in explaining religious teachings contextually and relevantly to the social conditions of the community (Amirulloh, 2016). Syamsul Arifin explains that religious extension workers act as agents of change who are essential in educating people about religious teachings and facilitating dialogue between religious communities (Safitri et al., 2023).

The role of religious counselors in carrying out their duties is critical because they function as directors who guide the community toward the goals that have been set. To achieve this, religious counselors must perform various roles in effectively guiding the community. In the context of strengthening religious moderation, the responsibility of religious counselors cannot be separated from the various problems that exist in society. A lack of understanding of moderation's values can be one factor that triggers conflict in social life (Aritonang, 2019). When people do not understand or internalize the principles of moderation, they may tend to fall into intolerant or extremist attitudes. Therefore, religious counselors are responsible for educating and guiding the community to appreciate differences and live a harmonious religious life (Hasanuddin, 2019).

Islamic religious counselors are responsible for providing guidance and counseling twice a week. They must establish two religious study groups in the villages under their supervision. Islamic counselors provide the community with religious knowledge and values, promoting moderate morals and understanding (Nurlaela et al., 2023). Meanwhile, Christian and Catholic religious counselors also have similar responsibilities in guiding their congregations. They need to organize routine activities, such as sermons, discussions, and teaching classes, which aim to deepen understanding of Christian teachings and emphasize the values of tolerance and respect for differences. Religious counselors have a significant effect on society; thus, what they propose and request is usually carried out by their community. As a result, the congregation is highly polite and obeys their instructions (Vela, 2021).

In this context, the role of religious counselors from the three religions is crucial in fostering an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding in a diverse society (Khotimah, 2020). Islamic, Christian, and Catholic religious counselors can collaborate in interfaith dialogue forums to strengthen social ties and reduce the potential for conflict. Through an inclusive and educational approach, they can work together to build a more harmonious society where everyone feels accepted and appreciated, regardless of cultural differences. Thus, the role of religious counselors is not only

limited to conveying the teachings of their respective religions but also includes social responsibility to create an environment of peace and mutual respect between religious communities.

The role of religious counselors from various religions in Cinta Damai Village includes:

1. Informative and Educational Roles

Islamic religious counselors position themselves as people obliged to convey religious teachings and educate society in the best possible manner following the guidance of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (Rohaman & Nugraha, 2017). Islamic religious counselors are responsible for social or moral issues by defending the community from disturbances, threats, challenges, and obstacles detrimental to the community's faith, morals, and worship.

Religious counselors must be able to guide and urge the community to do good, avoid prohibited acts, and invite to something their community requires to grow their area, such as community amenities and places of worship. As highlighted in Surah Ali – Imran verse 104:

وَلْتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

Meaning: "Let there be among you a group of people who call to virtue, enjoin (do) what is virtuous, and forbid what is evil. They are the lucky ones."

The role of religious counselors in strengthening religious moderation in the community of Cinta Damai Village is as a conveyor of information sourced from various religious teachings and information that must be conveyed from government programs while providing the best Islamic religious education following the guidance of the Qur'an and Hadith. Based on interviews and observations with Mr. Alamsyah, he explained that the role of counselors entrusted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs is to provide guidance and counseling to the community. One important aspect of this task is to convey government development programs, including human character development. Recently, the government has been actively seeking to socialize religious moderation. As a counselor, he has taken steps to welcome this program by conveying and socializing the concept of religious moderation to the community, primarily through the activities of *Majelis Taklim* (The Islamic Study Group). In the forum, he provided an understanding of what religious moderation is and explained the goals and benefits of implementing the values of moderation in religious life (Susanto & Ulfah, 2022).

In line with the above, Mr. Suherdi, an Islamic Religious counselor, said that his duties in the field were quite tricky, considering the diverse understanding of religion among the community (Julianto, 2024). After the government began to socialize religious moderation, counselors have also delivered material on this topic in religious studies to the religious study groups in the villages they support. Since religious moderation is a new term for some people, counselors try to provide clear explanations. Although others are less engaged in this topic, many recognize the value of living in harmony and tolerating diversity in a pluralistic society (Suherdi, 2024).

The informative and educational role of Christian religious figures is also crucial in shaping the public's understanding and attitude toward religious moderation. As spiritual leaders, they are responsible for conveying Christian teachings clearly and comprehensively, helping their congregations understand core values such as love, tolerance, and respect for differences. Through sermons, teaching classes, and discussions, religious figures can provide in-depth explanations of the concept of

religious moderation and emphasize the importance of living in harmony with people of other religions.

In an educational context, Christian religious figures also act as facilitators in building interfaith dialogue. They often hold seminars, workshops, and community meetings to discuss issues of diversity and moderation. By inviting active participation from congregations and the wider community, religious figures create a space for exchanging views and experiences, which can strengthen shared understanding and reduce prejudice. In addition, Christian religious figures also play a role in developing educational programs that emphasize the values of togetherness and tolerance. They often collaborate with other institutions, both government and non-governmental organizations, to disseminate messages of religious moderation. Through this approach, religious figures contribute to building a peaceful and harmonious society and reduce the potential for conflict caused by differences in belief.

Based on the results of the interview with Mr. Hariadi Gultom, a Christian religious counselor, he explained that Christian religious counselors serve as educators and mediators, providing a balanced understanding of Christian teachings while emphasizing the importance of tolerance and respect for differences in beliefs. Interviews and observations revealed that counselors actively held seminars, discussions, and interactive activities to educate the congregation about religious moderation. In each teaching session, they emphasize messages related to moderation, such as the importance of respecting others' beliefs and maintaining good relations within religious communities (Gultom, 2024).

However, Christian religious counselors encountered challenges, especially among congregations with orthodox beliefs. Some individuals resist the concept of moderation, which they perceive as threatening their beliefs. To overcome these challenges, religious counselors take an inclusive approach, such as holding interfaith dialogues and involving community leaders in discussions about moderation. In addition, they use social media to spread the message of religious moderation.

2. Consultative Role

The counselors are considered the best advisors who can provide solutions and insights into problems faced by the community (Iqbal et al., 2024). Through interviews and observations in the field, counselors continue to collaborate to accept questions and consultations, individually and in groups, on the growth of religious understanding, which frequently leads to mutual blame. Winda Sari explained that counselors often receive consultations from the community regarding various personal, family, and social issues when providing guidance. Sometimes, the congregation comes to consult after the study at the *majelis taklim*, or sometimes they suddenly come and immediately convey their problems. With the diverse understanding of the community, some residents feel unsure about their choices. Therefore, counselors are present to explain existing problems so that there is no friction, misunderstanding, or fanaticism between groups (Sari, 2024).

Basaruddin stated that one of the counselor's responsibilities is to provide a forum for the congregation to ask questions or consult if they are still unsure about religion. The counselor explains the different issues they confront, including emerging beliefs in society that mislead and accuse one another of being infidels, even among fellow Muslims. In this context, the counselor uses their knowledge to provide explanations that will serve as a reference and guideline for the community as they follow the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. The role of Islamic religious counselors as

consultants is crucial in assisting the community in resolving religion – related issues. As a place for the congregation to confide, the counselor functions as an instructor. As a result, the communication established by the counselor in the field must comprehend the community's different situations and conditions. To provide appropriate solutions to society's problems, the counselor must also be knowledgeable and have a national understanding.

In addition, the researcher found that Catholic religious leaders play a significant role in supporting religious moderation in their communities. As spiritual advisors, they help people understand and internalize religious teachings in an inclusive and tolerant way. By guiding interfaith relationships and social interactions, religious leaders contribute to reducing tensions and preventing fanaticism. In family counseling, religious leaders often discuss issues related to differences of opinion in multireligious families, thus encouraging dialogue and mutual understanding. The pastoral approach in listening to complaints and providing support also creates a safe space to discuss different beliefs. Social empowerment through programs that address issues of poverty and injustice also supports moderation, as these activities often involve interfaith collaboration. Religious leaders create stronger bonds and reduce prejudice by inviting community members from different backgrounds to work together.

Based on the results of an interview with Mr. Romulus Nainggolan, a Catholic religious counselor, he explained that religious moderation is highly dependent on a thorough comprehension of the religion's principles. In his role, the counselor strives to instill in the congregation the importance of respecting differences and seeing the beauty in them. Mr. Romulus frequently engages with families who have members from different religious backgrounds. In each consultation session, he invites them to discuss ways to respect each other's beliefs. This approach aims to create a harmonious atmosphere in the home and strengthen relationships between family members so that each individual feels appreciated (Nainggolan, 2024).

Mr. Romulus emphasizes the significance of understanding others' perspectives through transparent communication, which can help to lessen conflict and increase tolerance. He believes that creating awareness of shared values and appreciating diversity can lead to peaceful and supportive relationships, regardless of religious background. This endeavor also intends to foster a more inclusive community where everyone feels accepted and appreciated.

3. Advocative Role

The advocative role includes actions or efforts to defend, support, and fight for the rights of individuals and specific groups. In the context of religious counselors, important aspects of this advocacy role include voicing the community's needs, advocating for tolerance and moderation, and empowering the community. Counselor activities are simply a series of interactions between counselors and congregations. Counselors, also known as *da'i* (preachers), are responsible for providing knowledge to the congregations they supervise. This communication pattern ensures that Islamic religious counselor activities can occur effectively and smoothly. In addition, the advocacy role also includes efforts to protect the community from various threats and provide an understanding of legal regulations so that the community can avoid violations.

Considering the importance of counselors in promoting society, their role as advocates is critical. By the findings of an interview with Mr. Haji Suherdi, an Islamic religious counselor, the task of counselors in carrying out their advocacy role is to

provide legal protection to the community from various threats to faith, worship, and morals (Halimah & Fatmah, 2024), as well as threats that can disrupt national and state stability. In this context, counselors continue to convey material on how a good Muslim should have faith, worship, and morals following the guidance of the Prophet Muhammad SAW and how to be a believer who is obedient to the state without thinking or acting anarchically or excessively.

However, the facts on reality demonstrate that many ideologies that emerge in society blame each other, often without considering the opinions of the ulama. This matter creates an atmosphere of tension and conflict that can worsen relations between community members. These disagreements often arise from different interpretations of religious teachings, colored by social, economic, and political factors. This misunderstanding can lead to negative perceptions of other groups and reinforce intolerance. This situation can lead to radical actions that threaten society's stability and security. In a legal context, this division can be a loophole for the emergence of actions contrary to national values and applicable laws, such as violence or discrimination against certain groups.

To overcome these challenges, religious counselors must actively provide enlightenment and education to the community (Halimah & Fatmah, 2024). Counselors must be able to invite constructive discussions, promote values of tolerance, and encourage people to refer to legitimate and trusted sources to understand religious teachings. Thus, they can help create a harmonious atmosphere and maintain the stability of national and state life, where differences are valued and used as strengths, not as reasons for conflict.

From the interviews with several informants, the researcher concluded that there was an agreement on the importance of religious moderation in society. They emphasized that religious moderation begins with a good understanding of religious teachings, where religious counselors play a key role in providing education and guidance so that people can understand the values of tolerance and mutual respect. Furthermore, the informants agreed that religious counselors must act as advocates, providing legal protection and support to the community from various threats related to faith, worship, and social issues. Encouraging community dialogue and cooperation is also important to reduce tension and conflict. In the face of increasing ideologies that blame each other, counselors must be proactive in guiding individuals so they do not fall into extreme or anarchic attitudes. Thus, religious moderation is a vital step in creating a peaceful and harmonious society, where religious counselors are responsible for building understanding and practices that support moderation.

THE COUNSELOR'S MESSAGE IN STRENGTHENING RELIGIOUS MODERATION

The word religious moderation comes from the English term "moderation," which refers to an attitude of neither being excessive nor lacking in practicing religious beliefs. Essentially, religious moderation means maintaining a balance in the practice and understanding of religious teachings so as not to get caught up in extremism or radicalization that can damage social harmony. Religious moderation emphasizes a reasonable attitude, often called "moderate." It means accepting and respecting differences in religious views and not forcing one interpretation or practice on others. A moderate attitude creates space for dialogue, mutual respect, and tolerance between religious communities, thus creating a peaceful society (Aziz, 2019).

Religious moderation is a fair and balanced perspective in practicing religious teachings. Balance shapes attitudes, character, and viewpoints, supporting principles such as humanity, fairness, and togetherness. A firm attitude in moderation does not mean eliminating opinions but rather maintaining perspective so as not to get caught up in extreme or liberal attitudes. Moderate understanding (*wasathiyah*) is an important characteristic in Islam, which encourages the spread of teachings by respecting and responding to radical thinking following the principles of the Qur'an and As – Sunnah (Shihab, 2019).

Counseling messages in religious moderation are essential to build a balanced understanding and practice of religion. Here are some key points that can be conveyed in counseling:

1. Balance and Tolerance: Inviting religious people to maintain a balance between personal beliefs and respect for the beliefs of others. Tolerance is the key to creating harmony in diversity.
2. Dialogue and Communication: Encouraging dialogue between religious people to understand each other and find common ground. Good communication can reduce prejudice and increase harmony (Nurhadi et al., 2023).
3. Rejection of Extremism: Emphasizing the importance of rejecting all forms of extremism and violence in the name of religion. Religious moderation must be the guideline to prevent detrimental actions.
4. Value – Based Education: Integrating education on the values of moderation into the religious education curriculum so that the younger generation can understand the importance of a moderate attitude from an early age.
5. Development of Humanitarian Attitudes: Encouraging humanitarian attitudes in every religious action, emphasizing that religious teachings should benefit the larger community.
6. Implementation of Religious Teachings in Daily Life: Conveying that religious moderation must be applied in daily practice, both in social interactions and in resolving conflicts.
7. Role Models: Inviting religious leaders to be role models in practicing religious moderation so that the community can see real examples in daily life.
8. Awareness of Differences: Educating the community about the importance of realizing and appreciating differences and utilizing diversity as a source of strength, not division. (Cahyadi, 2018)

The role of religious counselors is crucial in improving religious moderation in Cinta Damai Village, especially considering the diverse background of the community. In this context, counselors are responsible for conveying messages that encourage tolerance, understanding, and cooperation between religious communities. In a heterogeneous environment, differences in beliefs and traditions can become a source of conflict if not managed properly. Therefore, religious instructors function as a bridge, providing guidance that can help the community understand the importance of living side by side with mutual respect. They encourage the community to see differences as strengths rather than threats and emphasize that open dialogue and mutual listening are the keys to creating harmony.

Through counseling programs, religious counselors can also introduce universal values in every religious teaching, such as compassion, justice, and peace. As a result, they actively contribute to creating an environment conducive to interfaith cooperation while preparing the community to face the challenges arising from these differences. These efforts not only strengthen religious moderation but also enrich the social and

cultural life in the village, creating a more peaceful and harmonious atmosphere for all residents.

Mr. Haji Suherdi, an Islamic religious counselor, from his interviews, revealed his commitment to increasing religious moderation. He emphasized the importance of tolerance between religious communities, inviting the public to appreciate differences and see them as strengths, not threats. In educational sessions and lectures at the *Majelis Taklim*, Mr. Suherdi conveyed the values of compassion, peace, and mutual assistance, showing that religious teachings should prioritize peace, not hatred. He also regularly holds interfaith dialogue forums that receive positive responses from the public, who believe they better understand one other's points of view and may share their experiences (Suherdi, 2024).

To combat extremism, Mr. Suherdi actively reminds the public about the dangers of extreme ideology and anarchist actions, explains the negative consequences of such actions, and invites them to return to moderate religious teachings. In addition, he educates the public about the rights and obligations of citizens and the importance of ethics in religion, with the hope that the community can behave in accordance with applicable legal and ethical values. Mr. Suherdi hopes that religious moderation will continue to be strengthened in this village because by respecting and collaborating with each other, the community can create a peaceful and harmonious environment where differences are valued as a gift. Therefore, the role of religious leaders and civil society organizations in strengthening the concept of religious moderation in Indonesia is also crucial. Religious leaders and civil society organizations can be a glue for Indonesian society in strengthening the concept of religious moderation and facing emerging challenges (Asy'ari, 2021a). With the support and cooperation of various parties, the concept of religious moderation can be implemented (Asy'ari, 2021b).

Hariadi Gultom, a Christian religious counselor, and Romulus Nainggolan, a Catholic religious counselor, conveyed several key messages to the public to increase religious moderation (Gultom, 2024).

1. Message of Tolerance and Respect: Religious counselors in Cinta Damai Village consistently emphasize the importance of tolerance between religious communities. They invite the community to respect differences and build harmonious relationships through lectures and discussions.
2. Religious Teaching Education: The counselors' messages also include education about moderate religious teachings, which teach the values of compassion, peace, and mutual assistance. It aims to counter extremism and strengthen commitment to peaceful religious teachings.
3. Dialogue and Collaboration: The counselors actively organize interfaith dialogue forums, allowing citizens from different backgrounds to share their views and experiences. These activities encourage collaboration in social programs that benefit the entire community, strengthening a sense of unity.
4. Legal and Ethical Awareness: The counselors also educate the community about the importance of understanding the laws and ethics of religion. They explain citizens' rights and obligations and how to behave in accordance with religious and societal values.
5. Community Strengthening: The counselors strengthen community networks through joint activities. They facilitate social activities involving various religious groups, which contribute to developing a sense of belonging and solidarity among residents.

Through these messages, Mr. Hariadi and Mr. Romulus strive to build a more harmonious and moderate society in Cinta Damai Village. Therefore, religious

moderation is an understanding and attitude in religion that is moderate, balanced, and mediates in understanding and practicing religious teachings. Religious moderation avoids extreme understanding and practice of religion, both in the form of liberalization and radicalization (Nurlaili et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that the role of religious counselors is critical in increasing religious moderation, particularly in Cinta Damai Village, which has a diverse community background. Religious counselors serve as directors and instructors, guiding the community to understand the values of tolerance, respect, and cooperation within religious communities. Challenges such as a lack of understanding of moderation can trigger social conflict; thus, counselors must take an active part in educating and helping the community recognize diversity and live a harmonious religious life.

Religious counselors have three main roles in carrying out their duties: informative and educational, consultative, and advocative. In the informative role, counselors convey moderate religious teachings and emphasize compassion and harmony. As consultants, they help the community understand various religious issues and resolve conflicts. On the advocative side, counselors protect the community from the threat of intolerance and extremism and provide an understanding of citizens' rights and obligations.

Religious counselors deliver messages emphasizing tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and legal awareness as important steps in building a peaceful society. Efforts to increase religious moderation in Cinta Damai Village are expected to strengthen social ties and create a harmonious environment for all residents through collaboration among counselors of all religions.

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