

Online Eucharistic celebration and the spiritual well-being of the Catholic Faithful of San Isidro Labrador Parish, Cuenca, Batangas during COVID-19 pandemic

Rosales, Renniel Jayson Jacinto ✉

Sta. Teresa College, Bauan, Batangas

De La Salle University – Manila, Philippines (rennieljaysonrosales@gmail.com)



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Abstract

Spirituality plays a big role in the life of many people. In this time of COVID-19 pandemic, with all the restrictions in social gatherings for health security purposes, physical attendance to the Eucharist celebration has been impeded. Thus, the spiritual nourishment of the people was left unaided. Despite the crisis the world is facing, the Catholic Church made use of different social media platforms to continue the faithfuls' spiritual nourishment by live-streaming the Eucharistic celebration. This study aims to understand the spiritual well-being of the Catholic faithful of San Isidro Labrador Parish, Cuenca, Batangas, and how online Eucharistic celebrations help their spiritual well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using the Spiritual Health and Life-Orientation Measure (SHALOM) of John Fisher, results have shown that there is no dissonance between the ideals and lived-experience/feelings of the participants, which may be attributed to the purposive and massive effect/help of the online Eucharistic celebrations provided by the Catholic Church.

Keywords: spirituality; COVID-19; online Eucharistic celebration; spiritual well-being; Catholic Church

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1. Introduction

Spirituality had been part of every religious person – both the laity and those in the clergy and consecrated life. Spirituality is commonly defined as an individual phenomenon connected with personal transcendence, superconscious sensitivity, and meaningfulness (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). It is also described as having relationships with other people (Pring, 2020) and with higher power (Schlehofer et al., 2008). The classical studies understand spirituality as a concentration on the religious, ecclesiastical, or matters concerned with the soul while current studies have shown that it is a wider acceptance of integrating human life and experience (Gomez & Fisher, 2003). Hence, spirituality is a broader concept than religion and has no confessional bond (Unterrainer, Lewis, & Fink, 2014). Furthermore, spirituality deals with the way a person lives a spirit-filled life (Hirang & del Castillo, 2020) and a quest for life's integration in his search for purpose through the transcendent (Cueto & del Castillo, 2017).

The importance of having a good spiritual life is an indication of healthy spiritual well-being since spirituality is living a life that is inspired, in accordance, and leading to the Holy Spirit (Classen, 2012). Thus, the spiritual well-being of the Catholic faithful is an integral part of being related to God. Ellison (1983) has mentioned that spiritual well-being is “the affirmation of life in a relationship with God, self, community, and environment that nurtures and celebrates wholeness” and further suggests that it “arises from an underlying state of spiritual health and is an expression of it”. Spiritual well-being is a religious component but not the same thing as spiritual health, spiritual maturity, and a dichotomous variable (Ellison, 1983). However, there is difficulty investigating the spirituality of a person because what can only be measured is the phenomenon or the consequences and not spirituality itself (Fisher, 2010).

A wide variety of wellness programs may help individuals to focus on their physical and mental health, especially during this pandemic. But in the spiritual struggle that many are facing in this time of pandemic, Koenig (2020) has suggested some tips to remain physically, mentally, and spiritually healthy and resilient; these include deepening religious faith, loving neighbor as one's self, using technology, loving and caring for neighbors in practical ways, becoming not reckless, and paying attention to physical health. In deepening one's religious faith by using technology, live-streaming of Eucharistic celebrations and other liturgical services is now part of the “new normal”.

This study explores the spiritual well-being of the Catholic faithful in the Parish of San Isidro Labrador, Cuenca, Batangas. It tries to describe the ideal spiritual well-being of the faithful compared to their lived experience/feelings and how the online celebrations/live streaming of the liturgical services helped them in the four domains of Spiritual well-being through the questionnaire developed by John Fisher (2013) called Spiritual Health and Life-Orientation Measure (SHALOM).

2. Literature review

2.1 The church during COVID-19 Pandemic

With the current COVID-19 pandemic the world is facing, the Catholic faithful's spirituality has been greatly affected due to the restricted public gathering, community quarantine, and health concerns. In the Philippines alone, as of September 8, 2020, there are already 238, 727 infected people and 3,890 deaths (WHO, 2020), and religious gatherings have been prohibited by the government, leaving the faithful unable to attend

liturgical celebrations.

The Church had taken steps to aid the faithful's spiritual needs with “online-based Church Masses, community prayers, spiritual recollections and retreats and Eucharistic adoration and processions” (del Castillo, Biana, & Joaquin, 2020). Furthermore, CBCP President Archbishop Romulo Valles, D.D. has encouraged that every diocese must provide spiritual nourishments through the internet, television, or radio while the family, as a basic ecclesial community, must pray together while attending virtual celebrations (Soliman, 2020). Though the faithful are attending celebration online, this cannot be the “status quo” of the Church because the ideal Church is always the people with the sacraments (Valles, 2020). The ardent desire of the faithful is no less than to be united in the celebration of the Eucharist because the Church cares for every human individual through the incarnation of Christ (Rosales, 2020).

In the Archdiocese of Lipa, Archbishop Garcera (2020), in his circular regarding pastoral guidelines to prevent the transmission of COVID-19, has instructed both the clergy and the faithful to be more obedient to the call of the government on community quarantine. Mass celebrations with the congregation are suspended and faithful in the Archdiocese were dispensed of their Sunday obligations. Faithful are then encouraged to tune-in to televised, radio-broadcasted, or live streamed masses provided by different churches and the church-owned radio stations. Majority of the parishes within the Archdiocese of Lipa are live-streaming their Eucharistic celebrations to respond to the spiritual needs and nourishment of the faithful.

2.2 *Online Eucharistic celebration and spiritual communion*

In this media age, the Church faces the task of having a place in preaching the Gospel and communicate it in symbols, models, images, and words that are accessible to the avenues available and can be understood by this culture (Mann, 2003). The Catholic Church has seen this need to join the media age since the beginning of the Second Vatican Council, presented in *Inter Mirifica* (Catholic Church, 1984), stating that “all members of the Church should make a concerted effort to ensure that the means of communication are put at the service of the multiple forms of the apostolate without delay and as energetically as possible, where and when they are need”. Thus, it is the role of the Church to console and continuously support the spiritual needs of the faithful in all means possible with the use of social media platforms.

The Eucharistic celebration is a communal celebration and the Code of Canon Law (Catholic Church, 1983) articulates that a priest may not celebrate the Eucharistic Sacrifice without at least one faithful, except for a good and reasonable cause. With the limitations brought about by the pandemic, many churches followed the instruction of the government to close their doors and celebrate alone or with some who live with the priest. The Eucharistic sacrifice, as aspired to be participated by the faithful in this trying time, is the source and summit of the Christian life (Catholic Church, 1984). This sacrifice is a sign of community, a meal which sinners are invited to participate, a sign of future heavenly banquet, and a challenge to make God’s reign present (Marinelli, 1993). The faithful can do nothing but stay at home and be united in the sacramental celebration through spiritual communion. Thus, the Church was led to celebrate with the online community through different social media platforms – making the faithful join the celebration through their televisions, radios, or Facebook. Moreover, Siapco (2020) has stated that attending an online celebration of the Eucharist, like that of the VirtueAL Mass of the Archdiocese of Lipa is not tantamount to attending a Eucharistic celebration physically. Adding that the Church makes allowances in these moments and making the attendance to online Eucharistic celebration a valid one – these allowances will help the people, especially the sick and those taking care of them, avail the treasury of indulgences provided by God’s grace. However, Parish (2020) has mentioned that participating in online worship is not an acceptable alternative in participating a physical interpersonal community and the reality of the celebration. The assertion of the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (Catholic Church, 1984) has specified that although the digital technologies might help in alternative modes of interaction, it is still artificial and potentially destructive to human social relationships.

The communion with Jesus by receiving the Eucharist has been impeded. People are trying to fill the gap between staying at home and attending the Eucharistic celebration by joining via live streaming of the Mass. Therefore, the spiritual nourishment has been fulfilled in a way or another by having full and active participation via a social media platform. The reception of the Eucharist might be the only thing they cannot partake of in this online mass. Hence, the priests enjoin the faithful to pray the “Act of Spiritual Communion”, which is a pious desire to receive the sacrament at the time a person cannot actually receive it (Costa, 1958). In order to communicate spiritually when it comes to the Eucharist, three acts are required, namely: an act of faith in the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist; an act of desire, which is accompanied by an act of love and sorrow for one’s sins, to worthily receive sacramental communion if it is possible; and an act of thanksgiving as if Christ is received sacramentally (H.V.G., 1943). Similarly, Costa (1958) has presented that this communion requires the conditions of being baptized, in the age of reason, the deliberate desire is the Eucharist and in the state of grace. Thus, in the faithful’s spiritual formation through social communication/media, each faithful’s presence can be authentic and will show them God’s presence through real relationships (Zsupan-Jerome, 2015).

2.3 The Spiritual Health and Life-Orientation Measure (SHALOM)

Spiritual health is a term that encompasses spiritual well-being and underlines all other aspects of well-being, including emotional, physical, mental, social, and occupational (Pham & del Castillo, 2020). In giving light to the measurement used in this study, the Spiritual Health and Life-Orientation Measure (SHALOM) is used to know if there is harmony or dissonance in the ideal spiritual well-being and the lived experience of the participants – where each person becomes the standard of which they are being measured, rather than being compared to other groups (Fisher, 2016). The four domains are personal, where one relates to self in finding meaning, purpose, and values in life; communal, where the interpersonal relationship is related to morality, culture, and religion; environmental, where the nurture and care for physical and biological, to the point of unity with the environment; and transcendental or God, where how one relates to God or something beyond human level (Fisher, 2016).

The Spiritual Health and Life-Orientation Measure (SHALOM) is composed of 20 items divided evenly into four domains to assess the quality of relationship people have with themselves, others, the environment, and with God (Fisher, 2014). SHALOM is divided into two measures. On one hand, the Spiritual Health Measure (SHM) measures the personal feelings or lived experience of the participants. On the other hand, the Life-Orientation Measure (LOM) measures the ideals for the participants regarding the four domains (Fisher, 2010).

3. Method

The study took the convenience of 75 Catholic faithful from San Isidro Labrador Parish, Cuenca, Batangas, Philippines as participants. They were the faithful who, because of the community quarantine implemented and/or for health security measures, were not able to attend the Eucharistic celebration physically. There were 53 female (70.7%) and 22 male (29.3%) participants.

The research utilized the Spiritual Health and Life-Orientation Measure (SHALOM) of Fisher (2011) as the research instrument. All participants were duly informed of the privacy and confidentiality of the results in answering the instrument. The SHALOM asked the respondents to give two responses to each of the 20 items to show their ideal spiritual health and their lived experience/feeling on their spiritual health. The results were then analyzed to determine if there is harmony or dissonance in the four domains during the time of community quarantine: (1) personal spiritual well-being, (2) communal spiritual well-being, (3) environmental spiritual well-being, and (4) transcendental spiritual well-being. Participants responded using the 5-point Likert scale (1=“very low” to 5=“very high”) where the results were quantitatively analyzed to compare their ideals and lived experience during the quarantine.

An additional column was integrated into the SHALOM, aside from ideal and lived experience. The help of

the online Eucharistic celebration in their spiritual health was asked for all the items. The added column also used the same Likert scale. This is to know whether the online mass helped them maintain their spiritual health during the community quarantine.

In the statistical treatment of the data, paired samples t-test was employed to know if there was any dissonance or harmony between the ideals and lived experience of the participants in terms of spiritual well-being. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was employed then to know if there was a significant relationship between the lived experience and the effect/help of online Eucharistic celebration on their spiritual well-being.

4. Results

The results show that there was no significant difference between the ideals and lived experience of the Catholic faithful in Cuenca, Batangas in terms of their spiritual well-being. There was a harmony between their ideal (life-orientation) spiritual health and their lived experience of spiritual health. The help of the intervention of the churches in having an online Eucharistic celebration shows that it highly helped them. The level of harmony between their ideals and lived experience shows that the help of the online Eucharistic celebration helps them cope up with the current situation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1 shows the ideals of the Catholic faithful of Cuenca’s importance of spiritual well-being. The participants gave high importance and were homogenous to the personal spiritual well-being (M=4.00; SD=0.528). This showed that they give high importance to the sense of identity, self-awareness, joy in life, inner peace, and meaning in life. The participants also gave high importance and homogenous to the communal spiritual well-being (M=4.06; SD=0.460). This showed that there is a high importance in their love of/for other people, forgiveness toward others, trust between individuals, respect for others, and kindness toward other people. Results also showed that they gave high importance and were homogenous to the environmental domain of their spiritual well-being (M=4.15; SD=0.577). It showed the importance of connecting with nature, awe at a breathtaking view, oneness with nature, harmony with the environment, and a sense of “magic” in the environment. Lastly, the participants gave high importance and were homogenous to their transcendental spiritual well-being (M=4.13; SD=0.537). This showed that they gave high importance to their personal relationship with God, worship of the creator, oneness with God, peace with God, and their prayer life.

Table 1

Results of the ideals for spiritual health (Life-Orientation Measure) (N=75)

Ideals	Min. Score	Max. Score	Mean	SD	Description
Personal Domain	2.40	5.00	4.00	0.528	High/Homogenous
Communal Domain	2.80	5.00	4.06	0.460	High/Homogenous
Environmental Domain	3.00	5.00	4.15	0.577	High/Homogenous
Transcendental Domain	3.00	5.00	4.13	0.537	High/Homogenous

Table 2 shows the lived experience or feelings of the Catholic faithful of Cuenca in their spiritual well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic, given the fact that there were health protocols such as community quarantine and strict implementation of “no public gatherings” policy of the local and national government. The participants have a high level of lived experience/feelings and homogenous on their personal well-being (M=4.04; SD=0.575). In their communal domain, they have a high level of lived experience/feelings and were homogenous on their spiritual well-being (M=4.00; 0.586). Their lived experience/feelings on the environmental domain of participants’ spiritual well-being also have a high level of practice and were homogenous (M=4.11; SD=0.641). Lastly, the participants have a high level of lived experience/feelings and homogenous on their transcendental spiritual well-being (M=4.04; SD=0.620). This means that despite the protocols implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Catholic faithful of Cuenca still has a high level of lived experience/feelings of their spiritual well-being.

Table 2*Results of the lived experience/feelings for spiritual health (Spiritual Health Measure) (N=75)*

Lived Experience/Feelings	Min. Score	Max. Score	Mean	SD	Description
Personal Domain	2.80	5.00	4.04	0.575	High/Homogenous
Communal Domain	2.60	5.00	4.00	0.586	High/Homogenous
Environmental Domain	2.40	5.00	4.11	0.641	High/Homogenous
Transcendental Domain	2.60	5.00	4.04	0.620	High/Homogenous

Table 3 shows the comparisons between the ideals and lived experience/feelings of the Catholic faithful of Cuenca on their spiritual well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the personal domain, the ideals and lived experience/feelings of the participants showed a mean difference of 0.040 and a *p*-value of .458, implying that there is no significant difference between the ideals and lived experience/feelings in the personal domain. The ideals and lived experience/feelings of the participants in the communal domain showed a mean difference of 0.064 and a *p*-value of .162, implying that there is no significant difference between the paired variables. In the environmental domain, the results showed a mean difference of 0.040 and a *p*-value of .424 between the ideals and lived experience/feelings, implying that there is no significant difference between the two. Lastly, the transcendental domain of the participants showed a mean difference of 0.088 and a *p*-value of .069, implying that there is no significant difference between the ideals and lived experience/feelings of the participants.

Table 3*Results of comparisons between ideals and lived experience*

Paired Variables	Min. Score	Max. Score	Mean	Mean Difference	<i>p</i> -value	Description
Ideals Personal and Lived Experience Personal	L1= 2.40 L2= 2.80	5.00	m1= 4.00 m2= 4.04	0.040	.458	No Significant Difference
Ideals Communal and Lived Experience Communal	L1= 2.80 L2= 2.60	5.00	m1= 4.06 m2= 4.00	0.064	.162	No Significant Difference
Ideals Environmental and Lived Experience Environmental	L1= 3.00 L2= 2.40	5.00	m1= 4.15 m2= 4.11	0.040	.424	No Significant Difference
Ideals Transcendental and Lived Experience Transcendental	L1= 3.00 L2= 2.60	5.00	m1= 4.13 m2= 4.04	0.088	.069	No Significant Difference

Note. p < .05.

Table 4 shows the results of the effect/help of the online Eucharistic celebration on the spiritual well-being of the Catholic faithful of Cuenca. The personal domain showed that online Eucharistic celebration has high effect/help and homogenous to the spiritual health of the participants (M=3.87; SD=0.654). In terms of the help to the communal domain, the online Eucharistic celebration has high effect/help and homogenous to the spiritual health of the participants (M=3.95; SD=0.659). Meanwhile, the effect/help of the online Eucharistic celebration has high effect/help and homogenous to the spiritual health of the participant (M=4.10; SD=0.649). Lastly, the results showed that there is a homogenous high effect/help of the online Eucharistic celebration to the transcendental spiritual health of the respondents.

Table 4*Results of the effect/help of Online Eucharistic celebration to spiritual well-being (N=75)*

Effect/Help	Min. Score	Max. Score	Mean	SD	Description
Personal Domain	2.20	5.00	3.87	0.654	High/Homogenous
Communal Domain	2.40	5.00	3.95	0.659	High/Homogenous
Environmental Domain	2.20	5.00	4.10	0.649	High/Homogenous
Transcendental Domain	2.40	5.00	4.03	0.644	High/Homogenous

Table 5 shows the correlation between the lived and experience/feelings and the effect/help of online

Eucharistic celebration of the Catholic faith of Cuenca. The personal domain showed an r -value of .446 and a p -value of .000; the communal domain showed an r -value of .664 and a p -value of .000; the environmental domain showed an r -value of .551 and a p -value of .000; the transcendental domain showed an r -value of .616 and a p -value of .000. The results implied that there is a moderately positive significant relationship between the lived experience/feeling and effect/help of online Eucharistic celebration in all domains of the spiritual well-being of the participants.

Table 5

Results of the relationship between lived experience and the effect of online Eucharistic celebration

Paired Variables	Mean	r -value	p -value	Description
Lived Experience Personal and Effect of online celebration Personal	M1= 4.04 M2= 3.87	.446	.000	Very Significant
Lived Experience Communal and Effect of online celebration Communal	M1= 4.00 M2= 3.95	.664	.000	Very Significant
Lived Experience Environmental and Effect of online celebration Environmental	M1= 4.11 M2= 4.10	.551	.000	Very Significant
Lived Experience Transcendental and Effect of online celebration Transcendental	M1= 4.04 M2= 4.03	.616	.000	Very Significant

Note. $p < .001$.

The participants were composed of 80.6% female. 43.1% of the participants were serving in the school for five years and below, 9.7% were serving for six to 10 years, the remaining participants were serving for 10 years and beyond. In the departments' participation, the participants were composed of 22.2% from the grade school, 36.1% from the junior high school, 19.4% from the senior high school, and 22.2% from the college.

5. Discussion

The study revealed that the Catholic faithful of the San Isidro Labrador Parish, Cuenca, Batangas have high importance to their spiritual well-being. This may imply that spirituality has a role in their life may it be with their personal (intra-personal), communal (inter-personal), environmental (nature), and transcendental (God) relationships. In addition, the lived experience/feelings (spiritual health) of the participants are in harmony with their ideals (life-orientations).

The results also showed that there is no significant difference between their ideals and lived experience/feelings for spiritual well-being. This may be affected by the high effect/help made by the online Eucharistic celebration provided by the parish to the faith faithful in giving spiritual nourishment through different social media platforms. The relationship between the lived experience/feelings and effect/help of online Eucharistic celebration might have filled the gap between the ideals and lived experience/feelings of the participants on their spiritual well-being. Thus, the spirituality of the people is nourished not just by being physically present in Church liturgical services but also by being personally willing to be in communion with the Church by any means possible.

6. Conclusion

The study has concluded that by using the Spiritual Health and Life-Orientation Measure (SHALOM) (Fisher, 2013), there is harmony between the ideals (Life-Orientation) and lived experience/feelings (Spiritual Health) of the Catholic faithful of San Isidro Labrador Parish, Cuenca, Batangas. Despite the limitations due to the health protocols implemented by the local government of Cuenca, Batangas brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, no dissonance was present in each of the domains of the spiritual well-being. The significant relationship between the lived experience/feelings and the effect/help of online Eucharistic celebration might have filled the gap that has existed due to the strict implementation of community quarantine and a limited number of people allowed in a public gathering – which is, to say, attending the Eucharistic celebration physically.

Christian Catholic practices have continued despite the pandemic that people have experienced. This has been proven by the fact that there is no dissonance between the respondents' spiritual well-being because of the way they interact and practice/celebrate the Eucharist virtually. Despite the restrictions, Catholic Christian practices in terms of the Eucharist celebration are still observed even though not physically. The result might also be connected to other practices that might be related to their spiritual practices.

As a recommendation, the researcher encourages the continuous effort of the Church to provide spiritual nourishment through online platforms. Though there is already a harmony between the life-orientation and spiritual health, it is also recommended to provide not just online Eucharistic celebrations but also online recollections and spiritual food for thoughts as their daily nourishment. It is high time for the Church to take advantage of the use of online social media platforms to evangelize and take good care of the spiritual life of the faithful, especially during this time of COVID-19 pandemic.

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