

# Understanding Parish Development in Rural East Java Indonesia: Preliminary Results

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the pastoral readiness and organizational capacity of the Catholic community in Ngeni, Blitar, through three Focus Group Discussions involving clergy, certified catechists, sacristans, and lay leaders from all eight stations under Ngeni. Across the FGDs, participants described a community marked by steady growth—now reaching approximately eight hundred Catholics—yet constrained by limited human resources and uneven local leadership. While Sunday Mass attendance averages one hundred fifty people, and special initiatives such as the Pundak Beach Mass attract strong participation, the community remains highly dependent on the Blitar parish and the diocese for administration, catechesis, and program development. The discussions revealed ambivalence regarding the proposal to elevate Ngeni to a quasi-parish. Early enthusiasm for autonomy has softened as lay members confronted the administrative, financial, and managerial responsibilities that such a transition would require. Only one certified catechist currently serves all stations, supported informally by volunteers with partial training, and many lay leaders expressed uncertainty about their capacity to manage independent pastoral structures. At the same time, the FGDs highlighted emerging strengths, including active spiritual life, creative outreach activities, and the presence of motivated local leaders.

**Keywords:** parish development; quasi-parish readiness; pastoral leadership; ecclesial governance; community participation

## **RESEARCH BACKGROUND**

The background of this research grows out of a shifting pastoral landscape in rural Blitar, where small Catholic communities are experiencing both numerical growth and structural strain. Ngeni and its seven satellite stations now serve roughly eight hundred Catholics, a notable concentration in an area marked by limited infrastructure, uneven educational access, and wide variations in local leadership. The community's desire for greater autonomy—expressed in earlier enthusiasm for becoming a quasi-parish—has collided with practical realities: a shortage of trained catechists, dependence on visiting clergy, and hesitancy among lay members to assume administrative responsibilities. Meanwhile, new forms of pastoral outreach, such as the well-attended Mass at Pundak Beach, suggest that local religious life is vibrant and responsive to cultural rhythms. These contrasts raise an important question about how rural Catholic communities build the internal capacity needed for sustainable self-governance. By examining the perceptions of priests, catechists, and lay leaders, this study seeks to understand the social, educational, and organizational conditions that shape Ngeni's readiness for greater pastoral independence, offering insight into the wider dynamics of rural church development in Indonesia.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design informed by principles of constructivist grounded theory to explore how geography, culture, pastoral structures, and community dynamics shape the readiness of the Ngeni Catholic network to become a quasi-parish. The approach emphasized understanding lived experiences rather than testing predetermined hypotheses, making it suitable for capturing nuanced perspectives from remote rural communities. Three Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)—covering regional dynamics, pastoral readiness, and community capacity—served as the primary data sources, complemented by field observations in the Tulungagung–Trenggalek region. This combined design allowed the research to situate pastoral realities within the wider social, cultural, and ecological landscape.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring representation from individuals with firsthand knowledge of local pastoral work, community leadership, ecological conditions, and cultural practices. Across the three FGDs, the study engaged priests responsible for eight rural stations, the sole certified catechist in the region, a sacristan who supports liturgy across all stations, lay volunteers, villagers affected by ecological and economic changes, and researchers observing local development. This diverse composition provided a holistic view of community functioning, including leadership strengths and gaps, water and land concerns, cultural influences, educational limitations, and the lived experiences of small rural Catholic communities.

Data analysis proceeded through three grounded-theory–inspired stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding involved identifying key concepts related to water dependence, harmony culture, administrative reluctance, mining threats, infrastructure challenges, and pastoral workload. Axial coding organized these concepts into broader categories such as geography and infrastructure, ecological vulnerability, economic transitions, cultural worldview, and pastoral capacity. Selective coding then integrated these categories into core themes that explain why the community exhibits strong religious devotion but limited organizational readiness for quasi-parish status. Triangulation of FGD transcripts and field observations strengthened the credibility and contextual depth of the findings.

**Table 1. Research Participants**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Role / Position</b>	<b>Location / Station</b>	<b>Key Functions / Expertise</b>	<b>Relevant Context &amp; Notes</b>
<b>A</b>	Lecturer / Cultural Tourism Worker	Tulungagung	Works with NU elders, cultural-tourism projects	Provides insight on Tulungagung's growth, NU's mediating role
<b>AK</b>	Researcher / Regional Observer	Tulungagung–Trenggalek	Provides contextual analysis on culture, geography, tourism	Observes Catholic–Kejawen blend & regional dynamics
<b>BN</b>	Certified Catechist & Senior Educator	Banyuurip	Only certified catechist in entire zone; decades of teaching	Critical HR bottleneck; cautious about quasi-parish status
<b>FR</b>	Priest	Oversees 8 stations incl. Ngeni & Banyuurip	Pastoral leadership, rotational visits, formation planning	Key informant on parish readiness & pastoral workload
<b>FS</b>	Priest	Blitar–Ngeni area	Supports pastoral work across stations	Advocates “walk with the people” pastoral philosophy
<b>GN</b>	Sacristan / Pastoral Assistant	Across all 8 rural stations	Travels w/ priests, assists liturgies, supports community	Bridges gaps in leadership & staffing
<b>LV</b>	Community Leaders	Rural stations	Assist with Mass, committees, outreach	Represent community readiness perspectives
<b>N</b>	Lay Catholic Community Member	Dongko, Trenggalek	Represents small Catholic minority (13 households)	Strong voice on mining threats, water security, rural livelihood
<b>PB</b>	Certified Catechist & Principal	Banyuurip	Only certified catechist; education leader	Central to catechesis and educational challenges
<b>Q</b>	Facilitator / Researcher	Works across Tulungagung–Trenggalek region	Leads FGDs, gathers data, guides reflection	Neutral facilitator in all three FGDs
<b>R</b>	Water Conservation Worker	Ngeni (Banyuurip area)	Works in water protection and local environmental efforts	Provides ecological insight; central to understanding water-based identity

Y	Shop Owner / Lay Catholic	Campur Darat	Operates roadside stall near JLS; hosts Sunday worship in home	Represents rural economy, infrastructure challenges, JLS emptiness
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## RESULTS

### **P1. Spatial isolation and infrastructural constraints significantly hinder the development of pastoral autonomy in rural multi-station communities.**

Organizational barriers, geographic distance, and the culture of self-sacrifice further weaken their “compassion satisfaction,” leaving them reluctant to seek help until crises arise. The result is a cycle where pastors know support exists but do not access it, reinforcing burnout and allowing support systems themselves to deteriorate rather than strengthen over time (Scott & Lovell, 2015). Moreover, traditional resilience practices still pastoralist communities adapt to environmental stress, and new technologies now strengthen their ability to make timely decisions, yet the long-term sustainability of these systems remains uncertain as climate pressures intensify (Awazi, 2025).

Youth engagement overall is held back by scarce financial resources, limited land access, weak advisory services, and few opportunities for skills training or mentorship, along with deeper issues such as gender bias, organizational barriers, poor infrastructure, conflict, and climate shocks. Strengthening rural pastoral development therefore requires collaborative, co-designed programs that build youth capacity, expand income opportunities, and equip young people with entrepreneurship and business skills (Hassen et al., 2024). Community-based conservation may create new constraints that undermine rural pastoral livelihoods by reducing access to essential grazing lands and fragmenting traditional rangeland systems (Lesorogol, 2024).

### **P2. Ecological vulnerability—particularly around water security—serves as a central driver of communal identity, resistance to extractive industries, and religious meaning-making.**

### **P3. Uneven rural–urban development weakens leadership pipelines and administrative capacity in rural faith communities.**

Economic disparity between industrial centers and rural hill regions contributes to leadership shortages, educational limitations, and reduced participation in administrative roles. Studies consistently show that rural–urban inequality and youth migration erode the local leadership pool and weaken institutional structures (Tickamyer & Duncan, 2020; Sutherland, 2019). Sociological evidence also finds that rural “talent flight” disrupts community continuity and lowers the availability of skilled individuals for organizational responsibilities (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). The Ngeni network reflects this pattern: while devotion remains strong, the limited number of trained professionals constrains administrative readiness for quasi-parish autonomy.

### **P4. Harmony-oriented cultural norms reduce willingness to assume assertive leadership roles, thereby limiting church administrative independence.**

The Javanese cultural emphasis on *rukun*—maintaining social harmony and avoiding conflict—encourages communal cohesion but discourages individuals from accepting leadership roles requiring assertiveness or decision-making. This aligns with empirical studies showing that Southeast Asian harmony cultures often produce strong interpersonal solidarity but weak bureaucratic or administrative engagement (Mulder, 2017; Hefner, 2020). Anthropological research also demonstrates that conflict-avoidance norms shape religious authority structures in Indonesia, making communities reluctant to adopt independent administrative systems (Kloos, 2018). Thus, cultural values that sustain devotion simultaneously limit organizational self-management.

**Table 1. Coding Analysis**

OPEN CODING	AXIAL CODING	SELECTIVE CODING
Difficult hilly/limestone terrain	Geography & Infrastructure• Dispersed villages• Uneven road quality• Underused JLS corridor	Spatial constraints shape pastoral capacity and community development
Roads patched by villagers	Community self-reliance in infrastructure	
JLS smooth but empty	Infrastructure without local economic integration	
Solar streetlight theft	Informal governance & weak sense of ownership	
Water as lifeline	Water & Ecological Vulnerability• Dependence on springs• Fear of mining impacts• Community-based conservation (PAMSIMAS)	Water security defines local identity, resistance to mining, and spiritual worldview
Mining threatening springs	Ecological threats to livelihood	
Limestone land but water abundant when managed	Local ecological knowledge	
Factories growing in Tulungagung	Economic Transformations• Urban–rural inequality• Declining agriculture (cloves)• Struggling micro-businesses• Emerging informal tourism	Uneven development widens the gap between industrial centers and rural hill stations
Small roadside shops with no customers	Rural economic stagnation	
Youth leaving for cities	Demographic thinning	

OPEN CODING	AXIAL CODING	SELECTIVE CODING
Rural tourism half-developed	Unstable tourism opportunities	
Islam Kejawen influence	Cultural & Spiritual Worldview• Harmony culture• Religious syncretism• Reluctance to assume authority	Local culture encourages devotion but hinders rapid structural change
Community avoids confrontation	Harmony as decision-making norm	
Manunggaling kawulo Gusti	Spiritual worldview shapes development attitudes	
Catholic community tiny / monthly mass	Pastoral Structure & Human Resources• Only one catechist• Sacristan covers 8 stations• Limited trained leaders• Dependency on mother parish	Strong faith but weak organizational capacity limits advancement toward quasi-parish
Weak leadership in Ngeni vs stronger in Lodayo	Uneven human resources	
Fear of administrative tasks	Psychological resistance	
Enthusiasm declining when tasks clarified	Emotional overwhelm	
Weekly services held in homes	Flexible but limited worship infrastructure	
Strong devotion, consistent attendance	Community Cohesion & Ritual Life• Ritual gatherings sustain unity• Beach Mass as bonding activity• Community identity rooted in shared ritual	Communal devotion sustains resilience amid structural limitations
Beach Mass drawing Catholics & non-Catholics	Social and interfaith bridging	
Generous collections shared with villagers	Community reciprocity	

## Conclusion

The coding patterns converge on a single conclusion: rural pastoral life in Ngeni is held together by strong communal devotion and ecological stewardship, yet its progress is constrained by geographic isolation, uneven economic change, limited human resources, and a cultural preference for harmony that slows structural transformation.

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## **FGD November 2025: Zoom Dialogue on Land, Water, Communities, and the JLS Corridor**

The November 2025 focus group discussion examined how land, water, community life, and the expanding JLS (Jalur Lintas Selatan) coastal corridor are reshaping rural areas in Tulungagung and Trenggalek. The session brought together four participants: A, an academic from UIN Tulungagung familiar with cultural and religious dynamics; N, a community member from the small Catholic station of Dongko; Y, a resident of Campur Darat living near the JLS; and R, a water-conservation practitioner from Ngeni. Facilitated via Zoom by Q, the conversation unfolded within the broader context of rapid industrial growth in Tulungagung, contrasting with the slower tempo of Trenggalek's upland villages, and the mixed expectations surrounding the new JLS highway. The purpose of the FGD was to understand how local people perceive development pressures—especially mining plans, shifting livelihoods, tourism prospects, and water security—while navigating cultural traditions and uneven infrastructure. Through shared stories about beaches, roads, forests, and faith communities, the discussion revealed both the vulnerability and resilience of these interconnected rural landscapes.

The screen flickered as the last few participants joined. **Q** adjusted her headset and smiled.

**Q:** Thank you, everyone, for making time this evening. Before we dive in, could each of you introduce yourselves and your connection to the Tulungagung–Trenggalek area?

**A:** I'm A, from UIN Tulungagung. Our campus has around twenty thousand students. Much of our community is Islam Kejawen—deeply rooted in old Javanese spiritual traditions. I've been working with local leaders on cultural tourism.

**N:** I'm N from Stasi Dongko. Our small Catholic community has just thirteen households. We're hidden behind Mount Kemlungkung, about twenty-four kilometers from Trenggalek. The road is smooth because it's part of the national route, but the curves twist your stomach.

**Y:** I'm Y from Campur Darat. I run a small shop near the JLS—though some days “small shop” is just a polite way of saying I sit in the wind waiting for someone to pass by.

**R:** I'm R, working on water conservation programs in Ngeni. Our village is part of Banyuurip. Even though the land is full of limestone, we still have plenty of water if it's managed well.

**Q:** Let's start broad. What's happening across these regions? How are things changing with the upcoming JLS?

**A:** Tulungagung feels like it keeps multiplying its factories. If you stand near Ngunut train station—which is surprisingly nice—you can practically hear the district humming. Ngunut itself is growing very fast.

**R:** True. But drive toward Trenggalek and the world becomes quiet. Almost eerie sometimes. The town center feels slow, like it's catching its breath. Meanwhile Dongko, Campur Darat, and Ngeni are tucked into hills with their own rhythms.

**Q:** N, would you share your view about the mining issue?

**N:** It's a heavy matter. The Australian company wants to mine twenty thousand hectares—around ten percent of Trenggalek. The concession covers Dongko, Pule, and Suluh. People here reject it strongly. It threatens our water sources. We depend on PAMSIMAS, our community-based water system. If the springs are damaged, we lose everything.

**Q:** What do people rely on for income?

**N:** Farming and livestock. Some raise etawa goats for competitions. Once, many grew cloves, but when the trade rules changed, it stopped being worth the trouble. Much of Dongko lies in pine forest managed by Perhutani. No one here is a big community figure in the larger sense. We're simple. Even our church—big but with only three rows of benches—is used just once a month.

**Q:** And the JLS? Do you see it as a threat or an opportunity?

**N:** Neither. It feels distant. People don't expect it to change their lives. Maybe because change seems like something that happens somewhere else.

**Q:** A, you mentioned involving NU leaders. Why?

**A:** To help break the deadlock. Mining companies speak the language of development; villagers speak the language of water and land. Religious elders often bridge those worlds. If NU elders join the discussion, maybe there's clarity.

**Q:** Let's move to Campur Darat. Y, how's the shop going?

**Y:** If you ask about profit, the answer would make you cry. The JLS road is beautiful—clean asphalt, solar streetlights—but empty. Sometimes motorbike racers use it for late-night speed runs. That's the only "traffic."

**R:** And some of the solar panels disappear. Villagers take them, though most won't admit it.

**Y:** People don't think of the JLS as tourism potential. They've heard nothing officially. No planning, no communication. Even though from Campur Darat to the JLS the road isn't extreme, we don't have a church there, so Sunday mass is held in my house. Everyone knows the area, but no one knows what the highway is supposed to bring.

**Q:** Last week some of you visited Pantai Sine. What was that like?

**R:** The road from Tulungagung to Sine is terrible—full of holes. Villagers patch it with cement on their own. It reminds me of the road toward Ngeni. But once you reach the JLS, the last three hundred meters to Sine are smooth.

**Q:** And the beach?

**R:** Beautiful but neglected. The bay is calm enough for fishing boats to anchor two hundred meters out. There's a large fish auction building—about eight by fifteen meters. Nice, but empty. It used to be damaged, then rebuilt, but still unused. A government house next to it is sometimes rented out. Fishermen can sell tuna, small sharks, mackerel—but many are tied to debts with local bosses.

**A:** The beach is dirty in places. But the river mouth is peaceful. Kids swim there. Still, the regency doesn't seem to develop it.

**Q:** And then you went to Pantai Pacar?

**R:** Yes. Different world. From Sine, the JLS cuts through limestone cliffs and forest. At the top of the cliffs, small cafés have appeared—semi-permanent buildings with lovely views. But the beach entrance is controlled by... let's call them "informal guardians." They charge ten thousand for entry and ten thousand for parking.

**Y:** The stairs make it less crowded. Clean beach, white sand, coral, even a big fish cage offshore. Pacar feels scenic but accidental—beautiful without management.

**Q:** What about Pantai Kelinci?

**A:** Still under construction. No clear timeline. Many spots along the JLS feel halfway born.

**Q:** Before we close, how does Ngeni fit into all this?

**R:** Ngeni works hard on water conservation. Even with limestone land, our springs survive because we protect catchment zones. People here feel connected to Banyuurip's tradition of guarding water as a shared lifeline. It's an irony: places like Dongko, Campur Darat, even parts of Trenggalek have water despite the karst landscape, yet development often threatens the very thing that keeps them alive.

**Q:** Final thoughts?

**A:** Tulungagung grows inward—factories, education, cultural tourism. But the outer rings, from Dongko to Sine, feel suspended between old rhythms and unpromised futures.

**R:** The JLS is like a spine waiting for nerves and muscles. Without local planning, it remains a quiet ribbon of asphalt through forests and hills.

**Y:** Village voices still travel slower than official announcements.

**N:** People here seek harmony with land. *Manunggaling kawulo Gusti*—finding unity with the divine through daily life. That shapes how they see development. They don't chase it; they measure it slowly, by the scale of their own needs.

**Q:** Thank you, everyone. This paints a vivid landscape of hills, water, faith, and quiet roads. The story continues from here.

The screen blinked, and the meeting dissolved as each participant clicked "Leave Meeting."

## **FGD Oktober 2025**

The focus group discussion explored the pastoral, social, and cultural dynamics of the Catholic community in Ngeni and its surrounding stations, aiming to understand their readiness to become a quasi-parish and the challenges that shape their development. Participants included FR, a priest overseeing several rural stations; BN, a senior catechist and long-time educator; GN, a sacristan who regularly accompanies priests across the eight stations; and AK, a researcher observing broader regional dynamics. The conversation took place within the geographical and cultural context of Tulungagung–Trenggalek, an area marked by limestone hills, dispersed villages, limited educational resources, and strong Javanese spiritual traditions. The FGD provided insight into how geography, water conservation practices, shifting livelihoods, and community dependence on the mother parish influence local capacity-building and long-term pastoral planning.

**Q:**

Thank you, everyone, for joining this session. Today we're focusing on the pastoral, social, and

cultural dynamics of the Catholic community in Ngeni. We also want to understand their readiness to become a quasi-parish and how local structures, resources, and geography shape their growth. Let's begin with the current state of the community.

**FR:**

Ngeni and Banyuurip are the largest centers of Catholic life here. In total, across the eight stations, we have around eight hundred people. On Sundays, the church usually sees about one hundred and fifty participants. Daily Mass draws ten to twenty. The numbers are stable, not too small but not large enough to claim full independence.

**Q:**

So, structurally, how does pastoral work operate? How do you manage eight stations?

**FR:**

We rotate. I take care of several stations, and my colleague supports the others. The terrain is tricky at times—some areas are up in the hills or deep within plantation zones—but the rhythm of visits has been steady. The strongest human resources are in Lodooyo, where we have a doctor and a gold trader who help lead the community. Ngeni has enthusiasm, but fewer professionals.

**BN:**

If I may add, the community still depends heavily on the mother parish in the city. I've been teaching for decades, and I happen to be the only certified catechist in this entire zone. That's not a badge of honor—it's a sign that the community urgently needs more trained people.

**Q:**

You've been saying something important. In the earlier interview, you mentioned that Ngeni is "not ready" to become a quasi-parish. Could you elaborate?

**BN:**

Certainly. A quasi-parish requires the ability to run administrative matters independently, maintain finances responsibly, manage catechetical programs, coordinate liturgies, and sustain pastoral initiatives without constant oversight. Many of our residents are farmers, laborers, or small-scale traders. They work long hours. They're devoted, but not yet confident in organizational matters. They still expect guidance from the diocese or from established parishes like Blitar.

**FR:**

That's true. When I first arrived, the enthusiasm was sky-high. People dreamed of becoming a full parish. I prepared them for a quasi-parish first, the step before full independence. But as responsibilities became clearer—paperwork, finances, infrastructure maintenance—they became overwhelmed. Eventually, they preferred to remain under Blitar. Dependence feels safer.

**GN:**

From my experience as a sacristan, I've seen that dynamic too. I travel with the priests to all eight stations. The devotion is there. The faith is strong. But the administrative culture isn't. People come to worship, help with cleaning, prepare offerings—but the heavier tasks, the ones requiring structure, still rely on a small handful of people.

**Q:**

Let's shift to the demographic and educational aspects. Are young people engaged?

**FR:**

Engagement is mixed. We have twenty candidates preparing for their first communion. That's

encouraging. But after primary school, many students have to go to Lodayo for middle school. Access shapes involvement. When they grow older, some move to cities for work. It thins the leadership pipeline.

**BN:**

Education is a real bottleneck. Ngeni has only one primary school. Exposure to broader learning environments is limited. Without training opportunities, the pool of future catechists, secretaries, or youth leaders remains shallow.

**Q:**

Let's also discuss the geography and cultural environment. How does local tradition shape the church community?

**AK:**

From what we observed during the field visits, the region blends Catholic identity with Kejawen values—what some people call spiritual Javanese culture. Rituals related to land, water, and ancestral respect are still part of daily life. The government in Tulungagung even promotes cultural tourism. You see statues of the Monkey God and martial-arts symbols everywhere, including PSHT markers. It's normal.

**FR:**

True. These cultural layers shape how people think about responsibility. Harmony is valued deeply. Community leaders rarely confront issues directly. This is beautiful but can slow decision-making. People hesitate to take on authority because they fear disrupting harmony.

**Q:**

Since you mentioned geography earlier—Dongko, Campur Darat, Banyuurip—how does the land influence daily activity?

**GN:**

Dongko is mountainous, twenty-four kilometers from Trenggalek. The road winds but is smooth because it's part of the national route. It sits behind Mount Kemlungung. The gold mining concession covers twenty thousand hectares. People talk about it with worry. They fear mining will destroy water sources.

**FR:**

Water is life here. Banyuurip means “the spring that brings life,” and Ngeni is also known for water conservation. They take it seriously.

**BN:**

Many families still farm or raise livestock. Some keep Etawa goats and join contests. They once farmed cloves, but market changes made it unprofitable. Water determines everything—farming, household life, even church activities.

**Q:**

Speaking of Campur Darat, the field notes mention that the community worships in homes rather than in a church building.

**AK:**

Correct. We visited the home of a resident who hosts weekly services. He manages farmland near the JLS route. He even opened a small stall along the JLS road, though it's quiet. Many farmers pass

by, but the road isn't seen as a tourism opportunity. People don't really receive information about JLS.

**GN:**

Solar-panel street lights were installed, but some were stolen. It reflects mismatched expectations. People don't feel JLS is for them.

**Q:**

That's quite revealing. What about Ngeni's own station?

**BN:**

Ngeni has a proper church, sizable but simple. Only three rows of benches, but enough. The station was founded by an older pastor decades ago, and many of us remain his followers in spirit. But we still lack figures of influence—no local doctors, teachers, or business owners who are Catholic, aside from myself.

**FR:**

And the Mass is held once a month in some stations, depending on distance. That limits growth.

**Q:**

Let's talk about challenges and hopes. What obstacles must be addressed before Ngeni can stand as a quasi-parish?

**BN:**

Training. Without more catechists, the community cannot sustain sacramental preparation or faith formation. One certified catechist is not enough. We need programs that bring skills to the community—accounting, administration, leadership.

**GN:**

Consistency is another issue. Volunteers are passionate but often busy. Harvest season or planting season can drain manpower.

**FR:**

Infrastructure remains a challenge, too. Roads, transportation, and communication barriers slow everything down. And the culture of dependence—understandable as it may be—needs gradual transformation.

**AK:**

Perhaps the parish can partner with local civil society groups. Ngeni is part of a broader environment—communities facing mining threats, water scarcity, land-use changes. These shared issues could serve as a bridge.

**Q:**

So there's potential for stronger networks beyond church structures?

**FR:**

Absolutely. When the sea-coast station in Banyuurip holds the beach Mass, around forty minutes from Ngeni, the sense of unity is felt. The collection there is significant enough that we split it between the village and the church. Experiences like that show the power of cooperation.

**BN:**

The community values gatherings—rituals, celebrations, processions. If these can be tied to formation, we may see new leadership emerge.

**Q:**

If you were to imagine Ngeni ten years from now, what would be different?

**FR:**

I imagine a community with at least five certified catechists, stronger youth groups, and stable local finance structures.

**BN:**

I imagine a quasi-parish finally standing, not from pressure, but from maturity.

**GN:**

And I imagine that even with modest facilities, the stations remain full of life. That the spirit doesn't depend on buildings, but on companionship.

**Q:**

Thank you. This dialog helps us see the landscape more clearly—geography, culture, education, and pastoral life woven together. The next phase of our study will look into leadership development and community readiness. Our time is up, but the conversation continues in our notes, our fieldwork, and in the lives of those we accompany.

## FGD August 2025

The FGD convened to assess pastoral capacity and community readiness in the Ngeni Catholic network, using a practical, person-centered lens to explore whether the eight stations can progress toward quasi-parish status. Participants included the priests (FR and FS), the sole certified catechist and local school principal (PB), the sacristan (GN), and several lay leaders and volunteers, with Q facilitating the discussion; together they represent Ngeni, Banyuurip, Lodooyo and nearby stations that serve roughly 800 Catholics. Held in the Ngeni meeting hall, the conversation covered Mass attendance and sacramental preparation (weekday and Sunday figures, 20 First Communion candidates), constraints on local administration and catechesis, inter-station differences in leadership and resources, the practical benefits of outreach activities such as Pundak Beach Mass, and wider structural challenges (limited trained personnel, educational gaps, infrastructure and transport). Overall, the group affirmed strong faith and communal commitment but concluded that Ngeni is not yet ready for autonomous parish status: the community needs targeted training, gradual capacity-building, and continued diocesan accompaniment to make sustainable pastoral and administrative transitions.

**Q:** Thank you for staying. We want to listen carefully to your views on how the eight stations under Ngeni are progressing. We now have around eight hundred Catholics, which is significant for a rural area like this.

**FR:** On Sundays we welcome about one hundred fifty people at Mass. Weekday Mass usually brings ten to twenty. The faith life is steady, even if resources are stretched.

**Q:** Let's talk about catechesis. We know there's only one certified catechist?

**PB** nodded. "Yes. I'm fifty-nine and currently the principal of the public elementary school in Banyuurip. People like to point out that I'm the only Catholic elementary school principal in the whole Blitar district. I didn't expect that to make me unique."

**Q:** Do you handle all catechetical work alone?

**PB:** Mostly yes, though I am assisted by a young man who once trained to become a religious brother but didn't continue. This year we're preparing twenty children for their First Communion. It is meaningful work, though demanding.

**GN**, the sacristan, leaned forward. "I support wherever I can. Years ago, I studied to be a religion teacher but didn't finish. Now I assist with liturgy, follow the priests to all eight stations, and prepare everything needed. Each station has its own rhythm, its own concerns."

**FR:** And the stations differ in structure too. Ngeni is the largest, with around two hundred fifty Catholics. But Lodooyo has stronger leadership—there are professionals there, including a doctor and a gold trader. They are used to handling administration. Ngeni has only an elementary school, and the nearest middle school is in Lodooyo. That shapes the way people organize themselves.

**Q:** There has been discussion about turning Ngeni into a quasi-parish. How feasible is it?

**PB:** Honestly, Ngeni is not ready yet. To become a quasi-parish—or even a full parish—the community must manage finances, facilities, and programs independently. Our people are devoted, but not fully prepared for that. We still rely heavily on Blitar and the diocese.



**GN:** People become anxious when they hear words like “independence” or “administration.” They imagine being suddenly responsible for huge tasks they don’t feel trained for. Many feel more comfortable staying under the Blitar parish.

**FR:** When I first arrived, enthusiasm was high. People spoke passionately about wanting Ngeni to become a parish one day. I took that seriously and started preparing the groundwork—training volunteers, forming committees. But over time, many realized independence comes with heavier obligations. Some felt overwhelmed. They prefer gradual growth.

**Q:** Do they feel pressured?

**FR:** Not pressured—just cautious. They want to grow, but not too fast.

**Q:** Let’s move to a happier topic: the beach Mass. People love hearing about it.

**FR:** The coastline in Blitar has enormous tourism potential. Every fifth Friday, we celebrate Mass at Pundak Beach in Banyuurip. It’s about a forty-minute drive from Ngeni. The atmosphere is beautiful—the waves, the sunlight, the openness. Attendance is good, and the collection is surprisingly generous. We divide it equally: half for the village, half for the church committee.

**GN:** The villagers appreciate that. It shows the Church is truly present among them, not only inside the building.

**PB:** And the beach Mass attracts people from outside the Catholic community. Some come simply because they’re curious. It becomes a place of natural encounter.

**Q:** Listening to all of you, Ngeni seems to sit at an interesting crossroads.

**FS,** who had been quiet, finally spoke. “The goal isn’t to force Ngeni into becoming a parish before it’s ready. Our role is to walk with the people. Growth must come from within the community.”

**FR:** When the community is ready—spiritually, administratively, emotionally—structure will follow. Until then, we walk together, step by step.

The group exchanged small nods. Outside, the sound of children playing filled the air, a gentle reminder that Ngeni’s story continues to unfold through the generations.