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## Congregational Reaction to the Phenomenon of Laroma Organization

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### ABSTRACT

This study discusses the interaction between adherents of the Lalang Rondor Malesung organization who are still loyal to practicing the old beliefs of Minahasa and the surrounding community. When believers carry out faith rituals, they face rejection from some people. With a Christian theological approach and qualitative research methods, this study aims to understand the views or reactions of the congregation to the phenomenon of the existence of the Lalang Rondor Malesung organization, as well as how they can coexist in existing differences. The results of the study show that there are various reactions among the congregation, ranging from rejection to acceptance, which reflects the dynamics of relationships between people of different faiths in a plural society. The conclusion of this study emphasizes the importance of building constructive relationships in the midst of differences in faith and belief as well as cultural diversity in living together.

*Keywords: GMIM, Lalang Rondor Malesung Organization, Malesung.*

### ABSTRAK

*Penelitian ini membahas interaksi antara penganut organisasi Lalang Rondor Malesung yang masih setia mempraktikkan kepercayaan lama Minahasa dan masyarakat sekitar. Ketika orang percaya melakukan ritual iman, mereka menghadapi penolakan dari beberapa orang. Dengan pendekatan teologis Kristen dan metode penelitian kualitatif, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami pandangan atau reaksi jemaat terhadap fenomena keberadaan organisasi Lalang Rondor Malesung, serta bagaimana mereka dapat hidup berdampingan dalam perbedaan yang ada. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ada berbagai reaksi di antara jemaat, mulai dari penolakan hingga penerimaan, yang mencerminkan dinamika hubungan antara orang-orang dari agama yang berbeda dalam masyarakat yang majemuk. Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya membangun hubungan yang konstruktif di tengah perbedaan iman dan keyakinan serta keragaman budaya dalam hidup bersama.*

*Kata Kunci: GMIM, Malesung, Organisasi Lalang Rondor Malesung.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The Lalang Rondor Malesung organization, abbreviated as Laroma, is one of the local beliefs in North Sulawesi Province that is misunderstood by some people, namely the Malesung belief which is embraced by a religious organization called Lalang Rondor Malesung (Laroma) which is located in Tondei Raya Village, West Motoling District, South Minahasa Regency. One of the events or cases of rejection that occurred to adherents of tribal religions, in this case the malesung belief in the Laroma organization, is the destruction carried out by individuals, this is evidenced by the case of destruction of a place of worship from the Laroma organization which is a follower of the Malesung Faith in Tondei Raya Village.

The background or reason for the perpetrators of the act of destruction is because it is based on the understanding that the Malesung belief carried out by the Laroma organization with various religious rituals that are still maintained or preserved by the adherents of the Malesung faith, is considered a form of misdirection in the view of the Christian faith, and there is also concern from parents about their children who are still categorized as teenagers and young people who are may be interested in the ritual practices embraced by the Laroma organization.

The life view of the people of North Sulawesi or the philosophy of the motto " *Si Tou Timou Tumou Tou* " and the Law of Love from Christianity certainly teach to accept and love others, so why is there still an attitude of rejection of the Laroma organization which is a follower of the Malesung religion in Tondei Village, West Motoling District carried out by some Christians? which in fact has been official and has a strong legal basis to be able to exercise their rights in belief in God Almighty with all the processions, rituals and customs they have. Regarding the reaction of rejection to belief groups, there have been many studies on this matter, among others. Rochmad et al. in an article entitled Dynamics of the Development of Belief Streams in Puduk District, Ponorogo Regency, revealed that there is discrimination against followers of belief streams in Puduk.<sup>1</sup> This causes believers to be forced to hide their identities, which has implications for a decrease in the number of followers. Despite efforts to overcome discrimination, believers still face challenges in gaining recognition and rights as part of society. Research notes that this discrimination has an impact on the confidence of believers. Kesia Martini Pesik, in an article entitled Recognition of

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<sup>1</sup> Rochmad Rochmad et al., "Dinamika Perkembangan Aliran Kepercayaan Di Kecamatan Puduk Kabupaten Ponorogo," *Kalimah: Jurnal Studi Agama Dan Pemikiran Islam* 19, no. 1 (January 31, 2021): 117–38, <https://doi.org/10.21111/klm.v19i1.6369>.

Adherents of the Lalang Rondor Malesung Belief in Religious and State Life, Research shows that after the Constitutional Court decision No. 97/2016, Laroma adherents obtained a recognized legal status. Despite having gained legal recognition, Laroma adherents still face challenges in gaining social recognition. Many members of the community still view Laroma as a heresy, which causes negative stigma and challenges in terms of public acceptance. Nahar Surur et al., in the article Analysis of Permendkbudristek No. 46 of 2023 on Structural Violence Occurring in Sapto Darmo Belief Schools in Kendal Regency noted that people's attitudes towards belief groups, especially Sapto Darmo, are still influenced by stigma and incomprehension. People tend to have stereotypical views of believers, which often leads to discrimination. However, with more inclusive policies and socialization efforts from the government, it is hoped that people's attitudes can change to be more tolerant and accept diversity. Although there have been many studies that have recorded social reactions to the existence of religious traditions, there is still a lack of in-depth analysis of the root causes of rejection in the context of North Sulawesi society, including cultural and religious aspects. Rochmad et al., researched only focused on Pudak District, so they could not describe the dynamics of belief flows in other areas that may have different conditions.<sup>2</sup> Kesia Martini Pesik, This article has not sufficiently explored the direct reaction from the congregation or the community to the followers of Laroma, because it is reviewed from the formal legal aspect.<sup>3</sup> Nahar Surur et al., see that discrimination has decreased due to government policies.<sup>4</sup> The researcher sees that there is a gap that needs to be filled, namely by conducting a study on the reaction of the congregation to the phenomenon of the Laroma organization in the midst of the congregation in Tondei village and after the case of destruction and discrimination against tribal religious people, how the community and tribal religious people can coexist in every view, faith and belief in the midst of existing differences.

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<sup>2</sup> Rochmad et al.

<sup>3</sup> Kesia Martini Pesik, "Rekognisi Penganut Kepercayaan Lalang Rondor Malesung Dalam Kehidupan Beragama Dan Bernegara," *Jurnal Socius: Journal of Sociology Research and Education* 10, no. 2 (2023): 116–42, <https://doi.org/10.24036/scs.v10i2.459>.

<sup>4</sup> Nahar Surur, Atik Dina Nasikhah, and Ego Setyawan, "Analisis Permendkbudristek No. 46 Tahun 2023 Terhadap Kekerasan Struktural Yang Terjadi Pada Aliran Kepercayaan Sapto Darmo Di Kabupaten Kendal," *Ganaya : Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Humaniora* 7, no. 4 (August 3, 2024): 79–90, <https://doi.org/10.37329/ganaya.v7i4.3488>.

## RESEARCH METHODS

Research is an activity that is carried out to search, record, formulate and analyze until compiling a report.<sup>5</sup> Thus, research is a systematic activity in order to obtain information and knowledge. The researcher uses the Qualitative research method because Qualitative research is the collection of data on a natural setting with the intention of interpreting or interpreting the phenomena that occur. Qualitative research is the collection of data, analysis, interpretation and even not using statistics. This research is a research that emphasizes problems in social life based on real conditions.<sup>6</sup> Bogdan and Taylor define qualitative research as a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observable behaviors.<sup>7</sup>

## RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Definition of Religion

According to the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI), religion is a teaching, a system that regulates the system of faith (belief) and worship to God Almighty as well as rules related to the association of humans and humans as well as humans and their environment<sup>8</sup>. Religion can be defined as a belief system based on sacred and supernatural values that can indirectly direct human behavior itself. In Religion there are various doctrines that are often difficult for human reason to understand, but humans have a sense that encourages religion.<sup>9</sup> The term Religion in Sanskrit is used in the context of Religion that tends to tantris, where Religion is seen as a sacred science that is studied in preparation for future life.<sup>10</sup> Religion is a complex concept. Imanuel Kant argued that religion is a revelation that is the result of actions, thoughts or moral reflections in the human experience<sup>11</sup>

The definition usually includes some or all of the elements, such as the belief in the existence of the supernatural (or something); prayer and communication with something

<sup>5</sup> Cholid Narbuko and H. Abu Achmadi, *Research Methodology* (Jakarta: Bumi Aksara, 2011), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Albi Anggito and Johan Setiawan, *Qualitative Research Methodology* (Sukabumi: Jejak, 2003), 8–9.

<sup>7</sup> Lexy J. Moeleong, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (Bandung: PT. Remaja Rosdakarya, 2009), 3.

<sup>8</sup> A. N. Moeliono, *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1988).

<sup>9</sup> HM Lumis Ridwan, *Agama Dan Perdamaian : Landasan, Tujuan Dan Realitas Kehidupan* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2017), 1.

<sup>10</sup> Olaf Schuman, *Approaches to the Science of Religions* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2019), 4–5.

<sup>11</sup> S.P. Lili Tjahjadi, *Hukum Moral Ajaran Imanuel kant tentang Etika dan Imperatif Kategoris* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1991), 59–60.

(being); a reality beyond the boundaries of transcendent that may include some form of heaven, or hell; the difference between sacred longings and profane between ritual acts and sacred objects; and a community bound by its adherence to these elements.<sup>12</sup>

### **Malesung Trust**

Malesung is an old name for a geographical area in the northern part of Sulawesi Island. "Malesung" means "Like a mortar", a local designation to describe the topography of the residential area that is in the middle (the bottom of the mortar), surrounded by mountains.<sup>13</sup> Malesung also refers to the meaning as spiritual values and teachings that underlie the dynamics of society in this region.<sup>14</sup> In the past, this teaching was taught in a traditional educational institution called Papandangan.<sup>15</sup> Malesung is believed to be a spiritual value and teaching that is embraced and inherited by the ancestors of the Minahasa people. Basically, this teaching believes that Apo' Si Nimema' En Tana' Wo Lawa' (God Who Created the Earth and Heaven) gives guidance (path) to the two main ancestors of the Minahasa people, Dotu Toar and Dotu Lumimuut.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Achmad Djatmiko, *Agama Dan Kajian Hubungan Internasional* (Yogyakarta: ANDI, 2019), 32.

<sup>13</sup> In society, there is no known special term to refer to the spiritual values and teachings of Malesung. In the past, this teaching was called Kanaraman (Custom) Malesung, Posan (Agama, Upacara) Malesung (Supit&Matu) atau ajaran Makatana' (Yang Empunya Tanah) Malesung (Wenas, 2007: 69). Now, this teaching is more often referred to as Malesung only.

<sup>14</sup> Jessy Wenas, *Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Minahasa* (Manado: Institut Seni Budaya Sulawesi Utara, 2007), 69.

<sup>15</sup> E. K. M. Masinambow, *Si Tou Timou Tumou Tou. Peranan Manusia Minahasa Dalam Pembangunan Nasional* (Jakarta: Karukunan Keluarga Kawanua, 1991), 31.

<sup>16</sup> There are many versions of the story about Dotu Toar and Dotu Lumimuut in Minahasa. The similarity of these various versions is the similarity of the main characters, namely two women and one man (Renwarin, 2007:43-47). The version that is commonly known starts from the figure of Karema (the first ancestor) who begged God for a human being to live in the Malesung area. For this prayer, a female figure emerged from the stone and was named Lumimuut (meaning "Sweating or Sweating Stone"). After Lumimuut grows up, Karema prays to ask for a partner for Lumimuut. Lumimuut later became pregnant and gave birth to a son, named Toar (meaning "Noble, Main, Very High"). It is said that after growing up, Toar and Lumimuut got married, and produced offspring. The process of intermarriage of their descendants that then gave rise to many tribes in Minahasa. Lumimuut and toar is later referred to as the forerunner of the Minahasa People

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## History and Background of Laroma

The literal meaning of "Lalang" in the local language means "Road". It is interpreted as a way, principle, value or old spirituality embraced by previous parents. "Rondor", literally means "Straight". It is interpreted as truth, goodness.<sup>17</sup> "Lalang Rondor" means the path of righteousness/goodness or the path of truth. Lalang Rondor Malesung is a teaching of goodness/truth that has been passed down to the Minahasa people in Tondei Raya from generation to generation by the ancestors (Dotu Lumimuut and Dotu Toar) since the time of Malesung.<sup>18</sup> The Lalang Rondor Malesung Organization (LAROMA) was established based on the will of communities from the Tondei, Pontak, Pakuweru, Raanan Baru, Motoling and surrounding areas, who faithfully and continuously carry out the teachings inherited from their ancestors. They meet regularly at the ritual or ceremony of the full moon Maso' Sico'o wo Towaku' or Meru Nubat. At that time, the ritual place was still in the Neang plantation, Tondei. The distance is approximately 4 km from the Tondei Raya area. LAROMA was agreed to be established on February 17, 2016 to occupy the secretariat in Jaga 2, Tondei Dua Village, West Motoling District, South Minahasa Regency. The secretariat is also used as a Wale Paluasan where the Maso' Sico'o wo Towaku' ritual is carried out. The location of the secretariat is 100 meters from Watu Lesung Lutau. LAROMA received the Inventory Seal of the Belief Believer Organization from the Directorate of Belief in God Almighty and Indigenous Peoples, Directorate General of Culture, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in 2021, and received a Certificate from the North Sulawesi Regional Agency for National Unity and Politics.<sup>19</sup>

## Legal Basis

The state has guaranteed the right to freedom of religion as stated in Article 29 paragraphs 1 and 2 of the 1945 Constitution which reads:

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<sup>17</sup> Suharti, Sumari, and Arif Wijaya, *Ajaran Kepercayaan Terhadap Tuhan Yang Maha Esa: Lalang Rondor Malesung* (Jakarta: Direktorat Kepercayaan Terhadap Tuhan Yang Maha Esa dan Masyarakat Adat, 2022), 6.

<sup>18</sup> Anastasia Devi Candrasari, *Ajaran Kepercayaan Terhadap Tuhan Yang Maha Esa Lalang Rondor Malesung* (Jakarta: Direktorat Kepercayaan Terhadap Tuhan Yang Maha Esa dan Masyarakat Adat, 2009), 6.

<sup>19</sup> Candrasari, 31.

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Verse (1) "The state is based on the One Godhead". Paragraph (2) "The State guarantees the freedom of each resident to embrace their own religion and to worship according to that religion and belief."<sup>20</sup>

Laroma believers are officially listed in the Inventory Sign of the Directorate of Belief in God Almighty and Indigenous Peoples, Ministry of Education, Research and Technology with Number 1145/F2/KB.02.03/2021, and officially recognized by the National Unity and Regional Political Agency of the North Sulawesi Provincial Government through Certificate Number 009/27/Kesbangpolda/XII/2021.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Existence of Tribal Religious Believers in Tondei Village**

Evidence of the existence of religious adherents of the Laroma Organization Tribe in Tondei village is marked by the formation of its Membership Structure. The management of Lalang Rondor Malesung consists of the Chairman and General Secretary. The Central Board is elected in the Paesaan Indeken Wangko (Grand Assembly) members for a period of 5 years, and can be re-elected after the term of office expires.

The ceremony implementer is a management structure that is responsible for the teachings and implementation of the ceremonies of the Lalang Rondor Malesung Faith. Structure of the Ceremony Implementer: Wali'ang/Ceremony Leader, Pamatuan, Se Ma'wio-wio/Se Ma'kawi-kawit.

People who are disturbed by the existence of believers actually do not understand or are ignorant of the phenomenon of the existence of believers who have been legalized or guaranteed by state law. There are also people who are worried about their children who are still in their teens and young people who will begin to be interested in the Laroma Organization with all forms of belief rituals carried out by the Laroma Organization, and also the perspective of people who consider the Laroma Organization to be an idolatrous organization or a misguided organization because they worship dead spirits and practice their beliefs by worshiping providing offerings to ancestors in the form of existing offerings, and there is an issue that says that Laroma worships stones, trees, and even the issue of fake news that is heard

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<sup>20</sup> Republik Indonesia, "Undang Undang Dasar Tahun 1945" (1945) Pasal 29 Ayat 1 dan 2.

<sup>21</sup> Undang-undang Dasar (UUD) 1945, Pasal 29 ayat 1 dan 2.

<sup>22</sup> Yoanes Litha, "SETARA Institute Kecam Perusakan Rumah Tinggal Penghayat Laroma," VOA Indonesia, June 25, 2022, <https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/setara-institute-kecam-perusakan-rumah-tinggal-penghayat-laroma/6632771.html>.

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that the general chairman of the Laroma organization, Iswan Sual, drinks blood. With all these issues, the acts of discrimination and intolerance that occurred eventually culminated in the destruction of Wale Paliusan.

On June 21, 2022, around 100 p.m. At 11.00 a.m., Wale Paliusan, which is a residence and gathering place for followers of the Lalang Rondor Malesung (Laroma) faith in Tondei Village, North Sulawesi, was damaged by the provocation of a handful of clergy. A clergyman was also involved in this destruction. When the destruction occurred, two other people intimidated a family in Wale Paliusan with the stigma of heresy and idolatry.

The destruction caused most of the walls to collapse and debris to scatter on the dining table while the family was having breakfast. The second destruction occurred again on June 22, 2022 at dawn by knocking down a coconut tree which caused Wale Paliusan to flatten to the ground. The perpetrators justified the series of destruction with the stigma that believers are heretical and worship demons. Fake news that believers have no official legal basis and various stigmas that corner believers have been circulating in the area for a long time, resulting in the destruction of Wale Paliusan.

The acts of discrimination and intolerance that occurred are criminal acts because they damage the rights of religious adherents of the Laroma organization which has been protected by state law. Although legally Laroma has received recognition, to get social recognition still has to face many challenges. The reaction of GMIM Immanuel Tondei congregation to Laroma shows a complex dynamic. There are members of the congregation who show their rejection of the existence of Laroma. This rejection is often based on ignorance and incomprehension of Laroma's teachings and practices. There are assumptions in the community about Laroma, such as accusations that they worship stones and trees, as well as false news about their leader drinking blood. These assumptions exacerbate the stigma and reinforce the rejection of Laroma. The most extreme reaction of this rejection is seen in acts of violence, such as the destruction of Wale Paliusan, where Laroma adherents gather. The vandalism perpetrated by a handful of clergy and other individuals shows how tension can turn into destructive physical acts.

Biblical Foundations, Leviticus 19:18, *"Do not seek revenge, neither hold grudges against your people, but love your neighbor as yourself."* Leviticus 19:18 is part of a verse that commands the Israelites not to hate one another, not to take revenge or to take revenge on one another, but to love one another. Kehidupan yang kudus adalah landasan untuk melihat bahwa

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setiap orang adalah sesame dalam hidup ini.<sup>23</sup> This verse and the other fourteen verses in this chapter end with a repetition of the Code of Holiness: "I am the Lord." The point of this chapter is that because God is holy, and because man is made in God's image, those who are called to imitate God's holiness must do so by acting mercifully and lovingly toward their fellow man. The congregation's view in responding to the existence of the Laroma organization and how the congregation accepts those who are members of the Laroma organization.

There are different views of the congregation in responding to the existence of the Laroma organization with various reactions. There are informants who are disappointed, shocked, surprised, and even some informants deny their existence. Some of these reactions are the initial reactions of an informant when he learned of the existence of the Laroma organization in the community. This is because, the shock of an informant turns into a sense of admiration as a form of preserving the heritage of Minahasa elders. In addition, there is an informant who accepts the Laroma organization as a form of their freedom as a human being. Furthermore, all informants are open or not anti-the presence of the Laroma organization. But by some informants, this openness leads them to take care of themselves so that there are certain boundaries between the informant and the Laroma organization.

Some of the reactions that arise when learning that there are members of the GMIM congregation Imanuel Tondei who are members of the Laroma organization are surprised, shocked, disappointed, and some regret that this can happen. In this regard, some informants pointed their sights to how the church should react to the fact that there is a GMIM congregation of Imanuel Tondei who is a member of the Laroma organization. According to some informants, the church should strengthen the pastoral care of the congregation members by visiting the members of the congregation who have joined the Laroma organization.

Some of the views that have emerged in the congregation about the way of ministry, especially regarding heresy or negative stigmas that lead to the Laroma organization, include trying as much as possible to convey God's word without offending the congregation. In other words, God's word must be delivered by choosing ethical words. Furthermore, there was an informant who emphatically stated that no words should be filtered. From the informant's point of view, it can be concluded that in conveying God's word, a preacher must say yes to the right, and not to the wrong.

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<sup>23</sup> Dianne Bergant and Robert J. Karris, *Tafsir Alkitab Perjanjian Lama* (Yogyakarta: KANISIUS, 2022),

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In the question about the way the congregation builds relationships with the Laroma organization, some informants said that within the scope of their ministry area, there are already some who have heard of participating in this Laroma organization, but only limited to knowing. There are also some informants who do not know for sure whether there is already a person in their neighbourhood who is determined to be involved in the Laroma organization. Furthermore, some informants agreed to say that they continue to interact as usual with anyone, and when approaching there are informants who say they need to look at the background of those involved and the extent of their involvement. This is because there are different approach methods, some also say that it is necessary to have a positive mindset when receiving information so that it can be wise in responding to it. Some informants agreed that there must be a good relationship between the congregation and the followers of the Laroma organization by not insulting each other, degrading or dropping other beliefs, distancing themselves from them to the point of being hostile to them. However, it is different from an informant who said that there must be a limit with the followers of the Laroma organization so that they are not affected by their teachings.

Some of the views that have emerged in the congregation about the destruction of the ritual place from the Laroma organization include those who say that they do not agree with the action because this country is a country of law so anyone who commits an illegal act will face the law. This is because whatever the reason is, violence cannot be justified, which will actually cause harm to oneself if you violate the law because violence will worsen the situation.

Furthermore, there is an informant who is neutral on this question where the informant thinks that there may be a reason why there is an individual who commits the act. If indeed the building violates the rules, this informant agrees with the action. However, if they do have the right to erect the building and do not disturb it, it means that they have the right to the building. However, it is different from an informant who immediately approved the act of destruction where the informant said that the place/land was a disputed land.

## **CONCLUSION**

Indonesia guarantees freedom of religion in accordance with the legal basis of Pancasila, although there is still rejection and discrimination against adherents of tribal beliefs. In the context of North Sulawesi, there is a motto "Si Tou Timou Tumou Tou" which emphasizes tolerance and openness to differences in beliefs that sometimes the reality is not in line with these values. The destruction of the place of worship of the Laroma organization by

some Christians in Tondei Village is a clear example of the incompatibility between the spirit of tolerance and the practice of intolerance in the community, even though understanding the law of love and Christian values such as humility and tolerance is important in maintaining relations between religious communities.

In general, the results of the study show that there are various reactions among the congregation to the existence of the Laroma organization. The reaction is an overflow of thoughts ranging from disappointment, surprise, to acceptance, but within the framework of an open attitude with certain limitations to the phenomenon. Responding to congregational members involved in the Laroma organization also makes it possible to prioritize efforts to strengthen pastoral care and establish good relationships in response to such involvement. Moreover, the view of the ministry and the response to the destruction of the Ritual Sites of the Laroma organization also shows the attitude of the congregation as a whole emphasizing the importance of conveying God's word wisely and responding to conflicts with love.

However, a builder who disagrees with the practices of the Laroma organization and a chairman of the Laroma organization, show a profound difference in their views and approaches to this phenomenon. Although both have shown a strong commitment to their respective beliefs, both as deniers and supporters of the Laroma organization, these differences in beliefs have influenced their response to this phenomenon. Nonetheless, both informants showed a willingness to defend their beliefs in a way that they considered true to be a dynamic in the interaction between beliefs and views in a multicultural society.

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