

## **Challenges and Solutions in Religious Guidance for Converts (*muallaf*) in Tanjung Beringin, Tanah Karo**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the primary challenges and potential solutions in the religious guidance of converts (*muallaf*) in Tanjung Beringin Village, Tanah Karo, North Sumatra. Utilizing a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation. This study showed that the absence of continuous religious guidance, combined with the lack of permanent *da'i*, has weakened the religious understanding and enthusiasm among the converts. Additionally, parental neglect in supporting their children's religious education exacerbates this issue. The study proposes several solutions, including establishing collaborations with Islamic organizations and *da'wah* institutions to provide alternating *da'i*, appointing permanent Islamic religious instructors, revitalizing basic Islamic studies, and enhancing parental involvement in religious education. These measures aim to strengthen the religious identity and resilience of the convert community against external influences.

**Keywords:** *Converts, Religious Guidance, da'i, Tanjung Beringin*

### **Abstrak**

Kajian ini menyelidiki tantangan utama dan solusi potensial dalam pembinaan *muallaf* di Desa Tanjung Beringin, Tanah Karo, Sumatera Utara. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi lapangan, dan dokumentasi. Kajian ini menunjukkan bahwa ketidakhadiran pembinaan agama yang berkelanjutan, ditambah dengan tidak adanya *da'i* permanen, telah melemahkan pemahaman dan semangat keagamaan di kalangan *muallaf*. Selain itu, kurangnya dukungan orang tua dalam pendidikan agama anak-anak mereka memperburuk masalah ini. Penelitian ini mengusulkan beberapa solusi, termasuk menjalin kerjasama dengan organisasi Islam dan lembaga dakwah untuk menyediakan *da'i* secara bergantian, menempatkan penyuluh agama Islam permanen, menghidupkan kajian dasar keislaman, dan meningkatkan keterlibatan orang tua dalam pendidikan agama. Langkah-langkah ini bertujuan untuk memperkuat identitas dan ketahanan agama komunitas *muallaf* terhadap pengaruh eksternal.

**Kata Kunci:** *Mualaf, Bimbingan Agama, da'i, Tanjung Beringin*

## **A. Introduction**

The right of every individual to choose and determine their religious belief is a fundamental right recognized universally, transcending mere worldly affairs and encompassing transcendental aspects (Rahmawati and Desiningrum 2020). In the context of religious freedom, the 1945 Constitution of Indonesia states in Article 29 paragraph (1) that every person has the right to embrace a religion and to hold beliefs according to their conscience (Christianto 2018; Dute 2021). The process of religious introduction and the search for the meaning of life is closely related to personal freedom in determining the religion to be followed, the values to be held, and the practices of worship (Rahmawati and Desiningrum 2020).

Conversion to Islam, particularly for converts (muallaf), often involves challenges in learning the new ways and elements of worship. 'Abd ar-Rahman ibn Muhammad defines muallaf as a non-Muslim individual whose heart has been softened by Allah to embrace Islam (Rahayu 2019). This experience highlights the profound need for guidance and community support (Tarigan 2021). In the book "Finding the Path to Salvation" (2021), it is explained that moving towards a better direction requires jihad or hard struggle, supported by motivation and spiritual encouragement (Marhani, Hafid, and Arnisyah 2022). After deciding to embrace Islam, it is essential for converts to practice the religion comprehensively – fully in all dimensions of life (Tarigan 2021).

Guidance for converts has specific objectives to enhance understanding and awareness in practicing Islamic teachings, which not only benefits the individual but also the community as a whole (Wahyuni 2018). However, a lack of effective guidance can lead to serious problems, as observed in Tanjung Beringin Village, Tanah Karo, where a majority of the community initially embraced Islam but later changed their beliefs. According to initial data from the head of the BKM Mosque, Mr. Nurdin, it was found that previously, the majority of the Tanjung Beringin Village community adhered to Islam, with a population of 80%. Over time, some of the community members apostatized or left Islam, leaving only 25% of the community as Muslims. Although some Islamic

organizations or da'wah institutions have visited, their efforts have not been maximal.

The issues in Tanjung Beringin Village prompt further research on religious guidance for converts in the area. Previous studies, such as those conducted by Widodo (2019), Adenan et al. (2020), and Mahamud et al. (2019) have highlighted the importance of guidance, but none of these studies specifically address the challenges within the geographical and social context of Tanah Karo. This research aims to identify effective solutions for the guidance of converts in this context.

## **B. Method**

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to explore and explain the dynamics of convert guidance and the challenges faced. The research was conducted in Tanjung Beringin Village, Tanah Karo District, from February to August 2023. Data were collected using a series of methods, including in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation. The data analysis technique used is interactive analysis as developed by Miles and Huberman (2014).

The data sources for this study are divided into two categories: primary data and secondary data, as categorized by Kaharuddin (2021). Primary data were directly obtained from the research subjects in the field, which included interviews with local community leaders such as Mr. FD and the head of the BKM mosque, Mr. NR, as well as interactions with convert residents in Tanjung Beringin Village, Tanah Karo. Both key informants play significant roles in the community. On the other hand, secondary data were obtained from sources not directly related to the research object, such as books, digital articles, and other written sources.

## **C. Results and Discussion**

### **1. The Condition of Converts (muallaf) in Tanjung Beringin Village**

Tanjung Beringin Village, a remote village located in the interior of Karo City, North Sumatra, has an interesting history related to religious conversion

among its residents. Initially, the majority of the village's population embraced Islam. However, over time, various factors began to influence the religious dynamics in the village. One of the main factors is the lack of adequate religious guidance and the poor physical condition of the mosque, which has suffered severe damage (Jumardi 2021). The mosque, which should be the center of religious activities and spiritual guidance for the community, is in an unfit condition, rendering it ineffective in meeting the needs for worship and spiritual nurturing. This situation indirectly diminishes the enthusiasm and activeness of the Muslim community in practicing their Islamic faith. Consequently, a phenomenon has emerged where Muslims become less concerned about their religious practices, providing opportunities for non-Muslims to engage in religious persuasion efforts, known as missionary movements. These movements aim to influence the community or village residents to accept their religion by employing various enticing strategies capable of swaying community decisions.

From the researcher's observations in Tanjung Beringin Village, missionaries from non-Muslim religions can exploit this unstable situation to persuade Muslims who have begun to feel distant from their religious practices to convert and embrace a new religion. The impact of this phenomenon can be seen in the changing religious composition of the village, where the number of Muslims may decrease while the number of adherents of other religions increases.

In facing these challenges, it is crucial for the government and related parties to reconsider the efforts towards religious guidance and restoration in Tanjung Beringin Village. The active role of the local Muslim community, along with support from the local government and religious institutions, is needed to rebuild the mosque, enhance spiritual guidance, and strengthen the religious identity of the Muslim community to be more resilient against external religious conversion efforts. By doing so, it is hoped that the existing religious diversity can be maintained while reinforcing the unity and religious identity of the community in Tanjung Beringin Village.

During an interview with one of the community leaders, Mr. Fadanta, often referred to as Bolang Fadanta, a respected and influential figure in the village, the researcher asked, "How did the initial increase in apostasy occur?" He replied, "The community here was predominantly Muslim. However, after the mosque was destroyed ten years ago, missionaries entered and built a church in this village. They began to spread their teachings by providing basic necessities to the community. Over time, many converted, and now Tanjung Beringin Village, which was once majority Muslim, has become a minority Muslim village."

From his statements, the researcher concluded that the lack of religious education among the community made them easily susceptible to changing beliefs. Due to a lack of deep understanding of their religion, they could be quickly influenced by aid or encouragement from other parties, leading to conversion. He added that the number of households in Tanjung Beringin Village is about 300, but currently, only around 33 households remain Muslim.

The issue of widespread apostasy was further corroborated by Mr. Nurdin, the head of the nearest BKM Mosque. In an interview, the researcher asked Mr. Nurdin about the condition of the Muslim community there, "What percentage of Muslims are there in Tanjung Beringin Village?" He replied, "Since 2021 until now, in 2024, the Muslim community has become a minority in this village. Currently, the percentage of Muslims is only about 25% of the population of Tanjung Beringin Village. In addition to being a minority, their religious fervor has also weakened. Abandoning prayer has become a common practice. It is very rare to find Muslims who are proficient in reciting the Quran among this minority."

The conclusion from the interview with Mr. Nurdin revealed that from 2021 to 2024, there has been a significant decline in the number of Muslims in the village. Currently, Muslims comprise only about 25% of the total village population, making them a minority. Furthermore, the religious fervor among the Muslim community has also declined. Many no longer regularly perform

prayers, and it is extremely rare to find Muslims proficient in reciting the Quran. This indicates a serious religious crisis in Tanjung Beringin Village.

## **2. Problems in the Guidance of Converts (muallaf)**

In this research, the main issue identified was the lack of continuous religious guidance. The absence of appointed da'i (Islamic preachers) in Tanjung Beringin Village has led to ineffective guidance processes. Additionally, other problems include a community culture that lacks interest in religious guidance, minimal efforts to learn and teach religious knowledge within families, difficult geographic conditions, and insufficient attention from the government..

### **1) Absence of Appointed Da'i in the Village**

The term "da'i" originates from Arabic, meaning a person who invites, with the feminine form referred to as "da'iyah". In the Indonesian language, a "da'i" refers to someone who works in da'wah (Islamic preaching), tasked with spreading Islamic teachings (Fahrurrozi, Faizah, and Kadri 2019). This means that a da'i invites others, directly or indirectly, through speech, writing, or actions to practice and disseminate Islamic teachings and promote positive changes according to Islam. Linguistically, "da'i/da'iyah" is the active participle form of the verb "da'aa, yad'uu, daa'in," which can also mean the sound of a horse in battle responding to a call. Technically, a da'i is a Muslim who performs da'wah, inviting others to the religion of Allah. This definition includes all levels of society, from messengers and scholars to rulers and every Muslim, both male and female. A da'i is seen as a guide who shows the way to salvation in this world and the hereafter. As a guide, a da'i must understand the correct path according to Islam before providing direction to others, making the role of a da'i very important in society as a respected leader (Fahrurrozi et al. 2019).

A da'i plays an essential role, especially for converts. The Quran explains that da'wah has a significant influence on maintaining one's worship on the right, correct, and approved path by Allah (Muhaemin 2017). The lack of preachers entering Tanjung Beringin Village and the minimal facilities and guidance for converts significantly affect the strength of their faith (Madjid, Latief, and

Santoso 2020). Moreover, a da'i who realizes Islamic teachings according to the Quran and Sunnah can prevent the community from adhering to animistic beliefs. The formation and improvement of society for the better depend on local da'i (Zebua 2023). However, the reality in Tanjung Beringin Village shows that there are no appointed da'i in the area, resulting in a lack of continuous guidance. If there are any visiting da'i, they are only temporary, as seen with movements like Gerakan Sumut Mengajar and Addakwah. This leads to the community becoming lazy in worship and practicing their religion due to their weak understanding. The lack of religious guidance and coaching is a serious issue that, if not addressed, will lead to further religious conversion.

## **2) Lack of Guidance and Motivation from Parents**

Children's development can be significantly affected if parents do not provide adequate support and encouragement. Children may feel less confident, lose the desire to achieve goals, and face difficulties in determining their life direction if they do not receive sufficient guidance and encouragement (Hidayah 2012). Parents play a crucial role as guides and sources of inspiration for their children. Continuous guidance helps children learn values, social skills, and good study habits, while motivation from parents can encourage children to achieve and face challenges more optimistically (Hidayah 2012). When this guidance and motivation are absent, children tend to seek influence from outside, which may not always be good or beneficial. This can lead to declining academic performance, deviant behavior, or psychological issues like depression and anxiety.

Besides da'i, parents also play a significant role in the religious education of their family members, particularly their children. Ida Latifatul (2019) explains that educating children about religion is an obligation that parents must fulfill without exception. The moral and religious education provided to children depends on the education they receive from their parents. Parents must guide their children towards Islamic teachings and make it a demand in life. Awakening the spiritual awareness and strength of children should be a serious

concern for parents from an early age, so the foundation of religious knowledge is more robust and instinctive for the child (Somad 2021). Islam is a highly influential education for the future of the child and family. The reality in Tanjung Beringin Village shows that parents prioritize their work over caring for their children. Some even consider guiding their children as a waste of time. Children are not supported in gaining knowledge, especially religious knowledge. This is also due to the parents' very limited understanding of their religion.

### **3) Difficult Geographical Conditions**

Inaccessible places can be a significant obstacle in various aspects of life, such as education, health, and economic development (Mufizar, Arkanudin, and Achyar 2012). Children living in remote areas often face difficulties obtaining a proper education. They struggle to access formal education due to distant schools, poor road infrastructure, and lack of transportation facilities. This can result in illiteracy and a lack of opportunities to continue education to higher levels.

Access to knowledge is often difficult for people living in remote areas. This is due to several factors, including difficult-to-navigate roads and the lack of awareness of the location among the community (Agusman et al. 2023). Tanjung Beringin Village is one such village located in the interior of Tanah Karo. The distance from the community's settlement to the main road is about 8 km. The road access is very damaged, further compounded by narrow roads and cliffside paths prone to landslides, making access to religious knowledge not as easy as for those living in cities. Teachers or da'i usually find it easier to visit if the location or geographical conditions are more accessible.

### **4) Lack of Government Attention**

The government's lack of attention to the guidance of converts can cause many problems for the community and the new converts themselves (Hidayati 2014). Without adequate guidance, new converts may find it challenging to understand and apply religious teachings in daily life. This can lead to feelings of isolation and a lack of support. Moreover, converts may experience social



isolation if they are not helped by their community. They may feel estranged from old friends and family but not yet fully accepted in their new community. One significant life change that can affect personal identity is a religious change. Without adequate training, converts may experience identity disintegration and difficulties adapting to their new identity. The lack of attention can also cause converts to face significant difficulties in maintaining their new faith, potentially leading them to revert to their old religion or become non-religious. Religious conversion can cause anxiety, fear, and other emotional problems. Converts may experience serious mental health issues if they do not receive proper support.

The government indeed has a significant role and responsibility towards its citizens, including building the necessary facilities and infrastructure such as roads and educational facilities (Usman 2014). Religious education in minority areas is often neglected. However, the community's religious understanding heavily relies on the availability of these facilities. The community desperately needs the services of a teacher or ustadz who is willing to be stationed in their area, which requires adequate funding. This is the issue faced by the Muslim community in Tanjung Beringin Village, where they still do not have a resident religious instructor who can act as a guide. Additionally, the mosque that once existed in the village has long been destroyed and has not been rebuilt.

### **3. Solutions to the Problems**

To address the issues in the guidance of converts in Tanjung Beringin Village, Tanah Karo, several solutions can be implemented:

#### **1. Collaborate with Various Islamic Organizations and Da'wah Institutions**

Tanjung Beringin is not the only village needing guidance. Many other remote villages across North Sumatra also require intensive guidance. A suitable initial step to address the current issues in guiding converts is to collaborate with Islamic organizations and da'wah institutions in North Sumatra, such as MUI, Muhammadiyah, Al Washliyah, DDI, Addakwah, GSM, and IKADI. If it is not possible to appoint a da'i to permanently reside in the area, at the very least, visits

and guidance can be conducted alternately through the bi'tsah al-du'ah (sending of da'i) program.

## **2. Request the Government (Local Ministry of Religious Affairs) to Appoint Islamic Religious Instructors**

Requesting the government (Local Ministry of Religious Affairs) to appoint Islamic Religious Instructors in the area is a highly appropriate solution to address the issues in guiding converts (Simanullang 2018). Islamic Religious Instructors are experts with in-depth knowledge of Islam, enabling them to provide more accurate and high-quality guidance. Their presence in areas with many converts will significantly help deliver proper religious teachings tailored to the needs of each individual.

With the presence of religious instructors, structured and systematic guidance programs can be developed. This is essential to ensure that converts receive continuous and uninterrupted guidance. A structured guidance program will cover various aspects of a convert's life, from basic understanding of Islamic teachings and daily worship practices to guidance in facing social and psychological challenges. Religious instructors can also design learning materials tailored to the level of understanding and needs of each convert, making the guidance process more effective.

Additionally, the presence of religious instructors provides moral and spiritual support for converts. This support is crucial, especially for those who have recently embraced Islam and may still face various challenges from their surroundings. Religious instructors can act as mentors and friends, providing encouragement and motivation for converts to continue learning and practicing Islam. They can also offer counseling and guidance in addressing various issues that may arise, whether in terms of religious understanding, social relationships, or psychological challenges.

Overall, the placement of Islamic Religious Instructors in areas with many converts will provide numerous benefits. Besides offering high-quality and structured guidance, their presence will also strengthen the moral and spiritual

support for converts. Therefore, requesting the government (Local Ministry of Religious Affairs) to appoint religious instructors in the area is a highly appropriate solution that needs immediate implementation to address the issues in guiding converts.

### **3. Revitalize Basic Islamic Studies**

The primary cause of weak religious attachment is the lack of understanding of basic religious knowledge. Hence, the next agenda is to revitalize basic Islamic studies, such as tauhid (monotheism) and fiqh (jurisprudence) of worship (Nurulita 2021). These studies aim to strengthen their faith and guide them to worship correctly. Ideally, these studies should be conducted in a mosque, but since the existing mosque has long been destroyed and the nearest mosque is about 4 km away from the community settlement, an alternative is to hold these studies in residents' homes alternately. Basic Islamic studies had been conducted every Tuesday night and Friday night at one of the residents' houses but only temporarily during specific da'wah programs from certain organizations

### **4. Training and Mentoring Da'i**

In addition to teaching basic Islamic knowledge to converts, those with potential and talent should be trained and mentored to become imams and religious guides. This aims to ensure that converts can independently conduct religious activities even without external da'i present in the area. Promising local youths can be sent to Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in North Sumatra for free, allowing them to return to their village and continue guiding the community.

### **5. Community Engagement Approach**

The culture in Tanjung Beringin, where residents seem indifferent to the guidance process and are preoccupied with work or sitting in coffee shops, poses a unique challenge in the guidance process. The appointed da'i should first engage with the local community. The da'i should skillfully win the hearts of the residents by visiting their homes, coffee shops, or workplaces.

#### **D. Conclusion**

The primary challenge faced by the convert community in Tanjung Beringin, Tanah Karo, is the lack of continuous religious guidance. The intermittent presence of da'i has resulted in weak religious understanding and low enthusiasm among converts, making them susceptible to abandoning their faith under external influences. Additionally, many parents prioritize fieldwork over supporting their children's religious education, leading to a further decline in religious practices. The study aims to raise awareness among parents about the importance of religious education for their children and to help the children become Quran memorizers and preachers who can positively influence their community. To address these issues, the study proposes several solutions. Firstly, bringing in permanent da'i who can reside in the area is crucial. Given the lengthy and often ineffective process of relying on government assistance, especially in minority areas, the most feasible immediate action is to establish collaborations among Islamic organizations and da'wah institutions to send da'i alternately.

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