

The Role of Choirs in Shaping the Faith of Young Catholics

Margaretha Maria Wasti*

Emanuel Martasudjita  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7199-125X>

Faculty of Theology, Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Experiences lived within liturgical setting often shape a person's faith more profoundly than formal instruction, especially when these experiences are embodied, communal, and rooted in the Church's theological understanding of worship. Within this framework, liturgical music becomes a privileged space where young Catholics encounter God through embodied prayer, harmony, and sustained participation in the life of the Church. This study aims to explore how long-term involvement in choir ministry shapes the faith, identity, and liturgical belonging of young Catholics within the Minahasa cultural context. To achieve this purpose, the research employs Max Van Manen's practical phenomenology to examine the lived experiences of nine young Catholics who have served eight to ten years in the choir ministry of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish, Sea - North Sulawesi. Data were collected through narrative descriptions submitted via Google Form and structured interviews, allowing participants to articulate their embodied, spatial, temporal, and relational experiences in depth. The findings indicate that choir ministry functions as a formative environment where bodily engagement, sacred liturgical space, long-term rhythms of service, and communal relationships nurture spiritual sensitivity, emotional maturity, and personal responsibility. Cultural elements of Minahasa particularly musical spontaneity, strong kinship values, and the communal ethos of Mapalus further enrich liturgical participation and deepen the youth's sense of belonging. Viewed through a phenomenological and inculturated lens, choir ministry emerges as an effective pastoral setting for holistic faith formation among young Catholics.

Copyright © 2026 Authors
This is an open access article under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license.



ARTICLE INFORMATION

Keywords:

Catholic Youth Ministry;
Faith; Liturgical Music;
Phenomenology

Article History:

Received: 27 January 2026
Revised: 12 April 2026
Accepted: 14 July 2026
Published: 15 October 2026

How to Cite in APA Style:

Wasti, M.M.,
Martasudjita, E. (2026).
The Role of Choirs in
Shaping the Faith of
Young Catholics. *JPAK:
Jurnal Pendidikan
Agama Katolik*, 26(2),
372-389

Introduction

Liturgical service constitutes a vital means of faith formation closely woven into the lives of Catholic believers, particularly Catholic youth. Within the liturgy, music plays a central role in directing the faithful toward a profound experience of

*Corresponding author: Margaretha Maria Wasti  srwastisjmj@gmail.com
 <https://doi.org/10.34150/jpak.v26i2>

prayer and active participation in the Eucharistic celebration. The Second Vatican Council (1963) affirms that music forms an integral part of the liturgy, strengthening prayer, adorning the rites, and fostering congregational participation—making liturgical music not merely an aesthetic element but a spiritual instrument for living out the mystery of faith. Within this pastoral context, choir service has become a particularly popular form of liturgical ministry among Catholic youth, offering both communal belonging and a space for the expression and appropriation of faith.

Nevertheless, involvement in a choir does not automatically produce faith growth; its effectiveness depends on liturgical appropriation, spiritual formation, and a clear orientation of faith, absent which musical service risks being reduced to a merely aesthetic or performative activity (Tobing & Fajariyanto, 2025). Consistent with this, Paskalita & Wilhelmus (2025) demonstrate that faith formation requires a sustained process, active engagement, and adequate accompaniment. St. Thomas Aquinas Parish, Sea - North Sulawesi exemplifies a community shaped by Minahasan culture, marked by a strong musical tradition, spontaneous communal singing, and the spirit of *mapalus*. These conditions render choir service not merely a liturgical function but a contextual space of faith formation, since inculturation allows faith to be lived through local cultural values in ways that deepen its meaning (Tibo & Martasudjita, 2024). Conversely, liturgy disconnected from lived experience and culture risks losing its transformative power. Although the choir serves as an entry point into ministry for many young Catholics, research examining its influence on faith growth—particularly through phenomenological and theological approaches—remains limited.

A substantial body of research affirms the positive contribution of liturgical music and choir service to the life of faith. Liturgical music has been shown to enhance active participation and cultivate a prayerful atmosphere within the Eucharist (Marek, 2024), while Christian service more broadly shapes leadership character oriented toward self-giving (Panjaitan, 2020). Religious music likewise contributes to constructing youth faith identity and communal experience (Ingalls, 2018), and choir service specifically functions as an effective means of spiritual formation owing to its communal, artistic, and disciplining character (Susanto, 2021). Research within the Indonesian context further indicates that youth involvement in liturgical service holds potential to form faith when accompanied by adequate guidance and appropriation (Amal et al., 2024), while liturgical music itself requires theological understanding lest it be reduced to mere aesthetic expression (Maeja, 2024).

Most of this research, however, emphasizes the positive impact of liturgical music service without examining the factors that either support or hinder faith formation—despite the risk that musical service may drift toward a performative orientation in the absence of adequate theological understanding and accompaniment (Tobing & Fajariyanto, 2025), pointing to the need for more reflective inquiry into the conditions under which choir service genuinely becomes a space of faith formation. Existing studies on Catholic youth, meanwhile, have concentrated largely on catechesis, leadership, or categorical activities, leaving liturgical experience as a space of faith formation comparatively underexplored; the integration of Max Van Manen's practical phenomenology with liturgical

theology and youth pastoral ministry likewise remains rare within the Indonesian context. This rarity is particularly notable given that inculturation, understood as the creative encounter between the Gospel and culture ([Martasudjita, 2021](#)), is vividly present in the liturgical life of the Minahasan people, where the value of *mapalus*, emphasizing solidarity, togetherness, and shared responsibility, shapes both the dynamics of the choir group and the way faith is lived. The experience of choir service therefore needs to be understood as a process shaped jointly by communal relationship, culture, and the quality of faith appropriation.

[Van Manen's \(1990\)](#) practical phenomenology has previously been applied in theological and educational research to explore religious experience, as in [Moran's \(2020\)](#) study; however, no research to date has employed Van Manen's four existentials—lived body, lived space, lived time, and lived relation—to understand the experience of Catholic youth choir service within the Minahasan cultural context, despite choir service being a pastoral space where bodily experience, liturgical space, the rhythm of service, and communal relationship converge in the process of faith formation.

Building on this identified gap, the present study seeks to uncover the meaning of choir service experience among Catholic youth at St. Thomas Aquinas Sea Parish through Max Van Manen's practical phenomenological approach, focusing on bodily experience, liturgical space, the rhythm of service, and communal relationships in shaping youth faith and character, while also examining the role of Minahasan culture in enriching liturgical appropriation. Theologically, this study is expected to offer new understanding of liturgical music as a mystagogical and incarnational space within faith formation; pastorally, it is intended to serve as a foundation for the local Church in designing youth accompaniment that is more contextual, relevant, and culturally attuned.

Liturgical music constitutes a fundamental element of the *liturgia Dei*, functioning not merely as an ornament of celebration but as a theological locus where the faithful experience God's presence affectively and participatively ([Ratzinger, 2000](#); [Marek, 2024](#)). [Second Vatican Council \(1963\)](#) affirms that liturgical music supports congregational prayer while adorning the rites as an integral part of the Church's worship, and [Ratzinger \(2000\)](#) describes liturgical music as "prayer sung"—a means of encountering God through the human voice—a view consistent with the broader theological tradition, in which [Augustine \(1991\)](#) regards liturgical singing as prayer doubled, and [Thomas Aquinas \(1981\)](#) positions music as a means of cultivating virtue. Empirical findings reinforce this understanding: liturgical music has been shown to deepen inward engagement in celebration ([Marek, 2024](#)), shape faith identity and strengthen communal solidarity ([Ingalls, 2018](#)), enhance emotional and spiritual well-being ([Walter et al., 2022](#)), and produce profound transformation in inward experience and faith identity ([Hubbell, 2025](#)). Much of this research, however, remains focused on the experience of the congregation and emphasizes the positive effects of liturgical music, leaving the experience of choir ministers themselves—and the conditions under which liturgical music genuinely becomes a means of faith formation—comparatively unexamined. Indeed, without adequate theological understanding and sustained accompaniment, liturgical music practice risks shifting toward a performance-oriented activity or the mere cultivation of

emotional atmosphere (Tobing & Fajariyanto, 2025), causing the music to lose its meaning as the Church's prayer and its capacity to yield an authentic experience of faith; liturgical music can therefore function fully only when aligned with liturgical norms and spirituality, supported by the faith understanding of those who minister through music, and oriented toward service and participation in the mystery of faith rather than aesthetics alone (Tobing & Fajariyanto, 2025).

Within the local Church, inculturation likewise constitutes an essential element: integrating local cultural values into liturgical music enriches liturgical expression while fostering a more contextual and profound appropriation of faith (Tibo & Martasudjita, 2024; Lema & Pius, 2025), whereas liturgical music devoid of this inculturative dimension risks becoming foreign to the lived experience of the faithful and losing its transformative power. Fransiskus (2019) affirms that young people constitute a vital part of the Church who must be given space for active participation, including in liturgical service, and the choir stands out as a particularly favored form of such service among Catholic youth for combining artistic expression, community, and spirituality. Panjaitan (2020) shows that liturgical service contributes to shaping youth leadership character, while Susanto (2021) finds that the choir provides a communal environment supporting the spiritual development and discipline of Catholic youth; correspondingly, Przygoda (2024) affirms that youth community plays a significant role in shaping religious identity and a sense of belonging to the Church, a process further reinforced by active liturgical involvement (Gabriel et al., 2023).

Even so, research within Indonesia continues to emphasize the motivation for service or character formation more than the depth of liturgical experience itself, and most studies have yet to critically distinguish between mere involvement in Church activities and authentic spiritual growth—despite the fact that service, including in the choir, does not automatically yield spirituality maturity. Several studies indicate that, absent adequate accompaniment and deep faith understanding, liturgical service may remain at the level of social activity or self-expression without producing meaningful spiritual transformation (Jatmiko, 2023; Tobing & Fajariyanto, 2025). Consequently, spiritual formation through choir service therefore requires sustained spiritual accompaniment, healthy communal relationships, and an understanding of liturgy as an encounter with God rather than merely a musical or social activity. Such formation is further shaped by the liturgy's capacity to remain rooted in lived experience through inculturation, so that faith can be appropriated contextually and in keeping with cultural identity (Tibo & Martasudjita, 2024; Lema & Pius, 2025); absent this dimension, liturgical service risks failing to touch the depths of faith experience. To date, little research has examined the spiritual experience of liturgical music ministers through the lens of bodily engagement, liturgical space, the rhythm of time, and communal relationship—underscoring the need for an approach capable of probing lived experience more deeply, so that faith formation is understood not merely as a concept but as an existential experience lived out within liturgical praxis.

Van Manen's (1990) practical phenomenology focuses on the lived experience of research subjects across four existential dimensions—lived body, lived space, lived time, and lived relation—offering a framework well suited to understanding liturgical service experience, as it encompasses the bodily, spatial,

temporal, and relational dimensions involved in choir ministry. Although phenomenology has previously been applied to the study of spirituality and education in Indonesia, its application within liturgical music research remains highly limited, despite choir service being far more than a musical activity—it constitutes an existential experience engaging the whole person in relationship with God and others.

A phenomenological approach enables the exploration of experience as it is genuinely lived, rather than merely understood in normative terms, thereby addressing a tendency in prior research to assume that liturgical service automatically forms faith without examining ministers' actual lived experience. Through Van Manen's framework, faith formation is understood as a process unfolding through bodily engagement, the experience of liturgical space, the rhythm of service, and relationships within the choir community—an approach that, beyond description, also helps identify the factors that support or hinder faith formation, since without liturgical awareness and spiritual accompaniment, musical experience may remain confined to technical or emotional dimensions without developing into a profound spiritual experience (Tobing & Fajariyanto, 2025). Van Manen's phenomenology therefore offers an apt approach for holistically understanding the experience of Catholic youth in choir service, while clarifying the extent to which such service functions as a genuine space of faith formation for young people.

Within liturgical theology, the human body is understood as a vehicle of prayer and participation. Martasudjita (2022) explains that the liturgy is incarnational in character, engaging body, voice, and sensory symbols that draw the faithful into an experience of God, with liturgical music—uniting body and voice—constituting a concrete expression of this incarnational participation. This view is reinforced in *Introduction to Liturgical Pastoral Care (Pengantar Pastoral Liturgi)*, which affirms that the liturgy possesses a bodily and communal character, such that bodily symbols and shared action shape the community's life of faith (Martasudjita, 2005); *A Liturgy that Humanizes (Liturgi yang Memanusiakan)* further asserts that the liturgy elevates human dignity through the encounter between God's grace and human experience, rendering choir service a liturgical act that shapes body, emotion, and relationship (Martasudjita, 2011); and *Liturgy and Culture (Liturgi dan Budaya)* understands music as an effective medium of inculturation precisely because it is embedded in the cultural identity of the faithful (Martasudjita, 2016). These theological perspectives provide the foundation for understanding the experience of Minahasan Catholic youth as shaped by vocal tradition and communal relationship distinctive to their local culture.

From the perspective of incarnational theology, bodily engagement in liturgical music constitutes genuine participation in the mystery of faith. The body that sings, breathes, and resonates within the liturgy becomes a locus of spiritual experience (Tibo & Martasudjita, 2024). Yet, this experience does not necessarily yield faith formation if it remains confined to outward expression without accompanying faith awareness and theological understanding. This condition is evident in pastoral practice when musical service emphasizes technical and aesthetic dimensions over its character as an act of the Church's prayer (Tobing &

Fajariyanto, 2025). Therefore, the incarnational experience within liturgical music requires the integration of body, faith, and liturgical awareness; such integration allows choir service to become a means of deep and transformative faith formation. Furthermore, the dimension of inculturation demonstrates that faith experience is invariably shaped by cultural context. Music rooted in local culture helps the faithful, including Catholic youth, to live out their faith personally and contextually, rendering the liturgical experience more meaningful and relevant (Lema & Pius, 2025).

Minahasan culture is distinguished by its musicality, vocal harmony, tradition of spontaneous singing, and the familial value of *mapalus*. Kirchberger (2023) shows that inculturation in Indonesia is consistently bound up with communal relationship, symbolic meaning, and spiritual experience shaped by local culture. Meanwhile, Martasudjita (2021) explains inculturation as the creative encounter between the Gospel and culture, through which cultural symbols are transformed into living expressions of faith—the liturgy is never separated from culture but becomes the space where the Gospel is concretely present. Within this framework, liturgical music serves as an effective vehicle of inculturation precisely because it unites body, voice, emotion, and social identity, a role further affirmed by Pardede (2024), who shows that church music contributes to preserving cultural identity while deepening the experience of faith. Najoan's (2020) research demonstrates that the value of *mapalus* strengthens solidarity, togetherness, and collective responsibility within ecclesial life, including in liturgical service. Consequently, such that inculturation not only enriches liturgical form but also opens space for a more contextual and meaningful faith experience (Tibo & Martasudjita, 2024; Lema & Pius, 2025).

A supportive culture, however, does not automatically produce faith formation; the value of togetherness may remain confined to its social dimension if not integrated with the meaning of faith and liturgical practice. Inculturation must therefore be understood as a reflective and critical process rather than the mere fusion of cultural elements with liturgy. Within Catholic youth choir service, musicality and the value of *mapalus* become genuine means of faith formation only when lived in the light of faith, supported by liturgical awareness, pastoral accompaniment, and a clear spiritual orientation. Without these conditions, the experience of musicality and togetherness remains confined to the cultural plane. To date, no study has specifically examined the lived experience of Minahasan Catholic youth in choir service as a form of faith inculturation, nor how Minahasan musicality and cultural values shape the experience of body, space, time, and relationship within choir ministry.

Cross-disciplinary research indicates that communal singing strengthens group identity and enhances emotional well-being (Clift & Hancox, 2001). Within a religious context, the choir functions as a *communio* that forms faith through togetherness, discipline, and service. Likewise, musical activity within the liturgy has likewise been shown to strengthen faith identity, communal relationship, and the spiritual development of young people (Ingalls, 2018; Walter et al., 2022). These studies, however, have yet to deeply explore the liturgical experience of choir ministers themselves—particularly across the dimensions of body, space, time, and relationship as examined through Van Manen's phenomenology—and

largely assume that involvement in religious music communities automatically forms faith, without examining how such experience is genuinely lived within the liturgical context.

Prior scholarship has thus addressed liturgical music from theological and pastoral perspectives, Catholic youth service in terms of motivation and character, Van Manen's phenomenology within spirituality research, and inculturation theology and Minahasan culture from sociological and cultural angles. Furthermore, Martasudjita's thought reinforces the theological foundation concerning the relationship between liturgy, culture, and incarnational action. These various strands of scholarship nonetheless remain partial and have yet to be integrated within a single analytical framework; no study to date has specifically examined the lived experience of Catholic youth in choir service by combining phenomenological, theological, and cultural-inculturation perspectives. This study addresses that gap through a phenomenological reading of the choir service experience of Catholic youth, connecting it to incarnational theology, the bodily dimension of liturgy, and Minahasan culture as a space for the inculturation of faith.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using Max Van Manen's practical phenomenological method to explore the lived experience of choir members. This approach was chosen for its capacity to grasp spiritual, emotional, and liturgical experience in depth, moving beyond mere description to reflect on the essential meaning embedded within such experience (Van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology enables the examination of long-term liturgical service through the dimensions of the body, liturgical space, the rhythm of service over time, and communal relationships as directly lived and experienced.

The study involved nine informants, all members of the choir of the Catholic Youth at St. Thomas Aquinas Parish, Sea - Diocese of Manado, who had served for eight to ten years. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on the criteria of active involvement in the choir, long-term service experience, and willingness to offer honest and in-depth reflection. The research was conducted within the Minahasan cultural context, distinguished by its rich musical tradition, vocal harmony, and spirit of communal solidarity (*mapalus*), which forms an integral part of understanding the liturgical experience under study.

Data were collected through online interviews and an open-ended questionnaire administered via Google Forms. The interviews were used to explore experiences related to the body, liturgical space, communal relationships, and the rhythm of service, while the questionnaire provided space for more personal and contemplative reflection. The combined use of these two techniques aimed to enrich the data and support triangulation, thereby ensuring both depth and reliability.

Data analysis involved reading the narratives holistically, identifying units of meaning, forming experiential themes, and subsequently organizing these themes into four existentials—lived body, lived space, lived time, and lived relation (Van Manen's, 1990). The analysis was conducted reflectively and iteratively, with continual reference back to the data to ensure that emergent themes remained

grounded in informants' authentic experience. The trustworthiness of the data was maintained through methodological triangulation, member checking, and reflexivity regarding the Minahasan cultural context and the spiritual dynamics underlying informants' experience. The entire research process adhered to the ethical principles of qualitative inquiry, including informed consent, confidentiality of informant identity, and the use of data solely for academic purposes.

Results

Lived Body: The Body as an Expression of Faith Rooted in Minahasan Musicality

The body is experienced not merely as a vocal instrument but as an integral part of a faith experience flowing through musicality deeply rooted in Minahasan culture. The Minahasan tradition, rich in vocal harmony and the habit of communal singing across various customary and family occasions, shapes the way the body is lived within the liturgy. The body thus functions not only as a technical instrument but also as a cultural and spiritual medium that carries collective memory and serves as a vehicle for contextual expressions of faith (Tibo & Martasudjita, 2024; Lema & Pius, 2025).

Musical experience cultivated from early childhood is evident in informants' accounts that harmonizing has been a habit since youth, and that when singing together, the body seems to automatically seek harmony, a disposition instilled through singing within the family from a young age. Such accounts indicate that the body has been shaped by a musical habitus, such that its response within the liturgy occurs spontaneously and is deeply internalized. This finding affirms that the inculturation of faith occurs not only at the level of symbol and text but also through a body formed by cultural practice (Lema & Pius, 2025).

The body is likewise experienced as a space of spiritual encounter, as reflected in accounts of frequently feeling chills while singing certain hymns, as though something were touching the heart from within, and of feeling that God touches the informants through their own voice. A trembling body, a steady breath, and a unified voice are understood as an experience of encounter with God. Within this context, liturgical music becomes an incarnational medium through which the experience of faith is concretely lived through the body.

According to Van Manen's phenomenology, the body shapes the human way of being in the world. In this study, the body becomes the way Catholic youth stand before God through liturgical song. This experience demonstrates that the faith of young people is not merely conceptual but rooted in concrete experience lived through their bodies. Engagement in liturgical music constitutes an existential experience consistent with findings that youth faith experience functions as a space for negotiating meaning across personal, relational, and cultural dimensions (Wasti & Mulyatno, 2026).

Nonetheless, bodily experience as a medium of faith does not always result in deep faith formation. Musical experience may remain at a merely emotional or aesthetic level if not accompanied by adequate liturgical awareness and faith reflection; the experience of getting chills or feeling "touched" is therefore not always synonymous with sustained spiritual transformation (Tobing & Fajariyanto, 2025). The body as an expression of faith within liturgical music thus

requires the integration of cultural experience, liturgical awareness, and spiritual accompaniment. When these three elements converge, the body becomes an authentic locus of encounter between the human person and God within the liturgy.

Lived Space: Liturgical Space as Sacred Space and Cultural Space

Liturgical space carries profound meaning, understood not merely as the building in which Mass is celebrated but as a space that instills inner peace and directs the heart toward God's presence. This is reflected in the way entering the church immediately brings a sense of calm, especially when singing near the altar. This experience indicates that liturgical space is a sacred environment that forms an awareness of God's presence. Within liturgical theology, the church is understood as the locus of encounter between the human person and God, where symbol, rite, and spatial atmosphere guide the faithful into the experience of prayer (Martasudjita, 2005).

The church's acoustics further reinforce this experience. The distinctive Minahasan vocal harmony, combining high notes with a solid lower register, produces a resonance that evokes an atmosphere of prayer, accounts suggest that when their voices resound within the church, it feels as though heaven itself is present. This indicates that liturgical space interacts with the community's musical practice, thereby deepening the experience of faith. Music within sacred space is capable of cultivating a reflective atmosphere, enhancing congregational engagement, and affirming the experience of God's presence (Purnama et al., 2025). Distinctive Minahasan musicality finds its resonance within liturgical space, thereby reinforcing the experience of faith on both a sensory and emotional level (Tibo & Martasudjita, 2024). Liturgical space thus becomes not merely a physical location but a formative space for religious consciousness, shaped through sensory and symbolic experience imbued with sacred meaning (Cowan & Andrews, 2024).

The meaning of space is likewise evident in rehearsals held in parishioners' homes or in modest church rooms. These spaces become places where communal bonds grow through banter, gentle correction, cooperation, and the shared struggle to harmonize voices, as reflected in the account that rehearsals held in parishioners' homes were the most memorable, involving shared meals, laughter, occasional minor friction, and subsequent reconciliation. This experience reflects the culture of *mapalus*—togetherness, solidarity, and collective responsibility—lived out concretely within community life (Najoran, 2020).

Within Minahasan culture, space is understood as a vessel for relationship, such that lived space is not merely liturgical but also cultural and relational in character; faith is formed through shared experience within community. Yet neither sacred space nor communal space automatically produces deep faith formation. Liturgical space may be experienced routinely and functionally without awareness of its liturgical meaning, while communal space may remain at the level of social relationship without developing into a *communio* of faith (Tobing & Fajariyanto, 2025). Similarly, a sacred atmosphere or sense of peace within the church is not always synonymous with a transformative experience of faith. Space merely opens the possibility for such experience but does not guarantee it; a

meaningful experience of faith still requires conscious appropriation, liturgical understanding, and integration with daily life.

Lived Time: The Time of Faith, the Time of Culture, and the Time of Service

The dimension of time constitutes a profound experience for the informants. Service rendered over eight to ten years reflects not merely the duration of involvement but also a process of self-formation, as reflected in the account of having changed considerably over the years of service, to the point of doubting that such maturity would have developed without the choir. This experience indicates that the time of service is not merely a chronological span but a transformative process unfolding through repeated engagement in liturgical practice. In phenomenology, time is understood as an experience that shapes the way one remembers, hopes, and finds meaning in life—reflected in liturgical experience, such as the account of feeling renewed strength each Advent and Christmas, when Christmas hymns consistently fill the heart with hope. This experience demonstrates that liturgical time shapes memory, hope, and the growth of faith through the rhythm of the Church's celebrations.

Liturgical time is understood not merely as a recurring sequence of events but also as a moment of spiritual renewal (Martasudjita, 2011). Within Minahasan culture, a communally patterned rhythm of life renders choir rehearsals, Sunday Mass, special liturgies, and feast days integral to a spiritual rhythm; faithfulness to this rhythm is experienced as a process of faith formation, as reflected in the account that the longer individuals serves, the more they sense God shaping them through this ministry. The time of service is thus not merely personal but also communal and cultural in character, as repeated engagement gradually shapes a disposition of faith (Gabriel et al., 2023).

According to Van Manen, lived time is subjective time experienced as a process of inner growth. Correspondingly, faith experience develops through reflection, engagement, and the ongoing construction of meaning within daily life (Wasti & Mulyatno, 2026). However, the duration of service does not automatically guarantee faith growth. Time may become a space of formation when accompanied by reflection and spiritual awareness, but may equally become an empty routine devoid of meaning. Liturgical repetition can deepen inner life when consciously and reflectively appropriated, yet may also become mechanical habit devoid of inward engagement (Tobing & Fajariyanto, 2025). Lived time within choir service must therefore be understood as a space of faith formation contingent on reflective awareness in appropriating each experience of service.

Lived Relation: Communal Relationship, Mapalus, and Fraternal Faith

The relational dimension emerges as the most dominant theme in the informants' narratives. These personal dynamics reflect Minahasan culture grounded in the value of *mapalus*—mutual assistance, presence for one another, and cooperation for the common good—as reflected in the account describing the choir as a family, sharing both hardship and joy. This experience indicates that such connections are not merely functional but constitute a space of togetherness that both sustains cultural values and strengthens faith.

The value of *mapalus* forms mutually supportive relationships that deepen communal bonds (Najoan, 2020). Within the concept of lived relations, relationships are not merely social interaction but a way of experiencing the self through the presence of others. These bonds shape identity, character, and spirituality. This finding indicates that the liturgical community becomes a concrete space of faith formation, where religious identity is constructed through shared, lived relational experience (Przygoda, 2024; Gabriel & Catherine, 2025). This result is likewise consistent with research showing that music within church communities plays a role in shaping collective identity and strengthening faith participation through shared practice in the life of the Church (Menger, 2025).

Relationships within the choir also serve as a vehicle for character formation, as reflected in informants' experiences of learning patience, forgiveness, and compassion through the choir. Even differences in pitch, minor conflicts, or tension during rehearsal become opportunities for growth. This is evident when members quarreled simply because the harmony was off, only to laugh together again afterward, an experience through which humility was learned. This finding indicates that relationships do not always proceed harmoniously, but that conflict and reconciliation give rise to a process of maturation in both character and faith. Community thus becomes a pedagogical space in which Christian values—patience, forgiveness, and humility—are concretely lived out. The relationships thereby formed also explain the sustainability of long-term service. Without this community, the informants noted that they might have already stopped serving, as the community provides them with strength. This finding is consistent with research showing that a contextual and relevant faith community plays a significant role in sustaining youth engagement and supporting faith growth amid the dynamics of modern life (Jatmiko et al., 2025). It affirms that the relational dimension is a critical factor in sustaining youth engagement within the Church, as a sense of belonging and communal support undergird the continuity of faith (Gabriel et al., 2023).

Within Van Manen's phenomenology, lived relation is understood as the experience of becoming oneself through encounters with others. For Catholic youth, relationships within the choir become a space for experiencing love, fraternity, and faith formation. This finding is consistent with research showing that youth faith experience develops through dynamic relationships, in which faith is given meaning through interaction with community and shared life experience (Wasti & Mulyatno, 2026).

Taken together, Van Manen's four phenomenological existentials reveal that choir service among Minahasan Catholic youth constitutes a holistic spiritual experience: the body becomes a medium of prayer; liturgical space becomes a place of encounter; the rhythm of service over time shapes maturity; and communal relationship sustains the values of *mapalus* and Christian fraternity. It must nonetheless be emphasized that communal relationship does not automatically produce deep faith formation. Relationship may remain at the level of social togetherness if not lived in the light of faith and directed toward spiritual growth; in certain contexts, community may even become exclusive or oriented toward comfort, thereby obscuring the faith dimension of togetherness (Tobing & Fajariyanto, 2025).

Communal relationship within the choir therefore becomes a space of faith formation only when lived as a *communio* rooted in Gospel values, supported by spiritual accompaniment, and directed toward shared faith growth. Absent these conditions, the relationship remains a powerful social experience but does not necessarily yield deep spiritual transformation. Choir service may thus be understood as a holistic space of faith formation, one that becomes effective only through the integration of bodily experience, liturgical awareness, communal relationship, and sustained spiritual accompaniment (Tobing & Fajariyanto, 2025).

Discussion

Liturgical Music as a Space for the Inculturation of Faith (Lived Body)

The findings indicate that the body serves as the primary medium for living out faith through voice, breath, bodily vibration, and sensitivity to harmony. These findings align with Martasudjita's (2022) view that the liturgy is incarnational in nature, such that the human body is not merely an instrument but a space for experiencing and responding to God's grace. The singing body within the liturgy thus becomes a locus of encounter with God, a place where faith is lived sensorially, emotionally, and spiritually (Martasudjita, 2011). These findings are further supported by Purnama et al. (2025), who state that liturgical music serves as a primary medium of spiritual experience, helping the faithful to live out their faith while simultaneously shaping religious and cultural identity. The experience of faith within choir service thus emerges as the outcome of a reflective process involving bodily engagement, liturgical meaning-making, and relationship within the faith community.

Bodily experiences of trembling, chills, or being filled with peace while singing particular parts of the liturgy indicate the presence of spiritual affect signifying genuine faith engagement rather than the mere performance of a musical task. Ratzinger (2000) affirms that liturgical music is "prayer sung," wherein the human voice becomes an expression of faith arising from the heart. This finding is consistent with Wasti & Mulyatno (2026), who showed that youth faith experience develops through bodily engagement, emotion, and relationship.

Minahasan culture further reinforces this experience through family vocal tradition, the culture of *mapalus*, and various customary celebrations that cultivate musical sensitivity and confidence in self-expression, thereby facilitating the appropriation of liturgical music as an experience of faith. Nabu et al. (2024) affirm that the integration of local culture within the liturgy fosters a deeper understanding of the mystery of faith, as it is expressed through symbols and cultural forms close to lived experience. Nonetheless, emotional experiences such as chills or being "touched" do not necessarily result in deep faith formation unless accompanied by faith reflection and liturgical awareness; bodily engagement thus becomes toward a faith experience but does not guarantee it directly (Tobing & Fajariyanto, 2025). Liturgical music as a space for the inculturation of faith through the body therefore requires the integration of cultural experience, liturgical awareness, and spiritual accompaniment. When these three elements converge, choir service becomes a means of authentic and transformative faith formation. Conceptually, this study demonstrates that choir service constitutes a model of experiential faith formation, in which faith is understood not merely

cognitively but is lived through bodily engagement, liturgical space, the rhythm of time, and communal relationships within liturgical praxis.

Liturgical Space as Sacramental Space and Cultural Space (Lived Space)

Informants described liturgical space as a space that "makes God present." Church acoustics, light, the altar, and an atmosphere of silence deepen the experience of faith, such that liturgical space is understood not merely as a physical location but as a sacramental space that awakens awareness of God's presence. Martasudjita (2005) affirms that liturgical space, through its symbols and the structure of its celebration, becomes a medium that guides the faithful into a deeper experience of faith.

This experience indicates that church space helps cultivate liturgical awareness, producing a felt closeness to God while singing. This demonstrates that liturgical space forms both affective and faith awareness, particularly when supported by aesthetic and musical elements attuned to liturgical action (Tibo & Martasudjita, 2024). Rehearsal spaces in parishioners' homes or in modest rooms, meanwhile, become spaces for the formation of *communio*; the value of togetherness within Minahasan culture (*mapalus*) further shapes the meaning of space as a place for mutual support, shared growth, and the concrete living out of solidarity (Najoran, 2020).

From the perspective of Van Manen's phenomenology, lived space represents the human way of experiencing being-in-the-world. The findings show that liturgical space becomes a space of encounter with God, while rehearsal space becomes a space of character formation; the two spaces complement one another as vehicles for the inculturation of faith, consistent with the view that youth faith development unfolds through relational spaces fostering interaction, reflection, and active engagement (Wasti & Mulyatno, 2026).

Nonetheless, neither liturgical space nor communal space automatically forms deep faith. Church space may be experienced routinely without awareness of its sacramental meaning, while communal space may remain at the level of social relationship without developing into a *communio* of faith (Tobing & Fajariyanto, 2025). Space as a vehicle for faith formation therefore requires conscious appropriation, liturgical understanding, and integration with the life of faith in order for it to become a genuinely transformative experience.

The Time of Service as a Process of Faith Maturation (Lived Time)

Service rendered over eight to ten years gradually fosters faith maturity. This finding indicates that faith experience does not occur instantaneously but develops through consistent engagement in liturgical service. Within Van Manen's phenomenology, lived time is understood as subjectively experienced time bearing meaning, memory, and transformation. Involvement initially prompted by a friend's invitation may develop into a deeper spiritual experience over time (Wasti & Mulyatno, 2026). This process aligns with the Church's liturgical time—Advent, Christmas, Lent, the Sacred Triduum, and Easter—which constitutes not merely a sequence of rites but a rhythm of faith formation that continually renews spiritual life.

Within liturgical theology, time possesses not only a chronological but also a kairological dimension—the time of salvation that enables the repeated and profound renewal of faith (Martasudjita, 2011). The liturgy shapes faith gradually through a process that cultivates fidelity, discipline, responsibility, and emotional maturity. Yet the duration of ministry does not automatically guarantee the growth of faith; without reflection and spiritual awareness, prolonged service may devolve into a routine devoid of meaning. The repetition of liturgy can deepen faith, but it may equally become a mechanical habit lacking inward engagement (Tobing & Fajariyanto, 2025). The time of service thus constitutes a space of faith formation contingent on the quality of appropriation; faith maturity is determined not by the length of ministry but by the extent to which that experience is reflectively lived and integrated into one's spiritual life.

Communal Relationship as *Communio* and the Inculturation of *Mapalus* Values (Lived Relation)

The relational dimension constitutes the strongest finding of this study. The choir is experienced as a family, offering a space for mutual support, gentle correction, motivation, and shared growth. This experience aligns with the value of *mapalus* within Minahasan culture, which emphasizes togetherness, mutual cooperation, mutual assistance, and fidelity to community. Relationships within the choir are thus not merely social but rooted in cultural values that reinforce solidarity and communal engagement (Najoan, 2020). From the perspective of ecclesial theology, this experience reflects *communio*—the fellowship of God's people realized through openness, solidarity, fidelity, and Christian fraternity. The choir thereby becomes a concrete space for living out Gospel values in daily life (Przygoda, 2024).

Van Manen explains that lived relation is the way human beings discover themselves through relationships with others. Within this context, relationships in the choir build not only social togetherness but also strengthen the spiritual experience, as community becomes a wellspring of steadfast faith. This finding is consistent with research showing that youth faith develops through dynamic relationships, with community serving as a space for emotional support, the search for meaning, and spiritual growth (Wasti & Mulyatno, 2026). Communal relationships also constitute the primary reason for sustained service, such that the choir functions not merely as liturgical support but as a means of faith formation that offers love, acceptance, and shared growth (Gabriel et al., 2023).

Nonetheless, communal relationships do not automatically yield deep faith formation. Togetherness may remain at a merely social level if not lived in the light of faith and directed toward spiritual growth; under certain conditions, a community may even become exclusive or prioritize comfort over faith, thereby obscuring its spiritual dimension (Tobing & Fajariyanto, 2025). Relationships within the choir therefore become a space of faith formation only when lived as a *communio* rooted in Gospel values, supported by spiritual accompaniment, and directed toward shared faith growth. Choir service may thus become a holistic space for the inculturation of faith—encompassing body, space, time, and relationship—whose effectiveness depends on the quality of appropriation, liturgical awareness, and the accompanying communal dynamics.

Research Contribution

This study offers several important contributions. First, it provides a phenomenological understanding of the liturgical experience of Catholic youth, an approach still rarely employed in pastoral-liturgical studies in Indonesia. Through a practical phenomenological lens, this study explores the meaning of a concretely-lived faith experience rather than merely describing liturgical practices or activities.

Furthermore, this study demonstrates the connection between liturgical music and faith formation, particularly within long-term service. This finding affirms that liturgical music functions not merely as an aesthetic element of celebration but also as a means of spiritual formation when appropriated reflectively and sustainably.

This study likewise shows that Minahasan culture enriches liturgical experience through musicality and the value of *mapalus*, affirming that inculturation enables faith to be lived contextually and relevantly within community life (Tibo & Martasudjita, 2024). In addition, this study integrates liturgical theology, incarnation, and inculturation within the concrete experience of Catholic youth, demonstrating that this experience of faith constitutes a unity between theological dimensions and lived experience.

Nonetheless, this study affirms that the effectiveness of faith formation through liturgy does not occur automatically but depends on the quality of liturgical appropriation, the dynamics of communal relationships, and spiritual accompaniment. This study thus offers not only theoretical and pastoral contributions but also a critical reflection on pastoral practice within the Church.

Pastoral Implications

The findings indicate that choir service holds significant potential as a means of faith formation for Catholic youth, provided it is understood not merely as a musical activity but as part of a directed and sustained process of faith formation. Liturgical music formation must integrate both technical and spiritual dimensions; beyond enhancing vocal ability and musicality, such formation must also deepen the understanding of liturgy and faith so that choir service is lived as a form of the Church's prayer.

Local culture, such as *mapalus*, may likewise serve as a resource in youth formation. The values of togetherness, solidarity, and collective responsibility embedded in Minahasan culture can be integrated into the communal life of the choir so that faith formation proceeds contextually and relevantly (Najoan, 2020). Pastoral accompaniment must further regard the choir as a space of *communio* that shapes character, faith, and spirituality; through healthy relationships, shared faith reflection, and the processing of service experience, the choir community can become a locus of faith growth rather than a mere gathering place.

These findings open opportunities for parishes and dioceses to develop models of youth accompaniment grounded in liturgical music that integrate the dimensions of liturgy, community, and inculturation. The success of such a model depends on the quality of accompaniment, the liturgical awareness of those serving, and the community's commitment to living out the values of faith. Absent

these three elements, choir service risks becoming merely a musical activity without meaningful spiritual transformation (Tobing & Fajariyanto, 2025).

Conclusion

This study shows that choir service constitutes a significant space of faith formation for Catholic youth at St. Thomas Aquinas Sea Parish. Drawing on Max Van Manen's practical phenomenology, the experiences of body, space, time, and relationship emerge as vehicles of faith formation. The body becomes a medium of prayer within an incarnational experience through liturgical music; liturgical and rehearsal spaces become places of encounter with God while simultaneously reflecting the communal values of Minahasan culture; the time of service shapes faith maturity through the Church's liturgical rhythm; and relationships within the choir community become a source of spiritual strength reflecting both the spirit of *mapalus* and the Church's *communio*.

Choir service produces not only musical harmony but also holistically shapes the identity, character, and spirituality of Catholic youth. This role, however, depends heavily on liturgical appropriateness on, the quality of communal relationship, the integration of cultural values, and adequate spiritual accompaniment; absent these elements, choir service risks becoming merely a musical or social activity without producing deep faith growth. Liturgical music is therefore a potential space for the inculturation of faith, yet one that requires conscious, reflective, and purposefully directed pastoral formation.

This study further affirms that liturgical music constitutes an effective pastoral means and may serve as a model for youth faith formation within local cultural contexts. It also opens space for the Church's reflection on developing more integrative accompaniment for Catholic youth, attending to the dimensions of body, space, time, relationships, and cultural context as a unified whole within the process of faith formation. Choir service thus holds potential as a model of contemporary mystagogy, one that allows faith not merely to be understood but to be concretely experienced within the liturgical life of the Church.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, youth accompaniers and liturgical leaders should regard the choir not merely as a musical task but as a pastorally designed means of faith formation. Choir training should incorporate spiritual formation, deepened understanding of liturgical meaning, and the strengthening of a spirituality of service, so that choir members develop not only vocal ability but also a deep appreciation of their role as liturgical ministers.

Youth accompaniment programs grounded in liturgical music should likewise be developed with due regard for local Minahasan culture, particularly the *Mapalus* value of togetherness, so that the inculturation of faith proceeds more contextually and encourages greater youth engagement in the life of the Church. Future research may extend this study to choirs in other parishes or employ a deeper theological approach to examine the role of liturgical music in youth faith formation across diverse cultural contexts. Additionally, subsequent studies could investigate the factors that support or hinder the effectiveness of choir service as a

means of faith formation. Including the factors that support or hinder the effectiveness of choir service as a means of faith formation.

References

- Augustine. (1991). *Confessions* (H. Chadwick, Trans.). Oxford University Press.
- Amal, Y., Midun, H., & Habur, A. M. (2024). Pastoral inovatif dan keterlibatan OMK milenial dalam kegiatan Gereja. *JPAK: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Katolik*, 24(1), 37–40. <https://doi.org/10.34150/jpak.v22i1.594>
- Aquinas, T. (1981). *Summa theologiae*. Christian Classics.
- Clift, S., & Hancox, G. (2001). The perceived benefits of singing: Findings from preliminary surveys of a university college choral society. *The Journal of the Royal Society for the Promotion of Health*, 121(4), 248–256. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/11811096/>
- Cowan, N. R., & Andrews, E. S. (2024). Liturgical gift or theological burden? Teenagers and ecumenical liturgical exchange events. *Religions*, 15(12), 1478. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15121478>
- Fransiskus, P. (2019). *Christus Vivit*. Vatikan: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Gabriel, G., & Catherine, O. (2025). The effectiveness of church youth ministry in fostering the faith and engagement of the millennial generation. *Ministries and Theology*, 2(2), 46–54. <https://doi.org/10.35335/ygvtb448>
- Hubbell, C. (2025). *Music's transformative power: A phenomenological exploration of Christian music's role in enhancing human development*. Doctoral dissertation. Liberty University.
- Ingalls, M. M. (2018). *Singing the congregational self*. Oxford University Press.
- Jatmiko, B., Thawn, C. S., & Kawengian, S. E. E. (2025). Mission-church type for college students: A qualitative research on contextual ministry in urban setting. *Evangelikal: Jurnal Teologi Injili dan Pembinaan Warga Jemaat*, 9(2), 263–281. <https://doi.org/10.46445/ejti.v9i2.1003>
- Lema, M. V., & Pius, I. P. X. (2025). Ekspresi inkulturasi budaya NTT dalam liturgi sebagai perjumpaan iman dan budaya. *Nubuat: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Kristen dan Katolik*, 2(4), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.61132/nubuat.v2i4.1469>
- Maeja, J. D. (2024). Kajian literatur untuk mengatasi permasalahan musik liturgi. *JPAK: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Katolik*, 24(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.34150/jpak.v22i1.548>
- Marek, A. (2024). Flourishing through prayer by singing in a liturgical choir. *Religions*, 15(3), 335. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15030335>
- Martasudjita, E. P. D. (2005). *Inkulturasi liturgi dalam konteks budaya Indonesia*. Kanisius.
- Martasudjita, E. P. D. (2011). *Liturgi yang memanusiakan*. Kanisius.
- Martasudjita, E. P. D. (2016). *Liturgi dan budaya*. Kanisius.
- Martasudjita, E. P. D. (2021). *Teologi inkulturasi: Perayaan Injil Yesus Kristus di bumi Indonesia*. Kanisius.
- Martasudjita, E. P. D. (2022). Inkulturasi dan tata perayaan Ekaristi 2020. *Studia Philosophica et Theologica*, 22(2), 159–180. <https://doi.org/10.35312/spet.v22i2.441>
- Menger, M. (2025). Mission and creativity: Congregational song, localization, and identity in the Christian evangelical church in Minahasa. *Educatio Christi*, 6(2), 136–162. <https://doi.org/10.70796/educatio-christi.v6i2.185>
- Moran, G. (2020). *Understanding religion and religious education*. REA Publications/NYU Press.

- Nabu, H., Silab, T., & Senda, S. (2024). Musik inkulturasi dalam perayaan Ekaristi dan relevansinya bagi liturgi Gereja Katolik. *Jurnal Studi Multidisipliner*, 8(6), 136–147. <https://sejurnal.com/pub/index.php/jsm/article/view/10379>
- Najoan, A. (2020). Nilai mapalus dalam komunitas Gereja Minahasa. *Jurnal Sosial Keagamaan*, 8(1), 44–59.
- Panjaitan, F. (2020). Kepemimpinan Yesus Kristus. *KINAA*, 1(2), 45–60. <https://doi.org/10.34307/kinaa.v1i2.14>
- Pardede, B. P. (2024). Ethnomusicology in church music education: Revitalizing Batak musical values and practices. *Edukasi: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran*, 5(2), 767–778. <https://doi.org/10.62775/edukasia.v5i2.1841>
- Paskalita, S., & Wilhelmus, O. R. (2025). Pendidikan iman anak dalam keluarga Katolik serta pembentukan sikap kasih sayang anak kepada Allah dan sesama. *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Katolik*, 25(2), 429–433. <https://doi.org/10.34150/jpak.v22i1.1013>
- Przygoda, W. (2024). The formation of young people to faith in God. *Religions*, 15, 1–15.
- Purnama, N. P., Mambrasar, Z. Y., Rundubelo, M. A. M., Turangan, T. J., Laleno, V. I., Tarumingi, D. A., Sendow, M. N., & Tumiwa, E. S. E. (2025). Music as a medium of liturgy, spirituality, and cultural identity: A study of worship in GMIM. *Santhet: Jurnal Sejarah, Pendidikan dan Humaniora*, 9(6), 2449–2459. <https://doi.org/10.36526/js.v3i2.6653>
- Ratzinger, J. (2000). *The spirit of the liturgy*. Ignatius Press.
- Second Vatican Council. (1963). *Sacrosanctum concilium*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Susanto, A. (2021). Pembentukan karakter OMK. *Jurnal Pastoral dan Pendidikan Iman*, 3(1), 77–89.
- Tibo, P., & Martasudjita, E. P. D. (2024). Liturgical theology: Liturgical inculturation as an effort to maintain religious and cultural identity for Catholic students who are prospective catechists of the Batak tribe. *Journal of Asian Orientation in Theology*, 6(2), 161–192. <https://doi.org/10.24071/jaot.v6i02.7850>
- Tobing, R. S. L., & Fajariyanto, T. C. (2025). The implementation of norms for liturgical songs and musical instruments by Catholic youth in the St. Raphael Sub-Parish, Saitnihuta. *International Journal of Christian Education and Philosophical Inquiry*, 2(3), 96–102. <https://doi.org/10.61132/ijcep.v2i3.377>
- Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. State University of New York Press.
- Walter, Y., & Altorfer, A. (2022). The psychological role of music and attentional control for religious experiences in worship. *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 75(12), 2272–2286. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9619243/>
- Wasti, M. M., & Mulyatno, C. B. (2026). Peran orang muda Katolik dalam pewartaan Injil di era digital: Perspektif teologi pastoral tentang pengudusan dunia digital. *Media: Jurnal Filsafat dan Teologi*, 7(1), 69–87. <https://doi.org/10.53396/media.v7i1.778>