

Research Article

The Implementation of Norms for Liturgical Songs and Musical Instruments by Catholic Youth in the St. Raphael Sub-Parish, Saitnihuta

Rhaffael Sebastian Lumban Tobing^{1*}, Tri Chandra Fajariyanto²

¹Sekolah Tinggi Pastoral Santo Bonaventura Keuskupan Agung Medan; e-mail: rhaffaeltobing@gmail.com

²Sekolah Tinggi Pastoral Santo Bonaventura Keuskupan Agung Medan; e-mail: cornelcandra@gmail.com

*Corresponding Author : Rhaffael Sebastian Lumban Tobing

Abstract: This study explores the implementation of liturgical music norms by Catholic Youth (Orang Muda Katolik/OMK) in the St. Raphael Sub-Parish, Saitnihuta. The research aims to examine the extent to which OMK participate in liturgical music ministry in accordance with the principles established by the Catholic Church, particularly regarding the use of liturgical songs and musical instruments. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. The findings reveal that OMK show commendable enthusiasm and active involvement in liturgical celebrations by singing hymns from official Church songbooks such as Puji Syukur and by accompanying the liturgy with instruments like guitars, cajons, and keyboards. While this reflects a genuine commitment to serve, it also exposes a lack of structured guidance and theological understanding related to the use of music in the liturgy. Many OMK rely on imitation and personal experience in selecting songs and instruments, often prioritizing the creation of a lively atmosphere rather than enhancing the sacredness of the liturgy. Moreover, the absence of traditional musical instruments and limited liturgical catechesis hinder the proper application of inculturation principles. This study underscores the urgent need for structured formation programs and official liturgical music guidelines to support OMK. With proper mentoring, the creativity and zeal of young people can be nurtured to align with the Church's vision of sacred, beautiful, and appropriate liturgical music—thus enabling them to become true ministers of prayer who deepen the community's encounter with the mystery of Christ.

Keywords: Catholic Youth; Liturgical Music; Musical Instruments; Liturgical Norms

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1. Introduction

Journal of Future Artificial Intelligence and Technologies accepts research paper submissions that contain at least 4000 to 8000 words or around 8 to 20 pages for research articles and a maximum of 30 pages for review articles. The introduction must be written briefly, concisely, and clearly. The introduction must contain an explanation of (1) the Research object, (2) Methods that have been used previously, (3) the Weaknesses and strengths of each method or may briefly allude to related work and/or hypotheses, (4) Research problems (5) Proposed solutions and/or approaches (6) List of Contributions (6) Rest of paper. The introduction section must be scientific and rich in citations. Use “maintext_FAITH” style for this paragraph.

Liturgy in the Catholic Church is a sacred celebration of faith imbued with deep spiritual meaning. In this celebration, music serves not merely an aesthetic function but holds profound theological and pastoral significance. Liturgical music, or *musica sacra*, is considered an integral element of the liturgy itself, not just a complementary aspect. The *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, a document from the Second Vatican Council, states that liturgical singing plays a central role in enhancing prayer, glorifying God, and deepening the participation of the faithful in the sacred celebration (SC art. 112). Therefore, every form of

music used in the liturgy must align with the spirit and norms of the Church in order to truly serve as an authentic medium of proclamation and prayer.

Liturgical music is governed by clear normative guidelines, both in terms of the songs and the musical instruments used. The document *Musicam Sacram* outlines three essential criteria for liturgical music: suitability for liturgical use, spiritual value that enriches faith, and artistic beauty that leads to an experience of the divine (MS art. 4, 28). Gregorian chant and sacred polyphony occupy a special place in the musical tradition of the Latin Church. Additionally, the use of instruments such as the pipe organ holds significant liturgical value due to its ability to foster a solemn atmosphere of worship (SC art. 120; MS art. 62). Nevertheless, the Church allows for inculturation through the use of local musical instruments, as long as they do not contradict the sacredness of the liturgy and have received approval from ecclesiastical authorities.

In the Indonesian context, the inculturation of liturgical music is a crucial concern, given the rich diversity of local cultures. Traditional music and regional instruments may be integrated into the liturgy if used wisely and in accordance with the spirit of the Church's liturgy (SC art. 119). Hymnals such as *Puji Syukur* and *Madah Bakti* have been compiled as common references for theologically and musically appropriate songs. However, not all cultural needs can be fully accommodated, which calls for responsible liturgical creativity, especially within basic ecclesial communities or mission areas.

In the development of pastoral liturgy, the involvement of Catholic Youth (*Orang Muda Katolik* or *OMK*) is key to sustaining and renewing liturgical music. *OMK* are not merely performers but also agents of inculturation who can bridge tradition and contemporary context. However, their understanding of liturgical music norms is often limited to technical aspects, lacking attention to the spiritual and liturgical dimensions. Therefore, liturgical formation and education for young people are urgently needed so that the music they present truly reflects the spirit of prayer and the sanctity of the liturgy.

This article aims to critically examine the implementation of liturgical music norms in song selection and the use of musical instruments, as well as the involvement of Catholic Youth in fostering liturgical music that aligns with the teachings of the Church. This study focuses on the correlation between *OMK*'s understanding of liturgical music and the actual practices within the celebration of the Eucharist. Thus, this article seeks to contribute to strengthening the liturgical formation of young Catholics and promoting liturgical music practices that are more consistent with the spirit and norms of the Church.

2. Proposed Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at describing and analyzing the conformity of song selection and the use of liturgical musical instruments by Catholic Youth (*Orang Muda Katolik* or *OMK*) with the norms of liturgical music in the Catholic Church. This approach allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of liturgical practices and their meanings from the perspective of direct participants—in this case, *OMK* members involved in liturgical ministries at the St. Raphael Station in Saitnihuta, under the Parish of St. Fidelis Doloksanggul, Humbang Hasundutan Regency, North Sumatra.

Three primary techniques were used for data collection: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to directly observe the practices of song selection and the use of musical instruments during Mass, including the arrangement of the choir and the types of songs performed. Interviews were conducted with *OMK* members as the main informants, supported by catechists, the parish priest, and members of the pastoral council, to explore their understanding of the norms of liturgical music. Documentation included song archives, musical scores, liturgical books (such as *Puji Syukur*, *Madah Bakti*, and *BETK*), as well as visual documentation of liturgical activities. The data collected consisted of primary data (from observations and interviews) and secondary data (from archives and supporting literature).

Data analysis was conducted through the stages of reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. Validity was strengthened through triangulation and informant confirmation. The research was conducted from March to April 2025 and was centered at St. Raphael Station, which was selected based on preliminary findings indicating that liturgical practices by *OMK* were not yet fully aligned with Church norms—therefore meriting academic and pastoral examination.

3. Results and Discussion

Songs to Be Sung in Accordance with the Priest's or Local Church's Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, it was discovered that written references to liturgical songs within the parish are extremely limited. This reveals a lack of official documentation or guidelines that can serve as a reference for the faithful, particularly for Catholic Youth (*Orang Muda Katolik* or OMK) who are still in the formative stages of faith and ministry. The scarcity of such references has led to a reliance on personal experience, habitual practice, and informal knowledge rather than systematic and structured learning in understanding liturgical music.

This finding aligns with the theoretical foundation that liturgical music is not merely an accessory to the celebration but a medium of prayer that directs the hearts of the faithful toward God. Songs used in the liturgy must meet the criteria of sacredness, beauty, and appropriateness for worship, and should ideally be rooted in Scripture and liturgical tradition. In this context, the absence of written references presents a significant obstacle. Without clear guidance, OMK often choose songs based on personal taste or popularity rather than their liturgical or theological value. This risks distorting the meaning of the liturgy and obscuring the role of music as a conduit for profound experiences of faith (Paulus Junaidi, 2021).

Furthermore, theoretical perspectives emphasize that OMK—especially those serving as musicians—are not only required to possess technical musical skills but also to embody the spirit of the liturgy. Without written references and systematic formation, such spiritual internalization is difficult to cultivate. As a result, the transcendental function of liturgical music—to unite the hearts of the congregation and draw them into the mystery of Christ—cannot be fully realized (Desti Saraswati, 2020; Sepen Kristian, 2021).

The study also noted that information regarding liturgical music within the parish is conveyed informally and sporadically—through direct reprimands, casual mentions in homilies, or brief sharing sessions without structured agendas. This reinforces the theoretical conclusion that liturgical music formation has not been conducted in a structured and consistent manner. Consequently, OMK often lack a comprehensive understanding of the criteria for selecting liturgical songs, resulting in the frequent use of songs that are incongruent with the context of the Catholic liturgy.

This condition negatively impacts the quality of OMK's participation in the liturgy, as they do not fully understand how songs should be chosen to support an atmosphere of prayer and foster unity within the celebration of the Eucharist. Instead of deepening the congregation's faith experience, songs may become a foreign element that distracts from the meaning of the celebration itself.

Therefore, both the theoretical framework and the empirical findings strongly indicate the urgent need for official written references and systematic formation in liturgical music. These are essential prerequisites to ensure that OMK are not only physically active in liturgical service, but also spiritually aware of their role as ministers of prayer—those who, through music and song, help the faithful enter into deeper spiritual communion with Christ. Such efforts are crucial to preserving the sacredness and beauty of the liturgy, and to ensuring that music truly functions as a means of faith, rather than merely a performance.

Songs Sourced from Official Hymnals of the Catholic Church

The findings of this study reveal that most of the songs used in liturgical celebrations at the station are sourced from official Catholic references, such as the *Puji Syukur* hymnal and musical scores issued by ecclesiastical authorities. This indicates a good level of awareness among liturgical practitioners regarding the importance of preserving the purity and sacred function of music in worship. Such awareness is in line with fundamental liturgical teachings, which emphasize that liturgical music must be based on official texts and possess theological depth.

This finding is particularly relevant in relation to the understanding expected of Catholic Youth (*Orang Muda Katolik* or OMK). Liturgical music is not merely a form of entertainment or emotional expression. Rather, it serves as a medium of prayer that directs the hearts of the faithful toward God. Therefore, the choice to use songs sourced from official Church materials reflects an effort to meet these standards and to guide the faithful toward a deeper experience of faith.

However, the study also reveals that despite this appropriate use of official sources, there are still practices involving the use of songs from outside the Catholic tradition. This contradicts the Church's liturgical principles, which require unity in the expression of faith during the Eucharistic celebration. Although these non-Catholic songs may be popular or emotionally moving, they can obscure the liturgical meaning and weaken the theological

dimension that sacred music is intended to build. This indicates a lack of consistency in the application of liturgical norms.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that while the creative and expressive enthusiasm of OMK is valuable for encouraging active participation, it is often not accompanied by a sufficient understanding of the theological and liturgical functions of music. Songs are often chosen based on emotional appeal or personal familiarity rather than on their doctrinal appropriateness. In fact, liturgical music should serve as a means of proclaiming the faith, deepening the meaning of the sacraments, and fostering unity among the faithful. It should not be reduced to a form of personal or cultural expression.

The study also confirms what is stated in liturgical theory, namely that liturgical formation remains unstructured. Both in theoretical literature and field observations, guidance on liturgical music is usually delivered informally and without a clear agenda. As a result, although there is some awareness of the importance of appropriate songs, the lack of systematic formation makes it easy for actual practices to drift from Church standards.

In conclusion, both theory and research findings emphasize the urgent need for well-planned liturgical formation and the availability of clear, written guidelines. Training should not only focus on musical technique but also on cultivating a deep theological understanding of liturgical music. Through this approach, OMK can participate more fully and appropriately in the Church's liturgy, while preserving the integrity and sacredness of the Eucharistic celebration.

Liturgical Song Appropriateness

The results of this study indicate an encouraging early development in the formation of church choirs at the station, particularly through the increasing involvement of Catholic Youth (Orang Muda Katolik or OMK). One notable form of this participation is the application of inculturated singing styles, which incorporate simple musical instruments that reflect local cultural traditions. This effort reflects the spirit of inculturation as emphasized in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and *Musicam Sacram*, which affirm that the integration of local cultural elements in the liturgy is acceptable, provided that the sacredness and liturgical norms are maintained.

Nevertheless, although the spirit of inculturation demonstrates a positive direction, the research also reveals several serious issues in the implementation of liturgical music by OMK at the station. The absence of Gregorian chant and sacred polyphony—both explicitly named in official Church documents as ideal models—signals a deviation from the Church's liturgical norms. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* affirms that Gregorian chant holds a "pride of place" in the liturgy, while *Musicam Sacram* emphasizes that liturgical music should deepen prayer and strengthen the unity of the Church. In practice, however, there is a tendency to use non-liturgical or popular songs that do not necessarily fulfill the three main criteria of liturgical music: sacredness, beauty, and liturgical suitability.

This situation is exacerbated by the limited number and capability of choir members. The immature vocal arrangements and technical imperfections suggest that the musical quality has not yet reached the minimum standard set by the Church. From the perspective of Edward J. Schaefer and Joseph A. Larkin, liturgical music is not merely a matter of technical or artistic performance, but must serve as a theological and spiritual medium that leads the faithful deeper into the mystery of faith. The lack of theological understanding and liturgical music catechesis among OMK is evident in the frequent misplacement of songs and the selection of musical styles that do not align with the structure and meaning of the liturgy. This reveals a gap between the spirit of service and the depth of liturgical comprehension.

On the other hand, the study also identifies a number of promising potentials. The initiation of vocal training and the incorporation of local language songs indicate an intention to grow and enhance the quality of liturgical music ministry. However, the long-term success of this formation depends heavily on the provision of formal and systematic guidance from the Church. Without adequate education on the theology of liturgical music, OMK's creativity runs the risk of deviating from the fundamental principle that liturgical music is a form of prayer, not merely entertainment.

This finding is strongly aligned with theoretical perspectives regarding the role of OMK in liturgical music. As Paulus Junaidi (2021) states, liturgical music must lead the faithful to God, with songs that reflect Church teachings, support liturgical texts, and allow for the full and active participation of the entire congregation. OMK as liturgical ministers must not rely solely on technical skills, but are also expected to internalize the spirit of the liturgy itself (Saraswati, 2020). Liturgical music is a spiritual bridge that deepens faith, rather than merely a form of artistic expression. Moreover, Sepen Kristian (2021) emphasizes that for the

younger generation, liturgical music can be an important medium to express faith and emotional involvement in the Eucharistic celebration. However, this potential can only be realized if musicians understand the transcendent role of liturgical music and do not view it merely as a routine task or form of entertainment.

In conclusion, while there are promising early signs of choir development at the station, a more structured and theologically grounded approach is needed to ensure that OMK's creativity and enthusiasm align with the identity of liturgical music as a means of glorifying God, proclaiming the faith, and fostering ecclesial unity.

Use of Musical Instruments with the Approval of the Local Priest

This study reveals that, up to the present time, there is no written reference or official guideline available regarding the use of musical instruments in the liturgy within the parish. This finding is based on direct observations and conversations with both the parish priest and catechists, who confirmed the absence of reference documents that could be utilized by the faithful, particularly Catholic Youth (Orang Muda Katolik or OMK), in the liturgical use of musical instruments. This points to a normative vacuum that should otherwise serve as a foundation for equipping liturgical music ministers to remain within the framework of Church teaching.

Furthermore, interviews with informants indicate that there has never been a formal consultation process between OMK and Church authorities concerning the use of musical instruments. The directions provided are generally oral and informal, communicated through homilies, brief admonitions, or spontaneous advice from the priest. In such a context, OMK tend to act based on personal or collective interpretation without clear theological and liturgical guidance. This irregularity reflects the weakness of the liturgical formation structure, especially in the technical and spiritual aspects of music.

Due to the lack of a systematic formation system, OMK in the outstations mostly imitate practices conducted by OMK at the parish level. This model of imitation becomes the only way for them to understand how musical instruments are to be used in the celebration of the Eucharist, even though it is not always grounded in strong theological or liturgical principles. This dependency on imitation risks perpetuating practices that are inconsistent with official Catholic guidelines and hinders the development of deeper liturgical understanding among OMK.

These findings are highly relevant when connected with the theoretical framework regarding the role of OMK in the implementation of liturgical music. Paulus Junaidi (2021) emphasizes that liturgical music is not merely a matter of aesthetics or musical creativity, but a means of prayer intended to direct the hearts of the faithful toward God. Both songs and instruments used in the liturgy must meet the criteria of sacredness, spiritual beauty, and appropriateness for worship. Therefore, the absence of formal guidance and formation significantly undermines this ideal, as it distances OMK from the understanding that liturgical music cannot be separated from the spirit of faith and the teachings of the Church.

As Desti Saraswati (2020) affirms, the role of a liturgical musician is not only viewed from the technical aspect but also from the spiritual dimension. Liturgical musicians are called to enrich the atmosphere of worship through a spirit of prayer, to foster congregational participation, and to create spiritual unity within the celebration of the Eucharist. In practice, however, the lack of written guidelines and formal direction within the parish becomes a major obstacle for OMK in realizing this role in its fullness.

Sepe Kristian (2021) also emphasizes that music, especially for the younger generation, possesses a transcendental function that can draw the faithful deeper into the mystery of faith. Yet, without an understanding of the theological and liturgical appropriateness of the songs and instruments used, this function may instead turn into a distraction or even a degradation of the sacred meaning of the liturgy itself.

Therefore, this study affirms that the absence of official guidelines and adequate formation systems represents a pressing issue that must be addressed. OMK hold great potential to enrich liturgical celebrations, but without a strong foundation in formation, their participation may inadvertently drift away from the essence of liturgical music as a vehicle for prayer, the proclamation of faith, and the celebration of the mystery of Christ. It is thus essential for the Church to give serious attention to the provision of written directives and the development of holistic liturgical formation programs for OMK, so that their role may truly align with the teachings and spirituality of Catholic liturgy.

Musical Instruments in Accordance with Liturgical Norms and Local Culture

This study found that Catholic Youth (Orang Muda Katolik or OMK) in the outstations have demonstrated enthusiasm in supporting liturgical celebrations through the use of various musical instruments, including guitars, cajóns, flutes, and keyboard-simulated piano sounds. Although these instruments are not the primary ones recommended by official Church documents—which prioritize the pipe organ or culturally contextual traditional instruments—their use reflects a spirit of participation and an initial effort by OMK to engage actively and creatively in the liturgy.

However, the findings also reveal that the application of inculturation principles in liturgical music has not been fully realized. Interviews with informants show that the lack of facilities, particularly the absence of traditional instruments that align with Catholic spirituality, is a major obstacle. In addition, the absence of catechesis or instruction regarding the proper use of musical instruments in the liturgical context has resulted in OMK having limited theological understanding when selecting and playing instruments.

Another significant observation is that instruments such as guitars and cajóns are often used to create a festive atmosphere or to maintain the rhythm of songs, without deeper consideration of the symbolic and theological meanings of liturgical music. This indicates that some OMK still perceive liturgical music merely as an accompaniment to enhance the mood, rather than as a form of prayer that leads the faithful into the mystery of faith. As emphasized by Paulus Junaidi (2021), liturgical music must meet three essential criteria: sacredness, spiritual beauty, and liturgical appropriateness. Musical instruments used in the liturgy should not simply aim to entertain, but should deepen the experience of faith and support the liturgical texts in an integrated manner.

This situation is also closely related to the spiritual role of liturgical musicians. As Desti Saraswati (2020) points out, the role of OMK as musicians is not only to display technical skills, but also to be grounded in a liturgical spirit and an awareness of the sacred nature of worship. When musicians understand that their task is to enrich the celebration of faith, their choice of instruments and their manner of playing music will be directed toward fostering an atmosphere of prayer and strengthening the unity of the community in the Eucharist.

Furthermore, Sepen Kristian (2021) underscores that liturgical music has a transcendental function, especially for young people. Music opens a path into the mystery of Christ more deeply, not only through words, but also through sounds and tones that move the heart. When music is performed without spiritual understanding, this transcendental potential is hindered or even lost.

Therefore, the findings of this study indicate an urgent need for more systematic formation of OMK in the use of musical instruments in the liturgy. The spirit of involvement and creativity that has already begun to grow among OMK must be guided and deepened through proper liturgical education, so that their role is not limited to technical participation, but truly supports the ultimate purpose of the liturgy: leading the entire congregation into a deeper encounter with Christ through the celebration of faith.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the implementation of liturgical music norms by Catholic Youth (Orang Muda Katolik or OMK) at St. Raphael Station in Saitnihuta reflects a promising spirit of involvement. OMK are actively engaged in liturgical music ministry by using songs from official Church sources such as Puji Syukur, and by playing instruments such as guitars, cajóns, and keyboards to support the atmosphere of the Eucharistic celebration. This trend indicates an emerging awareness of the importance of liturgical music as an integral part of prayer and the proclamation of faith.

Nevertheless, this implementation process has not yet fully aligned with the liturgical norms of the Catholic Church. The absence of written guidelines and structured formation has led OMK to rely heavily on imitation and personal experience when selecting songs or using instruments. Moreover, the use of songs from outside the Catholic tradition and the instrumental focus on creating ambiance suggest a need for deeper understanding of the theological meaning and spiritual function of liturgical music.

Therefore, concrete measures are needed, including the provision of official guidelines and the development of ongoing formation programs, to guide OMK's active participation in a more profound and liturgically appropriate direction. With proper accompaniment, the creativity and enthusiasm of OMK can continue to grow within the framework of sacredness,

spiritual beauty, and liturgical appropriateness, thereby strengthening their role as ministers of prayer who meaningfully support the celebration of faith.

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