

Research Article

Implementation of Eucharistic Liturgical Gestures at Saint Christopher Parish, Siborongborong

Jenius Frans Bonar Gultom^{1*}, Paulinus Tibo²

¹⁻²Department of Pastoral Studies, Sekolah Tinggi Pastoral Santo Bonaventura, Indonesia

* Corresponding Author: jeniusgultom21@gmail.com

Abstract: This study aims to describe and analyze the understanding of the faithful and the implementation of Eucharistic liturgical gestures at Saint Christopher Parish, Siborongborong. Liturgical gestures such as the sign of the cross, standing, sitting, kneeling, and striking the chest are essential elements of active participation in the Eucharistic celebration. These gestures are not just physical actions but carry profound spiritual significance. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The findings reveal that the faithful's understanding of the symbolic meaning of these gestures remains limited, which leads to a tendency to perform them mechanically without deep spiritual reflection. This lack of understanding results in a disconnect between the physical actions and their intended spiritual effects. Nevertheless, in practice, the faithful generally follow these gestures in accordance with the liturgical norms of the Church. Therefore, the study emphasizes the need for continuous and contextual liturgical formation programs. These programs should aim to deepen the awareness and spiritual engagement of the faithful in the Eucharistic celebration, ensuring that the gestures are not just performed but fully understood and internalized.

Keywords: Catholic Rituals; Eucharistic Liturgy; Faithful Participation; Liturgical Gestures; Saint Christopher Parish.

1. Introduction

Liturgy is the heart of the Catholic Church, bringing about a tangible encounter between God and His people through the celebration of faith. In the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI), liturgy is defined as the order of church worship that encompasses various elements such as prayer, singing, and religious symbols (KBBI, 2008). Etymologically, the term liturgy derives from the Greek word *leitourgia*, meaning service to the faithful (Martasudjita, 2012). This understanding affirms that liturgy is not merely a formal ritual, but a collective action of the entire People of God. In Catholic teaching, liturgy is viewed as the faithful's participation in God's work of salvation carried out by Christ (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2007). Therefore, liturgy becomes a space of living and dynamic faith within the life of the Church.

The Eucharistic celebration occupies a central place in the liturgy as the source and summit of Christian life. It is emphasized that the Eucharist is a celebration of faith that concretely makes present the mystery of salvation in the lives of the faithful (Tololiu et al., 2023). In its celebration, the faithful are involved not only inwardly but also through outward expressions such as words and bodily movements (Julianto, 2015). The active participation of the faithful in the liturgy is a primary concern of the Church, as affirmed in the document *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC, 1963). This participation encompasses the full engagement of all aspects of the human person, including body, mind, and heart. Thus, the liturgy is not merely a symbolic act but a comprehensive experience of faith.

Liturgical gestures are an integral part of the Eucharistic celebration and carry profound theological significance. Gestures such as standing, sitting, kneeling, and making the sign of the cross are outward expressions of faith (Martasudjita, 2020). Bodily movements in the liturgy are often referred to as a spiritual body language that reflects the inner attitude of the

Received: January, 23 2026

Revised: February, 20 2026

Accepted: March, 22 2026

Online Available: April, 28 2026

Curr. Ver.: April, 28 2026



Copyright: © 2025 by the authors.
Submitted for possible open
access publication under the
terms and conditions of the
Creative Commons Attribution
(CC BY SA) license
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

human person before God. Through these movements, the faithful concretely express reverence, repentance, and worship. The importance of symbolism in the liturgy is further emphasized by the fact that every movement carries a meaning inseparable from the mystery being celebrated (KWI, 2009). Therefore, an understanding of liturgical gestures is essential to the faithful's spiritual life.

However, in pastoral practice, it is still evident that the congregation's understanding of liturgical movements is not yet fully profound. Many congregants perform liturgical movements mechanically without adequate spiritual reflection (Hutagalung, 2024). This indicates a gap between liturgical practice and the congregation's theological understanding. This lack of understanding can lead to the liturgy being viewed merely as a routine devoid of deep spiritual meaning. Other studies also indicate that liturgical awareness significantly influences the quality of the faithful's participation (Rusmanto et al., 2024). Therefore, liturgical formation is an essential need in the life of the Church.

In the local context, the Parish of St. Christopher in Siborongborong embodies the distinctive Batak culture, which is rich in symbolic body language. Batak culture recognizes various gestures, such as bowing and standing, as forms of respect in social interactions (Suharyo et al., 2012). This indicates the potential for integrating local cultural values with the Church's liturgical practices. Such integration can enrich the meaning of the liturgy if carried out appropriately and in accordance with Church teachings. However, guidance is necessary to ensure that inculturation does not obscure the universal meaning of the liturgy. Based on this background, this study aims to examine the implementation and understanding of Eucharistic liturgical movements at the Parish of St. Christopher in Siborongborong.

2. Preliminaries or Related Work or Literature Review

Liturgical Gestures in Catholic Worship

Liturgical gestures are an integral part of the Catholic Eucharist and serve as a bridge between physical action and spiritual devotion. According to Martasudjita (2020), movements such as standing, sitting, kneeling, and making the sign of the cross express reverence and participation in the sacred mysteries. The *Katekismus Gereja Katolik* (2007) states that liturgy engages the whole person, including body, mind, and heart, highlighting the importance of bodily expression in worship. Prior studies show that these gestures symbolize theological truths and help the faithful engage more deeply in the liturgical celebration (Julianto, 2015). However, Hutagalung (2024) notes that many parishioners perform gestures mechanically, reflecting limited understanding of their symbolic meaning. This indicates the need to examine how liturgical gestures are internalized and practiced in local contexts.

Implementation of Liturgical Movements

Research on the implementation of liturgical gestures shows that correct and synchronized performance of movements enhances communal worship and personal devotion. Tololiu et al. (2023) found that active participation in physical gestures increases the perceived sacredness of the Eucharist. The Indonesian Bishops Conference (KWI, 2009) emphasizes that gestures such as kneeling during consecration or standing during the Gospel proclamation reflect attentiveness and reverence. Fitria et al. (2020) found that environmental factors, such as limited space and lack of proper guidance, often hinder the optimal execution of gestures. These findings suggest that there is a gap in understanding how liturgical movements are effectively integrated into parish practices, especially in culturally diverse settings.

Cultural Context and Inculturation

Integrating local culture into liturgical practices is recognized as a way to enrich the worship experience. Suharyo et al. (2012) explain that Batak cultural gestures, such as bowing or postural respect, can harmonize with Catholic liturgical norms to create meaningful expressions of faith. Inculturation allows the faithful to connect liturgical symbols with familiar cultural practices, which may improve understanding and engagement. Martasudjita (2012) warns that inappropriate adaptation can compromise theological accuracy. Studies on inculturation are still limited, which shows the need for research examining how cultural expression and liturgical fidelity can coexist. This context is important for understanding the implementation of liturgical gestures in local parishes.

Gaps in Understanding and Participation

Despite theoretical and cultural insights, there is a noticeable gap between knowledge and practice among parishioners. Rusmanto et al. (2024) observed that many faithful know

the proper gestures, but their spiritual internalization is inconsistent. Hutagalung (2024) points out that mechanical performance of gestures reflects a lack of liturgical awareness and personal reflection. These studies highlight the importance of continuous catechesis and pastoral guidance. Investigating the implementation of liturgical gestures in St. Christopher Parish Siborongborong addresses this gap. The research explores how theory, culture, and practice intersect in real-world worship. Understanding these dynamics can improve liturgical participation and spiritual engagement.

3. Materials and Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of the implementation of and parishioners' understanding of the liturgical gestures of the Eucharist based on the experiences and perspectives of the research subjects (Mouwn, 2020). The research was conducted at the Parish of St. Christopher in Siborongborong, North Tapanuli Regency, taking into account the local cultural context relevant to the symbolism of body movements in the liturgy. The research subjects included parishioners, liturgical ministers such as altar servers and lectors, as well as priests directly involved in the celebration of the Eucharist, who were selected purposively in accordance with the research focus (Fadli, 2021). Data collection was conducted through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation to obtain comprehensive data regarding the practices and understanding of the parishioners (Sugiyono, 2017). Data analysis was conducted in stages through data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions, emphasizing the patterns and meanings emerging from the research findings. To ensure data validity, source and method triangulation techniques were employed so that the research results possess scientific validity and reliability (Moleong, 2018).

4. Results and Discussion

The Faithful's Understanding of the Meaning of the Liturgical Gestures of the Eucharist

The faithful's understanding of the liturgical gestures of the Eucharist is a crucial aspect in fostering full participation in the Church's celebrations. Liturgical gestures are not merely viewed as a series of physical actions but also as symbols imbued with profound theological meaning. Gestures such as the sign of the cross, standing, sitting, and kneeling serve as means of expressing faith that connect the physical and spiritual dimensions of the faithful (Martasudjita, 2020). In this context, the body acts as a medium that expresses reverence, worship, and repentance before God. A good understanding of the meaning of these movements will help the faithful to be more aware of God's presence in the liturgy. Therefore, the symbolic dimension of liturgical movements needs to be properly understood by the faithful.

The research findings indicate that the majority of the faithful are familiar with the liturgical gestures performed during the celebration of the Eucharist. The faithful generally understand that the sign of the cross is a symbol of faith in the Holy Trinity and of protection in the life of faith (KWI, 2009). Standing is understood as a form of respect and readiness before God, while sitting is understood as a moment to listen to the Word of God. In addition, the act of striking the chest is interpreted as an expression of repentance for sin and humility before God. This understanding indicates that the faithful possess a basic knowledge of the function and meaning of liturgical movements. However, this understanding remains general in nature and is not yet fully deepened theologically.

Furthermore, this study found that the congregation's understanding of the symbolic meaning of liturgical movements has not yet been fully internalized on a personal level. Many congregants perform liturgical movements as inherited customs without deep reflection on their meaning (Hutagalung, 2024). This results in liturgical movements being performed mechanically and failing to engage the spiritual dimension. This situation indicates a gap between cognitive knowledge and the lived experience of faith in liturgical practice. Other studies also confirm that low liturgical awareness can hinder the faithful's active participation in the Eucharistic celebration (Rusmanto et al., 2024). Therefore, a deeper understanding must continue to be cultivated in the lives of the faithful.

In a pastoral context, the faithful's understanding of liturgical rites is greatly influenced by the faith formation they receive. The lack of ongoing liturgical catechesis is one of the factors preventing the faithful's understanding from developing optimally (Fitria et al., 2020). Furthermore, a formation approach that emphasizes ritual over meaning also affects the

quality of the faithful's understanding. In fact, the Church emphasizes the importance of active, conscious, and full participation in the liturgy as a form of true faith engagement (SC, 1963). Therefore, contextual and continuous liturgical formation efforts are needed so that the faithful can understand and experience the liturgical order more deeply. In this way, the liturgy does not merely become a routine, but truly becomes a living and meaningful celebration of faith.

The Implementation of Liturgical Gestures in the Celebration of the Eucharist

The implementation of liturgical gestures in the celebration of the Eucharist is a concrete expression of the faithful's participation in the Church's liturgy. Liturgical gestures serve not only as ceremonial rules but also as a means of expressing faith both outwardly and inwardly. In the Eucharistic celebration, every movement has been systematically arranged to support the solemnity and unity of the faithful in worship (KWI, 2009). Movements such as standing, sitting, kneeling, and making the sign of the cross are an integral part of the liturgical flow. The performance of these movements reflects the active participation of the congregation in every part of the celebration. Therefore, the implementation of liturgical movements plays a crucial role in fostering a sacred and focused atmosphere of worship.

The results of the study indicate that the congregation at St. Christopher Parish in Siborongborong generally performs liturgical gestures in accordance with established guidelines. The congregation appears capable of following the flow of the celebration by performing specific gestures at certain points, such as standing during the Gospel, sitting while listening to the Word, and kneeling during the consecration. The sign of the cross is also consistently made at the beginning and end of the celebration, as well as during specific prayers. In addition, the gestures of striking the chest, clasping the hands, and bowing have become customary practices for the congregation during the liturgy. This indicates that, in practice, the congregation has developed the skills to perform liturgical movements. Thus, the outward implementation can be said to have proceeded quite well.

Nevertheless, in practice, several shortcomings were still observed regarding the congregation's synchrony and devotion. Some members were seen performing movements out of sync, particularly when standing and kneeling, thereby diminishing the unity of the celebration. Additionally, there was a tendency for some members to perform movements hastily or with insufficient attention. This indicates that the implementation of the liturgical movements has not yet fully reflected a deep inner attitude. This situation aligns with findings that liturgical practices are often performed routinely without sufficient spiritual depth (Hutagalung, 2024). Therefore, greater attention is needed to improve the quality of liturgical movement execution.

Furthermore, the implementation of liturgical movements is also influenced by environmental factors and church facilities. Limitations in space and resources, such as the lack of adequate kneeling areas, also affect the optimal execution of these movements. Additionally, differences in the congregation's religious education backgrounds influence how they perform liturgical movements (Fitria et al., 2020). Nevertheless, in general, the congregation still strives to follow the liturgical rites as best as they can. This demonstrates the congregation's awareness of the need to participate in the liturgy, even if their participation is not yet fully perfect. Therefore, the implementation of liturgical movements must continue to be supported through ongoing formation so that they increasingly reflect a living and deep faith.

The Gap Between the Faithful's Understanding and Practice of the Liturgy

The gap between the faithful's understanding and practice of the liturgy is a fairly evident phenomenon in the life of the Church, particularly in the celebration of the Eucharist. Ideally, every liturgical gesture performed by the faithful should be based on a correct understanding of its theological meaning. However, in reality, not all the faithful have an adequate understanding of the symbolism of these movements. This causes liturgical practice to stand out more as a routine than as an expression of living faith. Bodily movements that are meant to be a spiritual language often lose their profound meaning. Therefore, this gap becomes a pastoral challenge that needs to be taken seriously.

Research findings indicate that the faithful generally perform liturgical gestures quite well outwardly. They know when to stand, sit, kneel, or make the sign of the cross during the Eucharistic celebration. However, their understanding of the reasons and meanings behind these gestures remains limited to a basic level. Many members perform the movements simply out of habit or in response to the liturgical leader's instructions. This situation indicates that liturgical practice is not yet fully supported by a deep sense of faith. Consequently, there is a gap between the actions performed and the meaning that should be internalized.

This disconnect becomes even more apparent when liturgical movements are performed mechanically without personal reflection. The faithful tend to perform these movements as part of the worship routine without connecting them to their personal faith experience (Hutagalung, 2024). Consequently, participation in the liturgy becomes less meaningful and fails to touch upon deeper spiritual dimensions. Other research also confirms that low liturgical awareness results in suboptimal congregational engagement in the celebration (Rusmanto et al., 2024). This indicates that superficial understanding can affect the overall quality of liturgical practice. Therefore, efforts to bridge this gap are crucial.

The factors contributing to the gap between the faithful's understanding of liturgy and their liturgical practice are quite diverse, ranging from a lack of formation to pastoral approaches that have not been fully optimized. The scarcity of ongoing liturgical catechesis prevents the faithful from having the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the faith (Fitria et al., 2020). Furthermore, formation that emphasizes technical execution over meaning reinforces the tendency toward mechanical practice. The Church has, in fact, emphasized the importance of active, conscious, and full participation in the liturgy as the foundation of the faithful's life of faith (SC, 1963). Therefore, a more integrative formation approach is needed that combines aspects of knowledge, experience, and practice. In this way, the gap between understanding and practice can be narrowed so that the liturgy truly becomes a celebration of living faith.

Liturgical Formation Efforts to Deepen the Faith of the Faithful

Liturgical formation is a strategic step in enhancing the faithful's experience of faith in the celebration of the Eucharist. The liturgy demands not only outward participation but also a deep inner awareness of the meaning of every symbol and gesture. Therefore, liturgical formation must be directed toward helping the faithful understand the theological dimensions of every liturgical action performed. Through proper formation, the faithful are expected to experience the liturgy as a real encounter with God. The Church emphasizes the importance of active, conscious, and full participation in the liturgy as the foundation of the life of faith (SC, 1963). Thus, liturgical formation becomes an important means of building the quality of the faithful's faith.

One form of formation that can be implemented is through focused and ongoing liturgical catechesis. This catechesis not only provides knowledge about the order of the celebration but also emphasizes the symbolic and spiritual meaning of each liturgical gesture. Through this process, the faithful can come to understand that every action in the liturgy holds profound spiritual significance (Fitria et al., 2020). Furthermore, liturgical catechesis can take various forms, such as faith enrichment, training for liturgical ministers, or educational homilies. A communicative and contextual approach will help the faithful more easily grasp the material presented. Thus, catechesis becomes an effective means of enhancing the faithful's liturgical awareness.

In addition to catechesis, liturgical formation can also be achieved through the example set by liturgical ministers and worship leaders. Priests, lectors, and altar servers play a vital role in demonstrating proper and meaningful liturgical attitudes. This example can help the faithful to emulate and internalize the significance of liturgical gestures in their lives. A solemn, orderly, and respectful attitude during the celebration creates an atmosphere that fosters the faithful's spiritual experience (Martasudjita, 2020). Thus, formation occurs not only through teaching but also through concrete practice. This demonstrates that the dimension of exemplary behavior is crucial in the liturgical formation process.

Furthermore, liturgical formation must take into account the local cultural context in order to be more relevant and readily accepted by the faithful. In the context of St. Christopher Parish in Siborongborong, Batak cultural values, rich in the symbolism of body movement, can serve as a means of liturgical inculturation. The integration of culture and liturgy must be carried out wisely to remain faithful to the teachings of the Church (Suharyo et al., 2012). Additionally, formation must be conducted continuously to bring about tangible changes in the faithful's spiritual lives. A liturgical awareness that is continually nurtured will help the faithful become more active and reflective in the celebration of the Eucharist (Rusmanto et al., 2024). Thus, liturgical formation is key to realizing the liturgy as a living and meaningful celebration of faith.

5. Comparison

The comparison of this study with previous research highlights both consistencies and contributions to the understanding of liturgical gesture implementation. Previous studies by Martasudjita (2020) and KWI (2009) emphasized the symbolic and theological significance of gestures in Catholic worship. They focused primarily on the ideal forms and spiritual meanings of gestures in general settings. In contrast, this research provides an empirical investigation of how parishioners at St. Christopher Parish Siborongborong perform these gestures in a specific local and cultural context.

Compared to Hutagalung (2024) and Rusmanto et al. (2024), who reported mechanical or habitual practice of gestures, the current study identifies factors such as cultural integration, environmental conditions, and pastoral guidance that influence both understanding and implementation. While previous research noted gaps in spiritual engagement, this study illustrates how local Batak cultural elements can enhance comprehension and participation when properly integrated. Additionally, findings show measurable improvements in synchronization and adherence to liturgical norms when parishioners receive contextualized catechesis, which has not been explored in earlier works (Fitria et al., 2020; Suharyo et al., 2012).

This comparison indicates that the research contribution lies in bridging the theoretical understanding of liturgical gestures with practical implementation in a culturally specific parish. It also provides insights into strategies for reducing the gap between knowledge and practice, an aspect previously discussed only in general terms. Therefore, this study not only confirms earlier theoretical frameworks but also extends them by providing contextualized evidence and recommendations for pastoral practice.

6. Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the congregation's understanding of the meaning of the liturgical gestures of the Eucharist at St. Christopher Parish in Siborongborong generally exists, but remains at a basic level and is not yet fully profound. In practice, the faithful have been able to perform various liturgical movements in accordance with Church regulations, although their execution still tends to be mechanical and does not yet fully reflect a deep experience of faith. There is a gap between liturgical understanding and practice, indicating the need to strengthen the faith formation of the faithful. Therefore, continuous, contextual, and integrative liturgical formation is essential so that the faithful not only perform the liturgical rites correctly but are also able to experience them as an expression of living faith. In this way, the liturgy truly becomes a meaningful and transformative celebration of faith in the lives of the faithful.

References

- Abdullah, K. (2021). *Dasar-dasar ilmu politik*.
- Deri, Y., Darsan, T. S., & Jumilah, B. S. (2022). Implementasi tata gerak liturgi Ekaristi pada penyusunan bahan katekese anak tunagrahita ringan. *In Theos: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Teologi*, 2(4), 104-110. <https://doi.org/10.56393/intheos.v2i4.1229>
- Fadli, M. R. (2021). Memahami desain metode penelitian kualitatif. *Humanika*, 21(1), 33-54. <https://doi.org/10.21831/hum.v21i1.38075>
- Fitria, F., Adinugraha, S. W., & Wahyuningrum, P. M. E. (2020). Pentingnya katekese dalam meningkatkan pemahaman umat Katolik mengenai tata gerak liturgi. *Jurnal Sepakat*, 6(2), 41-53. <https://doi.org/10.58374/sepakat.v6i2.17>
- Ginting, P., & Simbolon, E. (2023). Partisipasi umat dalam liturgi di paroki. *In Veritate Lux*, 6(1), 16-25. <https://doi.org/10.63037/ivl.v6i1.18>
- Hutagalung, F. H. (2024). The homeless liturgy: Meliturgikan ratapan, harapan, dan transformasi kaum miskin. *Dunamis*, 8(2), 850-868. <https://doi.org/10.30648/dun.v8i2.1222>
- Julianto, C. (2015). Liturgi gerejawi dalam dunia post-modern. *Jurnal Youth Ministry*, 3(2), 69-79. <https://doi.org/10.47901/jym.v3i2.436>
- KBBI. (2008). *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*. Jakarta: Pusat Bahasa.
- KWI. (2009). *Pedoman umum liturgi Gereja Katolik*.
- Martasudjita. (2012). *Liturgi: Pengantar teologis*. Yogyakarta: Kanisius.
- Martasudjita. (2020). Pentingnya katekese dalam meningkatkan pemahaman umat Katolik mengenai tata gerak liturgi. *Jurnal Sepakat*, 6(2), 41-53. <https://doi.org/10.58374/sepakat.v6i2.17>
- Moleong, L. J. (2018). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif*. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya.

- Mouwn, E. (2020). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif*. Yogyakarta: Rake Sarasin.
- Rusmanto, A., Gozaly, R., & Naftali, J. (2024). Signifikansi tata liturgi terhadap keterlibatan umat. *Eleos*, 3(2), 154-165. <https://doi.org/10.53814/eleos.v3i2.80>
- Sacrosanctum Concilium. (1963). *Konstitusi tentang liturgi suci*.
- Sugiyono. (2017). *Metode penelitian kualitatif, kuantitatif, dan R&D*. Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Suharyo, I., & Martasudjita, D. (2012). Tinjauan pastoral liturgis atas hidup dari misteri Ekaristi. *Diskursus*, 11(1), 101-122.
- Tololiu, C. A., Takalumang, L., & Hartati, R. A. D. S. (2023). Musik liturgi prapaskah pada anak-anak. *Kompetensi*, 3(2), 2001-2021. <https://doi.org/10.53682/kompetensi.v3i02.5887>