

Liturgical Music Practices in Worship at GMIM Pniel Watulambot Congregation

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: January 12, 2026	This study examines the practice of liturgical music in worship at GMIM Pniel Watulambot Congregation, focusing on musical implementation, the readiness and competence of music ministers, team coordination, and congregational participation. The study was motivated by differences in musical competence, preparation, coordination, and congregational responses observed in regular Sunday worship and special services. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, with data collected through literature review, direct observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The research was conducted in February 2026 at GMIM Pniel Watulambot Congregation, Minahasa, North Sulawesi, involving members of the music ministry team selected purposively based on their experience and involvement in worship music. Data were analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings indicate that liturgical music functions not only as accompaniment but also as a medium for creating the worship atmosphere, directing congregational attention, supporting congregational singing, and facilitating the appreciation of liturgical meaning. Musical implementation varies according to the theme and purpose of worship, with special services generally receiving more intensive preparation. Differences were identified in song mastery, pitch accuracy, rhythmic stability, tempo, dynamics, and coordination. Sudden changes in team composition and limited rehearsal time also affected musical consistency and congregational participation. The study concludes that strengthening liturgical music ministry requires continuous competency development, structured rehearsals, effective coordination, and systematic personnel management while maintaining active congregational participation as its primary orientation.
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1. Introduction

The Evangelical Christian Church in Minahasa (Gereja Masehi Injili di Minahasa/GMIM) is a Protestant church rooted in the Calvinist theological tradition, in which worship is understood as an encounter between God and His people, centered on the Word of God and carried out regularly and orderly. Worship is not merely a weekly routine but an act of devotion with theological and spiritual dimensions, in which each element contributes to the spiritual growth of the congregation. Within this context, church music is an integral part of worship that shapes congregational experience and participation. Bjorlin (2025) emphasizes the formative power of congregational singing in the spiritual life of believers, while from a Calvinist perspective, music is intended not as performance or entertainment but as a means for the congregation to collectively express faith (Rice et al., 2022). Consequently, music ministers have responsibilities extending beyond technical skills to spiritual responsibilities in supporting congregational participation (Jardinal et al., 2023). Thornton (2023) further explains that contemporary worship music has a complex relationship with performance, as singers, stage arrangements, lighting, and music production can influence congregants' experiences while remaining oriented toward worship and participation. Recent research also shows that liturgical music can shape emotional experiences and encourage congregational engagement through singing and bodily responses during worship (Wong & Purmanasari, 2024). Thus, liturgical music should be understood not merely in terms of musical performance but also in relation to congregational experience, participation, and spiritual formation.

GMIM Pniel Watulambot Congregation is located in Watulambot Village, Tondano Barat District, Minahasa Regency, North Sulawesi, Indonesia, and is part of Tondano V within the organizational structure of GMIM. The congregation consists of 22 church cells, 463 families, and 1,982 members (Senduk, 2020). Sunday worship is conducted in three sessions, namely an early morning service at 5:30 a.m., a morning service at 9:30 a.m., and an evening service at 7:00 p.m., each involving different congregational compositions. The early morning service is generally attended by older congregants, whereas the morning and evening services involve more diverse age groups, potentially influencing patterns of participation, including congregational singing and responses to music. Worship is guided by the GMIM worship order known as MTPJ (Menjabarkan Trilogi Pembangunan Jemaat), which is systematically arranged according to the liturgical year; therefore, liturgical elements and congregational songs are selected according to the theme and ecclesiastical season (Lakoy et al., 2023). The music ministry is coordinated by the Music Commission (Mendrofa, 2024), with each worship session served by a team consisting of three singers and one instrumentalist. Each team is responsible for leading congregational praise and accompanying songs according to the predetermined order of worship. This structure demonstrates the importance of role distribution, preparation, and coordination in liturgical music. Nugrahu et al. (2023) found that ensemble training can improve church musicians' skills and the quality of worship accompaniment, thereby supporting congregational engagement. The music ministry is therefore expected not only to function effectively from a technical perspective but also to facilitate deeper congregational participation in the liturgy and singing (Rumengan, 2024).

However, the implementation of liturgical music at GMIM Pniel Watulambot faces several challenges related to the readiness, musical abilities, and coordination of ministry teams. Differences in musical readiness and ability can be observed in song mastery, pitch accuracy, ensemble cohesion, and the accompanist's ability to maintain tempo and dynamics (Darmojuwono et al., 1980), while Pasaribu (2025) emphasizes the importance of accompaniment techniques, lyric interpretation, rhythm and meter, tempo, dynamics, and phrasing in supporting congregational singing. Variations in the musical background and ministry experience of team members may also influence performance quality (Rumengan, 2023), and unexpected replacement of team members can affect team coordination and

readiness (Tobing et al., 2023). Such differences are particularly evident between special services, such as anniversary celebrations, which generally involve more structured rehearsals and better coordination, and regular Sunday services in which preparation may be constrained by rehearsal time and team availability. Beyond technical competence, church music can contribute to a vibrant worship atmosphere and encourage active congregational singing (Tamba et al., 2026), while Bemey (2026) demonstrates that church music also regulates the flow of worship, distributes roles between music leaders and congregants, and contributes to spiritual experience and character formation. Bjorlin (2025) similarly emphasizes the formative capacity of congregational singing, whereas Kim (2022) highlights the importance of music ministers' preparedness, worship understanding, sound quality, and coordination in supporting active participation. Therefore, liturgical music practice at GMIM Pniel Watulambot should be understood as a comprehensive process involving music ministers' preparedness and abilities, team coordination, song selection and performance, instrumental accompaniment, and congregational responses. Based on this context, this study aims to describe liturgical music practices in Sunday worship at GMIM Pniel Watulambot Congregation, focusing on the forms of musical implementation, the readiness and musical abilities of music ministers, team coordination, and their relationship to congregational participation in worship.

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research method. This method was selected because the study aimed to understand, describe, and interpret in depth the practice of liturgical music during worship services at GMIM Pniel Watulambot Congregation. Qualitative research is used to understand a phenomenon within its natural context by emphasizing the experiences, perspectives, and actions of the research participants as the primary sources of data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A descriptive qualitative approach enables researchers to describe phenomena based on data obtained directly from the field without manipulating the research conditions (Haryoko et al., 2020). Therefore, the researcher was directly involved in observing, collecting, interpreting, and making sense of data related to the practice of liturgical music during worship services.

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary research instrument and is responsible for determining the research focus, collecting data, interpreting findings, and drawing conclusions based on field evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Accordingly, the research was conducted in a natural setting to allow the practice of liturgical music to be observed as it occurs during regular worship activities. Data obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation were compared and interpreted to develop a comprehensive understanding of the practice of liturgical music at GMIM Pniel Watulambot Congregation.

2.1 Research Location and Time

This study was conducted in February 2026 at GMIM Pniel Watulambot Congregation, West Tondano District, Minahasa Regency, North Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. The research site was selected because the congregation has ongoing music ministry activities that are relevant to the focus of this study, particularly the involvement of the music ministry team in worship services.

2.2 Research Subjects

The research subjects were members of the music ministry team or music commission at GMIM Pniel Watulambot Congregation, particularly those directly involved in providing musical services during worship. Participants were selected purposively based on their involvement, experience, and knowledge of the liturgical music practices under investigation. In qualitative research, purposive selection of participants enables researchers to obtain rich

and relevant information concerning the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

2.3 Data Collection Techniques

Data collection techniques refer to systematic procedures used by researchers to obtain empirical data relevant to the research focus. In qualitative research, data are collected in natural settings from multiple sources to facilitate an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Haryoko et al., 2020). The data collection techniques employed in this study consisted of literature review, observation, interviews, and documentation.

a. Literature Review

The literature review was conducted by reading, examining, and reviewing various scholarly sources, including books, journal articles, and previous studies related to liturgical music, music in worship, church music ministry, and musical practices in congregational contexts. The literature review aimed to obtain a conceptual and theoretical foundation for understanding and interpreting the research findings. The use of relevant literature in qualitative research also helps researchers position the phenomenon under investigation within an appropriate scholarly context (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

b. Observation

Direct observation was conducted at GMIM Pniel Watulambot Congregation to obtain data concerning the practice of liturgical music as it naturally occurs during worship services. The researcher observed the forms of liturgical music practices, the involvement of the music ministry team, the use of musical instruments, the relationship between music and the sequence of worship, and the role of music in creating the atmosphere of worship. Observation in qualitative research enables researchers to obtain data based on behaviors and activities that occur directly within their natural context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The results of the observations were recorded in field notes and subsequently analyzed and interpreted according to the research focus.

c. Interviews

Interviews were conducted to obtain information directly from participants involved in the implementation of liturgical music, particularly musicians and worship song leaders. The interviews explored the participants' experiences, perspectives, understanding, and interpretations of liturgical music practices during worship services at GMIM Pniel Watulambot Congregation. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, allowing the researcher to use an interview guide while providing participants with opportunities to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

d. Documentation

Documentation was used as supporting data to complement the findings obtained from observations and interviews. The documentation included photographs of worship activities, ministry records, recordings of musical activities, and other documents related to the implementation of liturgical music. Documentation enables researchers to obtain supporting evidence and cross-check information obtained through other data collection techniques (Haryoko et al., 2020).

2.4 Data Analysis Technique

The research data were analyzed qualitatively through three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The analysis was conducted continuously from the data collection process through the completion of the study (Miles et al., 2014). Data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation were first selected and

categorized according to the research focus. The data were then displayed in descriptive form to facilitate the identification and understanding of relationships among the findings. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the patterns, themes, and meanings identified in the data, followed by verification to ensure that the conclusions were consistent with the field data. This analytical model is widely used in qualitative research to systematically organize and interpret research data (Miles et al., 2014).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 The Role and Practice of Liturgical Music in Worship

Based on observations and interviews conducted at GMIM Pniel Watulambot, liturgical music plays an integral role in supporting the overall implementation of worship. Music is present in regular Sunday worship, Passion Sunday worship, and congregational anniversary celebrations, but its implementation varies according to the liturgical structure, theme, and theological emphasis of each service. In regular Sunday worship, music primarily supports congregational singing and maintains continuity among liturgical elements. During Passion Sunday, musical expression tends to emphasize solemnity and reflection, whereas anniversary worship is generally more celebratory and supported by more intensive preparation. This finding supports Rice et al. (2022), who explain that congregational singing functions as a means of collectively expressing faith rather than merely providing musical entertainment. Similarly, Thornton (2023) argues that congregational music exists within a complex relationship between musical performance and collective religious participation.

The observations further demonstrate that liturgical music functions not only as accompaniment but also as a medium for creating the atmosphere of worship, directing congregational attention, and supporting worshippers in experiencing the meaning of each liturgical section. Therefore, the role of musicians and singers extends beyond technical musical performance to include spiritual and liturgical responsibilities. Jardinal et al. (2023) emphasize that church musicians have both technical and spiritual responsibilities because their musical service contributes to congregational participation. Wong and Purmanasari (2024) similarly found that liturgical music can shape emotional experiences and encourage congregational participation through singing and other forms of response. Bjorlin (2025) further demonstrates that congregational song has formative power because it enables worshippers to express experiences and emotions while directing their attention toward God. These perspectives are consistent with the present findings, in which the manner and quality of musical presentation contribute to the atmosphere and experience of worship.

The findings also indicate that liturgical music is closely connected to the social and theological context of worship. The differences among regular Sunday, Passion Sunday, and anniversary worship demonstrate that musical choices cannot be separated from the meaning and purpose of each service. Bemey (2026) found that church music can regulate the flow of worship, organize relationships between music leaders and congregations, and contribute to spiritual experience and character formation. This is relevant to GMIM Pniel Watulambot because musicians, singers, worship leaders, and congregants operate as an interconnected system. Thus, liturgical music becomes an important part of worship that integrates musical expression, liturgical interpretation, and congregational experience rather than functioning merely as an accompanying element.

3.2 Musical Competence, Coordination, and Congregational Participation

A significant finding of the study concerns differences in the readiness and musical competence of worship teams. Although songs are determined through the church's liturgical structure, their realization varies according to the preparation and competence of musicians and singers. Observations revealed differences in pitch accuracy, song mastery, rhythmic stability, tempo control, dynamics, and coordination among team members. These differences

demonstrate that predetermined liturgical materials do not automatically produce consistent musical quality. Darmojuwono et al. (1980) emphasize the importance of musical competence in supporting effective musical performance, while Rumengan (2023) identifies differences in musical ability among church music servants as a factor affecting the implementation of church music ministry. The diverse backgrounds of team members, including differences in formal music education and practical experience, can therefore influence the quality and consistency of musical performance.

The importance of musical competence is also evident when worship teams perform songs with more complex melodic, rhythmic, or harmonic structures. Pasaribu (2025) found that church musicians require competencies in accompaniment techniques, rhythm and meter, tempo, dynamics, phrasing, and lyric interpretation to support congregational singing effectively. The present findings reinforce this perspective because musical accompaniment directly influences the congregation's ability to follow and participate in singing. Preparation is particularly important in special services. Teams assigned to anniversary worship generally demonstrate greater readiness because of more structured rehearsals and coordination, whereas regular Sunday worship may face limitations related to rehearsal time and members' availability. Nugrahu et al. (2023) similarly demonstrated that ensemble training can improve church musicians' technical skills and collective coordination.

Another challenge identified in the study is the sudden change in worship-team composition when members are unable to attend scheduled services. Although replacement is necessary to ensure the continuity of worship, differences in song familiarity, musical interpretation, vocal characteristics, instrumental techniques, and communication may affect team coordination. Tobing et al. (2023) similarly highlight that changes in personnel and differences in preparation can influence the effectiveness of music ministry. Therefore, coordination among singers and instrumentalists is essential for maintaining tempo, harmony, dynamics, transitions, and musical unity. Mendrofa (2024) emphasizes the importance of organized church music ministry, including appropriate scheduling and coordination. In this context, the development of substitute personnel, distribution of musical materials, and communication before worship can help minimize disruption caused by unexpected personnel changes.

The study further shows variations in congregational participation across worship services. In some services, congregants participate actively in singing, while in others they tend to be more passive. These differences suggest that participation is influenced not only by song selection but also by vocal leadership, instrumental accompaniment, tempo, dynamics, and the overall atmosphere created by the music team. Rumengan (2024) emphasizes that liturgical music should support worshippers in understanding and experiencing each part of worship while encouraging active congregational singing. Tamba et al. (2026) likewise found that church music can create a more vibrant worship atmosphere and encourage congregational activity in singing. Wong and Purmanasari (2024) also demonstrate the relationship between liturgical music, emotional experience, and participation. Thus, effective liturgical music requires a balance between musical competence, preparation, coordination, and sensitivity to the needs of the congregation.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the practice of liturgical music at GMIM Pniel Watulambot encompasses musical, liturgical, organizational, and spiritual dimensions. The principal challenges include differences in musical competence, unequal preparation, limited rehearsal time, sudden changes in team composition, and variations in congregational participation. These findings suggest the need for regular and structured rehearsals, continuous development of musicians' and singers' competencies, effective coordination, and a reliable system for substitute personnel. Pasaribu (2025) and Nugrahu et al. (2023) reinforce the importance of continuous competency development and ensemble training. Such efforts can improve the consistency of musical service while maintaining its primary orientation

toward active congregational participation and meaningful worship.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, liturgical music plays an integral role in Sunday worship at GMIM Pniel Watulambot. It functions not only as musical accompaniment but also as a medium for creating the worship atmosphere, directing congregational attention, supporting congregational singing, and helping worshippers appreciate the meaning of each liturgical element. The implementation of liturgical music varies according to the characteristics, themes, and purposes of regular Sunday worship, Passion Sunday worship, and congregational anniversary celebrations.

The study also reveals differences in the readiness and musical competence of worship teams, particularly in song mastery, pitch accuracy, rhythmic stability, tempo, dynamics, and coordination. Special services, particularly congregational anniversary celebrations, tend to involve more intensive preparation, whereas regular Sunday worship may be affected by limited rehearsal time and sudden changes in team composition. These conditions demonstrate that the quality of liturgical music depends not only on individual musical ability but also on preparation, teamwork, communication, and organizational coordination.

Overall, the practice of liturgical music at GMIM Pniel Watulambot encompasses musical, liturgical, organizational, and spiritual dimensions. Differences in the readiness of music teams are also associated with variations in congregational participation, particularly in congregational singing. Therefore, strengthening the music ministry requires continuous development of musicians' and singers' competencies, regular and structured rehearsals, improved team coordination, and an effective system for managing personnel changes, while maintaining the primary orientation of music ministry toward active congregational participation and meaningful worship.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this research or its publication.

Authors' Contribution

Merary Michela Kainde: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Data curation, Formal analysis, Visualization, Writing – original draft, and Writing – review & editing.

Luccylle Manina Takalumang: Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Validation, and Writing – review & editing.

Franklin E. Dumais: Supervision, Validation, Project administration, and Writing – review & editing.

All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Statement on the Use of AI

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used for language translation during the preparation of

this manuscript. The authors remain fully responsible for the content, interpretation, analysis, and final version of the manuscript.

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