

Beyond Liturgical Accompaniment: Church Music and Congregational Formation in Indonesian Pentecostalism

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Received date: July 26, 2025; Accepted date: January 25, 2026, Published: January 29, 2026

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of church music in the formation of congregational spirituality and character at the Gereja Sidang Jemaat Allah (GSJA) Yang Moon Permata, Tateli Satu, North Sulawesi, Indonesia. This article conceptualizes church music not merely as a liturgical or aesthetic element, but as a structure of worship roles and as a theological and pedagogical medium that organizes congregational participation, shapes spiritual experience, and internalizes moral values. This study is significant because discussions of church music often emphasize its functional aspects, while its role in nurturing spirituality and character has rarely received integrative analysis. The study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method. Data were collected through participatory observation during worship services, in-depth interviews with church leaders, music ministers, and congregants, and document analysis of liturgies and church songs in use. The study analyzes the data thematically by linking empirical findings with role theory. The findings demonstrate that church music functions as a structure that regulates the flow of worship and the distribution of socio-spiritual roles among worship leaders, music teams, and congregants. Church music also operates as a medium of spiritual experience that cultivates faith consciousness through musical repetition, emotional intensity, and collective practice. Furthermore, church music contributes to the formation of congregational character through the internalization of values such as honesty, love, discipline, and responsibility, which congregants subsequently translate into their everyday social lives. The originality of this study lies in its integration of worship role structures, spiritual experience, and moral habituation within a single analytical framework, thereby offering a new contribution to the fields of practical theology, sociology of religion, and character education in the context of local church communities.

Keywords: Church Music, Congregational Spirituality, Character Formation, Gereja Sidang Jemaat Allah.

Introduction

Music constitutes one of the most enduring forms of cultural expression embedded in human life across time and space (Said, 2021). It exists not only as a medium of entertainment, but also as a means of education, social communication, emotional regulation, and the construction of psychological meaning. In religious contexts, music occupies a particularly central position

because it functions as a bridge between human experience and transcendent reality (Hentschel & Kreutz, 2021). A growing body of scholarship demonstrates that music has the capacity to generate sacred atmospheres, mediate spiritual experience, and direct the emotional and affective responses of individuals within religious rituals (Djohan, 2005). As sound operating through frequency, music demonstrably influences the human nervous system and triggers emotional responses that may be either constructive or destructive, thereby exerting a direct impact on human attitudes and behavior.

Within religious traditions, music has long functioned as an integral element of worship practices. Historical studies indicate that ancient Egyptian and ancient Greek societies incorporated music as a core component of their ritual activities (Mack, 1995). Similarly, in ancient Jewish tradition, music and song occupied a central place in liturgical life and later provided a foundation for the development of Christian church music (Prier, 1993). In Christianity, musical practice evolved from a cappella Gregorian chant toward increasingly complex and contextualized musical forms, following historical, cultural, and theological transformations within the church. This trajectory demonstrates that church music has never remained static; rather, it has continuously adapted to the social and spiritual contexts of its worshiping communities.

The most significant developments in contemporary church music appear within Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. In contrast to non-Pentecostal traditions that tend to emphasize formal liturgical structures and vocal harmony, Pentecostal church music features dynamic expression, the use of electric instruments, and musical styles closely aligned with popular music. Wijayanto (2017) shows that praise and worship music in Charismatic churches adopts dramatic, repetitive, and emotionally charged musical strategies to cultivate intense congregational engagement. Music does not merely accompany worship; instead, it becomes the primary framework that shapes the rhythm, atmosphere, and overall religious experience of the congregation.

From sociological and psychological perspectives, church music in this context functions as a mechanism for forming collective experience (Benzecry & Collins, 2014; Shelemay, 2011; Xiao, 2025). The involvement of worship leaders, musicians, singers, choirs, and even dancers creates reciprocal relationships between worship ministers and congregants through musical mediation. This process produces what may be described as a shared spiritual experience, in which emotions, religious meanings, and bodily responses become simultaneously oriented through music and song. Consequently, church music does not simply generate a worship atmosphere; it also holds the potential to shape inner dispositions, ethical attitudes, and behavioral orientations that extend into the everyday lives of congregants.

Within the context of the Gereja Sidang Jemaat Allah (GSJA) Yang Moon

Permata Tateli Satu in North Sulawesi, church music cannot be understood as a purely local phenomenon. Rather, it forms part of a broader national trend that continues to gain prominence in Indonesian Christian life. Demographically, Indonesia hosts more than 76,000 churches—approximately 62,000 Protestant and 14,000 Catholic—with the Christian and Catholic population estimated at 27–29 million people, or roughly 10–11 percent of the national population (Sulistyowati et al., 2025). Within this expansive landscape, church music plays a crucial role in shaping worship experiences. Empirical research demonstrates a very strong relationship between musical accompaniment and congregational interest in worship, with a correlation coefficient of 0.755, indicating that music significantly influences engagement, liturgical atmosphere, and spiritual appropriation among congregants (Sulistyowati et al., 2025). These findings provide a broader context for worship practices at GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu, where music appears intensively and continuously throughout worship services, involving altar music teams, worship leaders, singers, and active congregational participation. Emotional and spiritual expressions—such as joy, gratitude, and profound religious experience—regularly emerge during worship, indicating that music functions as a medium that guides congregants toward spiritual awareness and lived faith. Notably, despite its relatively small membership, this church community is widely recognized for its positive social ethics and behavior within the surrounding environment. This condition strengthens the academic question of how church music not only shapes personal spirituality, but also contributes to character formation and social praxis among congregants.

Scholarly discussions on the role of church music in Christian worship have developed along several major trajectories. The first approach positions church music as a medium for spiritual experience and individual emotional engagement in worship. From this perspective, music transforms profane space into sacred space and facilitates experiences of personal intimacy with God (Dueck, 2017). Worship music—particularly in the form of contemporary worship music—often functions as a catalyst for intense religious experience, evoking a sense of divine presence, submission, and affective faith engagement. However, critical studies warn that excessive emphasis on emotional experience and subjectivity may marginalize theological reflection and biblical literacy in the formation of congregational faith (Ballard, 2011; Graham, 2024; Herbst, 2025). In this context, church music becomes a site of tension between emotional authenticity and theological depth within modern worship practices.

The second trajectory conceptualizes church music as an instrument for community formation and the construction of collective faith identity. Studies within this framework emphasize that communal singing operates not merely as an expression of individual faith, but as a social mechanism that fosters solidarity,

belonging, and communal identity among congregants (Kloppers & Kloppers, 2015; Taylor, 2023). Worship music generates what scholars often describe as *communitas*, namely a shared sense of togetherness that transcends hierarchical church structures and strengthens social bonds within the congregation. Furthermore, musical practices in church settings contribute to processes of religious socialization, through which values of faith, ethics, and Christian visions of life become internalized via repeated participation in song and musical ritual (Schnable, 2012; Stowe, 2018). From this perspective, church music does not merely shape worship atmosphere, but also participates in the construction of social and moral identity within faith communities.

The third trajectory highlights the educational, theological, and contextual functions of church music within historical and cultural dynamics. Scholars understand church music as a medium for proclaiming faith, providing theological education, and reflecting doctrinal understanding, in which songs function simultaneously as prayer, teaching, and embodied expressions of belief within liturgical practice (Graham, 2004; Leinweber, 2020). In addition, several studies emphasize the importance of contextualizing church music within local cultures, as seen in the integration of indigenous musical traditions—such as *karungut* music in Kalimantan—into church worship to enhance relevance and spiritual meaning for congregations (Handoko et al., 2025). Historical analyses further demonstrate that church music has consistently adapted, from Gregorian chant to contemporary worship forms, without losing its fundamental role as a medium of faith formation (Prassl, 2015). Nevertheless, most studies within this trajectory continue to focus on liturgical, theological, or cultural functions, while rarely addressing character formation in the everyday lives of congregants.

Despite the richness of these approaches, the majority of existing research continues to prioritize spiritual experience, liturgical practice, or communal identity in general terms. Relatively few studies explicitly analyze church music as a mechanism for character formation, specifically in terms of how music contributes to the internalization of ethical values such as honesty, compassion, discipline, and moral courage within congregational social life. Moreover, research on Pentecostal church music in Indonesia has largely emphasized musical and expressive dimensions, while paying limited attention to the social and pedagogical roles of music in nurturing congregational spirituality. This gap provides the primary justification for the present study.

Against this background, this study aims to analyze the role of church music in the formation of congregational spirituality and character at the Gereja Sidang Jemaat Allah Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu. The study seeks to explain how church music not only constructs emotionally engaging worship experiences, but also functions as a sustained medium for cultivating values and character among congregants. Drawing on role theory (Biddle, 1986; Linton, 1936), this study

argues that church music operates as a social and spiritual agent that mediates relationships among faith, worship practice, and congregational behavior. Within the context of Pentecostal churches, this study contends that music does not merely supplement liturgy, but instead serves as a strategic instrument for shaping spirituality and character, thereby contributing to the ethical and social life of the wider church community.

Methods

This study focuses on the role of church music in the cultivation of congregational spirituality and character at the Gereja Sidang Jemaat Allah (GSJA) Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu in North Sulawesi. The unit of analysis is church music practice within the context of worship, including musical performance, the involvement of music ministers and congregants, and the processes of spiritual experience and character formation mediated through music. Accordingly, this study does not treat music merely as an auditory artifact, but rather as a social and religious practice that actively shapes spiritual awareness, ethical attitudes, and behavioral orientations in the everyday lives of congregants.

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design (Lune & Berg, 2017). The qualitative approach allows the researcher to examine the phenomenon in a deep, contextual, and meaningful manner based on the subjective experiences of worship participants. The case study design is particularly appropriate because the research seeks to investigate intensively and holistically a single ecclesial context, namely GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu, as a representative example of distinctive Pentecostal church music practice. Through a case study, this research captures the dynamic relationships among music, spirituality, and character formation as they unfold in lived situations, rather than producing statistical generalizations.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. The study derives primary data from informants who directly participate in church music practice, including church leaders, worship leaders, church musicians, singers, and congregants who actively attend worship services. The study collects secondary data from worship documentation, church archives, and other supporting materials related to church music practice. This combination of data sources enriches the analytical context and ensures a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

The study collects data through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Participatory observation takes place during worship services to directly observe musical presentation, interactions between worship ministers and congregants, and the emotional and spiritual responses of congregants to music and song. The study conducts semi-structured in-depth

interviews with key informants to explore their perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of the role of music in the cultivation of spirituality and character. The researcher interviewed twelve informants. In addition, documentation in the form of worship notes, recordings of musical activities, and church archives serves as supporting data. The research instruments include interview guides, observation checklists, field notes, and recording devices, all of which support data consistency and depth in line with the objectives of the study.

The study analyzes the collected data using thematic analysis (Miles & Huberman, 2013). The analytical process proceeds through several stages, including initial coding of interview and observational data, grouping codes into major themes, and interpreting these themes within the framework of role theory and scholarship on church music. Thematic analysis enables the researcher to identify recurring patterns of meaning related to the functions of music in shaping congregational spirituality and character. Through these stages, the study seeks to produce a systematic and in-depth understanding of how church music operates as a spiritual, pedagogical, and social medium in the life of the GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu congregation.

Results and Discussion

General Overview of the Gereja Sidang Jemaat Allah Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu

The Gereja Sidang Jemaat Allah (GSJA) constitutes one of the Pentecostal Christian church synods in Indonesia that is institutionally affiliated with the Persekutuan Gereja-Gereja di Indonesia (PGI) and is also a member of the Persekutuan Injili Indonesia (PII). As part of the Pentecostal tradition, GSJA emphasizes spiritual experience, expressive faith, and active congregational participation as central elements of worship practice. These characteristics manifest clearly in its liturgical order, patterns of ministry, and the prominent role of church music in congregational life.

The Gereja Sidang Jemaat Allah Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu is located on Jalan Air Hidup Jaga IV, Tateli Satu Village, Mandolang District, Minahasa Regency, North Sulawesi. Geographically, the church occupies a strategic position within a residential area and along a main road, making it easily accessible and visible to the surrounding community. This location enables the church to integrate closely with the social life of its congregants and supports consistent attendance in various worship services and fellowship activities. The presence of the church at the heart of the community also strengthens its function as both a spiritual and social space for local residents.

Historically, GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu was established and formally inaugurated on January 12, 2012. During its initial phase, the church

consisted of only three households and conducted worship services in a rented space. Through the support of congregants and the local community, the church acquired legal ownership of its land and building within the same year. Since then, the church has experienced steady growth in both congregational size and ministry activities. At present, GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu comprises approximately fifty households, including men, women, and children, with a congregational structure that remains relatively stable and active.

In its worship practice, GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu displays distinctive Pentecostal-Charismatic characteristics, namely expressive, dynamic worship that is rich in musical elements (Cooper, 2017). Church music is presented intensively and in a structured manner from the beginning to the end of the service, forming the primary framework of the overall liturgy. The music team, commonly referred to as the Altar Team, plays a dominant role in accompanying and directing the flow of worship in collaboration with the worship leader, singers, and the congregation, which actively participates in praise and worship. Musical ministry does not operate merely on a spontaneous basis; instead, it undergoes systematic preparation through regular rehearsals held every Saturday, including song selection, technical musical practice, and sound system and instrument checks.

The structure of Sunday morning worship at GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu demonstrates a clear grouping of songs based on their liturgical functions and theological messages. Worship services begin with praise songs that energize the congregation, followed by worship songs that are more reflective and meditative, and are then integrated with prayer, Scripture reading, sermons, and congregational response songs. Music also accompanies offering moments and the closing of worship, indicating that music does not function merely as an interlude, but rather as a medium for spiritual transition between different segments of the service. This pattern illustrates that music plays a crucial role in shaping the worship atmosphere, directing congregational emotions, and deepening faith engagement (Bagir et al., 2017; Poplawska, 2011; Widyawati et al., 2025).

In terms of facilities and infrastructure, the church possesses a main building that serves as both a worship space and a venue for community activities, including religious education, weddings, and social events. The altar occupies the central front area of the church as the visual and symbolic focal point of worship, accompanied by a pulpit used by the pastor for preaching and biblical instruction. Seating facilities accommodate approximately 125 chairs, which adequately meet congregational needs. The musical instruments used are relatively simple, consisting of a keyboard, guitar, and cajon, supported by basic sound system equipment such as speakers and a mixer. Although the facilities remain limited and continue to develop, they sufficiently support regular

worship services and music ministry.

Moreover, the practice of music ministry at GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu does not focus solely on technical or aesthetic aspects, but also intentionally seeks to foster emotional and spiritual engagement among congregants. Following worship services, the music team conducts brief evaluations of the ministry, while congregants receive informal opportunities to offer feedback. This pattern reflects an institutional awareness that church music constitutes an essential component of congregational formation, encompassing both spiritual development and character formation.

Accordingly, GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu represents a church community with an organized worship structure, systematically planned music ministry, and active congregational involvement. These conditions render the church a relevant and appropriate research site for analyzing the role of church music in the cultivation of congregational spirituality and character, prior to a more focused discussion of the specific research findings.

Forms and Patterns of Church Music Presentation as a Structure of Worship Roles

The presentation of music at GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu does not function merely as a liturgical accompaniment, but operates as a structure that organizes roles and participation within worship. Through music, the church constructs the sequential order of ritual, regulates transitions between segments of worship, and frames congregational involvement in emotional and social terms. In other words, music does not appear as a neutral element; rather, it activates mechanisms of role differentiation and functional distribution within the worship space. This perspective aligns with role theory, which conceptualizes social life as a field of structured positions, expectations, and behaviors, in which individuals perform roles according to collectively recognized functional divisions (Biddle, 1986; Linton, 1936). In the context of this study, such role structures emerge and become legible through the musical forms of worship: who leads, who accompanies, who responds, and when such responses are expected to occur.

Empirical observation indicates that GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu conducts worship through a consistent and carefully planned musical order. The church's location within a residential area and its ease of access reinforce regular participation, as congregants face minimal barriers to attending routine services. More decisive, however, is the pattern of musical preparation prior to worship. Saturday rehearsals function as an institutional mechanism to ensure uniformity of repertoire, technical readiness, and role coordination among musicians, worship leaders, and singers. Interviews with five informants reveal that these rehearsals serve to "ensure that the music team understands the songs" and that

“the musical performance can be delivered properly” on Sunday. At the same time, technical preparation—such as checking the sound system, microphones, and instruments—operates as a prerequisite for the effective functioning of the musical role structure, because technical disruptions can disturb the flow of worship and reduce the intensity of congregational participation.

Table 1. Sequence of Musical Presentation and Liturgical Functions in Worship

No.	Stage of Worship	Musical Form / Song Type	Song Examples
1	Opening	Opening praise song	<i>Kami Datang Memuji-Mu; Bangkit Serukan Nama Yesus</i>
2	Opening Prayer	Non-musical (verbal)	—
3	Praise	Affirmative praise songs	<i>Besar Setia-Mu; Ku Jadi Baru</i>
4	Worship	Reflective worship songs	<i>Tinggikan Nama-Mu</i>
5	Transition to the Word	Sermon prayer	—
6	Scripture Reading	Non-musical (collective)	—
7	Sermon	Non-musical (verbal)	—
8	Congregational Response	Response song	<i>Ku Mau Cinta Yesus Selamanya</i>
9	Offering	Offering song	Thematic praise song
10	Closing	Closing song and benediction	Song of encouragement

Source: Worship Ministry Schedule Document of GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu, 2024.

The pattern of musical liturgy in Sunday morning worship demonstrates how music constructs the basic framework of worship through sequential stages. As shown in Table 1, worship begins with a brief opening session of approximately five minutes, marked immediately by opening songs such as “*Kami Datang Memuji-Mu*” or “*Bangkit Serukan Nama Yesus*,” which function to call attention and condition the initial worship atmosphere. Following the opening prayer led by the pastor or worship leader, the praise-and-worship

segment moves into affirmative praise songs such as "*Besar Setia-Mu*" and "*Ku Jadi Baru*," and then proceeds to more reflective worship songs such as "*Tinggikan Nama-Mu*." This sequence represents not merely musical variation, but a dramaturgical pattern of worship: music moves from a mode of "gathering" the congregation toward a mode of "deepening" awareness of God's presence, before the service enters the phase of the Word. After the sermon prayer and collective Scripture reading, in which congregants are invited to stand and read together, the sermon lasts approximately thirty minutes. Notably, after the sermon, music re-enters the liturgy through a response song such as "*Ku Mau Cinta Yesus Selamanya*," which functions as a ritual mechanism to close the cognitive phase (reception of the Word) and open the affective phase (commitment and response). Music then accompanies the offering and the closing segment, culminating in the benediction. This structure demonstrates that music regulates the rhythm of worship and serves as a transitional bridge between segments, so that worship appears as a sequence guided by musical devices.

This musical liturgical pattern produces a relatively clear and repetitive distribution of roles. The Altar Team functions as the primary support of the musical rite by providing accompaniment, maintaining tempo, and reinforcing transitions between segments. The worship leader assumes the role of director by initiating songs, regulating the intensity of praise and worship, and activating congregational responses. Singers or the choir occupy a supporting role that strengthens vocal quality, stabilizes pitch, and reinforces lyrical repetition to facilitate congregational participation. The congregation itself does not function as a passive recipient, but occupies the role of liturgical participant by singing together, standing, clapping, dancing, and at times crying. Accordingly, music operates as a social mechanism that clarifies functional boundaries: who leads, who facilitates, and who responds. This division does not reflect an administrative arrangement alone, but rather a performative distribution that emerges and becomes recognizable within worship practice itself (Biddle, 1986; Linton, 1936).

Interview data further reinforce these findings, particularly with regard to liturgical structure and role organization. Five informants, including worship leaders, church musicians, and singers, demonstrate a shared understanding that the worship order consists of an opening greeting, opening prayer, a sequence of praise and worship songs, proclamation of the Word, offering, response or worship song, intercessory prayer, benediction, and announcements. When asked about the number of songs, variations in responses—eight or nine songs—suggest that the precise number matters less than the existence of a recognized "musical package" that functions as a performative standard of worship (Interview, May 29, 2024). Similarly, in relation to adapting songs to worship themes, most informants emphasize thematic alignment, while one informant

highlights a primary orientation toward “God-centeredness,” namely songs that exalt the name of God. These differences indicate that the musical structure remains regulated while allowing space for negotiation of meaning between thematic adaptation and general theological emphasis, all of which remain bound by the liturgical objective of creating an intense and directed worship atmosphere.

The arrangement of performers and musical communication also reveals the technical dimension of role structure. The study records that musicians position themselves to the left of the altar or pulpit and conduct sound checks prior to worship. More significantly, worship leaders and musicians employ an internal “coordination language” through finger signals to indicate repetition from the beginning, repetition of the refrain, or song closure (coda). This form of non-verbal communication demonstrates that musical role structure involves not only positional arrangement, but also real-time coordination that ensures ritual flow remains stable despite minor improvisations. At this point, music functions as a collective work system that demands role discipline, coordination, and adherence to internal cues to maintain harmonious worship.

The dominant musical character at GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu further clarifies why music effectively frames roles and responses. The available instruments—keyboard, guitar, and cajon—supported by a basic sound system consisting of two speakers and a mixer, produce a worship atmosphere that aligns with contemporary pop-oriented styles commonly found in Pentecostal-Charismatic traditions (Cooper, 2017; de Jong, 2016; Thornton, 2020). In practice, this style facilitates lyrical repetition, sustains emotional progression, and enables congregants to follow musical flow without complex musical demands. Repetition and progression thus operate not merely as aesthetic choices, but as ritual strategies: music guides congregants from heightened affective phases of praise toward contemplative phases of worship, and then back toward affirmation of commitment through response songs. Accordingly, musical character remains inseparable from its function as a regulator of worship experience.

Documentary data further strengthen these findings by demonstrating the regularity of the church’s worship service schedule, including Sunday school worship, general worship, family worship, and men’s, women’s, and youth services. This regularity indicates that music does not occur as an incidental element of Sunday morning worship, but integrates into the church’s social rhythm throughout the week. In this context, the musical role structure—Altar Team, worship leader, singers, and congregation—operates not as a one-time arrangement, but as a repeatedly reproduced pattern within the church calendar, thereby forming habits and increasingly stabilized role expectations.

Table 2. Worship Service Schedule of the Gereja Sidang Jemaat Allah Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu

No.	Day	Location	Time	Type of Worship Activity
1	Sunday	Church Building	07:00 – until finished	Sunday School Worship
2	Sunday	Church Building	09:00 – until finished	General Worship
3	Sunday	Congregants' Homes	16:00 – until finished	Family Worship
4	Tuesday	Congregants' Homes	16:00 – until finished	Men's Fellowship Worship
5	Tuesday	Congregants' Homes	16:00 – until finished	Women's Fellowship Worship
6	Thursday	Youth House	15:00 – until finished	Youth Worship

Source: Worship Ministry Schedule Document of GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu, 2024.

Accordingly, the presentation of church music at GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu constructs a structure of worship roles through three primary mechanisms. First, music organizes liturgy as a sequential and directed ritual flow. Second, music distributes socio-spiritual roles clearly among worship leaders, musicians, singers, and the congregation. Third, music presents a contemporary musical character that effectively frames congregational participation through lyrical repetition, emotional transition, and performative coordination. These findings indicate that music functions as a social mechanism that regulates positions, expectations, and actions in worship; it simultaneously disciplines and activates roles, so that worship unfolds not merely as a series of events, but as a collective practice animated through the distribution of musical roles (Biddle, 1986; Linton, 1936).

Church Music as a Medium for the Formation of Congregational Spirituality

Church music at GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu does not function merely as an aesthetic element or a liturgical accompaniment, but operates as a primary medium for the formation of congregational spirituality. Within the Pentecostal-Charismatic worship context, music serves as a bridge that connects ritual practice, emotional engagement, and religious consciousness. As a result, congregational spirituality does not develop solely through cognitive instruction delivered in sermons, but emerges affectively and collectively through repeated

musical practices (Cooper, 2017; de Jong, 2016; Thornton, 2020). In this sense, spirituality does not appear as an abstract concept; rather, it is produced through the embodied, emotional, and vocal participation of congregants within a worship space mediated by music.

Interviews with congregants indicate that music functions as the primary means through which they “feel the presence of God” during worship. Four out of five informants stated that music helps them enter a deeper atmosphere of worship, generating feelings of peace, joy, and awareness of God’s love in their personal lives. Congregants understand music as a medium that “brings self-awareness,” both in relation to God’s goodness and to human shortcomings and limitations (M, R, K, J, Interview, May 29, 2024). In congregational experience, musical moments—especially during worship sessions—become spaces for inner reflection, self-examination, and renewal of faith. This dynamic is evident in the emotional expressions observed during worship services, such as congregants closing their eyes, raising their hands, crying, or remaining silent in reflective postures while worship songs are sung. These expressions indicate that music facilitates spiritual experiences that are affective and personal, even though they occur within a collective setting.

Such affective-spiritual experiences do not emerge spontaneously without structure, but are shaped through musical repetition and organized emotional intensity. Praise and worship songs used at GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu tend to feature simple, repetitive lyrics that focus on fundamental faith themes such as God’s faithfulness, renewal of life, love, hope, and obedience. This lyrical repetition functions as a mechanism for internalizing faith values: congregants do not merely hear these theological messages, but repeatedly articulate and sing them. Within this framework, music functions as a form of “musical prayer,” namely prayer expressed through collective singing that enables congregants to articulate faith not through complex theological language, but through accessible affective expression. Accordingly, music serves as a means of strengthening personal faith while simultaneously shaping shared religious consciousness (Wijayanto, 2017).

The study also finds that congregants explicitly associate music with the growth of their faith over time. Worship accompanied by music is perceived as an experience that “renews faith,” “strengthens the heart,” and “awakens a desire to live better.” Even when one informant views music primarily in technical terms, such as team readiness and song mastery (H, Interview, May 29, 2024), this minority perspective underscores the dominant perception among other congregants who understand music as a spiritual medium rather than mere performance. These variations demonstrate that music-mediated spirituality remains personal in nature, while being facilitated by a shared ritual structure.

Furthermore, church music functions as a secure spiritual space for

congregants. Within the pressures of everyday life marked by economic, social, and emotional challenges, musical worship at GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu provides a space for emotional release and inner healing. Congregants express joy, sorrow, gratitude, and even anxiety through singing and bodily gestures during worship. Music allows these emotions to be received and interpreted within a religious framework, rather than suppressed or ignored. Several informants stated that through worship and song they experience calmness, courage to face the future, and renewed hope in daily life (P, E, B, Interview, May 29, 2024). In this context, music does not merely stimulate emotion, but directs emotion toward faith and relationship with God (Murtonen, 2018; Olivier, 2023).

The spirituality shaped through music also relates closely to repeated social practice. Interview data indicate that congregants possess a strong desire to attend worship services regularly, as worship is understood both as a religious obligation and as a spiritual necessity. This desire remains closely linked to consistent and meaningful musical experiences. Music therefore helps sustain congregational spiritual continuity through scheduled and repeated worship practices. Within role theory, music facilitates the enactment of religious roles among congregants, namely roles as worshipers, pray-ers, and active members of a faith community. These roles are not learned solely through formal instruction, but through repeated participation in the same musical practices, which gradually form spiritual habits (spiritual habitus) (Biddle, 1986; Linton, 1936).

These findings are reinforced by reflections from church leadership, who regard music as a primary means of congregational spiritual formation. According to church leaders, music helps congregants open themselves to the Word of God and prepares their hearts to receive teaching. Music functions as a bridge between congregants' everyday lives and the theological messages conveyed in sermons. In this sense, music operates as a transformative medium that connects affective and cognitive dimensions of worship (M, Interview, May 29, 2024).

These findings are summarized in the following table:

Table 3. The Role of Church Music in the Formation of Congregational Spirituality at GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu

No.	Dimension of Musical Role	Form of Musical Practice	Impact on Congregants
1	Medium of spiritual experience	Repetitive and reflective praise and worship songs	Congregants experience God's presence, inner peace, and spiritual joy
2	Means of forming religious awareness	Repetition of lyrics focused on faith, love, and obedience	Faith values become internalized within personal awareness and reflection
3	Collective musical prayer	Congregational singing performed together	Faith is expressed affectively and collectively, strengthening the relationship with God
4	Secure spiritual space	Emotional expressions (crying, raising hands, closing eyes)	Emotional release, inner healing, and renewal of faith
5	Reinforcement of personal faith	Repeated musical worship experiences	Congregational faith grows and fosters a desire to live better
6	Binder of routine religious practice	Music present in weekly worship and other church activities	Cultivates longing for worship and continuity of spiritual life
7	Facilitator of congregational religious roles	Active participation in praise and worship	Congregants enact roles as worshipers and members of the faith community
8	Affective-cognitive bridge in worship	Music leads congregants toward the Word and faith response	Congregants become more receptive to sermons and theological messages

Source: Processed from observation and interview data, 2024.

Accordingly, congregational spirituality at GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu is formed through musical practices that are repetitive, intensive, and collective. Music does not merely accompany worship, but operates as a primary mechanism for shaping religious awareness, internalizing faith values, and sustaining congregational spiritual experience. Music enables congregants to enact and embody their religious roles consistently, while spirituality is produced through social practices that continue to be reproduced within the worship space (Biddle, 1986). In this way, church music can be understood as a socio-spiritual medium that binds individuals into shared experiences of faith, while simultaneously deepening congregants' personal relationships with God.

Church Music and the Formation of Congregational Character in Social Life

Church music at GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu contributes to the formation of congregational character not through rigid moral instruction, but through repeated mechanisms of value internalization embedded in worship practice. Music operates as a subtle form of ethical pedagogy by instilling ideas about how believers ought to behave, and by consistently reinforcing these ideas through lyrics, atmosphere, and the embodied participation of congregants in praise and worship. Within the framework of role theory, this process reflects the formation of role identity: congregants do not merely perform religious roles during worship, but come to understand themselves as "Christians" who are expected to display particular dispositions in social life. Character therefore emerges as the outcome of internalized role expectations legitimated by the community, not as an instantaneous transformation, but as the product of value habituation within repeated ritual practice (Linton, 1936; Biddle, 1986).

Substantively, interview data indicate that congregants perceive praise songs as instilling specific character values, particularly honesty, love, humility, and responsibility. Three out of five informants stated that the "meanings and positive values" embedded in worship songs encourage them to apply these teachings in everyday actions, such as exercising greater emotional control, speaking more carefully, and showing greater respect for others (P, E, B, Interview, May 29, 2024). These values operate primarily through lyrics that function as "normative narratives" repeated continuously in worship. When congregants sing texts about faithfulness, renewal of life, or God's love, they do not merely recite doctrine, but affirm moral standards regarding how believers ought to live. In the language of the field findings, praise texts make congregants "aware of both good and bad actions," thereby positioning music as a catalyst for ethical reflection that shapes ways of thinking and acting in social relationships.

The findings also reveal a clear process of translation from musical ritual to everyday social domains. Informants do not limit their reflections to positive experiences during worship, but explicitly connect these experiences to family

relationships, work ethics, and social conduct. Several congregants describe worship as a space that fosters a desire to “live better,” which they interpret as striving to become more patient, more faithful to responsibilities, and more attentive to others (E & B, Interview, May 29, 2024). At the family level, worship music encourages inner reconciliation, as congregants feel more willing to acknowledge mistakes and repair relationships. In workplace and social interactions, values derived from worship songs function as practical moral orientations, such as acting honestly, managing emotions, and maintaining ethical behavior. This dynamic explains why the study observes perceptions of the congregation as “well-behaved” and positively influential within the surrounding community: such social character emerges through the stable absorption of norms that are continuously reproduced in musical worship practice.

Moreover, music operates as a form of soft moral control (Lang et al., 2016; Lukenbill & Young, 2017). The findings do not indicate that character formation occurs through sanctions or punishment, but through a combination of expectations, norms, and habituation. First, at the level of expectation, congregants express a strong desire to attend worship and interpret it as a moral obligation to “respond to God’s goodness”; this desire links self-discipline with religious routine (P, E, & B, Interview, May 29, 2024). Second, at the level of norms, the study records ritual behaviors such as respecting others during worship, maintaining polite conduct, and adhering to expressive conventions, including clapping, raising hands, bowing, and closing eyes during prayer. These norms function not merely as liturgical order, but as embodied ethical training: congregants learn to regulate themselves, respect shared space, and adjust behavior to sacred contexts. Third, at the level of concrete practice, worship lyrics containing theological and moral values provide practical reference points for congregants to act “in accordance with the teachings of the Word of God” in social life. Because music repeats these norms consistently, the church does not need to enforce morality through rigid control; musical ritual itself constructs internal moral reminders that operate from within the individual (Lang et al., 2016).

At the same time, the findings also reveal an important nuance. Two informants state that music does not “directly change character,” because transformation ultimately depends on personal agency, yet they acknowledge that music shapes attitudes and dispositions during worship by encouraging positive expression, emotional openness, and active participation (M & W, Interview, May 29, 2024). Rather than weakening the argument, this variation reinforces the theoretical interpretation that music does not function as a singular mechanical cause, but as a socio-cultural condition that enables character formation through message repetition, affective intensification, and communal

legitimation. In other words, music provides moral infrastructure, while individuals remain agents who translate these messages into action. From a role theory perspective, the church shapes the role identity of believers through music, and that identity exerts normative pressure for social behavior to align with the religious self-image that congregants affirm (Linton, 1936; Biddle, 1986).

Accordingly, church music contributes to congregational character formation through three interrelated pathways. First, music internalizes character values through lyrics and repeated moral messaging. Second, music encourages the translation of values from the worship space into family relations, work, and broader social life. Third, music functions as a mechanism of soft moral control through habituation, modeling, and communal expectation rather than through sanction. In the case of GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu, music does not merely “animate worship,” but actively constructs an ethical habitus that links ritual piety with the everyday social behavior of congregants beyond the church.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that church music at GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu does not function as a supplementary element of worship, but operates as a socio-spiritual mechanism that regulates ritual practice, shapes religious experience, and encourages ethical habituation among congregants. Three main findings substantiate this conclusion. First, music functions as a structure of worship roles that organizes the liturgical flow, regulates transitions between segments, and distributes roles—Altar Team, worship leader, singers, and congregation—in a performative manner (Biddle, 1986; Linton, 1936). Second, music operates as a medium for the formation of spirituality: it produces affective-collective experiences such as peace, joy, and awareness of God’s presence; internalizes faith values through lyrical repetition; and provides a secure spiritual space for inner healing (Murtonen, 2018; Olivier, 2023). Third, music correlates with character formation through the repeated internalization of moral values in song texts, the translation of those values into everyday social relations, and soft moral control achieved through habituation rather than punishment (Lang et al., 2016; Lukenbill & Young, 2017).

Why does this pattern emerge? The explanation lies in the way music functions as a ritual technology that simultaneously regulates bodies, manages emotions, and stabilizes role expectations. At the level of worship, music does not merely “fill” the liturgy; rather, it constructs a collective rhythm that gradually draws congregants into a sacred atmosphere—from gathering attention, deepening affective engagement, to readiness to receive the Word and express post-sermon commitment. At this point, music operates as a form of coordination infrastructure that unites worship actors through disciplined

rehearsal, positional division, and internal gestural language, such as finger cues, that preserve ritual stability. Within role theory, this stability matters because social roles do not operate solely through individual intention, but through practical rules and collective expectations that actors continually reproduce through action (Biddle, 1986; Linton, 1936). Accordingly, consistent musical intensity becomes a prerequisite for the orderly enactment of religious roles: who leads, who facilitates, and how the congregation responds.

The findings on spirituality reveal a deeper mechanism. Music becomes a medium of faith experience because it constructs a shared affective space in which emotions are processed into religious meaning. Interview data indicate that “feeling the presence of God” does not occur spontaneously, but emerges from repeated practices—recurrent lyrics, musical progressions that heighten intensity, and bodily gestures legitimated within Pentecostal-Charismatic worship (Cooper, 2017; de Jong, 2016; Thornton, 2020). The repetition of lyrics centered on faithfulness, renewal, love, and hope forms a kind of musical prayer that enables congregants to narrate themselves before God without relying on complex theological language. Consequently, spirituality at this research site appears not merely as something understood, but as something experienced: a social production of religious consciousness mediated through sound, body, and collective participation.

The character-related findings extend the implications of music beyond the worship space. Music functions as a medium of character formation through value internalization and social habituation. Interviews indicate that congregants do not receive moral values as rigid normative commands, but encounter them as “normative narratives” that they repeatedly sing and rehearse. This repetition renders values familiar, accessible, and easily translated into family life, work, and social relations. Because moral control operates softly—through expectations of worship attendance, norms of ritual politeness, and bodily discipline during worship—character formation proceeds through habituation rather than formal sanction (Lang et al., 2016). This dynamic explains why some informants state that character change ultimately depends on personal agency, while still acknowledging that music reshapes dispositions and attitudes. Music provides moral infrastructure, while individuals actively translate that infrastructure into action.

When compared with previous studies, these findings intersect strongly with three dominant strands in the literature on church music. The first strand views music as a medium of spiritual experience that can strengthen personal intimacy with God while remaining vulnerable to emotionalism (Kloppers & Kloppers, 2015). The second strand emphasizes music as a means of community formation and collective faith identity through communal singing (Kloppers & Kloppers, 2015; Taylor, 2023). The third strand highlights music as an

educational-theological medium and a vehicle for contextualizing worship practices (Graham, 2004; Handoko et al., 2025). This study contributes a distinctive insight by moving beyond spiritual or communal functions alone. It demonstrates that music also operates as a role structure that organizes social relations within worship and simultaneously connects them to the formation of spirituality and character. The novelty of this study therefore lies in integrating three analytical layers—ritual–role structure, spiritual experience, and moral habituation—within a single framework that positions music as an institutional device that both regulates and animates religious practice (Biddle, 1986; Linton, 1936).

Historically, these findings affirm that local Pentecostal–Charismatic expressions of faith should not be understood merely as the adoption of contemporary worship styles, but as processes of religious institutionalization that emphasize affect, participation, and spiritual experience. The routine practice of musical rehearsals, the stability of song structures, and the use of simple yet functional instruments at GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu reveal the formation of a relatively established worship pattern, despite the church's relatively recent founding in 2012. This pattern aligns with the observations of Anderson (2017) and Friesen (2016), who argue that Pentecostal traditions historically move from early flexibility toward the stabilization of worship elements deemed effective in sustaining spiritual experience without descending into fanaticism or rigid formalism. In this context, repetitive and structured music functions as an institutional mechanism that preserves Pentecostal authenticity while providing a stable framework for congregational participation, as also observed in processes of denominationalization across global contexts (Nel, 2016; Resane, 2022). Modern musical forms therefore do not signal ritual fragility; rather, through repetition, worship calendars, and organized practices, music enables communities to build historical continuity and negotiate a balance between charismatic experience and institutional stability (Gooren, 2010; Gudorf, 2012).

Socially, music in worship at GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu functions as a mechanism for cultivating togetherness and for governing collective emotion, or emotional governance. Music provides a safe space for emotional expression—such as crying, raising hands, or silent reflection—that allows congregants to manage inner tensions and collectively cultivate positive emotions, as observed in various religious communities that use ritual, prayer, and symbolic practice for emotional regulation (Floyd & Sharp, 2016; Johnston et al., 2022). At the same time, music generates social discipline through behavioral norms, role regularity, and accepted standards of expression within worship. As a result, emotions do not emerge in unregulated forms, but are framed within a shared ritual order (Cassaniti, 2014; Scheer, 2020). In Pentecostal–Charismatic

traditions, the emotional energy produced through repeated musical practices strengthens congregational engagement and sustains the continuity of faith communities (Penttilä, 2023). Consequently, music produces not only individual spiritual experiences, but also communities with relatively stable social rhythms—visible in recurring worship schedules, attendance expectations, and participation standards—that reinforce solidarity, social cohesion, and a sense of belonging in everyday church life (Andrews, 2020; Oyola, 2017).

Ideologically, these findings indicate that music plays a strategic role in shaping the identity of “believers” through processes of religious role identity formation legitimated by the church community. Music does not operate neutrally; it conveys theological messages, moral norms, and ideal images of the expected religious subject. Repetitive lyrics, patterned congregational responses, and regular worship participation function as mechanisms of religious socialization that gradually internalize specific moral and affective orientations. As a result, piety emerges not merely as inner belief, but as directed affect and orderly social behavior. This process aligns with sociological and psychological studies demonstrating that religious identity forms through interactions among social environments, repeated practices, and role expectations internalized by individuals within faith communities (Lee & Sim, 2022; Maraşlıoğlu & Kartopu, 2023; Peek et al., 2008; Seol & Lee, 2012). In the context of GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu, musical worship practices serve simultaneously as spaces of identity exploration and commitment: congregants learn to recognize themselves as religious subjects through active participation in praise and worship, and then bind that identity to moral standards upheld by the community. Music thus operates as an ideological apparatus of subject formation by directing emotion into a framework of faith, clarifying religious role identity, and translating belief into ethical orientations expected in social life (Lee & Sim, 2022; Setiawan & Asa, 2024).

A balanced reflection on these findings must address both function and dysfunction. Functionally, music strengthens congregational engagement, fosters experienced spirituality, sustains desire for worship, and subtly internalizes moral values through habituation, thereby enabling ritual piety to extend into social ethics. However, potential dysfunctions warrant attention. First, affective intensity may disrupt the balance between emotional experience and theological depth, echoing critiques that excessive emphasis on experience can reduce biblical literacy or reflective faith (Anderson, 2017; Nel, 2016; Resane, 2022). Second, strong role structures may foster dependence on particular actors, such as worship leaders or music teams, leading congregational participation to become overly guided rather than developing as autonomous spiritual capacity. Third, specific expressive standards may generate subtle normative pressure, whereby congregants who do not display similar emotional expressions feel less

spiritual, despite the personal and diverse nature of faith experience.

In response to these potential dysfunctions, relevant action plans should not aim to reduce music, but to recalibrate the formation ecosystem so that music remains powerful, balanced, and inclusive. First, churches can develop models of integrated formation by linking song sequences with brief theological introductions that enrich lyrical understanding without unduly lengthening worship, thereby anchoring affective experience in reflective meaning (Graham, 2004). Second, churches should pursue role distribution and leadership regeneration by training youth and new members to lead worship, read Scripture, or facilitate prayer, so that role structures do not depend on a small group and participation becomes more inclusive. Third, churches can emphasize inclusivity of expression by offering pastoral education that affirms diverse bodily and emotional responses, emphasizing faith orientation and moral integrity rather than uniform expression. Fourth, evaluations of music ministry, which already occur, can expand beyond technical performance to formative impact by assessing lyrical diversity and examining whether music effectively supports the translation of values into social life rather than remaining confined to worship atmosphere.

In sum, this study affirms that church music at GSJA Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu functions as an institutional device operating on three interrelated levels: organizing worship roles, producing spirituality as collective experience, and shaping character through moral habituation. These findings broaden perspectives on church music by positioning it not merely as aesthetic expression or emotional stimulus, but as a socio-spiritual mechanism that forms religious subjects and connects ritual practice with social life.

Conclusion

This study concludes that church music at the Gereja Sidang Jemaat Allah (GSJA) Yang Moon Permata Tateli Satu does not function as an additional liturgical element or merely as an accompaniment to worship, but operates as an integrated socio-religious mechanism in the formation of worship role structures, congregational spirituality, and social character. The findings demonstrate that music organizes ritual flow, distributes roles among the altar team, worship leader, singers, and congregants, and frames affective participation in a directed manner. Through repeated and institutionalized musical practices—both in Sunday worship and in church activities throughout the week—music becomes the primary medium that mediates spiritual experience, internalizes faith values, and translates ritual piety into moral orientation and social behavior. Accordingly, the central conclusion of this study is that church music operates simultaneously at ritual, affective, and normative levels, shaping congregants not only as worship participants, but as religious subjects with particular identities, emotional dispositions, and social character.

From an academic perspective, this study contributes by offering an integrative approach to the study of church music. In contrast to previous research that tends to examine spiritual, aesthetic, or communal functions of music in isolation, this study integrates three analytical layers—worship role structures, spiritual formation, and character habituation—within a single theoretical framework grounded in role theory. The primary contribution of this research lies in conceptualizing church music as an institutional device that not only “animates” worship, but also “regulates” social relations, collective emotion, and religious identity within the congregation. By positioning music as a mechanism of role distribution, affective management, and role identity formation, this study extends discourse in the sociology of religion and church music studies, particularly within the Pentecostal-Charismatic context in Indonesia, which has often been interpreted primarily through the lens of individual spiritual experience or emotional expression.

Nevertheless, this study acknowledges several limitations. First, the research focuses on a single local church community, which requires caution in generalizing the findings to other Pentecostal church contexts. Second, the data primarily derive from worship observations, congregational interviews, and church documents, and therefore do not sufficiently explore perspectives from outside the church community regarding the broader social impact of church music. Third, the study does not systematically compare the musical practices of GSJA with those of other denominations or different liturgical traditions. Accordingly, future research should pursue comparative cross-denominational studies, expand research sites to include churches with diverse musical characteristics, and combine qualitative approaches with quantitative methods to more comprehensively assess the relationship between church music, spirituality, and congregational character formation within broader social life.

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