

## Development of Youth Liturgy as a Means of Character Education in Local Churches

<sup>1</sup> Natalia Adriana Tamangunde

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Kristen Indonesia Tomohon

		<b>Abstract</b>
Received:	07 July 2025	<p><i>The development of youth liturgy in local churches plays a strategic role as a means of character education, significantly contributing to the formation of young people's personality and spirituality. Liturgy functions not only as a religious ritual but also as a faith experience that holistically shapes moral, social, and spiritual values. This study aims to explore in depth how youth liturgy can be optimized as an effective medium for character formation through meaningful and contextual worship experiences. The research employs a qualitative descriptive approach, with data collected through in-depth interviews with youth and worship leaders, participatory observations during worship services, and document analysis of liturgy practices at a GMIM Imanuel Sawangan congregation in the Airmadidi Satu region. The findings indicate that participatory liturgy designed to suit cultural contexts and youth needs enhances discipline, responsibility, and internalization of Christian values among young participants. Moreover, the use of musical and narrative elements within the liturgy proves effective in attracting active participation and deepening faith appreciation. Innovative liturgical practices that integrate contemporary music with relevant messaging create worship experiences that foster not only spirituality but also positive social character development. This study underscores the necessity of developing youth liturgy as a tool for character education to meet contemporary challenges and strengthen the role of local churches in shaping a generation rooted in integrity and Christian values. The practical implications of this research may serve as a reference for other churches in developing effective and adaptive youth liturgy models.</i></p>
Revised:	16 July 2025	
Accepted:	23 July 2025	
<b>Keywords:</b>		<i>Youth liturgy, character education, local church, worship, character formation</i>
(*) Corresponding Author:		<a href="mailto:nataliatamangunde@gmail.com">nataliatamangunde@gmail.com</a>
<b>How to Cite:</b>		Tamangunde, N. (2025). Development of Youth Liturgy as a Means of Character Education in Local Churches. <i>International Journal of Education, Information Technology, and Others</i> , 8(3.B), 278-286. Retrieved from <a href="https://jurnal.peneliti.net/index.php/IJEIT/article/view/12346">https://jurnal.peneliti.net/index.php/IJEIT/article/view/12346</a>

### INTRODUCTION

Liturgy in the Christian tradition is not merely a formal ritual but a central spiritual and pedagogical activity in congregational life. It functions as the primary medium for expressing faith and shaping the spiritual identity of believers (Mariyanto, 2004). Rice and Husstutler (2001) define liturgy as “worship as an act of communal participation,” emphasizing that worshippers—regardless of age—are called to be active agents rather than passive spectators. Liturgy, in this understanding, is a dynamic, formative space where spiritual identity is built and social bonds within the church community are strengthened.

In the contemporary context, particularly in youth ministry, the relevance and impact of liturgy are being seriously tested. Today's youth grow up in a digital, pluralistic, and rapidly shifting cultural environment. As Kristiana and Raharjo (2020) explain, this generational shift demands a new liturgical paradigm—one that is not only doctrinally sound but also culturally sensitive and participatory. Unfortunately, many liturgical practices in local churches, including in GMIM Imanuel Sawangan, have not adequately responded to this reality. Observations and informal interviews with church leaders and youth show a growing sense of disconnection: worship feels repetitive, distant, and unrelatable to youth. Attendance is often routine, and engagement—both emotional and spiritual—is minimal.

This disconnection reflects a deeper issue: the failure of liturgy to serve as an effective instrument for character education. While ideally liturgy is a tool to form values such as discipline, honesty, responsibility, and spiritual depth (Gulo et al., 2024), in practice it often becomes a mere ritualistic formality. Theological reflection from Tillich (1951) affirms that faith expressions—particularly in liturgy—must carry existential meaning. In other words, liturgy must be able to speak to the real, daily experiences and struggles of its participants, especially youth undergoing identity formation and facing moral challenges in society.

The absence of contextual engagement in youth liturgy contributes to the weakening of faith identity and the erosion of moral character among church youth. Elements that could serve as bridges—such as music, visual arts, and digital technology—are either underutilized or presented in outdated formats. According to Benjamins (2021), music in liturgy is not merely decorative but deeply formative, capable of touching emotional and psychological layers of the worshipper. Similarly, Brooks (2024) shows how biblical musical meditation can reduce anxiety and enhance emotional well-being—an especially crucial insight considering the increasing mental health challenges faced by Gen Z.

In GMIM Imanuel Sawangan, liturgical practices tend to follow a fixed structure rooted in tradition, which, although theologically valid, often lacks room for innovation or creative expression from the youth. Efforts to involve youth in worship planning and music ministry are present but limited, often top-down in nature. This structural rigidity leads to low ownership and minimal active involvement from young members. Hibbert and Hibbert (2020) stress that participatory involvement in music and liturgy not only fosters a sense of responsibility but also creates spiritual intimacy and solidarity. When youth are positioned only as recipients—not contributors—of worship, the transformative potential of liturgy is significantly diminished.

Moreover, the digital era presents both challenges and opportunities for youth liturgy. Lestari (2021) and Kristiana & Raharjo (2020) argue that the integration of technology into Christian education—including worship—is inevitable and potentially beneficial if rooted in sound theological principles. However, local congregations often face resistance to change, driven by concerns over theological purity, generational gaps, or fear of “secularization” in worship.

Mariyanto (2004) notes that the greatest challenge in liturgical renewal lies in the inertia of tradition and the anxiety of change, especially when it threatens established norms.

In light of these challenges, it becomes urgent to re-examine how youth liturgy can be reconstructed as an inclusive and transformative medium—not merely for expressing faith, but for forming character. A liturgy that integrates youth voices, embraces relevant media, and resonates with their lived realities holds the potential to restore worship as a space of meaningful spiritual encounter. This involves not only technical or aesthetic adjustments, but a theological reorientation that affirms the youth as full participants in the liturgical life of the church.

Therefore, this study aims to explore how the development of youth liturgy can be optimized as a character education tool in local churches, with a specific focus on GMIM Imanuel Sawangan, located in the Airmadidi Satu region. By employing a qualitative approach, the research seeks to understand the lived experiences, contextual challenges, and practical possibilities for designing and implementing youth-oriented liturgy that is both biblically grounded and culturally resonant. The goal is to contribute to the development of liturgical models that foster spiritual growth, ethical responsibility, and social engagement among Christian youth in today's church.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of youth liturgy development (Creswell, 2013; Moleong, 2019). Data were collected using in-depth interviews with youth and pastors, participatory observation during worship services, and documentation related to the implemented liturgy. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data display, and conclusion verification methods (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014, as cited in Silverman, 2021). Data validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study was conducted at the GMIM Imanuel Sawangan congregation in the Airmadidi Satu region, which has an active youth community.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This study aims to examine how the development of youth liturgy can serve as an effective medium for character education in the local church, specifically in the congregation of GMIM Imanuel Sawangan, Airmadidi Satu District. With a background of an active and dynamic youth community, this study highlights the significant role of creatively and contextually designed liturgy in shaping character values aligned with Christian teachings. The research findings are presented through three main aspects identified from field data and supported by relevant theoretical frameworks and previous studies: the role of contemporary music and singing, active youth participation in liturgy, and the adaptation of liturgy in the digital era.

### ***Contemporary Music and Singing as a Medium for Shaping Spiritual and Emotional Identity***

The study conducted in the congregation of GMIM Imanuel Sawangan, Airmadidi Satu District, reveals that contemporary music and singing in youth liturgy play a highly strategic role in shaping the character and spiritual identity of young people. The active participation of the youth community in this church provides space for them to be directly involved in a worship process that is both creative and meaningful. Music, as one of the most dominant elements in liturgy, serves not merely as an accompaniment to worship rituals, but as a symbolic form of communication that allows young people to express their emotions and faith in a personal and emotional manner. Benjamins (2021) asserts that musical practices in liturgical contexts function as *speech acts*—meaningful communicative actions—that connect spiritual dimensions with emotional experiences. This dynamic facilitates the internalization of Christian values while also strengthening communal bonds among the youth.

Furthermore, Brooks (2024) offers a relevant analysis by explaining that musical meditation in worship serves as a significant anxiety-reducing mechanism among young congregants. In the context of GMIM Imanuel Sawangan, liturgical music accompanied by contemporary songs creates a space where youth can release psychological tension and cultivate inner peace. The spiritual experiences fostered through music directly contribute to the improvement of their psychological well-being. Lee (2025) reinforces this finding through empirical research demonstrating that exposure to religious music has a positive impact on the mental health and worship motivation of young church members. Hence, music becomes a bridge connecting the spiritual and psychological dimensions of youth life, serving as a catalyst for deeper engagement and active participation in church worship.

At GMIM Imanuel Sawangan, youth involvement in musical and worship services offers them opportunities to actualize themselves while cultivating a sense of responsibility and solidarity. Music not only enriches liturgical experiences but also builds a strong sense of belonging and commitment to the church community. Hibbert & Hibbert (2020) emphasize that youth participation in music ministry is an effective form of character education, fostering discipline, cooperation, and mutual respect among members. This approach aligns with the development of liturgy that prioritizes active participation as a key component of youth character formation in local church contexts.

Moreover, the integration of contemporary music and singing in liturgy cannot be separated from the social and technological developments influencing the worship patterns of today's younger generation. Lestari (2021) and Kristiana & Raharjo (2020) highlight the importance of liturgical adaptation that responds to digital technology and contemporary culture so that worship remains relevant and touches the real lives of young people. In GMIM Imanuel Sawangan, liturgical innovation through contemporary music also encourages digital

engagement and broader social interaction, enabling character formation to occur not only within the formal setting of worship but also through digital platforms and social networks integral to youths' daily lives.

Theoretically, these findings are consistent with the concept of Christian character education as articulated by Tillich (1951) and Gulo et al. (2024), who stress that character formation must holistically integrate faith, spiritual experience, and social practice. Contemporary music and singing, as integral parts of youth liturgy, provide a concrete medium to realize such integration within dynamic youth communities in the modern era. Therefore, liturgy involving contemporary music not only strengthens spiritual character but also equips young people with the emotional and social skills necessary for faithful and responsible living in society.

### ***Youth Active Participation in Liturgy as a Means of Character Education***

In the context of the GMIM Imanuel Sawangan congregation in the Airmadidi Satu District, the active participation of youth in liturgy has proven to be a key factor in supporting transformative character education. The youth community in this congregation is known to be vibrant and dynamic, engaging not only in weekly worship services but also in age-group worship and social ministries. The liturgies are designed to open space for participation—such as collective Scripture readings, intercessory prayers composed by the youth, and brief devotional introductions delivered in their own language. These components serve as platforms where values such as responsibility, boldness in expressing faith, and empathy begin to grow and take root. In practice, the youth are not only trained to serve in front of the congregation, but they are also invited to reflect on the spiritual meaning behind every liturgical act they perform.

Hibbert & Hibbert (2020) emphasize that music ministry, particularly when managed directly by youth, is one of the most effective forms of participatory liturgy in developing discipline and teamwork. This is evident in field observations, where the youth music team at GMIM Imanuel Sawangan regularly conducts rehearsals, arranges song lists, and coordinates with worship leaders. Such processes demand punctuality, openness to feedback, and a willingness to serve selflessly. These values naturally become part of Christian character education embedded in the dynamics of worship. Active involvement in ministry is not merely a spiritual activity but also a means of refining personality and nurturing a strong work ethic within the church community.

Furthermore, youth involvement in liturgy promotes solidarity and high social cohesion. Through collaborative ministry, the youth learn to set aside differences in background and personality in pursuit of a shared goal: creating an empowering and edifying worship experience. This aligns with Tillich's (1951) view of worship as a social act that unites individuals with God and with one another. In a participatory worship setting, each person is called to be an active subject in the redemptive work of God, rather than a passive recipient. Therefore, an open and dialogical liturgy can serve as a space for cultivating spirituality that is inherently connected to the social and moral dimensions of youth life in the church.

The experience of youth in GMIM Imanuel Sawangan in managing and actively participating in liturgy also shapes a reflective and critical approach to faith. Through group discussions, the development of thematic liturgies, and collective worship evaluations, youth are encouraged to explore the relationship between biblical texts, their own life contexts, and practical application. Character education in this setting does not occur through moral lectures, but through concrete experiences within a community that lives out Christian values contextually. As Gulo et al. (2024) point out, effective Christian education must integrate faith and social practice, which resonates well with the pattern of youth liturgy developed at GMIM Imanuel Sawangan.

Thus, the development of liturgy that emphasizes youth active participation at GMIM Imanuel Sawangan in the Airmadidi Satu District impacts not only the vitality and relevance of worship but also serves as a strategic medium for character education. In this framework, liturgy is not merely viewed as a formal ritual, but as a means of cultivating Christian faith and personality in an integrated manner. This process nurtures a generation of church youth who not only understand their faith but are also ready to become leaders and servants of character, both within the church and in society at large.

#### ***Contextualizing Liturgy in the Digital Era as a Medium for Character Education***

In the context of local churches such as GMIM Imanuel Sawangan, Airmadidi Satu District, which hosts an active and tech-savvy youth community, the development of contextualized youth liturgy has become increasingly significant. Today's youth are shaped by digital culture, which influences their thinking, interactions, and access to spiritual values. Consequently, static and monotonous forms of liturgy often fail to capture their attention or foster meaningful participation. The integration of digital media—such as projectors, digital music, reflective videos, and social media platforms for sharing spiritual messages—not only enriches the worship experience but also creates opportunities for character education that is contextual and relevant to the daily lives of young people. Lestari (2021) affirms that the use of technology in Christian education holds great potential in bridging faith values with the fast-paced and interactive realities of youth culture.

It is crucial to understand that digital liturgy is not merely about aesthetics or modernizing worship formats; it encompasses deeper theological and pedagogical dimensions. Digitally contextualized liturgy must remain rooted in Gospel values and the principles of Christian education. Kristiana and Raharjo (2020) emphasize that Christian education in the digital era demands creative approaches in communicating faith, without compromising spiritual depth. In practice at GMIM Imanuel Sawangan, youth are not passive recipients of worship but active participants involved in content creation, thematic liturgy design, and sharing testimonies through video or online platforms. This process nurtures their skills in communication, leadership, and spiritual responsibility—indirectly shaping strong, relevant Christian character.

More than a methodological adaptation, the contextualization of liturgy in the digital era serves as a spiritual and social strategy that bridges faith and praxis. Tillich (1951) asserted that Christian theology must engage with the dynamics of the times and respond to the existential needs of humanity. In this light, liturgy is not confined to encounters with God within church walls but also takes place within the digital world, which is a fundamental part of contemporary youth life. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and digital Bible apps used in youth liturgy enable value-based learning—such as love, honesty, forgiveness, and justice—to be communicated in a more accessible and applicable manner. As Gulo et al. (2024) emphasize, the integration of faith with social practice is central to Christian character education, and in the digital context, this integration becomes tangible through cross-platform interactions that foster both spiritual and moral development.

Overall, youth liturgy at GMIM Imanuel Sawangan demonstrates that contextualization in the digital era not only enhances youth engagement but also serves as an effective educational medium for character formation. The active involvement of youth in designing, managing, and leading digital-based liturgy cultivates leadership, responsibility, and deep personal reflection. Liturgy is no longer merely a space for “spiritual consumption,” but becomes a “character laboratory” where young people are trained to live by Christian values rooted in faith and responsive to the modern world. This transformation is the result of a synergy between relevant liturgical approaches and a grounded spirit of ministry—offering a replicable model for other local churches.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study reveals that the development of youth liturgy that is creative, contextual, and participatory plays a significant role in shaping the character of young people in the local church, particularly in the congregation of GMIM Imanuel Sawangan, Airmadidi Satu District. Liturgy is no longer perceived merely as a series of formal worship rituals but rather as a formative spiritual space where Christian values—such as responsibility, leadership, solidarity, and integrity—are imparted in a practical and meaningful way in the lives of youth. The integration of music and contemporary worship songs as core components of liturgy not only enriches worship expression but also serves as a medium for forming spiritual identity and emotional well-being. These findings are in line with studies by Benjamins (2021), Brooks (2024), and Lee (2025), which emphasize the role of music in facilitating spiritual experience, reducing anxiety, and strengthening youth engagement within the church community.

Furthermore, the contextualization of youth liturgy in the digital age emerges as a key factor in bridging faith with the real-life context of today’s youth. The wise use of digital media—such as videos, digital Bible applications, and social media platforms—not only enhances the worship experience but also fosters a more relevant and transformative character education process. This supports the arguments of Lestari (2021), Kristiana & Raharjo (2020), and the

theological perspectives of Tillich (1951) and Gulo et al. (2024), who advocate for the integration of faith with social practice as the core of Christian character formation.

In conclusion, youth liturgy that is holistically and contextually developed can serve as an effective medium for character education—spiritually, socially, and ethically. It empowers young people not merely as passive recipients of worship but as active participants who develop leadership, responsibility, and reflective faith. This model of liturgy presents a replicable strategy for other local churches in equipping and engaging the next generation in the light of the Gospel.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alkitab Terjemahan Baru. (1974). Lembaga Alkitab Indonesia.
- Benjamins, L. (2021). Musicking as liturgical speech acts: An examination of contemporary worship music practices. *Studia Liturgica*, 51(2), 185–201. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/00393207211033993>
- Brooks, L. P. (2024). *Restoring functions of Christian worship: An examination of the impacts of biblical musical meditation on anxiety* [Doctoral dissertation, Liberty University]. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/5461/>
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2016). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Gulo, K. K., Zendrato, N., Darma, F. E., & Topayung, S. L. (2024). Dampak pendidikan Kristen dalam pembentukan identitas keagamaan anak di era digital: Tantangan dan peluang. *Damai: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Kristen dan Filsafat*, 1(4), 70–83.
- Hibbert, M., & Hibbert, V. (2020). *Pelayanan musik*. ANDI.
- Kristiana, D., & Raharjo, W. (2020). Pendidikan Kristen di era digital: Tantangan dan peluang. *Jurnal Teologi Kristen*, 8(2), 150–162.
- Lee, K. M. (2025). *The impact of religious music on psychological well-being: A survey study of Chinese Christians in Hong Kong churches* [Doctoral dissertation, Liberty University]. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/6570/>
- Lestari, S. (2021). Integrasi teknologi dalam kurikulum pendidikan Kristen. *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Kristen*, 6(4), 210–220.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE Publications.
- Manik, R. E., & Saragih, O. (2024). Peran pendidikan agama Kristen dalam membangun iman remaja di era digital. *Tri Tunggal: Jurnal Pendidikan Kristen dan Katolik*, 3(1), 167–175.
- Mariyanto, E. (2004). *Kamus liturgi sederhana*. Kanisius.
- Moleong, L. J. (2017). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif*. Remaja Rosdakarya.

- Moleong, L. J. (2019). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif* (Ed. revisi). Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Rice, H. L., & Husstutler, J. C. (2001). *Reformed worship*. Geneva Press.
- Silverman, D. (2021). *Qualitative research* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Sugiyono. (2017). *Metode penelitian kualitatif, kuantitatif, dan R&D*. Alfabeta.
- Tillich, P. (1951). *Systematic theology, Vol. 1*. University of Chicago Press.
- Wainwright, G. (2006). *Worship with one accord: Where liturgy and ecumenism intersect*. Oxford University Press.