

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY: APPLIED BUSINESS AND EDUCATION RESEARCH

2025, Vol. 6, No. 7, 3646 – 3660

<http://dx.doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.06.07.30>

## Research Article

### A Needs Assessment of Choral Groups at an Archdiocesan Shrine in Tacloban City, Philippines: Basis for an Extension Project

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*Article history:*

Submission 03 June 2025

Revised 30 June 2025

Accepted 23 July 2025

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative needs assessment explores the current practices, challenges, and developmental needs of the choirs serving at an Archdiocesan Shrine in Tacloban City. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive design, data were gathered through interviews and focus group discussions with ten purposively selected participants from choir members, coordinators, and conductors. Thematic analysis revealed five major themes: current musical practices, training and skill development needs, resource limitations, coordination and leadership, and spiritual and community growth. Findings indicate that while choirs exhibit strong commitment and structured rehearsal routines, they face significant gaps in formal training, access to musical resources, and leadership support. Participants also emphasized the choir's role as a spiritual community and expressed a desire for deeper liturgical formation and pastoral guidance. These findings suggest the need for multidimensional interventions, including capacity-building initiatives, resource allocation, leadership development, and spiritual enrichment. The study further recommends the implementation of an extension project by the Leyte Normal University Bachelor of Music in Music Education, offering workshops and mentorship to address the identified needs. Strengthening the choir ministry is seen as essential not only for improving liturgical music quality but also for enhancing the spiritual vitality of the parish community.

**Keywords:** *Needs assessment, Church choirs, Qualitative descriptive study*

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## Introduction

Church choirs play a vital role in Catholic liturgy, especially in parishes like the Archdiocesan Shrine in Tacloban City. Their function extends beyond leading congregational singing. They help shape a sacred and participatory environment, enrich the liturgical celebration,

and support the Church's mission of evangelization through music. As Bailey and Davidson (2005) note, liturgical music is not simply ornamental—it is a spiritual and theological expression that communicates the core truths of faith and invites the faithful into deeper worship.

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*How to cite:*

Mabini, J. P. & Macapaz, N. J. Q. (2025). A Needs Assessment of Choral Groups at an Archdiocesan Shrine in Tacloban City, Philippines: Basis for an Extension Project. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*. 6(7), 3646 – 3660. doi: 10.11594/ijmaber.06.07.30

Participation in a church choir also nurtures both personal and communal growth. It requires dedication, teamwork, and a shared sense of service, fostering moral development and belonging within the parish community (Mall et al., 2021). For many choir members, this ministry becomes a source of fulfillment that strengthens their faith and identity. In addition to its spiritual value, research shows that group singing enhances mental and emotional well-being, helping to reduce stress and build positive social connections (Bailey & Davidson, 2005). These benefits make the choir not only a musical group but also a community of faith and care.

However, sustaining an effective and vibrant choir ministry demands more than commitment—it requires structured support. As Krueger and Casey (2014) emphasize, musical competence alone is not sufficient. Choir members must also be trained in essential areas such as vocal technique, choral blending, music theory, and liturgical understanding to effectively lead worship. Access to adequate resources—like hymnals, functional instruments, printed music, and appropriate rehearsal spaces—is also crucial for quality preparation and delivery.

Equally important is the presence of strong, compassionate leadership. Choir conductors serve as both musical and spiritual guides who align repertoire with liturgical seasons, mentor members, and ensure smooth coordination. According to MacLachlan (2022), when church authorities extend active support to choirs, they foster a culture of excellence and spiritual vitality. Without this support, choirs may face disorganization and reduced participation.

Given these dynamics, it becomes essential to assess the specific needs of parish choirs through qualitative inquiry. By understanding their experiences, challenges, and aspirations, church leaders and educators can co-develop responsive programs that support training, resource provision, and spiritual formation—ensuring that choirs remain a powerful and enduring presence in parish life.

At the Archdiocesan Shrine, seven distinct choirs constitute the core of the parish's liturgical life, each sustained by individuals

who selflessly dedicate their time, vocal talent, and musical expertise in service to the Church's worship and mission. These ensembles vary in size and structure—some are guided by trained conductors and accompanists, while others continue to thrive through the dedication of volunteers despite the absence of formal leadership. Collectively, they comprise the Grand Choir, which contributes significantly to the spiritual atmosphere of major liturgical events such as the Fiesta, the Paschal Triduum, and the Advent season. A coordinated rotation system ensures that each choir is assigned to specific Sunday Masses, providing the parish community with a consistent and meaningful musical presence throughout the liturgical calendar. In light of this, this study is conducted to examine the current conditions and identify the specific needs of the choirs. The findings will serve as the basis for proposing an extension program under the Bachelor of Music in Music Education of Leyte Normal University, aimed at strengthening and sustaining the Shrine's liturgical music ministry, in alignment with the mandate of state universities and colleges (SUCs) in the Philippines to conduct community extension services as part of their fourfold functions of instruction, research, extension, and production.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study aims to explore and assess the specific needs of the choirs serving at the Archdiocesan Shrine in Tacloban City to support their growth and effectiveness in fulfilling their liturgical role. To guide this investigation, the following research questions are proposed:

1. What are the current musical practices, and what challenges, if any, do choir members and conductors face in terms of training, resources, and coordination of the choirs?
2. What are the choir members' and leaders perceived needs for musical, liturgical, and leadership development (e.g., training, resources, mentorship)?
3. How can the church leadership, along with other stakeholders, respond to the identified needs to strengthen the choir ministry?

### **Review of Related Literature**

Church choirs have long been integral to religious worship, serving not only as musical

leaders but also as vital components of community building and spiritual enrichment. The role of choirs extends beyond mere performance; they facilitate congregational participation, enhance the emotional depth of services, and preserve liturgical traditions. However, the effectiveness and sustainability of church choirs are contingent upon various factors, including organizational structure, resource availability, and the personal well-being of choir members. This literature review examines the multifaceted aspects of church choirs, focusing on their significance, the challenges they face, and strategies for their development and sustenance.

**Significance of Church Choirs.** Church choirs hold a central place in the life of the liturgy, enriching worship not only through the beauty of song but by guiding the faithful in prayerful participation. As Mall et al. (2020) affirm, choirs deepen the solemnity and vibrancy of liturgical celebrations, shaping a sacred atmosphere that invites reflection, reverence, and communal worship. Yet the role of the choir extends well beyond its musical function. It serves as a spiritual and social space where members grow in faith together, find mutual support, and express a shared sense of purpose. Participation in church choirs has been shown to foster a strong sense of belonging and spiritual well-being. Bailey and Davidson (2005) note that choir involvement strengthens connections within the faith community, offering individuals a meaningful way to contribute and feel rooted in parish life. The benefits are not only spiritual but also psychological and social. Clift and Hancox (2001) found that choir members often experience reduced stress and increased emotional well-being through regular singing. Similarly, Moss et al. (2018) reported perceived health benefits among choir participants, including enhanced mood and deeper social connectedness. Taken together, these studies highlight the multifaceted value of church choirs. They are not only custodians of liturgical music but also catalysts for healing, fellowship, and spiritual growth—nurturing both the individual and the wider community in profound and lasting ways.

**Challenges Facing Church Choirs.** While church choirs remain central to parish life, they face persistent challenges that affect their effectiveness and sustainability. A key issue is the lack of access to musical training and resources. As McFarland (2006) notes, limited opportunities for structured education can hinder performance quality and member retention. Financial constraints further limit the ability to acquire materials or offer training programs. Time pressures also pose difficulties. Kramer (2011) highlights how members often struggle to balance rehearsals with personal and professional commitments, leading to irregular attendance. This is compounded by declining volunteerism, making it harder to sustain active ensembles. Broader cultural shifts add to these challenges. Lawton (2022) observes that declining church attendance and aging congregations have reduced choir participation. Differences in musical preferences across generations can also cause tension, with traditional hymns appealing less to younger members and contemporary songs sometimes alienating older ones. Together, these issues call for creative and adaptive strategies to support choir ministries today.

**Strategies for Development and Sustainability.** Addressing the challenges of church choirs requires a well-rounded strategy that includes training, resource development, and community-building. Structured programs in vocal technique, music theory, and liturgical understanding—such as those recommended by Krueger and Casey (2014)—can enhance musical quality and member confidence. Fostering a supportive choir culture is equally essential. Danyew (2016) highlights that open communication, recognition of contributions, and social bonding help strengthen member commitment and attract new participants. Sustaining the ministry also involves creative resource mobilization. Churches might organize benefit concerts, apply for grants, or seek local sponsorships. Digital platforms can aid in sharing music and managing schedules efficiently. Finally, embracing diverse musical styles and engaging members across generations can revitalize choirs and reflect the richness of the congregation. Inclusivity not only strengthens

worship but also builds a more connected and vibrant community.

Church choirs play a vital role in deepening worship and building community within congregations. Yet they often contend with limited resources, time pressures, and shifting demographics. Addressing these challenges requires intentional efforts—such as skill-building programs, inclusive community practices, smart resource management, and flexible repertoire choices. When supported in these ways, choirs not only enhance liturgical celebrations but also foster a stronger, more connected parish life.

## Methodology

*Research Design.* This study adopts a qualitative descriptive design, well-suited for capturing the real-life experiences, challenges, and needs of church choir members and leaders in their natural context. As Sandelowski (2000) explains, this approach seeks to provide a clear, low-inference account of events using participants' own language, staying close to the data without heavy theoretical framing. In this study, the design allows for an honest and grounded portrayal of choir life at the Archdiocesan Shrine—shedding light on musical practices, organizational hurdles, and areas for growth. Rather than aiming to build new theory, the goal is to generate insights that can guide practical interventions and pastoral support. This approach ensures both methodological integrity and direct relevance to the lived realities of the choir ministry.

*Participants.* The study involved 10 purposively selected participants, comprising choristers, choirmasters, and choir coordinators from the Archdiocesan Shrine in Tacloban City, ensuring that all groups were adequately represented. Using purposive sampling ensured that all participants were actively engaged in the choir ministry and could offer meaningful insights into its current strengths, challenges, and opportunities for growth. The selection was guided by these criteria: (a) He/she must have served for more than 5 years in the shrine; (b) an active officer, section leader, choirmaster, or a choir/ministry coordinator; and (c) willing to participate in the study. The selection

was bounded by the need to capture a diversity of roles and experiences within the music ministry, rather than statistical generalization.

In qualitative research, the focus is on depth rather than breadth, making smaller sample sizes both appropriate and effective. Creswell (2016) suggests that 5 to 25 participants are often sufficient for in-depth exploration, while Guest et al. (2006) note that data saturation can be achieved with as few as six to twelve interviews, especially in relatively homogeneous groups. Given this, the inclusion of 10 carefully selected participants in this study is adequate to generate rich, meaningful insights aligned with the research objectives.

*Research Environment.* The study was conducted at an Archdiocesan Shrine in Tacloban City—a Roman Catholic parish where seven choirs actively support the liturgical life of the church. Each choir follows a designated schedule for Sunday Masses and other celebrations, with membership ranging from 15 to 40 individuals. As a vibrant parish with structured liturgical practices, the Shrine offers a fitting context for exploring the experiences, challenges, and needs of church choirs. It also provides valuable insight into the role of sacred music in Catholic worship and the operational dynamics of parish-based ensembles.

*Data Gathering Procedures.* Before data collection, a formal letter was submitted to the parish office to request permission and identify potential participants. Upon approval, individuals were purposively selected based on their active involvement in the choir ministry. The researchers then arranged individual interviews or focus group discussions in coordination with participants. Prior to each session, participants received an informed consent form outlining the study's purpose, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Only those who provided signed consent were included.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions conducted from January to March 2025. Interviews were held in private, quiet spaces within

the parish premises, such as the conference room or unused meeting areas, to ensure comfort and confidentiality. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes, while the focus group discussions lasted for 40 minutes. An interview guide was used to maintain consistency across sessions while allowing flexibility to probe for additional details. With participants' consent, all interviews and discussions were audio-recorded to ensure accurate transcription and analysis. Field notes were also taken to capture non-verbal cues and contextual observations.

After data collection, all audio recordings were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. To protect participant identity, pseudonyms or participant codes (e.g., P1, P2) were assigned and used throughout the analysis and presentation of results. All transcripts and audio recordings were stored on a password-protected device accessible only to the researchers. Participants were offered the opportunity to review their transcripts for accuracy through member checking. Upon completion of transcription and analysis, the recordings were securely deleted. Data were then analyzed using thematic analysis, as outlined in the following section.

**Data Analysis.** Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, following the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2006), which offers a structured and rigorous approach to identifying patterns within qualitative data. The process began with data familiarization, involving repeated reading of transcripts and field notes to gain a deep understanding of the content. Initial codes were then generated by identifying key phrases, recurring ideas, and significant statements across the data set.

In the next phase, related codes were clustered to form preliminary themes, which were reviewed for coherence and consistency with the overall data. These themes were then refined, clearly defined, and named to capture the essence of participants' experiences. The findings were presented in narrative form, supported by direct quotations to ensure that the voices of participants were authentically repre-

sented. This method ensured both analytical rigor and fidelity to the lived realities shared by those involved in the study.

**Ethical Considerations.** This study adhered to established ethical standards for research involving human participants. Ethical clearance was secured from the institutional review board of the researcher's academic institution prior to data collection. The review process covered the study's design, instruments, consent protocols, and data protection measures. All participants received a written informed consent form, presented in English and explained in Waray or Filipino as needed to ensure clear understanding. The form detailed the study's objectives, the type of questions that would be asked, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to refuse or withdraw from the study at any point without penalty or loss of benefits. Participants were also informed that they could decline to answer any question they found uncomfortable. Each participant was given ample time to review the consent form before signing, and only those who provided written consent were included in the study.

To maintain confidentiality, all data were anonymized. Participants were assigned pseudonyms or participant codes (e.g., P1, P2) to remove identifying information from transcripts and research documentation. Audio recordings were made only with explicit verbal and written permission from participants at the start of each interview or focus group. These recordings, along with the verbatim transcripts, were stored on a password-protected laptop and backed up on a secure, encrypted external storage device accessible only to the researcher. Hard copies of consent forms were stored in a locked cabinet at the researcher's residence. All data will be retained for a period of two years following the completion of the study, after which both digital and physical data will be permanently deleted and destroyed in accordance with data protection guidelines.

A risk-benefit assessment was considered to ensure participant protection. The study was classified as minimal risk, as it did not involve

sensitive topics or vulnerable populations. Potential benefits include the improvement of choir development initiatives and liturgical music practices at the Archdiocesan Shrine. While no monetary compensation was provided, participants' contributions were acknowledged with gratitude and respect. The researchers declared no conflict of interest and affirmed their commitment to transparency, accuracy, and the ethical treatment of all participants, upholding their dignity, autonomy, and well-being throughout the research process.

## Results

Through interviews and focus group discussions, participants shared their insights into the current state of their music ministry. Thematic analysis revealed five major themes: Current Musical Practices, Training and Skill Development Needs, Resource Limitations, Coordination and Leadership, and Spiritual and Community Growth. These themes provide a holistic view of how music ministry functions in the Shrine, as well as the gaps that, if addressed, could elevate both the musical and spiritual dimensions of worship.

### Theme 1: Current Musical Practices

All ten participants reported having a structured approach to preparing for liturgical services. Most choirs meet two to three times a week, usually in the evenings, to rehearse for Sunday Masses, feast days, and special liturgical events. Rehearsals generally begin with vocal warm-ups, followed by section practice (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and group blending sessions. The choirs typically prepare songs in advance, reviewing liturgical calendars to ensure that music selections are appropriate for the season.

"We have rehearsals every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. We start with warm-ups, then go over the music together, and end with a prayer." (P6 – a newly appointed choir secretary)

Though newly appointed as choir secretary, the participant demonstrated a clear understanding of the structured approach

adopted by their group. Her account reflected a well-organized rehearsal routine that balanced vocal preparation with spiritual grounding. The inclusion of prayer at the end of each session highlighted the choir's dual focus on musical discipline and liturgical devotion.

"We don't just rehearse the tune—we reflect on the message behind the songs too." (P5 – a chorister with more than a year of experience)

This statement speaks to a practice that goes beyond technical delivery, anchoring music in theological meaning and spiritual reflection. It suggests that rehearsals are not solely concerned with musical accuracy, but also with understanding the spiritual message conveyed through each piece. Such an approach reflects a deeper level of engagement, where music becomes a medium for catechesis and personal faith formation.

"Even if we're not active every week, we still come together before feasts to ensure our music aligns with the celebration." (P2 – a choir coordinator active mainly during special church occasions)

The flexibility of the choir's schedule is seen as both a limitation and an opportunity to prioritize quality during high-feast seasons. While limited weekly participation may pose challenges in consistency and continuity, it allows the choir to concentrate its efforts on preparing more intentionally for major liturgical celebrations. This approach reflects an adaptive strategy that aligns musical preparation with the liturgical significance of specific events.

"During practice, we make sure each member knows the structure of the Mass, the liturgical seasons, and even what to wear." (P6)

This reflects a well-organized music ministry that integrates liturgical formation into its musical preparation. By incorporating knowledge of the Mass structure, liturgical

seasons, and even appropriate attire, the choir ensures that members are not only musically prepared but also liturgically informed. This holistic approach reinforces the role of the choir as a vital contributor to the sacredness and order of the liturgical celebration.

"We review songs regularly, especially for new members, so everyone can catch up and feel confident." (P7 – a chorister and vice president of a choir)

By regularly reviewing songs, especially for new members, the choir fosters a learning environment that accommodates varying levels of experience. This practice not only enhances musical proficiency but also encourages long-term commitment and a sense of belonging among its members.

Despite variations in scheduling and levels of participation, all participants consistently demonstrated a profound respect for the role of music in the liturgy. The choirs' rehearsal practices reflected a shared dedication to both musical excellence and spiritual purpose. This dual focus highlights their understanding of sacred music not merely as an artistic pursuit, but as a meaningful act of worship—where technical precision and heartfelt devotion are seen as equally vital expressions of their ministry.

### **Theme 2: Training and Skill Development Needs of Choral Groups**

A commonly expressed concern among participants was the lack of formal musical training. While a few had prior experience through school or mentorship, many struggled with key areas such as sight-reading, vocal technique, diction, rhythm, ensemble blending, and liturgical understanding. There was unanimous agreement that structured workshops and training programs would greatly enhance both the choir's performance quality and members' confidence.

"I know how to read notes, but I'm slow. Sight-reading on the spot is hard for me." (P6)

Participant 6, a new member, reflected a common experience among less-trained singers—expressing both vulnerability and a strong desire for growth. Her insights highlighted the technical challenges faced by those with limited formal music education, especially in areas like sight-reading. This underscores the importance of providing foundational training to help members participate with greater confidence and competence in the choir ministry. This reflects a broader issue within the choir ministry, where varying levels of musical literacy impact overall performance and cohesion.

"Our biggest challenge is not having a skilled choirmaster. We need someone who can guide us with vocalization and proper pronunciation." (P2)

This points to a leadership gap that affects the technical capacity of the choir. The absence of a skilled choirmaster limits opportunities for structured vocal training and proper guidance in fundamental techniques such as diction and vocalization. Without a knowledgeable leader, choirs may rely on informal methods that lack consistency and effectiveness.

"We're good at harmonizing, but we need more exposure—maybe seminars or conventions with choirs outside the region." (P4 – choir treasurer and member)

His comments reflect a mature perspective and a desire to improve through external benchmarking. As a veteran member, he recognizes the value of learning from other choirs and broadening their exposure beyond the local parish. Participation in seminars or conventions could provide fresh insights, new techniques, and inspiration for continuous improvement. This openness to external engagement suggests a forward-thinking attitude that could benefit the entire choir ministry.

"The skills in our group vary so much—some of us have had formal

training, others are just learning. That's a challenge we try to manage." (P5)

This insight illustrates the internal diversity of skill levels within choirs, which can affect cohesion. When some members have formal musical training while others are still learning basic techniques, it creates challenges in achieving uniformity in sound and performance. This disparity can also impact rehearsal efficiency, as more time may be needed to accommodate varying learning paces. Addressing this issue requires targeted training programs that cater to both beginners and more advanced members to foster a more balanced and unified ensemble.

"If only we had regular training with music professionals, it would boost our confidence and bring us to a new level." (P7)

Here, the participant connected the need for training with the emotional and spiritual confidence of the group. She emphasized that regular instruction from music professionals would not only enhance their technical abilities but also strengthen their sense of assurance and purpose during liturgical performances. This reflects the belief that competence in music contributes to a more meaningful and fulfilling ministry experience. It also shows how skill development can positively influence the overall morale and unity of the choir.

With all of these responses, the data reflects a strong desire for capacity-building initiatives, such as vocal clinics, music theory classes, and mentorships, to support both individual and collective growth. Participants consistently emphasized that access to structured and sustained training would address existing skill gaps and promote greater musical confidence. Such initiatives are viewed not only as opportunities for technical improvement but also as essential for enhancing group cohesion, liturgical performance quality, and personal fulfillment within the ministry. The expressed need for professional guidance and continuous development underscores the choirs' commitment to serving with competence, reverence, and renewed purpose.

### **Theme 3: Resource Limitations in Liturgical Services & Preparations**

Another dominant theme was the lack of sufficient resources to support the choir's functions. These include inadequate access to musical instruments (especially functioning keyboards), hymnals, printed sheet music, storage facilities, and rehearsal venues. Some choirs rely on personal or borrowed equipment, and often rehearse in the church when it is not in use, creating scheduling and space challenges.

"We rehearse inside the church or in the conference room if it's available. But there's no real music room for us." (P3 – chorister with 17 years of experience)

This participant's long-term perspective accentuates the enduring nature of this need. Having served in the choir for 17 years, she has witnessed firsthand the persistent lack of a designated rehearsal space and the challenges it brings. Her observation suggests that this issue has remained unaddressed over time, underscoring the importance of prioritizing space allocation for the sustainability of choir activities.

"We've had the same keyboard for years. It works, but we need an upgrade." (P5)

Aging equipment has a noticeable impact on both musical quality and group morale. The continued use of outdated instruments, such as an old and deteriorating keyboard, hinders the choir's ability to deliver consistent and refined sound during practices and liturgical celebrations. Moreover, the lack of updated tools can lead to frustration or a sense of being undervalued among members, who view proper equipment as essential to performing their role with confidence and dignity.

"For our last event, we had to use our own funds to buy costumes. That might affect future projects because the moneys tight." (P6)

Financial strain becomes evident when choir members are required to cover non-musical expenses, such as costumes for liturgical performances. These costs, though essential for maintaining decorum during formal events, are often not subsidized by the parish, placing the burden on individual members for sponsorships. For those with limited resources, this added responsibility may discourage continued participation and limit the choir's capacity to engage in future activities.

"Sometimes we're just given digital copies, but access is limited—it's hard when you have to buy your own sheet music." (P10 – a chorister with limited resources)

Accessibility and affordability remain significant concerns, particularly for younger or student members of the choir. With limited access to printed sheet music, many are left to purchase materials on their own, which can be financially burdensome. Such constraints not only affect individual preparation but also compromise the overall efficiency and inclusivity of the choir.

"We dream of having a cabinet for our music files and a room just for practice. Somewhere that feels like our own." (P7)

This heartfelt wish reveals the longing for ownership, identity, and permanence in their ministry. The desire for a designated space and proper storage for music materials reflects the choir's aspiration to establish a sense of belonging and organizational stability. Providing adequate rehearsal space not only improves efficiency but also reinforces the choir's role as a valued part of the parish community.

Resource limitations extend beyond logistical concerns; they significantly impact the vitality and effectiveness of the choir ministry. Limited access to instruments, sheet music, storage, and rehearsal venues hinders musical quality and disrupts planning. Constantly adapting to these constraints can lead to inconsistent rehearsals and

performances. More critically, insufficient support may dampen the morale and spiritual enthusiasm of choir members, undermining their sense of purpose and diminishing their contribution to the liturgical life of the parish.

#### **Theme 4: Coordination and Leadership in the Ministry**

Effective leadership and communication emerged as a mixed theme: while some participants noted well-organized teams and responsive coordination, others revealed challenges with inconsistent leadership. Coordination typically involves group chats, meetings, and informal networks, but the effectiveness depends heavily on the presence and attitude of both choir leaders and music ministry priest-in-charge in this regard.

"Our choir head coordinates closely with the parish. It's busy, but we stay focused on serving together." (P5)

The participant's response reflects a choir that operates with a strong sense of structure and alignment with parish directives. Regular coordination between the choir head and parish leadership appears to foster efficiency and shared accountability. Such collaboration contributes to a unified approach to ministry, enabling the group to stay focused despite a demanding schedule.

"We have our own coordinators, and sometimes we get updates directly from other ministries. It works, but it's not always smooth." (P3)

Multiple communication channels—such as through coordinators and inter-ministry networks—are commonly used to manage information flow within the choir. While generally effective, these systems may occasionally lead to inconsistencies or delays in communication. As a result, coordination efforts can be affected, potentially impacting rehearsal planning and overall group readiness.

"There's collaboration, yes, but not all priests who are assigned to us are as hands-on. I can say this because I have been here serving for so many years." (P7)

Variations in the level of pastoral involvement were observed, with some assigned priests taking a more active role in choir-related activities than others. This difference in engagement can shape how supported choir members perceive themselves to be within their ministry. Depending on the extent of clerical guidance, choirs may experience varying degrees of direction and autonomy, each contributing to distinct leadership dynamics.

"Leadership in choirs should guide with empathy. Be a leader, not a boss." (P1 – senior coordinator)

Empathy and mutual respect are emphasized as key qualities in effective leadership within the choir setting. The comment suggests that leaders should prioritize guidance and support over authoritative control. This perspective aligns with the principles of servant leadership, promoting a collaborative and respectful environment for all members.

"I hope leaders realize they were chosen for a reason—and that members are there to follow, not to fight." (P4)

Concerns were expressed regarding the presence of internal misunderstandings or disagreements within the choir. The participant emphasized the importance of leadership that fosters unity and shared purpose among members. A clearly defined direction, supported by mutual respect and cooperation, is seen as essential for maintaining harmony and effectiveness in the ministry.

Effective leadership and sustained support from church authorities play a vital role in fostering choir morale, organizational cohesion, and overall development. When

guidance is clear and consistent, choirs are better equipped to function collaboratively and fulfill their liturgical responsibilities with confidence. Such leadership creates an environment where both musical and spiritual growth can flourish.

### **Theme 5: Spiritual and Community Growth of Choristers**

Perhaps the most profound theme to emerge was the choir's role as a spiritual and communal anchor. Participants did not see the choir merely as a performance group but as a faith community where they could grow together in service and prayer. Many called for more opportunities for Bible sharing, spiritual retreats, doctrine classes, and personal formation.

"More time for prayer and reflection together would strengthen our bond." (P5)

This reflects the choir's desire to deepen their purpose and service through shared spiritual practices. It suggests that beyond musical preparation, members value moments of prayer and reflection as essential components of their ministry. Such practices are seen as a way to strengthen not only individual faith but also the collective bond and spiritual unity of the group.

"Monthly Bible sharing would really help us grow spiritually as a group." (P7)

Rooting the choir's activities in Scripture and prayer reflects a deep understanding of the spiritual foundation of music ministry. The suggestion to hold monthly Bible sharing sessions shows a desire to strengthen not only musical service but also the group's faith and unity. Such practices support the Church's broader vision of liturgical music as both a spiritual offering and a form of communal worship.

"Some of us already attend doctrine classes and spiritual retreats—it deepens our connection not just with God, but with each other." (P6)

This response describes how existing spiritual efforts could be expanded across all choir members. While some individuals already engage in doctrine classes and retreats, these opportunities are not yet widespread or systematic within the group. Expanding access to such formative activities could foster a more unified spiritual identity, enriching both personal growth and the collective experience of worship through music.

*“We just want recognition and encouragement. It's not about the spotlight, it's about knowing we matter.” (P8)*

Recognition, for many, is tied to spiritual worth and a sense of being valued in the community. Feeling appreciated affirms the significance of their role in the liturgy and reinforces their commitment to the ministry. Simple acts of acknowledgment can greatly enhance morale and help members feel that their service is not only seen but also spiritually meaningful.

*“I'm proud of what we've built. I hope the next generation carries on with the same heart.” (P7)*

The statement, both nostalgic and hopeful, speaks to legacy and the emotional depth of choir service. It reflects a sense of pride in what the choir has accomplished and a sincere hope that future members will carry on with the same dedication and heart. This sentiment reveals that choir participation is more than a musical endeavor—it is a spiritual journey and a meaningful expression of service to the Church. The theme affirms that choirs function as spaces for fellowship, faith formation, and shared mission, fostering both personal growth and communal identity. Participants view their role not simply as performers, but as ministers who help animate the spiritual life of the parish. Accordingly, choirs merit intentional pastoral support, structured opportunities for spiritual formation, and sustained investment to ensure

their continued vitality and impact within the worshiping community.

## Discussions

The findings of this study reveal the layered and often underappreciated realities that parish-based choirs navigate today. While participants demonstrated structured rehearsal routines and a deep devotion to their liturgical role, many also voiced a clear need for more formal musical training. This mirrors earlier research highlighting the importance of musical literacy, strong leadership, and theological grounding in faith-based music ministries (Krueger & Casey, 2014; McFarland, 2006; Bailey & Davidson, 2005). The widespread desire for workshops and professional development reflects what Moss et al. (2018) and Mall et al. (2021) describe as essential to nurturing both musical skill and spiritual depth. Difficulties in sight-reading, vocal blending, and harmonization—frequently mentioned by participants—echo concerns raised by Clift and Hancox (2001) and Welch et al. (2014), underscoring the need for foundational training to achieve technical proficiency.

Resource constraints were another recurring theme. Consistent with the findings of Kramer (2011) and Clift and Hancox (2001), participants reported limited access to instruments, sheet music, and rehearsal spaces—factors that directly affect artistic consistency and group morale. Financial burdens, often borne personally by choir members for items such as instruments or performance attire, reflect broader patterns in volunteer-led ministries (Coleman, 2017; Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003), where insufficient institutional support can lead to exhaustion and reduced engagement. Together, these insights point to a pressing need for more intentional support systems that affirm the artistic, spiritual, and emotional labor of church choirs, ensuring their sustainability and vitality in parish life. Leadership challenges similarly resonated with Danyew (2016) report, emphasizing the critical role of empathetic, visionary, and organized leadership for fostering morale, cohesion, and liturgical integrity.

Beyond technical and administrative concerns, the spiritual dimension emerged as a vital area of need. Participants' desire for regular Bible sharing, spiritual retreats, and doctrinal classes reflects the view that music ministry is not solely artistic but fundamentally pastoral (DeNora, 2000; Tisdell, 2003). The emphasis on strengthening spiritual bonds within the choir community is supported by Lloyd et al. (2008) and Livesey et al. (2012), who note that faith-based music groups foster emotional resilience, community trust, and deeper engagement with liturgical life. Moreover, the aspiration to engage in inter-choir seminars and conventions indicates a recognition that external benchmarking, mentorship, and peer interaction are essential for growth, as documented by Fu et al. (2018) and Clift et al. (2010).

The participants' call for recognition and pastoral affirmation echoes Tillman's (2000) assertion that meaningful validation strengthens both spiritual commitment and artistic excellence in church choirs. In response, a multidimensional strategy is essential. This includes structured training in vocal technique, sight-reading, music theory, and liturgical understanding (Hylton, 1997); leadership development through mentoring and capacity-building programs (Glass, 2018); and greater investment in resources such as instruments, hymnals, and rehearsal spaces (Tinto, 2012). Just as important is intentional spiritual formation—offered through regular retreats, prayer gatherings, and Bible studies—that nurtures the deeper purpose of the ministry.

Addressing these interconnected areas is not solely about enhancing musical performance; it is about sustaining choirs as spiritually vibrant communities rooted in faith and service. Music ministry, in this light, becomes a transformative force—one that unites theology, community, and artistry into a living expression of worship and belonging (Ternovaya, 2017; Tillman, 2000).

## Conclusions

The findings of this qualitative needs assessment highlight an urgent call for targeted

support to strengthen the choir ministry at the Archdiocesan Shrine in Tacloban City. While the choirs demonstrate deep commitment through consistent rehearsal practices and liturgically attuned music-making, the lack of structured training in areas such as vocal technique, music theory, choral leadership, and liturgical knowledge signals untapped potential. Without formal instruction, the technical and theological depth necessary for a fully empowered liturgical music ministry may remain underdeveloped. Material limitations—such as inadequate access to instruments, printed music, and appropriate rehearsal spaces—further constrain the choirs' capacity. These challenges are often exacerbated by financial pressures placed on volunteers, which compromise both performance readiness and long-term sustainability. In addition, inconsistencies in leadership and communication hinder coordination and weaken the shared vision needed to sustain a vibrant ministry. More than musical ensembles, these choirs are faith communities. Participants voiced a genuine desire for spiritual growth through activities such as Bible sharing, retreats, and doctrinal formation. This dual identity—as liturgical ministers and communities of faith—calls for a holistic approach to choir development, one that integrates pastoral care with musical and organizational support. Overall, the findings underscore the need for a multidimensional strategy that includes capacity-building, resource provision, leadership formation, and spiritual enrichment. Strengthening these areas is not only essential to elevating the quality of liturgical music but also to nurturing the spiritual vitality, unity, and mission of the choir and the wider parish community it serves.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several key recommendations are proposed to support the ongoing development of the music ministry at the Archdiocesan Shrine in Tacloban City. To address theme 2, a primary need is the establishment of structured music training programs that focus on essential skills such as vocal technique, sight-reading, music theory,

and choral conducting. These should be complemented by liturgical formation to deepen choir members' understanding of the Mass and the theological role of sacred music. Collaboration with clergy and catechists can help ensure that this formation is both relevant and spiritually enriching.

To address persistent material constraints, the parish is encouraged to invest in fundamental resources—such as functional musical instruments, hymnals, and a dedicated rehearsal space—that will support consistent practice and performance. Strengthening the organizational structure of the ministry is also vital. Forming a unified music ministry council and offering leadership development opportunities for choir coordinators could enhance communication, planning, and shared vision. Equally important is nurturing the spiritual life of the choir. Regular Bible sharing, retreats, and formation sessions can cultivate a deeper sense of community, mission, and pastoral identity among members. These activities affirm that music ministry is not only a task of performance, but a vocation rooted in faith and service.

The Shrine is also encouraged to pursue external collaborations for broader learning and enrichment. In particular, it is recommended that the Leyte Normal University Bachelor of Music in Music Education Program initiate an extension initiative that offers community-based workshops, training sessions, and mentorship. Such a partnership would create mutual benefits—providing parish choirs with practical support while offering pre-service music educators meaningful, service-oriented field experience in a real-world context.

## Acknowledgements

We want to thank the parish priest and his team of priests and members of the choral groups at the Archdiocesan Shrine in Tacloban City for allowing us to gather data relative to the study.

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