

# REVITALIZATION OF CHURCH MUSIC THROUGH A CREATIVE ECONOMY APPROACH: STRATEGIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Revitalisasi Musik Gereja melalui Pendekatan Ekonomi Kreatif: Strategi dan Peluang

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## Abstract

This study explores the revitalization of church music within the Minahasa Evangelical Christian Church (GMIM) through the lens of creative economy, identifying opportunities, and formulating contextually grounded development strategies. Despite rich musical traditions and high congregational competence in choral and traditional performances, these assets remain underutilized as economic resources because of the absence of professional management, digital infrastructure, and institutional policies. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, direct observations, and document analysis across selected GMIM congregations in Minahasa. Thematic analysis revealed four key opportunity domains: physical products, digital content, performance services, and strategic collaboration. While digital platforms and inter-institutional partnerships offer high economic potential, their implementation is hindered by their limited technical capacity, copyright awareness, and formal revenue-sharing mechanisms. The findings indicate that current music-related activities are primarily driven by spiritual and communal motives, with economic benefits remaining incidental rather than systemic. To address this, this study proposes a four-pillar development framework of management, production, marketing, and values centered on the establishment of a church-based creative unit ("Bait Musica"), capacity-building programs, digitalization, and cultural preservation. Strategic initiatives, such as an annual Minahasan Sacred Music Festival, cooperative-based distribution, and monetized digital content, are recommended to ensure sustainability and inclusivity. Crucially, the model emphasizes ethical commercialization, ensuring that economic development aligns with spiritual integrity and communal values. This study contributes to the discourse on faith-based creative economies by demonstrating how religious institutions can serve as catalysts for local economic empowerment without compromising cultural or theological authenticity. The proposed framework offers a replicable model for other religious communities seeking to transform sacred art into sustainable community-driven enterprises.

## INTRODUCTION

The creative economy has become a primary driver of economic growth in the era of globalization, where ideas, creativity, and innovation serve as core assets for sustainable development (Bangsawan, 2023). The music sector, as one of the most dynamic subsectors, has demonstrated significant contributions to Indonesia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In 2021, the music industry contributed IDR 6.80 trillion, indicating substantial potential for further development (Sinambela, 2020). The advancement of digital technology continues to expand access to and distribution of music, creating new opportunities for creative actors from diverse backgrounds (Syafitri & Nisa, 2024). Within religious contexts, music functions not only as a liturgical tool but also as a medium for cultural expression and community identity. As a social and spiritual institution, the Church plays a strategic role in facilitating the creative expression of its congregations. In Indonesia, numerous churches possess strong musical traditions, particularly hymns, choirs, and traditional

local music. However, this potential has not yet been fully channeled into a creative economic force capable of economically empowering congregants.

The development of the creative economy in Indonesia impacts not only the entertainment industry but also opens space for local communities to participate in a culture-based economic ecosystem (Luqma et al., 2023). Churches, with their strong community structures and extensive social networks, possess valuable social capital that can be leveraged for creative music-based economic development. Congregants with musical talent can be engaged in recording production, performance, training programs, and digital product development, thereby generating economic value (Damanik, 2024). Moreover, church music often incorporates rich local cultural elements such as regional-language hymns or traditional instruments, which can serve as unique creative commodities (Era et al., 2020). Thus, integrating church music into the creative economy not only offers economic benefits but also contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage (Liliweri, 2021). The church can act as a creative incubator, fostering innovation while maintaining religious values and local traditions. Empowerment through continuous training and capacity building is essential to sustainably maximize this potential. Therefore, a systematic approach that connects spiritual, cultural, and economic dimensions is necessary for the development of church music.

The Minahasa Evangelical Christian Church (GMIM) is a denomination with a particularly strong tradition of church music deeply integrated into the daily lives of its congregation. In GMIM worship, music serves not only a functional purpose, but also forms part of the cultural identity of the Minahasan people (Kusni, 2020). Many congregants possess high musical competence in choral performances, traditional instruments, or sacred songs. However, to date, this potential has not been professionally managed to generate a sustainable economic value. Using a creative economy approach, the GMIM can develop music-based business models that actively involve its members. Sacred music festivals, music training programs, digital recordings, and paid performances could become additional sources of income for both the Church and its members. Furthermore, such models could foster collaboration between churches, local governments, and the private sector in developing cultural tourism centered on sacred music. Thus, the revitalization of church music would not only enrich spirituality but also serve as an inclusive driver of local economic development (Mangayi, 2016; Nana, 2024; Opuni-Darko, 2024; Rammelmeier, 2025).

Previous research has demonstrated that participation in group music activities enhances subjective well-being, social solidarity, and community identity (Syahroni & Irawan, 2024). Within church contexts, music functions as a medium for reinforcing moral and religious values, as well as facilitating social reconciliation and healing (Purba et al., 2022; Untung et al., 2021). Several studies indicate that traditional music in worship, such as that found in GKPS Medan, holds high cultural value and can be leveraged as an asset for creative economic development (Darnita, 2022). Additionally, initiatives such as modern and traditional music training in Lombok show that integrating music into the ministry can stimulate youth creativity (Harnish, 2019). Research by Pransinartha, (2024) revealed that empowering musical talent within the GKE Imanuel Mandomai Congregation successfully increased active participation and a sense of belonging. Efforts to contextualize local culture in church music, as seen in GKJ Baki, further demonstrate the synergy between art and faith in liturgical and economic contexts (Halim et al., 2024). Churches can also act as agents of economic transformation by applying entrepreneurial principles in the ministry Sandiki & Kustiadi, (2024) and Doma & Yohanes, (2023). Community-based empowerment approaches have proven effective in improving congregational welfare, especially in areas affected by economic disruptions (Polhaupessy & others, 2024; Siregar et al., 2023).

Although numerous studies have addressed the theological and liturgical aspects of church music, few have directly linked them to the creative economy (Purba et al., 2022; Untung et al., 2021). Prior research has primarily focused on cultural preservation and worship functions, without exploring the economic dimensions that could be generated (Halim et al., 2024; Sipayung et al., 2024). Some studies highlight the empowering potential of music but fail to formulate specific, measurable

business models (Natonis et al., 2024; Pransinartha, 2024). Moreover, the approaches used remain localized and have not been integrated into a broader creative economy framework. Research by (Damanik, 2024; Kusni, 2020) emphasizes the importance of education and entrepreneurial spirit in the church ministry, yet does not directly connect these to music as a creative commodity. Meanwhile, digitalization initiatives for church music, as proposed by Maringka & Tarumingi, (2024), open new possibilities but have not been examined from an economic perspective. Training and capacity-building models, such as those implemented by Polhaupessy & others, (2024); Saputra et al., (2022), demonstrate effectiveness in skill enhancement but lack evaluation of their economic impact. Consequently, although initial evidence suggests the economic potential of church music, a comprehensive framework that integrates cultural, spiritual, and economic aspects remains absent.

Prior studies have not explicitly examined the GMIM context as a case study for music-based creative economic development. Despite GMIM's strong organizational structure, extensive congregation network, and rich musical heritage, making it a highly relevant subject, such a focus is lacking. While some local initiatives exist, such as children's choir training and sacred music festivals, they are not systematically or sustainably managed. No study has formulated development strategies that consider the unique social, cultural, and religious context of Minahasa. Furthermore, the potential for digitalizing church music through streaming platforms, spiritual podcasts, or online music courses has not been thoroughly explored. These limitations highlight the need for more focused research on contextual and participatory creative economic models. Without a planned approach, the economic potential of church music will continue to be overlooked. Therefore, it is crucial to explore adaptive and innovative business models. This study aims to fill this gap through a multidisciplinary approach that integrates theology, culture, and creative economy.

Despite existing empowerment efforts through music in various churches, a significant research gap remains regarding how church music can develop into a sustainable and creative economic ecosystem. Most studies emphasize liturgical and cultural dimensions, neglecting aspects of the management, marketing, and monetization of sacred music products. Currently, no integrated model connects music production, digital distribution, capacity training, or congregational economic empowerment within a unified framework. Moreover, the GMIM context, as one of Indonesia's churches with the strongest musical traditions, has not been a primary focus in creative economy studies. However, the economic potential of hymn recordings, music festivals, and training programs is substantial when managed professionally. The lack of empirical data on income generation, congregant participation, and social impact further hinders policy development. Hence, this study provides robust scientific evidence of the feasibility and sustainability of a church-music-based creative economy model. Without a comprehensive understanding, existing initiatives remain sporadic and lack long-term impact.

The novelty of this study lies in the integration of a creative economy approach with religious and local cultural contexts within a systematic analytical framework. Unlike previous studies, which tend to be fragmented, this study proposes a holistic model that combines spiritual, cultural, and economic aspects of church music development. The focus on the GMIM as a case study offers a unique contribution as no similar in-depth research has been conducted in this region. This study also developed a strategic framework that can be replicated by other churches across Indonesia. The proposed model is innovative and adaptable to contemporary development by utilizing digital technology and the principles of social entrepreneurship. Additionally, the participatory approach ensures that congregants are not merely participants but also owners and beneficiaries of these initiatives. This novelty is both academic and practical, as it can be implemented in church policies and community empowerment programmes. Thus, this study offers concrete solutions for strengthening local economies through cultural and spiritual assets already held by churches.

This study aims to identify music-based creative economic opportunities that can be developed in church environments, particularly within the GMIM context. Furthermore, it seeks to formulate effective and sustainable development strategies to realize this potential. Emphasis was

placed on congregational empowerment, cultural preservation, and local economic strengthening through innovation in sacred music. The adopted approach is multidisciplinary, integrating perspectives from theology, management, and creative economy.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a case study design to explore opportunities and strategies for developing a creative economy through church music within the Minahasa Evangelical Christian Church (GMIM). The exploratory design was strategically chosen to enable an in-depth understanding of how sacred music can serve as a vehicle for local economic empowerment and cultural preservation. This research focuses on the sociocultural and institutional dynamics within the GMIM that influence the transformation of musical practices into creative economic activities. A purposive sampling technique was applied to select research sites, specifically GMIM congregations in the Minahasa region that demonstrate strong musical traditions and active community engagement in music-related activities. The selection of these locations ensures access to contexts in which the intersection of faith, culture, and creativity is most evident. The case study method allows for a contextualized analysis that captures the complexity of integrating religious practices with economic development initiatives. Data were gathered from multiple sources within each case to ensure depth and richness in the understanding of the phenomena under investigation. This methodological choice aligns with the study's aim to generate actionable insights grounded in real-world ecclesiastical and community settings.

The population of this study comprises members of the GMIM congregations in Minahasa, who are actively involved in church music activities, including liturgical and cultural performances. A purposive sampling strategy was used to identify 25 key informants with relevant knowledge and experience related to church music and community development. The sample includes church leaders and music coordinators, who play strategic roles in shaping musical programs and guiding community initiatives. It also encompasses active congregants, such as choir members, instrumentalists, composers, and event organizers from the GMIM Gloria Tara-Tara congregation in Tomohon, known for its vibrant musical engagement. This diverse sample ensures a multi-perspective understanding of the challenges and potential of leveraging music for economic purposes. The inclusion criteria emphasize direct involvement in music production, performance, and management within the church context. By focusing on individuals with practical experience, this study provides nuanced insights into the operational and cultural dimensions of music-based initiatives. The sample size was sufficient to achieve data saturation within the qualitative framework, allowing for comprehensive thematic development.

Data collection was conducted using multiple qualitative techniques to ensure methodological rigor and data triangulation. In-depth interviews were conducted with church leaders, musicians, cultural activists, and community representatives to explore their perception of music as a creative economic asset. Semi-structured interview guides were used to maintain consistency, while allowing flexibility for emergent themes. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) are organized with music groups to elicit collective views on opportunities, constraints, and collaborative strategies for music-based economic development. Direct observation is employed during worship services, rehearsals, recordings, and public performances to document the practices, interactions, and contextual factors influencing music production. Documentary analysis includes reviewing church archives, annual reports, regional creative economy policies, and relevant scholarly literature to contextualize findings within broader institutional and theoretical frameworks. All the data were recorded, transcribed, and stored securely to ensure accuracy and confidentiality. The integration of multiple data sources enhanced the credibility and transferability of the findings. This multi-method approach supports a holistic and nuanced interpretation of how sacred music can be repositioned within a creative economic paradigm.

Data analysis was performed using thematic analysis, following a systematic process of coding, categorizing, and interpreting patterns across the dataset. Initial open coding was applied to interview transcripts, field notes, and documents to identify recurring concepts related to creative economic opportunities, development strategies, and socio-economic impacts. Codes are then grouped into broader themes such as cultural commodification, community ownership, digital innovation, and sustainable funding models. Narrative analysis was subsequently used to interpret the lived experiences and belief systems of participants regarding the role of music in spiritual and economic life. To ensure trustworthiness, data triangulation was conducted by cross-verifying the findings from interviews, FGDs, observations, and documents. Member checking was implemented by sharing preliminary interpretations with the selected participants for validation. The research team maintained an audit trail to document analytical decisions and enhance transparency. Ultimately, the findings are synthesized into a contextually grounded model for developing a sustainable creative economy through church music, offering both theoretical contributions and practical recommendations for religious and community institutions.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

#### 1. Creative Economic Opportunities from Church Music

Church music within the GMIM (Minahasa Evangelical Christian Church) context holds significant potential as a source of creative economy, despite not yet being professionally managed. Observations and interviews revealed that congregants possess high musical competencies, particularly in choral performance, solo vocals, and mastery of traditional instruments such as the kolintang. However, production capacity remains limited owing to insufficient recording equipment and the absence of adequate music studios at the congregation level. Congregations such as Gloria Tara-Tara in Tomohon have actively participated in inter-church choir competitions, demonstrating artistic capabilities ready for commercialization. Despite frequent public performances, no formal system exists to manage honoraria or revenue from these appearances. As one music coordinator stated, "We are often invited to perform at choir competitions, but so far there has been no revenue-sharing system." This reflects an emerging awareness of the economic value of musical skills, although not yet institutionalized. Thus, economic opportunities remain at the potential stage rather than operational, and focus more on achievement than financial return.

Digital music products represent an underutilized opportunity for the GMIM congregations. No official recordings of Minahasan-style hymns or sacred songs in MP3, streaming, or YouTube formats were found, which were institutionally managed by the church. While some young members upload rehearsals or worship videos on social media, they are not structured as income-generating creative products. The potential of digital platforms, such as Spotify, Apple Music, and YouTube Premium, has not been explored for the distribution and monetization of sacred music. In focus group discussions (FGDs), most participants acknowledged that their music could attract listeners beyond the congregation, particularly in the Minahasan diaspora. However, limited understanding of copyright, licensing, and digital production remains a major barrier. The absence of church policies supporting music digitalization further results in isolated and sporadic initiatives. Therefore, developing digital music content presents a significant opportunity that requires both technical support and institutional support.

Physical music-based products such as songbooks, sheet music, and merchandise are nearly absent in current GMIM practices. The documentation of sacred songs remains manual and unstandardized, making broad distribution difficult. There has been no effort to print professionally designed music sheets or hymn books for sale or educational use. During group discussions, some congregants proposed creating videos of church music activities on digital platforms, but no concrete follow-up has occurred. Financial constraints and a limited understanding of branding are cited as primary reasons. Nevertheless, enthusiasm for such ideas was notably high, especially among



younger members. If properly managed, physical products can serve as symbols of cultural identity and supplementary sources of income. This indicates that demand exists, but supply remains undeveloped.

Paid musical performances and creative events represent the form of a creative economy closest to congregational reality, although currently unsustainable. Intercongregational sacred music festivals have been held in several klasis (districts), these are seasonal and do not generate surplus funds for further development. When ticketing exists, it only covers operational costs rather than generating profits. The FGD participants noted that such events could evolve into annual programs with sponsorship and paid entry. However, they acknowledged weak managerial and promotional capacities as key obstacles. Charity concerts that generate a surplus for congregational empowerment have never been conducted, despite the favorable reception of the concept. Cultural-spiritual performances tailored to tourists have not been developed, even though Minahasa has strong tourism potential. Thus, performance-based opportunities remain wide open but require professional event management.

**Table 1.** Map of Church-Based Creative Economic Opportunities in GMIM

| Opportunity             | Concrete Example                                                                                                       | Current Readiness                   | Economic Potential | Implementation Difficulty                          |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Physical Products       | Merchandise (t-shirts, mugs), songbooks, sheet music, miniature traditional instruments                                | Low-no production yet               | Medium             | Medium                                             |
| Digital Products        | Digital hymn recordings, podcasts, music subscriptions, online courses                                                 | Low-only informal content available | High               | High (requires human resources and infrastructure) |
| Services & Performances | Sacred music festivals, charity concerts, paid performances, faith narratives combined with music                      | Moderate-seasonal activities exist  | High               | Medium                                             |
| Strategic Collaboration | Partnerships with Tourism Office, media, universities, village-owned enterprises (BUMDes), congregational cooperatives | Low-not yet structured              | High               | Low-Medium (depending on stakeholders)             |

Collaboration with external parties presents a significant potential for advancing church music as a creative economy. Document analysis shows that local governments in Tomohon and Minahasa run cultural tourism programs, such as the Flower Festival and the Minahasa Charm Festival, which could incorporate GMIM music. However, to date, church music has not been integrated into these agendas. In interviews, cultural figures affirmed that Minahasan sacred music carries unique aesthetic and spiritual value worthy of broader promotion. Partnerships with the Tourism Office, local media, or universities can serve as bridges to expand the reach and economic value of church music. For instance, music recordings can be used as event soundtracks or regional promotional material. However, without proactive church initiatives, these opportunities will continue to be missed. Hence, cross-sector synergy is essential in transforming potential into tangible outcomes.

Based on the field findings, four categories of creative economic opportunities can be identified: physical products, digital products, performance services, and strategic collaborations. Physical products include merchandise, songbooks, and traditional instruments, which are repackaged as cultural commodities. Digital products include music recordings, podcasts, online courses, and digital music subscriptions. Performance services include concerts, festivals, and paid public appearances. Strategic collaborations entail partnerships with the government, the private sector, and educational institutions. Although most opportunities remain conceptual, the

congregational enthusiasm is high. Table 1 maps these opportunities according to current readiness, economic potential, and implementation difficulties. This opportunity map serves as the foundation for formulating contextual and realistic development strategies.

## 2. Community-Based and Culturally Grounded Development Strategies

One key strategy proposed by respondents was the establishment of a church-based enterprise dedicated to professionally managing music-related activities. During FGDs, participants suggested creating "Bait Musica," a creative economic unit responsible for music production, marketing, and distribution. This unit is managed by a team of congregants including musicians, technicians, and marketing managers. The generated profits are allocated to congregational development, performer compensation, and a permanent arts fund. A senior GMIM pastor stated, "We are ready to support this, as long as it does not compromise the spiritual meaning of the music itself." This indicates institutional readiness provided that religious values are preserved. With a clear structure, such a unit can serve as a driver of microeconomic activity at the congregational level. This model not only empowers individuals, but also strengthens community cohesion through collective efforts.

Capacity-building strategies form the critical foundation for sustainable economic development. Respondents emphasized the need for technical training in music recording, digital editing, and production software. Additionally, music management training, covering marketing, copyright, and financial planning, was identified as essential. Some young congregants expressed interest in modernized vocal and traditional instrument courses. Therefore, a GMIM youth musician incubation program, completed with training facilities and mentorship, is proposed. This program can be implemented collaboratively in nearby music schools or universities. Enhanced capacities would enable congregants to become not only artists, but also independent economic actors. Such empowerment must be gradual and sustained in order to ensure measurable outcomes.

Cross-sector collaboration is a crucial strategy to expand the reach and economic impact of church music. The discussions yielded proposals for partnerships with the Tourism Office to include GMIM music in regional cultural tourism agendas. For example, spiritual kolintang performances have become regular attractions at tourist sites and hotels. Synergy with Christian media, such as radio, podcasts, and television, could also support content promotion and distribution. Digital platforms, such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, have been recognized as effective and low-cost promotional tools. Although some congregants are already active on social media, their content lacks professional packaging. With a planned digital marketing strategy, the audience's reach could extend beyond local congregations. Such collaborations would not only enhance visibility, but also open doors to sponsorships and commercial partnerships.

Cultural preservation has emerged as a central principle in all proposed strategies. The respondents stressed the importance of systematically documenting distinct Minahasan sacred songs, including notation, lyrics, and historical context. Additionally, copyright certification for congregant-composed songs was seen as vital for protecting works from external exploitation. An annual "Minahasan Sacred Music Festival" was proposed, integrating spiritual, cultural, and economic elements. This event could include competitions, music product exhibitions, and training sessions while attracting tourists. In FGDs, many participants affirmed that church music is a heritage that must be preserved and developed, not only for worship, but also for future generations. Thus, development strategies must not sacrifice cultural value for profit. Preservation and commercialization should proceed hand in hand.

Revenue-sharing models are essential for fairness and sustainability. The discussions revealed diverse views on income distribution from music activities. Some have proposed a 50% share for performers, 30% for churches, and 20% for equipment development. Others prefer fixed honoraria, which is similar to professional artists. These differing views highlight the need for an ethical framework for the creative economy to be issued by GMIM Synod. Such guidelines should transparently regulate the financial aspects, ownership of work, and benefit distribution. With clear

regulations, internal conflicts can be avoided and congregational trust in the system can be established. A fair revenue model encourages active participation and fosters a sense of ownership over creative economic initiatives.

**Table 2.** Framework for Developing GMIM Church Music-Based Creative Economy

| Strategic Pillar         | Specific Strategy                                                                                             | Key Actor                                                 | Resources Required                                             | Success Indicators                                                                           |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Management               | Establishment of a business unit "Bait Musica" and ethical guidelines for the creative economy from the Synod | Congregational Council, GMIM Synod, music team            | Internal regulations, organizational structure, seed funding   | Formation of an official management unit and operational standard operating procedures (SOP) |
| Production               | Digital recording training, documentation of traditional songs, copyright certification                       | Musicians, congregants, cultural experts, IT institutions | Recording equipment, trainers, digital database                | At least 10 songs digitally documented and licensed                                          |
| Marketing & Distribution | Tourism collaboration, social media promotion, sales through cooperatives/BUMDes                              | Tourism Office, media, congregational cooperatives        | Digital platforms, partner networks, creative content          | 3 active partnerships, 5,000 monthly media reach                                             |
| Values & Sustainability  | Annual Minahasan Sacred Music Festival, fair revenue-sharing system, cultural preservation                    | Entire congregation, youth, leaders                       | Institutional commitment, active participation, endowment fund | Values & Sustainability                                                                      |

Collaboration with congregational cooperatives or village-owned enterprises (BUMDes) has been proposed as a distribution and marketing strategy for music products. Items such as CDs, songbooks, and merchandise can be sold in cooperative stores or stalls during church events. This system would make marketing more organized and allow revenue to be accumulated. Some congregants who currently sell CDs informally note that a cooperative system would be more efficient and trustworthy. In addition, cooperatives can serve as financial management and reinvestment hubs. This strategy strengthens community-based economies and ensures that profits return to congregation. Thus, the creative economy would not only generates economic value but also reinforces social solidarity. This model aligns with the strong familial values inherent in the Minahasan culture.

Digital platforms have been identified as key strategies for reaching a broader audience. In interviews, young congregants noted that sacred music could become engaging content on TikTok or Instagram Reels if creatively packaged. A proposal was made to establish an official GMIM YouTube channel that featured worship recordings, music tutorials, and spiritual podcasts. Such content can be monetized through advertisements, sponsorships, or donations. Additionally, church websites or apps can include digital music subscription features. Using this strategy, GMIM music could reach Minahasan diasporas in Jakarta, Surabaya, and even overseas. Digitalization not only improves accessibility, but also opens passive income opportunities. However, all of these require initial investment and competent human resources.

Based on these findings, a development framework was formulated comprising four pillars: management, production, marketing, and values. The management pillar includes the establishment of a business unit and ethical regulations. The production pillar covers training, documentation, and



digitization. Marketing pillars involve partnerships, social media, and distribution networks. The value pillars emphasize cultural preservation, equity, and spiritual integrity. Table 2 summarizes these strategies, including the key actors, required resources, and success indicators. This framework was designed to be replicable in other congregations with contextual adaptation. Through a participatory and community-based approach, these strategies aim not only for economic growth, but also for empowerment and the preservation of ecclesial identity.

## Discussion

### 1. Creative Economic Opportunities from Church Music: Interpretation and Contextualization

The findings reveal that church music within the GMIM context possesses latent economic value, although it remains largely unstructured and institutionally unrecognized. Despite the high artistic competence of choral and traditional music performance, the absence of formal production infrastructure limits its transformation into a viable economic asset. This gap between capability and commercialization reflects a broader trend in faith-based communities, where spiritual functions often overshadow economic potential (Damanik, 2024; Kusni, 2020). The lack of recording studios, standardized documentation, and professional management systems indicates a critical need for capacity investment at the congregational level. While congregants such as those in Gloria Tara-Tara demonstrate readiness for public performance, their engagement remains driven by spiritual and communal motives rather than financial sustainability. This aligns with previous studies showing that religious art is often devalued in economic terms because of its sacred connotations (Liliweri, 2021). However, the expressed desire for revenue-sharing mechanisms suggests growing awareness of music as both cultural and economic capital. Thus, the transition from symbolic to economic value requires the deliberate institutional repositioning of music within the Church's mission.

Digital platforms represent a transformative opportunity, yet their underutilization underscores the significant digital divide within religious institutions (Lae, 2025; Moss, 2025; Ndjama, 2025). The absence of officially managed digital content, such as streaming hymns or licensed recordings, reveals a disconnection between technological potential and ecclesiastical practice. While younger congregants informally use social media, these efforts lack strategic alignment with branding, copyright, or monetization frameworks. This mirrors global patterns in which religious organizations lag in digital adaptation despite high public engagement (Maringka & Tarumingi, 2024). The reluctance to embrace digital monetization may stem from theological concerns about commodifying sacred art, a tension noted in liturgical studies (Rusman et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the acknowledgment that Minahasan sacred music could attract diaspora audiences indicates a market potential beyond liturgical boundaries. Platforms such as Spotify and YouTube Premium offer scalable, low-cost distribution models that can generate passive income with minimal operational burden. Therefore, digitalization is not merely a technical upgrade, but a paradigm shift in how churches perceive the role of music in public engagement and economic resilience.

The near absence of physical music-based products highlights a missed opportunity for cultural commodification and identity branding. Merchandise, songbooks, and instrument replicas can serve two functions: preserving heritage and generating revenue. Unlike secular cultural industries that actively brand traditional art, religious communities often treat such items as liturgical tools, rather than marketable assets. This reflects a broader reluctance to engage with market logic in sacred domains, as observed in studies of liturgical inculturation (Halim et al., 2024). However, the high enthusiasm among youth for branded products suggests a generational shift in perception, where faith and identity are increasingly expressed through a consumable culture (Sipayung et al., 2024). The challenge lies in designing products that maintain theological integrity while appealing to aesthetic and emotional value. Ethnographic research in similar contexts shows that religious branding can enhance community pride without compromising sanctity (Syafitri & Nisa, 2024).

Hence, physical products should not be seen as commercial dilution but as tangible expressions of living faith and cultural continuity.

Performance-based activities, while closest to operational reality, suffer from seasonal execution and weak managerial framework. Sacred music festivals and choir competitions are culturally embedded, but lack continuity and financial planning, limiting their economic impact. These events function more as spiritual expressions than business ventures do, resulting in cost-recovery models rather than profit generation. This aligns with findings from other faith-based creative initiatives, where passion-driven efforts fail to scale due to a lack of professional management. The recognition of managerial and promotional weaknesses in FGDs indicates self-awareness and openness to improvement. Charity concerts and tourist-oriented performances remain untapped despite Minahasa's tourism potential, suggesting a need for strategic vision beyond internal congregational needs. The integration of music into tourism agendas could position GMIM as a cultural ambassador that enhances both visibility and economic contribution. Therefore, shifting from episodic to institutionalized event management is essential for the sustainable development of the creative economy.

Strategic collaboration with external stakeholders is one of the most promising pathways for scaling church-based creative economy initiatives. The existence of regional cultural festivals, such as the Flower Festival and the Minahasa Charm Festival, offers ready-made platforms for integrating sacred music into public life. However, the current exclusion of GMIM music from these programs reflects institutional inertia and lack of proactive engagement. Partnerships with tourism offices, the media, and universities can bridge this gap by providing access to audiences, funding, and technical expertise. Such collaborations are consistent with community-based creative economy models, in which religious institutions act as cultural anchors. The proposed use of church music as event soundtracks or promotional material exemplifies how sacred art contributes to regional branding without losing its spiritual essence. Furthermore, these alliances can foster mutual legitimacy, enhancing the church's social relevance, while enriching public cultural offerings. Thus, cross-sector synergy is not just an economic strategy but a form of public theology in action.

The categorization of opportunities into physical, digital, performance, and collaborative domains provides a structured framework for diagnosing readiness and prioritizing interventions. Table 1 illustrates that, while digital and collaborative opportunities have high economic potential, they also demand significant investment in human and technical resources. In contrast, physical products and seasonal performances are more accessible, but offer moderate returns, requiring branding and professionalization to scale. This typology enables targeted policy recommendations, based on feasibility and impact. For instance, starting with low-difficulty, high-readiness initiatives such as improving event management can build momentum for more complex digital ventures. The framework also allows for phased implementation and reduces financial and institutional risk. Moreover, it aligns with national creative economy policies that emphasize sectoral clustering and ecosystem development. By mapping opportunities systematically, the Church can move from ad hoc initiatives to a strategic evidence-based approach.

The persistence of non-monetized music practices does not indicate resistance to economic development but rather a need for value-congruent models that respect spiritual and cultural integrity. Congregants are not opposed to income generation, but seek assurance that commercialization will not compromise the sacred nature of music. Ethical sensitivity is a strength, not a barrier, because it ensures that economic initiatives remain grounded in communal values. The concept of creative stewardship where talent and culture are developed for communal benefit resonates deeply within the GMIM context. Therefore, the discussion must shift from whether church music should be monetized to how it can be sustainably and ethically commercialized. Models that reinvest profits into community development, arts education, and cultural preservation align with the theological principles of justice and care. In this light, the creative economy has become an extension of the

diaconal ministry, where economic empowerment serves spiritual and social flourishing. Hence, the discourse must refrain from commodification to sacred entrepreneurship.

## 2. Community-Based and Culturally Grounded Development Strategies: Toward Sustainable Models

The proposal for “Bait Musica” as a church-based creative enterprise reflects a significant shift from volunteerism to professionalization in ecclesial music management. This model moves beyond ad hoc event planning to establish a dedicated unit that is responsible for production, marketing, and financial oversight. Such institutionalization is critical for sustainability, as seen in successful faith-based creative initiatives in other regions (Darnita, 2022; Saputra et al., 2022). The involvement of musicians, technicians, and marketing managers ensures a multidisciplinary approach that mirrors the professional creative industries. Crucially, endorsement by a senior pastor, conditional on preserving spiritual meaning, demonstrates institutional buy-in, which is essential for legitimacy and resource allocation. This aligns with studies showing that clergy support is a key determinant of innovation adoption in religious settings (Siregar et al. 2023; Polhaupessy et al. 2024). By embedding economic activity within the church’s mission, “Bait Musica” avoids the perception of secularization and instead frames entrepreneurship as a service. Thus, the model exemplifies ecclesial innovation where tradition and modernity coexist in mutually reinforcing ways.

Capacity building is not merely a technical necessity but a form of theological empowerment, enabling congregants to become active agents of change. The demand for training in digital production, copyright, and financial management reflects the desire for self-reliance and long-term sustainability. This resonates with the concept of asset-based community development, in which local talent is leveraged as a resource for collective advancement (Natonis et al., 2024; Pransinatha, 2024). The proposed youth musician incubation program, supported by partnerships with music schools, ensures intergenerational transfer of skills and values. Such programs also address the brain drain often seen in rural religious communities, where talented youth leave because of a lack of local opportunities. By creating pathways for artistic and economic participation, the church becomes a space for vocation, not just worship. This transforms music from a liturgical accessory into a legitimate career option within the faith. Therefore, training is not just about skill acquisition, but also about reimagining the role of the artist in the body of Christ.

Cross-sector collaboration is positioned not as external dependency but as a strategic alliance that amplifies impact without compromising autonomy. The proposed integration of kolintang performances into tourism sites exemplifies how sacred art can become a public good while retaining religious significance. Synergy with Christian media and digital platforms extends the church’s reach beyond geographical and denominational boundaries, thus fulfilling a missional imperative in the digital age (Atuahene, 2022; Bogdan, 2024; Hearn Jr, 2013; Langi et al., 2025; Zsupan-Jerome, 2014). These partnerships also provide access to marketing expertise and funding mechanisms that are otherwise unavailable to the congregations. The recognition of social media as a low-cost, high-impact tool reflects a pragmatic understanding of the contemporary communication dynamics. However, the call for professional packaging indicates an awareness of the quality standards in the creative marketplace. This suggests that congregants do not seek charity but equitable participation in the creative economy. Hence, collaboration must be based on mutual respect and shared goals, and not merely tokenism.

Cultural preservation is not a nostalgic exercise but a forward-looking strategy that grounds innovation in identity. The emphasis on documenting traditional songs, securing copyrights, and hosting an annual Minahasan Sacred Music Festival reflects a conscious effort to safeguard intangible heritage. This aligns with UNESCO’s framework for safeguarding cultural expressions, particularly those tied to spiritual practices (Liliweri, 2021; di Era et al., 2020). By certifying ownership of the original compositions, the church protects its intellectual property from exploitation by external actors. The festival model combines cultural celebrations with economic activity, creating a sustainable cycle of production, performance, and patronage. Moreover, it positions the GMIM as a

custodian of the Minahasan identity, enhancing its social capital and influence. In an era of cultural homogenization, such initiatives assert the value of local knowledge and expression. Thus, preservation is not resistance to modernity but a form of cultural resilience that strengthens both the community and the economy.

The debate over revenue-sharing models has revealed a mature discourse on equity, ownership, and institutional trust. The proposed splits such as 50% to performers, 30% to the church, and 20% to development reflect an understanding of fair value distribution. The alternative suggestion of fixed honoraria indicates a desire for professional recognition akin to that of secular artists. These discussions underscore the need for transparent synod-level guidelines to prevent conflicts and ensure accountability. Without such a framework, even well-intentioned initiatives risk internal fragmentation. Therefore, the call for an ethical creative economy policy from GMIM Synod is both timely and necessary. It formalizes the principles of justice, stewardship, and participatory governance in economic activities. This aligns with broader theological trends toward economic ethics in the ministry. A fair revenue model does not just distribute money; it builds trust, encourages ownership, and fosters long-term commitment.

The integration of music products into cooperatives or BUMDes exemplifies a community-based economic model that prioritizes collective benefits over individual profit. By channeling sales through congregational cooperatives, the initiative ensures that revenue circulates within the community, reinforcing social solidarity. This mirrors successful models in rural Indonesia, where cooperatives serve as engines for inclusive growth (Siregar et al., 2023; Luqma et al., 2023). The preference for cooperative systems over informal sales reflects the desire for transparency, efficiency, and institutional memory. Moreover, such structures enable reinvestment in music education, equipment, and youth programs, thereby creating a self-sustaining ecosystem. This model resonates with the Minahasan cultural values of family and mutual care (*gotong royong*), thus making it culturally appropriate and socially cohesive. Therefore, economic development is not imposed from outside but emerges organically from communal values. The church thus becomes not just a spiritual center but also an economic hub rooted in relational ethics.

The proposed digital strategy, centered on YouTube, podcast, and subscription models, represents a visionary approach to audience expansion and passive income generation. The recognition that sacred music can engage content on TikTok or Instagram Reels demonstrates an acute understanding of contemporary media culture. This is not about diluting sacredness but repackaging it for relevance in digital public spheres. Monetization through advertisements, sponsorships, or donations allows sustainability without direct charging and preserves accessibility. The inclusion of digital subscriptions offers a scalable revenue stream that can support full-time musicians and content creators. However, the acknowledgment of the required investment in human resources and infrastructure reflects realism, not naivety. This strategic foresight positions the GMIM at the forefront of digital ecclesial innovation in Indonesia. Ultimately, the framework in Table 2 synthesizes management, production, marketing, and values into a replicable context-sensitive model. Balancing professionalism with piety and innovation with tradition offers a blueprint for sacred creative economic development in faith communities worldwide.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that church music within the GMIM (Minahasa Evangelical Christian Church) context holds substantial untapped potential as a driver of the creative economy, provided that it is reimagined beyond its liturgical function. While congregants exhibit high musical competence and cultural richness, the absence of professional management, digital infrastructure, and institutional policies has constrained their transformation into sustainable economic assets. The findings reveal that opportunities exist across physical products, digital content, performance services, and strategic collaborations, yet most remain at the conceptual or episodic stage. Without formal systems for production, monetization, and revenue sharing, these initiatives risk remaining

fragmented and financially non-viable. However, the widespread recognition of music's economic value among congregants indicates a fertile ground for change. The transition from symbolic to economic capital requires the intentional repositioning of music as both a cultural heritage and creative enterprise. This shift must be guided by ethical frameworks that preserve spiritual integrity, while enabling economic participation. Ultimately, the church is not merely a venue for worship, but a viable incubator for community-based creative economies.

The proposed development framework, centered on management, production, marketing, and values, offers a structured, replicable model for institutionalizing music-based economic initiatives in religious communities. The establishment of a dedicated unit such as "Bait Musica" ensures professional oversight while embedding economic activity within the church's mission and governance. Capacity-building programs, digitalization strategies, and cross-sector partnerships are critical enablers that bridge the gap between artistic potential and market readiness. Crucially, the integration of cultural preservation and fair revenue-sharing mechanisms ensures that development is inclusive and sustainable. This model aligns with global trends in faith-based social entrepreneurship in which religious institutions leverage their social capital for local economic empowerment. By anchoring innovation in communal values, the framework avoids the commodification of sacred art and promotes sacred entrepreneurship. The success indicators outlined, such as documented digital content, active partnerships, and institutionalized festivals, provide measurable benchmarks for long-term impacts. Thus, the model transcends the GMIM context, offering a transferable blueprint for other faith communities in Indonesia and beyond.

Revitalizing church music through a creative economy lens is not a departure from a spiritual mission, but an extension of it toward holistic community empowerment and cultural continuity. The Church, as a trusted and enduring institution, is uniquely positioned to steward creative resources in ways that balance economic viability with ethical responsibility. This study affirms that music, when managed strategically and participatively, can generate income, preserve heritage, and strengthen communal identities. The integration of digital platforms, cooperative economies, and tourism partnerships has expanded the church's public role beyond sanctuaries. Future research should explore the scalability of this model across different denominations and cultural settings as well as its long-term socioeconomic impacts. Policymakers and church leaders must recognize the strategic value of investing in creative ministries as part of broader community development agenda. By embracing innovation without sacrificing tradition, religious institutions can become pioneers in sustainable value-driven economies. This reimagining of sacred art as a catalyst for transformation makes a significant contribution to both theological practice and creative economic scholarship.

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