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Research Article

Shaping Resilient Faith through Sto. Niño Bendisyoni Hymn: The Case of Local Parishioners in Tacloban City

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the role of the Sto. Niño Bendisyoni hymn in shaping and sustaining resilient faith among local parishioners in Tacloban City, a community deeply affected by the trauma of Super Typhoon Yolanda. Utilizing a qualitative single case study design, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with long-term parishioners to examine how this locally revered hymn reinforces spiritual strength, communal identity, and emotional healing. Findings revealed that the hymn functions not only as a liturgical tradition but also as a spiritual anchor that inspires hope, unity, and a profound connection to the divine, especially during times of crisis. Participants described the hymn as a “musical prayer” that fosters both personal and collective resilience, underscoring its importance in their daily worship and cultural identity. Grounded in Fowler’s Faith Development Theory, this study affirms that sacred music, particularly the *Sto. Niño Bendisyoni* hymn, serves as a transformative medium for faith formation and community recovery, highlighting its enduring power in post-disaster spiritual life.

Keywords: *Local parishioners, Resilient faith, Sto. Niño bendisyoni hymn*

Background

Hymnology refers to the scholarly study of hymns, encompassing their historical development, theological themes, musical structures, and cultural contexts within Christian worship traditions (Watson & Hornby, 2013). It goes beyond merely appreciating hymns as religious songs by examining how they reflect and

influence the beliefs, values, and practices of faith communities. Hymns are dynamic rather than static compositions; they evolve alongside the communities that sing them, undergoing musical, lyrical, and theological adaptations that reflect and shape local cultural identities and worship practices (Menger, 2024). In this way, hymns serve as both mirrors and molders

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of collective faith. Committees responsible for compiling hymnals often revise texts and melodies to meet the needs of new generations, broadening the scope of musical styles used in worship. This underscores the dynamic and living nature of hymnody within the Christian tradition.

Parallel to hymnological scholarship is a growing body of research on resilient faith, understood as a form of spiritual strength that enables individuals and communities to endure and grow through adversity. Empirical studies indicate that spirituality is associated with positive mental health outcomes, fostering hope, gratitude, and perseverance (Koenig, 2012). Resilience is increasingly conceptualized as a dynamic and developmental process rather than a fixed trait (Manning et al., 2019). In the context of trauma, spirituality has also been linked to post-traumatic growth, wherein individuals reconstruct meaning and derive strength from profound challenges (Tan, 2013). From a biopsychosocial perspective, spiritual environments may further support both emotional regulation and adaptive stress responses (Brewer-Smyth & Koenig, 2014).

Bringing these broader concepts into focus, this study is centered on Tacloban City, Philippines, a community where spirituality and adversity are deeply intertwined. In particular, the local hymn *Sto. Niño Bendisyoni* is a significant expression of communal faith and devotion. This hymn is sung before the priest's final blessing at the conclusion of the Mass at the Archdiocesan Shrine of Sto. Niño, a practice that has become a cornerstone of local Catholic life. Archival records indicate that on June 22, 1968, the late writer and musician Professor Agustin El. O'Mora of Palo, Leyte composed the "*Sto. Niño Bendisyoni Hymn*." The hymn was intended not only for local liturgical use but also for broader provincial adoption following an ecclesiastical decree signed on June 1, 1967, by the Bishop of Palo, Most Reverend Teotimo C. Pacis, C.M., D.D., declaring Señor Sto. Niño as the Patron of Leyte. These historical details situate the hymn within the intersecting spheres of religious devotion, civic celebration, and regional identity formation in Eastern Visayas during the late 1960s.

The hymn is more than a liturgical tradition; it acts as an emotional and spiritual anchor for the people of Tacloban, reflecting a devotion to Santo Niño that embodies protection, healing, and cultural identity. After catastrophic events like Super Typhoon Yolanda in 2013, local religious devotion—including collective prayer and ritual practices—has been documented as a significant source of comfort, strength, and communal unity in resilience processes (Wilkinson, 2015).

Collectively sung during prayer, fiestas, and processions, the *Sto. Niño Bendisyoni* hymn functions as a ritual expression of faith, unity, and endurance within the Tacloban community. It embodies both theological affirmation and cultural identity, particularly in a context shaped by collective hardship. Despite its evident spiritual and communal significance, limited scholarship has examined how a single, localized hymn contributes to the cultivation of resilient faith. While hymnology addresses worship practices broadly and resilience studies explore spirituality as a coping resource, few studies situate these discussions within a specific cultural and post-trauma context. This study addresses that gap by investigating the hymn's role in sustaining spiritual strength and communal solidarity in Tacloban.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Faith Development Theory (Fowler, 2001), which conceptualizes faith not merely as adherence to doctrinal beliefs but as a fundamental way of knowing, valuing, and making meaning of one's experiences. Fowler posits that faith is universal in structure, as individuals orient their lives around what they perceive to be of ultimate importance—what he describes as "centers of value" or "centers of worth." In this sense, faith functions as a dynamic framework through which persons interpret reality, construct identity, and situate themselves within broader narratives of meaning and commitment (Siner, 2015).

Within this framework, the *Sto. Niño Bendisyoni* hymn is understood as a symbolic locus through which parishioners articulate and sustain their faith. Consistent with

Fowler's view, the hymn operates as a mediating symbol that shapes how individuals interpret suffering, uncertainty, and communal experience. Through its lyrical content, melody, and cultural embeddedness, it reinforces shared religious images and narratives associated with the Santo Niño, thereby sustaining continuity, communal identity, and hope. In doing so, the hymn provides a meaningful interpretive horizon through which life's adversities are understood within a broader narrative of divine care and purpose.

Statement of the Problem

This study examined how the *Sto. Niño Bendisyoni* hymn shapes resilient faith among parishioners in Tacloban City, particularly in times of hardship. It was guided by the following research questions:

1. How does the Sto. Niño Bendisyoni hymn contribute to the development of resilient faith among Tacloban parishioners based on Fowler's stages of faith?
2. What specific lyrical and musical elements of the hymn contribute most significantly to the recovery of spiritual resilience in a post-disaster context?

Significance of the Study

The insights gathered from this study were valuable for the following:

Students. Through this study, students will discover how the Sto. Niño Bendisyoni hymn can offer comfort and guidance, especially during difficult times. Gaining a deeper understanding of the hymn's message may inspire students to see their faith as something active and living in their daily lives, helping them grow spiritually.

Local Parishioners. This study seeks to explore why the Sto. Niño Bendisyoni hymn holds such deep meaning for parishioners and how it strengthens their faith in Sto. Niño. Through this exploration, we hope to highlight how the hymn helps people feel closer to Sto. Niño, making their devotion more personal and meaningful.

Researchers. This study was beneficial to both current and future researchers as this study will serve as their guide or reference who

wish to conduct the same study related to Shaping Faith & Cultural Resilience in Sto. Niño Bendisyoni Hymn in Tacloban City.

Church Leaders and Practitioners. The study provided actionable insights for church leaders to enhance the role of hymns in community worship and spiritual development. It underscores the potential of hymns as tools for fostering resilience and unity, especially in disaster-prone regions like Tacloban.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to examining how the *Sto. Niño Bendisyoni* hymn shapes the lived faith experiences of parishioners in Tacloban City. It focused specifically on individuals who reported a meaningful connection to the hymn and were willing to articulate their experiences. As such, the findings reflect subjective accounts rather than institutional or doctrinal evaluations of the hymn's role in Catholic practice.

Geographically, the research was confined to Tacloban City and does not claim generalizability to other parishes, provinces, or devotional contexts. Temporally, it centered on the hymn's contemporary significance, with historical background referenced only to contextualize present-day meanings. Methodologically, the study relied primarily on qualitative data, particularly in-depth interviews, which privilege depth over breadth; limited quantitative data were used solely to supplement narrative accounts. These boundaries define the scope of the inquiry and situate its conclusions within a specific local, temporal, and participant-based context.

Review of Related Literature

Resilience in the Philippine Context. Faith is widely recognized as a resource for resilience within increasingly "super-diverse" (Phillimore, 2011) and "hyperdiverse" (Miyares, 2010) societies. Empirical research indicates that religious belief and practice foster adaptive coping through mechanisms such as perceived divine support, meaning-making, and gratitude (Manning et al., 2019; Pargament, 1997). Resilience is now understood as a dynamic process operating at individual and

communal levels, where faith traditions provide interpretive frameworks that sustain hope and collective endurance during adversity (Wilkinson, 2016).

In the Philippine context, spirituality plays a central role in coping with hardship and disaster. Studies show that Filipinos frequently interpret suffering within frameworks of divine providence, sustaining hope and communal solidarity (Dalisy & De Guzman, 2016). As one of the world's most disaster-prone nations, the Philippines illustrates how faith communities become integral to recovery processes, particularly following Super Typhoon Haiyan (Wilkinson, 2016; O'Connell et al., 2017). Religious practices and church-based networks provide emotional reassurance, social cohesion, and collective meaning-making, transforming places of worship into spaces of refuge and resilience during crisis (O'Connell et al., 2017).

Hymnology and Spiritual Formation. Hymnology is widely recognized as formative in shaping doctrine, identity, and communal belonging. Communal singing fosters *communitas*, strengthening shared sacred meaning and collective identity (Taylor, 2023). Hymns transmit theological content in accessible and memorable forms, reinforcing continuity across generations (Stallsmith, 2021). Research further indicates that congregational music nurtures spiritual belonging and lived faith, particularly during crisis, when hymns function as sources of comfort and solidarity (Kwok, 2019). In the Philippine context, hymnody is localized through language and cultural adaptation, deepening its resonance within worship practices and communal life (Stallsmith, 2021).

Methodology

Research Design. This study employed a single case study design (Gustafsson, 2017) to explore how the Sto. Niño Bendisyoni hymn contributes to the development of resilient faith among parishioners in Tacloban City. This approach is well suited for examining complex phenomena within a real-life context, allowing an in-depth understanding of how faith, resilience, and cultural religious practices intersect. Focusing on the hymn enabled the researchers to examine both individual faith experiences and broader communal dynamics shaped by

Tacloban's historical and cultural context. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and contextual analysis, providing a holistic perspective on how the hymn strengthens faith, fosters communal identity, and supports resilience amid adversity (Yin, 2012).

Research Environment. Tacloban City, specifically the Archdiocesan Shrine of Sto. Niño, served as the primary research site, as it is the principal setting where the Sto. Niño Bendisyoni hymn is regularly sung during liturgical celebrations. The shrine holds significant spiritual importance for local parishioners, and the hymn forms an integral part of communal worship, particularly before the final blessing of the Mass. More than a musical element, the hymn functions as a shared devotional expression embedded in the community's religious life. As a focal space of prayer and gathering, the shrine provides a context in which parishioners collectively draw strength from their faith, especially in periods of hardship such as the aftermath of Typhoon Yolanda.

Research Participants. The research utilized Purposive sampling to choose participants, specifically targeting individuals who possess a deep personal connection to the Sto. Niño Bendisyoni hymn and are prepared to share their experiences. A total of 12 participants were involved, facilitating a diverse yet concentrated examination of viewpoints while fostering meaningful, in-depth discussions. Interviews were conducted with all 12 participants, and data saturation was reached at participant 12, as no new themes emerged. Prior research suggests that thematic saturation in qualitative interviews may often be achieved within approximately 12 participants, depending on study scope and homogeneity (Guest et al., 2006). However, sample size should remain flexible and guided by the point at which no new themes emerge (Fugard & Potts, 2014; Hennink et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the number may be increased if necessary to attain saturation. To ensure that participants can offer relevant and insightful reflections on how the hymn fosters resilient faith, the study established specific inclusion criteria. Chosen individuals met the following criteria: a) have been active parishioners for a minimum of 15 years

and exhibit strong engagement in the church community; b) be open and willing to share personal experiences and reflections regarding the hymn's influence on their spiritual journey; and c) be residents of Tacloban City, to guarantee that the research accurately represents the hymn's impact within the local context.

Research Instrument. The primary instrument used in this study was an interview guide designed to assist the researchers in collecting reliable and meaningful data by allowing participants to elaborate on their personal experiences in depth. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions intended to promote a conversational and relaxed atmosphere, enabling participants to express their perspectives more freely than a traditional survey would allow. The instrument was developed by the researchers and underwent validation by three content and research experts to ensure the clarity, relevance, and effectiveness of the questions. This validation process is intended to support the generation of rich, engaging, and insightful discussions that thoroughly explore the participants' viewpoints.

Data Collection Procedures. Prior to data collection, formal request letters were sent to parish authorities to secure permission to conduct the study at the Archdiocesan Shrine of Sto. Niño. Identified participants were then contacted through parish networks and provided with informed consent forms outlining the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary nature of participation, and confidentiality measures. Only those who returned signed consent forms were scheduled for interviews.

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured guide with open-ended questions focused on participants' experiences of the Sto. Niño Bendisyoni hymn and its role in shaping their faith, particularly in times of adversity. Sessions were held in familiar and mutually agreed-upon settings to ensure comfort and openness. Interviews began with brief background questions to establish rapport, followed by in-depth prompts exploring spiritual meaning, emotional responses, and communal experiences. Probing questions were used to clarify and deepen responses. With participants' permission, interviews were audio-recorded for accuracy.

Audio recordings were securely stored and transcribed verbatim, with identifying information removed to maintain anonymity. The transcripts were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns related to faith, resilience, and communal identity. Findings were synthesized into a structured report and shared with relevant parish stakeholders to ensure transparency and acknowledgment of participants' contributions.

Data Analysis. The study utilized Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis to examine how the Sto. Niño Bendisyoni hymn fosters resilient faith among parishioners in Tacloban City. Data analysis followed a systematic process: (1) familiarization through repeated reading of transcripts; (2) generation of initial codes capturing significant statements related to faith, hope, and communal identity; (3) searching for patterns across codes; (4) reviewing and refining candidate themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the analytic report supported by representative participant excerpts.

Coding and theme development were facilitated using ATLAS.ti software to organize and manage qualitative data systematically. ChatGPT was used solely for language editing and grammatical refinement and did not participate in coding, interpretation, or theme generation. The analysis identified recurring themes that illustrate the hymn's role as both a spiritual anchor and a communal expression of resilience.

Ethical Consideration. Prior to data collection, the study received clearance from the Research Ethics Committee (REC). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and participation was entirely voluntary, with the option to withdraw at any time. The researchers ensured strict confidentiality and the protection of personal information throughout the study. Ethical principles including respect, beneficence, fairness, and confidentiality, were observed. Participants were fully informed of the study's purpose and procedures and provided written consent to confirm their voluntary involvement.

Research Reflexivity. Research reflexivity required an ongoing awareness of our position within the study. We recognized that we were

not detached observers but individuals shaped by our own experiences, perspectives, and assumptions, all of which could influence data collection, interpretation, and engagement with participants. Throughout the research process, we intentionally practiced openness and humility, continually examining how our backgrounds and prior understandings might shape emerging insights. This reflective stance informed our methodological decisions and analytic judgments, helping us remain attentive to participants' meanings. By sustaining this awareness, we sought to ensure that parishioners' voices remained central to the study.

Triangulation. The triangulation method employed in this research combined various data sources, including interviews, participant observation, and documentary analysis, to yield a comprehensive understanding of how the Sto. Niño Bendisyoni hymn cultivates resilient faith among parishioners in Tacloban City. Initially, in-depth interviews were carried out with parishioners, enabling them to recount personal experiences regarding how the hymn has bolstered their spiritual resilience, especially during difficult periods such as Typhoon Yolanda. These interviews offered rich, qualitative insights into the emotional and individual connections that parishioners maintain with the hymn.

Furthermore, documentary analysis enriched these findings by scrutinizing pertinent texts, historical documents, and literature to frame the hymn's cultural and religious importance. This approach traced the hymn's development and underscored its enduring impact on faith within the community. Collectively, these triangulated methods ensured coherence across data sources, thereby enhancing the study's reliability and offering a thorough perspective on the hymn's influence on both individual and communal resilience in Tacloban City.

Results

Themes are organized according to recurring patterns identified across participants' narratives, reflecting shared meanings and experiences related to the *Sto. Niño Bendisyoni* hymn. Twelve parishioners participated in the

study and are identified as P1–P12. Line numbers are provided where direct excerpts are cited. Each participant is referenced by a number (P1–P12) corresponding to their interview, with line numbers indicated for specific quotes.

Theme 1. The Development of Resilient Faith of the Local Parishioners Through Sto. Niño Bendisyoni Hymn

Participants consistently described the *Sto. Niño Bendisyoni* hymn as integral to the development of their resilient faith. Across interviews, parishioners articulated how the hymn functions not merely as a liturgical song but as a lived expression of prayer, trust, and spiritual grounding, particularly during periods of hardship and uncertainty. Many respondents associated the hymn with experiences of comfort, renewed hope, and a heightened awareness of divine presence. Their narratives indicate that, through repeated communal singing, the hymn has become embedded in personal and collective memory, reinforcing both individual devotion and shared religious identity.

Reinforcement of Communal Identity. Participants' responses reflected how the *Sto. Niño Bendisyoni* hymn contributes to a shared sense of belonging and collective identity. Parishioners described the act of singing the hymn as a unifying practice that affirms common values, beliefs, and traditions. Many emphasized that communal singing during liturgical celebrations fosters solidarity and strengthens interpersonal bonds within the parish. Their accounts suggest that the hymn functions not only as an expression of worship but also as a ritual that reinforces communal cohesion and shared religious identity.

Findings from participant interviews reveal that the hymn serves as a strong link for spiritual and community ties. Many respondents highlighted the deep emotional and spiritual connection they feel when they sing the hymn during Mass, novenas, and community gatherings. Participant 3 described the experience as follows:

When we sing this, it's like we are one family in faith. (P3, line 32)

Similarly, Participant 6 shared a more detailed and emotionally resonant account:

Yes, of course! When we sing this during Mass, especially during the fiesta celebration, oh my, I really feel a deep connection with others like we are one big family. There's no one acting superior, no one feeling inferior. We're all praying, giving thanks, and worshipping one Lord together. And you can really feel the strength of faith in every voice singing with me. (P6, line 21)

Participant 8 (P8, line 14) further reinforced this theme by stating:

When we sing this hymn during Mass or during community prayers, I feel a strong sense of unity among us. (P8, line 14)

The *Sto. Niño Bendisyoni* hymn functions not only as an expression of devotion but also as a cohesive force within the community. It serves as a cultural and spiritual symbol that reinforces shared faith and collective heritage among parishioners.

Source of Hope and Strength. The *Sto. Niño Bendisyoni Hymn* isn't just a simple prayer song, it serves as a beacon of hope and strength for the local parishioners. During tough times or uncertainty, this hymn brings a profound sense of spiritual comfort. It acts as a constant reminder of God's presence and protection, boosting the faith of everyone who sings it. For many, this hymn is a source of emotional and spiritual support, lifting their spirits and helping them face life's challenges with renewed determination and trust in the divine. In moments of personal struggle or doubt, parishioners turn to the hymn for comfort. Participant P8 (P8, line 4) shared:

Aahhh, this strengthens my faith through the song's reminder that the Sto. Niño is always present,

pouring out His blessings. (P8, line 4)

Participant P12 further emphasized this by stating:

My problems may not be solved immediately, but the hymn gives me strength to continue and to trust that He has a plan for me. (P12, line 6)

The hymn contributes to the cultivation of spiritual resilience. Even when immediate solutions are not evident, its message fosters inner strength and sustains a steadfast belief in ongoing divine guidance and presence.

For many parishioners, the *Sto. Niño Bendisyoni* Hymn is a crucial part of their spiritual resilience, particularly when faced with trials. Participant P6 (P6, line 18) shared:

The Sto. Niño hymn is a great help to me personally because it enlightens me and reminds me of the many trials I've faced in my life, yet the Lord has always been there watching over me. (P6, line 18)

In addition, Participant P3 explained the hymn's effect on their spiritual strength:

When I hear the Bendisyoni, it feels like my faith is being strengthened. Even though there are many trials, I am left with hope. (P3, line 10)

The repeated blessings in the melody of the hymn provide a feeling of divine comfort and inspire ongoing faith in God's plan, even during the toughest times.

A Source of Connection to Sto Niño. The *Sto. Niño Bendisyoni* hymn functions as a mediating symbol that deepens parishioners' spiritual connection to the Santo Niño. Through its lyrical and devotional elements, the hymn operates as both prayer and affirmation of divine care and protection, reinforcing intimacy with the sacred. This sustained engagement culti-

vates a heightened sense of devotion and spiritual attachment within the faith community. As P6 articulated, devotion to the Santo Niño provides comfort and strength, particularly during periods of personal struggle:

Well, of course, since I am a devotee of Sto. Niño, He is the one I turn to when I have problems. Especially when this hymn is sung at the end of Mass, I feel comfort and joy, almost like I forget my problems, and I feel His love. (P6, line 12)

Participant P2 expressed how the hymn provides comfort and reassurance in times of difficulty:

It reminds me that no matter how difficult life gets, Sto. Niño is there, embracing us with his mercy and love. (P2, line 16)

For many parishioners, the hymn feels like a direct connection to the core of their faith, a recognition of God's constant presence. They see the hymn as a way for the Sto. Niño to show His compassion and mercy. This spiritual connection is also tied to one's identity as a child of God, as explained by Participant P4 (P4, line 34):

The hymn reminds us that we are children of God... Even if we make mistakes, we have a Father willing to listen to us. (P4, line 34)

Participant P5 emphasized how singing the hymn becomes an act of gratitude and recognition of divine blessings:

When it comes to the Niño, I am truly full of gratitude. That's all I can really say. I just say, 'Thank you, Niño, thank you', especially when this song is sung, I am deeply thankful for all the blessings I receive each day. (P5, line 22)

This emphasizes the emotional and spiritual significance of the hymn as a form of gratitude, where singing serves as a heartfelt acknowledgment of God's support in our daily providence.

Motivation to Increase Liturgical Participation. Liturgical participation remains a central expression of active faith within Catholic communities, yet many parishes report declining engagement, particularly among younger members. In response, culturally resonant hymns have been employed as pastoral resources to renew involvement. This study investigates how the *Sto. Niño Bendisyoni* hymn, deeply rooted in local devotion, encourages more meaningful participation in liturgical celebrations. Interview data indicate that the hymn enhances liturgical engagement, especially during Mass and feast observances, as its familiar melody and devotional lyrics foster emotional connection and intentional worship. As P2 shared:

When I hear the hymn, I feel encouraged to stand up and sing. It puts me in a spirit of worship, even when I'm tired. (P2, line 46)

Likewise, Participant 5 stated:

The hymn helps me focus on the Mass. It's easier to participate because I already know the tune and understand the meaning of the words." (P5, line 38)

Participant 9 (P9, line 46) shared a particularly reflective insight:

When we start singing the Bendisyoni, I don't just sit there in church. It feels like my heart is being moved to participate, to pray, and to truly connect with God. (P9, line 46)

For the participants, these statements reflect a personal transformation sparked by the hymn, shifting the participant from passive attendance to active spiritual engagement. It highlights the hymn's ability to foster deeper

involvement in worship through a meaningful and emotional connection.

Cultural and Religious Identity. Cultural and religious identity serves as the cornerstone for how individuals relate to their community and spiritual beliefs. Within parish environments, these identities frequently intertwine through rituals, language, and collective expressions of faith. The Sto. Niño Bendisyoni Hymn, performed in binisaya and incorporated into religious practices, exemplifies this connection powerfully. It is not merely a song of worship; it also reinforces the parishioners' cultural heritage and Catholic identity. Participant 1 shared:

When we sing the Bendisyoni, I don't feel like I'm just attending Mass, I also remember our traditions. I think of the fiesta, the novena prayers, and the people in our village. (P1, line 54)

Through the evocation of shared cultural memories, the hymn anchors the faith experience in a local context that extends beyond formal worship and into daily life. Participant 7 reflected:

It matters to me that the hymn is in Waray. Because while we're praying, we're using our own language. It feels more personal and natural. (P7, line 32)

The use of local language deepens the emotional and spiritual dimensions of worship, strengthening the connection between cultural identity and religious faith. Participant 12 stated:

We teach this hymn to our children. Because through it, they learn not just the song, but also the meaning of faith and our traditions. (P12, line 43)

The hymn functions as a means of conveying cultural and religious heritage, serving as a vehicle for transmitting essential values and identity to subsequent generations.

A Symbol of Faith in Times of Crisis. The Sto. Niño Bendisyoni Hymn stands out as a meaningful representation of faith in times of adversity. It holds special significance within the community, especially during events such as natural disasters, illness, or public health crises, offering comfort, a sense of divine protection, and spiritual reassurance. Its message of blessing and the presence of the divine strengthens spiritual resilience and deepens the community's trust in God through the intercession of the Sto. Niño. Participant 1 shared a moving experience during Typhoon Yolanda, reflecting on how the hymn became a source of strength in the face of uncertainty:

When Yolanda came, I didn't know if I would survive. But despite the danger, I went straight to the Sto. Niño Church because we were cooking there early that morning. While the world outside was in chaos, I just prayed earnestly, clinging to His grace. I am deeply grateful to the Sto. Niño, because even in the midst of the storm, He gave me another chance at life. Until now, I continue to serve Him, as a way of giving back for His immeasurable mercy. (P1, line 37)

Participant 6 shared a personal account of surviving a life-threatening illness, attributing their recovery to the intercession of the Sto. Niño:

Oh my, yes ma'am, it was really overwhelming. Back then, I was diagnosed with a tumor in my uterus, and I felt like my chances of surviving were slipping away, that was around June or July 2019. I truly thought I was going to die from my illness; it was so painful and suffocating. But I held tightly to the hand of the Sto. Niño and begged Him for help. Ma'am, it was truly miraculous, by God's mercy, the tumor disappeared. That's why my hope in the Sto. Niño remains so strong. It's because of Him that I was healed. (P6, line 51)

Participant 7 also recounted a life-threatening experience during Typhoon Yolanda, highlighting how the hymn's spiritual strength carried them through the ordeal:

...because before, we were at the center during Typhoon Yolanda, and I thought I was really going to die. But I was able to hold on to the grill, and the water was already so high, with so many things floating around. I can truly say, 'Oh my God, I'm really going to die.' If I didn't have faith in Him, I would've been dead for sure. It was so difficult, so overwhelming, but my faith in the Sto. Niño and my devotion to Him helped me survive. Even in the hardest of times, the Sto. Niño hymn gave me strength and hope to keep going. That's why, even now as I talk to you, I can't help but cry. The Sto. Niño, a symbol of faith, gave me the courage and hope to endure, even in the midst of those trials. (P7, line 44)

Sto. Niño, the child Jesus, and the hymn has grown into a meaningful expression of faith during difficult times, providing spiritual comfort and reinforcing the sense of God's protection and compassion, especially amid fear and uncertainty.

Theme 2. Factors that Contribute in Fostering Resilient Faith among Local Parishioners in Tacloban City

This theme delves into the different elements that help nurture a resilient faith among parishioners. The community's resilience is deeply rooted in their spiritual practices, a strong sense of togetherness, and an unwavering hope.

Perceived Divine Protection, Blessings, and Spiritual Comfort from the Lyrics. In Tacloban City, a place that has faced devastating events like Typhoon Yolanda, faith has become a vital source of strength and healing. The Sto. Niño Bendisyoni hymn, sung with genuine devotion by the parishioners, serves as both a

heartfelt request for safety and a declaration of trust in the divine. It expresses gratitude for the blessings received while also affirming the unwavering presence and guidance of the Sto. Niño.

Participant 3 shared a heartfelt reflection in Waray and English on how the hymn continually brings joy and spiritual light:

Ah, this song, 'Sto. Niño, bendisyoni, an am' minahal nga bungto,' always touches my heart. It reminds me how we start everything by asking for the Sto. Niño's blessing and protection. When we sing 'Karawata gad, pamatii gad' and 'Did' ha imo kaluoy, salirungan an am' kalag,' it's like we are placing all our worries and prayers into His loving hands. And when we say 'Di Ka namon igbubulag' again and again, it shows how deeply we trust Him, He is always with us, watching over us. This hymn is more than just words; it's a prayer full of faith and love, reminding us that His care never leaves us. (P3, line 16)

Another participant expressed:

This hymn, for me, is a reminder that Sto. Niño is loving and merciful... this song has truly become my personal prayer, hehe (P7, line 32)

The power of this hymn to evoke trust and hope was further echoed by Participant 10:

Aww, when I trust Him and sing in my heart the Bendisyoni hymn, especially the line 'don't leave us,' I believe He will help us no matter what happens. (P10, line 26)

As an embodied prayer, the Sto. Niño Bendisyoni Hymn reinforces beliefs in divine protection and blessing, fostering spiritual comfort and trust in the Sto. Niño's constant presence. Participant 1's reflection highlights how this lyrical element fosters a sense of companionship with both the divine and the community during hardships.

...this Sto. Niño Bendisyoni hymn is very dear to my heart, ahh... Even though I am getting old, I never forget the hope it gives me. When the song says “Sto. Nino han Tacloban” (Sto. Nino of Tacloban), it brings me joy because I am not alone; uhmm... the Sto. Niño is always with me through my hardships. (P1, line 45)

Participant 4’s testimony reflects the emotional strength and peace gained through this intimate spiritual dialogue.

Ahh, the prayer “pamatii gad in inga amon pag-ampo” (Hear us well, our prayers), I always feel it in my heart, hehe... especially when I am the one praying; it always gives me strength and peace. This song, uhmm... brings comfort, especially when there are many problems in life. So, I am truly thankful to the Sto. Niño who always listens to my prayers. (P4, line 41)

Participant 11’s experience emphasizes how the hymn’s words offer a refuge of love and care, filling their soul with strength amid life’s challenges.

...when I receive the clear words, especially ‘In your mercy, refuge of our soul,’ I truly feel the love and care of the Sto. Niño for us. Even though life gives us trials, we are not abandoned nor forsaken. This song, uhmm... fills my soul with strength and hope. (P11, line 33)

As a source of spiritual comfort, the hymn strengthens believers’ resilience and sustains hope amid hardship.

The Melody Aids in Deepening the Personal Devotion and Prayer. The melody of the *Sto. Niño Bendisyoni* hymn contributes significantly to the cultivation of personal devotion and contemplative prayer among parishioners. Structured in 4/4 meter and set at a moderate

tempo—originally conceived in a march style—the hymn sustains a steady, processional character that facilitates collective singing while preserving reverent focus. Harmonically, it follows a conventional diatonic progression in C or D major, offering tonal familiarity and structural stability. Notably, toward the closing phrase, particularly on the line “*di ka namon ibubulag*” (“we will not leave you”), the hymn employs a subtle modal interchange, introducing harmonic color that heightens expressive intensity. This shift enriches the musical texture and underscores the lyrical affirmation of fidelity, thereby deepening the emotional and devotional impact of the concluding statement.

Many participants shared that its gentle tune soothes their minds and steadies their emotions, transforming fear and grief into silent prayer. This melodic experience strengthens their faith, deepening their trust in the constant presence of the Sto. Niño. Participant 6 emphasizes how the soft and hopeful tone of the hymn supports a reflective and prayerful experience.

Even the melody of the song is quiet, but full of hope. (P6, line 19)

Participant 3 reflects how melody aids the participant in entering a state of peace and surrender during worship:

the hymn begins, I feel at ease, knowing that my prayers will be answered, and that He will not abandon me. (P3, line 38)

Participant expresses the emotional impact of singing the hymn, enhanced by its melody, brings comfort and a deep sense of divine connection.

I forget my problems, and I feel His love. (P5, line 18)

The melody of the *Sto. Niño Bendisyoni* hymn operates not merely as a musical element but as a mediating structure that facilitates deeper engagement in prayer and spiritual reflection. Its measured and hopeful tonal character supports emotional attunement, enabling worshippers to articulate burdens, petitions, and trust within a devotional framework.

Through its melodic contours and expressive qualities, the hymn contributes to the sacralization of ordinary liturgical moments, fostering personal devotion and sustained spiritual intimacy with the Santo Niño.

Triangulation. Interviews documented parishioners' experiences of emotional and spiritual consolation, particularly during crises such as Typhoon Yolanda. Musical analysis focused on the hymn's diatonic structure, simple harmonies, and solemn tempo, elements that support inclusivity, collective participation, and expressions of hope and divine guidance. Participant observation during Sunday Mass captured embodied devotion through reverent gestures, emotional engagement, and unified singing. Together, these complementary methods enhanced the study's credibility and provided a holistic account of how the hymn sustains communal faith and resilience within Tacloban's Catholic community.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the *Sto. Niño Bendisyoni* hymn functions as a formative resource in the development of resilient faith among parishioners in Tacloban City. Interpreted through Faith Development Theory (Fowler, 1981; Fowler, 2001), the hymn operates within the synthetic-conventional stage, where belief is shaped and sustained through shared symbols, communal narratives, and trusted traditions. In this case, the hymn does not merely accompany faith development; it actively mediates it. Through repeated collective singing, parishioners internalize resilience as a communal spiritual practice, integrating personal suffering and collective loss into a shared devotional framework. Particularly in a post-disaster context, the hymn serves as a stabilizing symbolic structure that enables believers to reinterpret adversity within an inherited narrative of divine care. This case illustrates how culturally embedded musical rituals function as lived mechanisms of faith formation, reinforcing Fowler's proposition that faith evolves through engagement with meaningful communal symbols.

Beyond its theoretical alignment, the study shows that the hymn strengthens both personal belief and communal identity. Participants consistently described singing the hymn as fostering unity across social distinctions and life experiences. The act of communal singing aligns individual emotions with a shared spiritual language rooted in devotion to the Sto. Niño. As a collective ritual, it reinforces cohesion and affirms belonging. Research suggests that faith communities enhance resilience by providing social and spiritual support systems (Manning et al., 2019), and the findings confirm that shared musical worship operates as one such support structure.

Participants further identified the hymn as a source of hope and inner strength during personal trials and community-wide crises. The hymn enables parishioners to interpret illness, loss, and disaster within a theological narrative of blessing, protection, and trust in divine presence. Spiritual practices that foster meaning-making, comfort, and perceived divine support are recognized as central to resilience (Brewer-Smyth & Koenig, 2014). In this context, resilience emerges not only as emotional endurance but as faith-informed interpretation of adversity.

The hymn also deepens spiritual connection. Through singing, parishioners experience relational closeness to the Sto. Niño, characterized by trust and dependence. Engagement with devotional music has been associated with higher intrinsic religiosity and spiritual well-being (Park & Suh, 2022). This perceived divine companionship provides reassurance during hardship and contributes to emotional stability and courage, consistent with research showing that religious involvement strengthens coping and resilience through perceived support from the sacred (Koenig, 2012). The devotional structure of the hymn transforms collective worship into an intimate spiritual encounter.

The findings also highlight the hymn's role in sustaining cultural and religious identity. Sung in Waray or Binisaya and embedded in local devotional life, it connects faith to shared history, language, and tradition. In a community shaped by collective trauma, the hymn represents continuity and survival. Traditional

spiritual practices that preserve cultural meaning contribute to communal stability and resilience, as engaging in religious rituals strengthens cultural values, belonging, and intergenerational identity transmission within religious communities (Santiago, 2023).

During times of crisis, particularly following Super Typhoon Yolanda, the hymn functioned as a spiritual anchor. Participants described it as a familiar structure that helped them interpret fear and uncertainty within a narrative of divine protection. Studies on spirituality and post-traumatic growth affirm that faith practices provide interpretive frameworks that sustain hope amid loss (Okan et al., 2025; Manning, 2014). The hymn thus operated as both symbol and practice through which resilience was collectively enacted.

Both lyrical and melodic elements contributed to emotional and spiritual comfort. The prayerful text affirmed divine mercy and protection, while the calm, processional melody facilitated contemplation and surrender. Together, these elements nurtured inner peace and strengthened resilience at personal and communal levels (Manning et al., 2019). The hymn's integration of text, music, and ritual participation demonstrates how embodied devotional practices sustain faith and resilience within lived religious communities.

Conclusions

The *Sto. Niño Bendisyoni* hymn emerges as a sustaining spiritual resource within the Tacloban parish community. More than a liturgical element, it operates as a shared framework through which parishioners interpret hardship, particularly in the aftermath of Super Typhoon Yolanda. Through its devotional lyrics and familiar melody, the hymn fosters communal unity, reinforces trust in divine protection, and nurtures resilience across generations. It embodies a collective expression of hope and continuity, reflecting how faith is enacted and strengthened through shared musical practice. In this way, the hymn represents not only personal devotion but also the enduring spiritual resilience of the Tacloban community.

These results suggest important pastoral and cultural implications. Culturally rooted hymns and devotional music serve as

stabilizing forces in disaster-prone contexts, supporting both spiritual coping and communal cohesion. As both symbol and practice, the hymn facilitates healing, reflection, and renewed commitment to faith by integrating memory, identity, and worship. Preserving and intentionally incorporating indigenous devotional music into liturgical life may therefore strengthen intergenerational faith transmission and communal recovery. More broadly, communal singing functions as an embodied practice through which cultural continuity, spiritual resilience, and collective hope are sustained during times of crisis.

Recommendations

The parish choir is encouraged to organize formation sessions, musical catechesis, or reflective workshops that deepen parishioners' understanding of the hymn's theological and cultural meaning. Developing high-quality recordings or multimedia presentations for dissemination through digital platforms could further extend its reach, especially to Tacloban communities abroad, strengthening diasporic spiritual connection and cultural continuity.

Church servers and parishioners may benefit from structured catechetical orientation on the hymn's spiritual symbolism and role within the liturgy. Greater awareness of its meaning can foster more intentional participation during Mass and devotional gatherings. Through attentive presence, coordinated liturgical gestures, and reverent engagement, servers and parishioners contribute to a worship environment that is solemn, participatory, and spiritually enriching.

Local officials and community leaders are encouraged to recognize the *Sto. Niño Bendisyoni* hymn as an element of Tacloban's intangible cultural heritage. Integrating the hymn into civic-religious events, cultural festivals, and commemorative activities can strengthen communal identity and spiritual solidarity. Collaborative initiatives between the LGU and parish institutions may support educational, cultural, and youth-oriented programs that highlight the hymn's historical, devotional, and resilience-building significance, particularly in a disaster-prone context.

Subsequent studies may examine the role of other regional devotional hymns in shaping faith and resilience across diverse communities. Comparative research could broaden understanding of sacred music as a mechanism for spiritual coping and cultural continuity. Quantitative or mixed-method approaches may also assess the psychological and emotional impact of devotional singing over time, thereby complementing qualitative insights and contributing to interdisciplinary scholarship on religion, music, and resilience.

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