

FROM FAMILY ENCULTURATION TO LITURGICAL CO-RESPONSIBILITY: A DEVELOPMENTAL COMMUNICATION MODEL OF CHILDREN'S MUSICAL FORMATION

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Abstract

Children do not become liturgical participants merely through exposure to religious music or the acquisition of repertoire. Their formation develops across family, educational and ecclesial environments and requires progressively deeper relations among sound, symbol, action, faith and community. This theoretical study constructs a Developmental Model of Liturgical Musical Agency by synthesising the theology of *participatio actiosa*, relational communication, the communicative theory of the musical act, family religious transmission and selected research in music education. The model comprises five analytically distinct but overlapping stages: musical-religious enculturation, symbolic comprehension, communicative agency, ecclesial participation and reflective co-responsibility. Across this trajectory, family roles change from modelling and emotional mediation to explanation, autonomy

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support, dialogue and shared discernment. The model rejects rigid age bands and treats feedback, accessibility, regression and renewed learning as constitutive features of development. Formation should therefore be assessed not by attendance, repertoire size or public performance alone, but by a child's growing capacity to relate musical action to liturgical meaning, respond freely within an assembly and assume responsibility appropriate to development and ability. The model offers criteria for connected family and parish practice while preserving the theological specificity of liturgy.

Keywords: family upbringing; liturgical music; musical agency; religious socialisation; *participatio actiosa*; children; developmental model; liturgical formation

1. Introduction

Religious and musical formation begins before a child can explain either faith or music. A melody heard repeatedly, the rhythm of family prayer, an adult's posture during worship and the alternation of sound and silence establish a pre-conceptual horizon of meaning. Within that horizon, sound is never only an acoustic event. It becomes associated with particular people, gestures, seasons, emotions and forms of belonging. Later, children learn words, recognise ritual functions, take musical roles and evaluate what they experience. These changes are often described separately as religious socialisation, catechesis, musical training or liturgical participation. Their developmental continuity is less often examined.

This fragmentation has practical consequences. Exposure may be mistaken for formation, performance for participation, and compliance for faith. A child can sing accurately without understanding why the assembly sings; another can remain silent while listening attentively and interpreting the action. An adolescent may possess musical competence but withdraw when there is no space for questions, choice or genuine responsibility. Conversely, an adult may praise visible activity while overlooking interior attention, reception and discernment. A developmental account is therefore needed to distinguish forms of engagement without arranging children in a hierarchy of religious worth.

The present article develops such an account through a synthetic reading of the five-part argument of *Muzyka liturgiczna jako akt*

komunikacyjny (Liturgical Music as a Communicative Act).¹ That study first establishes the theological meaning of *participatio actiosa*, then reconstructs action and communication, describes the musical act and its subjects, applies the model to liturgical celebration, and identifies practical and interdisciplinary implications. Read developmentally, these elements disclose a trajectory from received patterns to interpreted symbols, intentional response, ecclesial coordination and responsible discernment.

The proposed model does not treat the family as a substitute for the parish or music education as a substitute for liturgical formation. It asks how the distinctive contributions of home, education and worship may become intelligibly connected. Its central thesis is that children's liturgical musical agency grows when reception, meaning, freedom and responsibility are progressively integrated within credible relationships. Formation is thus neither a private achievement nor the automatic effect of institutional attendance. It is a relational process in which the child gradually becomes capable of responding as a member of an assembly.

2. Aim, Research Problem and Method

The principal research question is: which developmental capacities connect early family experience of religious music with increasingly conscious, relational and responsible participation in liturgical musical acts? Three subsidiary questions guide the analysis. First, how does the family's role change as children move from imitation toward intentional action? Second, how can participation be differentiated from performance or mere external activity? Third, which observable indicators can guide formation without reducing spiritual development to measurement?

The aim is to construct a model useful for family pedagogy, religious education and parish formation while preserving the theological specificity of the liturgy. "Musical-liturgical agency" denotes the developing capacity to receive, interpret and undertake musical action within worship in relation to its text, ritual function, community and transcendent reference. Agency is not independence from others and does not mean unrestricted choice. It emerges within responsive relationships and may be expressed by singing, attentive

¹ Paweł Piotrowski, *Muzyka liturgiczna jako akt komunikacyjny. Studium ku teologii komunikacji liturgicznej. W świetle koncepcji "participatio actiosa"* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo PETRUS, 2026), 4-51, 52-119, 120-169, 170-205, 206-234.

listening, silence, bodily participation, accepting an appropriate ministry, or enabling the participation of others.

The study is theoretical and constructive. It uses conceptual reconstruction, interdisciplinary synthesis and model building. Five categories derived from the theological-communicative account—participation, relational communication, intentional action, ecclesial co-subjectivity and formative implication—are interpreted developmentally. They are placed in dialogue with research on parental support in music learning, intergenerational transmission of faith, family music listening and inclusive musical practice. Empirical studies clarify conditions and possible mechanisms; they do not prove theological claims or establish universal stages.

The model is evaluated by four criteria: conceptual coherence, theological adequacy, developmental plausibility and practical usefulness. It must explain change without identifying development with chronological age; affirm the child's agency without making the liturgy child-centred; distinguish home and parish while showing their relation; and generate practices that can be observed, discussed and revised. The result is a heuristic framework rather than a psychometric scale or a causal theory.

3. Theological and Communicative Foundations

3.1. *Participatio Actuosa* and Liturgical Agency

The first foundation is *participatio actuosa*. The Second Vatican Council describes full, conscious and active participation as a right and duty arising from baptism and as a primary concern of liturgical formation. It also associates participation with acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons, songs, actions, gestures, bodily attitudes and reverent silence.² This breadth is decisive. "Active" cannot be reduced to constant audible activity, and "conscious" cannot be reduced to verbal explanation. Participation integrates interior appropriation and external action, personal response and ecclesial belonging.

The instruction *Musicam Sacram* makes the same distinction when it connects interior participation with external forms and recommends that the faithful be led gradually toward fuller involvement. It also insists that musical formation begin early and

² Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium: Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 4 December 1963, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 56 (1964): 97–138, nos. 14, 30, 112.

that the ecclesial dimension of sacred music remain clear.³ Development therefore concerns neither the accumulation of tasks nor progressive proximity to the sanctuary. It concerns an increasingly adequate correspondence among what is received, understood, intended and enacted.

This understanding corrects two opposite reductions. The first identifies participation with visibility: the child participates "more" when singing alone, carrying an object or standing before the assembly. The second spiritualises participation so completely that concrete formation becomes unnecessary. Liturgical agency holds interior and external dimensions together. A child's silent listening may be participatory when it is attentive and related to the common action; a technically polished solo may be insufficiently participatory when it directs attention toward the performer rather than the rite. The relevant question is not simply "What did the child do?" but "What relation among meaning, freedom, action and assembly was realised?"

Benedict XVI similarly warns that active participation should not be understood superficially as mere external activity.⁴ This theological qualification protects the developmental model from becoming a ladder of performance. At every stage, reception precedes and accompanies action. Mature agency includes the capacity not to act when listening or silence better serves the celebration.

3.2. Relational Communication and the Musical Act

The second foundation is relational communication. A transmission model asks whether a message reached a receiver. A relational model also asks what relationship was enacted, how the receiver responded and whether that response affected subsequent action. In liturgy, music does not merely carry verbal content. It coordinates bodies and voices, marks ritual time, articulates acclamation or supplication, and contributes to *communio*. Children therefore learn a mode of being-with others, not only a set of songs.

The third foundation is the communicative musical act. Its meaning depends on subjects, intention, musical and liturgical codes,

³ Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Musica Sacram: Instruction on Music in the Liturgy*, 5 March 1967, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 59 (1967): 300–320, nos. 15–18, 42.

⁴ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation*, 22 February 2007, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 99 (2007): 105–180, no. 52.

context and feedback. The assembly is not a passive audience but a co-subject; at the same time, Christ remains the primary subject of liturgical action.⁵ This theological asymmetry prevents the model from treating worship as an occasion for autonomous self-expression. Yet ecclesial co-subjectivity also prevents children from being reduced to objects of adult instruction. They receive an action that precedes them, but their response is real and consequential.

The distinction among sign, code and act clarifies formation. A melody can be recognised as a sign, while its musical code includes tonal, rhythmic and stylistic conventions. Its liturgical code situates it as an acclamation, psalm response, hymn or other ritual form. The act arises when particular subjects use those signs and codes intentionally in a concrete celebration. Formation fails when one layer is isolated. Teaching words without enacted context leaves the liturgical code abstract; rehearsing sound without interpreting function turns the rite into repertoire; encouraging expression without reference to the assembly weakens ecclesial meaning.

Feedback closes the communicative circle. It may be verbal, but it is often embodied and temporal: hesitation, confident response, fatigue, silence, sensory distress or the assembly's capacity to join. Responsible leaders observe these responses and adjust preparation, tempo, explanation, key, repetition or role. The child's reaction is not noise to be overcome; it is information about whether a relationship has become possible.

3.3. Development without Rigid Age Bands

The five stages proposed below are heuristic, overlapping and reversible. They name dominant formative tasks, not age-based identities. A young child may display reflective insight, while a musically skilled adolescent may require basic symbolic comprehension in an unfamiliar rite. An adult entering the Church may begin with enculturation. Disability, language, family practice, migration and parish culture influence both sequence and expression.

This non-linear account is compatible with genuine development. Each stage presupposes capacities made possible by earlier experiences, but no stage is simply left behind. Enculturation continues whenever a community learns new repertoire. Symbolic comprehension deepens when familiar words are heard in a new

⁵ Piotrowski, *Muzyka liturgiczna jako akt komunikacyjny*, 143–155.

season. Agency is renegotiated as roles change. Ecclesial participation can be disrupted by conflict or exclusion, and reflective co-responsibility continually returns to receptive listening. Development is cumulative without being mechanically sequential.

The model therefore separates capacity from worth. It does not assign spiritual status, diagnose faith or compare children competitively. It enables adults to ask what kind of support is presently needed and whether the environment permits a meaningful response. The developmental unit is not the isolated child but the child-in-relation: with caregivers, peers, ministers, the assembly, ritual symbols and God.

4. Five Stages of the Developmental Model

4.1. Musical-Religious Enculturation

Enculturation is entry into a world in which music, faith and relationships already possess patterns. Repetition produces recognition; recognition permits anticipation; anticipation enables a first form of participation. Lullabies, seasonal songs, sung prayer, family celebrations and attendance at worship locate musical sound within affection, memory and ritual time. Even when a child cannot explain the practice, predictable recurrence can create a basic grammar of belonging.

The family's decisive role at this stage is modelling rather than formal instruction. Children observe whether adults sing, listen, ridicule, hurry, become anxious or remain attentive. They notice whether religious music belongs only to public occasions or also has a credible place in domestic life. Consistency matters more than declared intention. Research on intergenerational transmission shows that parenting approaches, congregational involvement and intensive religious socialisation help explain differences in the continuity of religion between generations.⁶ Such findings cannot equate social continuity with faith, but they demonstrate that institutional contact alone cannot replace lived mediation.

Shared musical activity can also support relational cohesion. A cross-cultural study of 760 young people found that family and peer music listening were associated with cohesion in the corresponding

⁶ Jesse Smith, "Transmission of Faith in Families: The Influence of Religious Ideology," *Sociology of Religion* 82, 3 (2021): 332–356.

relationships across four cultural settings.⁷ Liturgical formation has a distinct purpose, and correlation is not causation. Nevertheless, the relational mechanism matters: music becomes formative when it is embedded in shared attention, emotional credibility and recurrent interaction.

The chief danger is saturation without interpretation. Religious music used as continuous background may become familiar without becoming meaningful. Families can instead establish small, recognisable practices: one refrain during a liturgical season, a sung response at prayer, a moment of silence, or a brief recollection after worship. The aim is not to reproduce a church service at home, but to create enough continuity for sound to become connected with relation and memory. Enculturation supplies a vocabulary of belonging; formation must gradually help the child understand how that vocabulary functions.

4.2. Symbolic Comprehension

Symbolic comprehension develops when a child begins to connect musical forms with ritual functions and theological meanings. The question changes from “Do I know this song?” to “What are we doing by singing it here?” An acclamation, psalm response, entrance song and meditative chant cannot be treated as interchangeable selections because they participate differently in the celebration. The child begins to perceive not only musical contrast but ritual purpose.

The family mediates this transition through concise explanation, narrative and recollection. An analysis of Jesus’ communication highlights clarity, memorable images, narrative structure and direct relational engagement.⁸ Applied pedagogically—not as a commercialisation of religion—this insight favours language connected with experience. A parent may ask why the same words return, what the assembly answers, why the music changes, or why silence follows a chant. Such questions invite children to verbalise partial understanding without turning conversation into an examination.

⁷ Diana Boer and Amina Abubakar, “Music Listening in Families and Peer Groups: Benefits for Young People’s Social Cohesion and Emotional Well-Being across Four Cultures,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 5 (2014): Article 392, 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00392>.

⁸ Paweł Piotrowski, *Jezus Mistrzem marketingu* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo PETRUS, 2023), 24–30.

Symbolic comprehension is embodied. Children interpret tempo, vocal unity, spatial location, gesture and silence alongside words. A slowly unfolding response may communicate waiting differently from a festive acclamation. A cantor's location and posture may indicate service rather than display. Catechesis that explains texts while ignoring enacted form remains incomplete; performance without interpretation leaves musical and liturgical codes detached. Formation joins both through a cycle of experience, naming, comparison and renewed experience.

The principal danger is premature abstraction. Technical or theological vocabulary should name an experienced relation rather than substitute for it. An explanation must also remain answerable to the rite: adults should not invent meanings merely to retain attention. Misunderstanding is not simply failure; it is feedback revealing which connection among sign, action and meaning has not yet become intelligible. The appropriate response is often a simpler question, another experience or a more concrete contrast, not a longer lecture.

4.3. Communicative Agency

At the third stage, children increasingly perceive themselves as capable of making a response that matters. They choose to enter a refrain, sustain listening, prepare a psalm, join a family practice, or accept a modest responsibility. Agency includes competence, but its core is intentional relation: the child understands enough of the act to orient action toward prayer and community. The transition is visible when participation becomes more than copying and begins to include choice, preparation and self-correction.

Research on instrumental learning illustrates the importance of adult support that combines structure with responsiveness. In a study of 337 parent-pupil-teacher trios, constructive outcomes were associated with eliciting children's views, negotiating involvement within appropriate parameters, providing a structured home environment, supporting teacher-pupil rapport, maintaining communication and remaining an interested audience.⁹ Liturgical formation is not an instrumental lesson, and its purpose is not musical achievement. The findings nevertheless clarify why control

⁹ Andrea Creech, "Learning a Musical Instrument: The Case for Parental Support," *Music Education Research* 12, 1 (2010): 13–32, at 30–31.

and withdrawal can reinforce one another: children need both dependable support and a meaningful sphere of response.

Family practice now changes from direct modelling toward scaffolding. Parents provide regularity, help a child prepare and communicate with parish leaders, but avoid turning every celebration into an assessment. Choice should be real but bounded. A child may choose among suitable ways of participating or decide when to undertake preparation; the child does not redesign the liturgy according to preference. Adults remain responsible for boundaries, while explaining why those boundaries serve the common action.

Failure must be interpreted carefully. A missed entry, an abandoned role or reluctance to practise can indicate insufficient competence, anxiety, unclear meaning, conflict, sensory overload or an emerging need for autonomy. The response should distinguish these possibilities. Agency grows when errors can be acknowledged without humiliation and when feedback identifies a next step. Praise focused only on performance may make visibility the goal; feedback related to meaning, effort and service better integrate musical and liturgical development.

4.4. Ecclesial Participation

Communicative agency becomes ecclesial participation when the child relates personal action to the action of the whole assembly. The decisive movement is from “my part” to “our celebration.” Musical accuracy remains relevant, but it is judged by whether it supports the ritual act and the participation of others. The child learns that leading is not dominating, listening can sustain another’s ministry, and silence may belong to the common act.

This stage makes visible the multiple subjects of liturgical musical action: composer, cantor or choir, instrumentalists, celebrant and assembly, ordered within Christ’s action and the Church’s response. Communication is therefore polycentric but not unstructured. Different ministries possess distinct functions, and no single performer exhausts the act.¹⁰ A child’s contribution acquires ecclesial meaning when it is coordinated with these relations rather than displayed beside them.

¹⁰ Piotrowski, *Muzyka liturgiczna jako akt komunikacyjny*, 155–169, 194–205.

The family supports ecclesial participation by resisting two opposite errors. The first is privatisation, in which the child's religious experience is detached from the community and judged only by personal feeling. The second is performative display, in which a public role becomes evidence of family achievement. Parents can redirect attention toward service by asking: Did the music help people respond? Was there room for others? Did the chosen pace, volume or manner clarify the rite? What did the action communicate?

Parish practice is equally decisive. Children can be conspicuously present yet remain without a voice if adults reserve all meaningful reflection and decision for themselves. Age-appropriate consultation about comprehensibility, vocal range, rehearsal or accessibility does not transfer liturgical authority to children. It recognises their feedback as relevant to the common action. Conversely, responsibility without preparation is tokenistic. A genuinely ecclesial role includes clear expectations, accompaniment, the possibility of refusal and review after the event.

At this stage, belonging is tested by difference. The assembly includes people with unequal musical ability, confidence, sensory needs and familiarity. Children learn ecclesial participation when they can adjust their own action, receive another person's contribution and accept that the common good may limit individual preference. This is a musical apprenticeship in *communio*: unity realised not through uniformity, but through ordered and reciprocal participation.

4.5. Reflective Co-responsibility

Reflective co-responsibility combines participation with the capacity to evaluate musical-liturgical action according to criteria that exceed personal taste. An older child or adolescent asks whether repertoire corresponds to the ritual moment, whether the text communicates faith, whether the manner of performance invites the assembly, and whether preparation includes people with different capacities. The young person can increasingly give reasons, receive criticism and revise a judgement.

This stage includes critical distance. Questions, aesthetic disagreement and even temporary withdrawal should not automatically be interpreted as loss of faith. They may indicate that inherited forms require explanation, that a practice has lost relational credibility, or that the young person is testing whether participation

can become personally owned. Adults maintain liturgical and ethical boundaries while making room for reasons, doubt and discernment. A predetermined answer demanded before listening would produce compliance, not co-responsibility.

The family now becomes a partner in reflection rather than the sole source of answers. Conversation can compare domestic preferences with liturgical criteria, distinguish emotional attraction from ritual adequacy and examine how digital culture shapes attention. It can also acknowledge conflict honestly. Reflective agency matures when young people can explain a judgement, revise it in dialogue and accept responsibility for its communal consequences.

Co-responsibility does not mean identical roles. A teenager, parent, musician, catechist and celebrant possess different competencies and authority. It means that each response enters a structured relationship and that the strongest participant does not silence the weakest. It also means that consultation has consequences: observations about an inaccessible key, rushed tempo, incomprehensible text or inadequate preparation should inform future action. Mature formation is evidenced by the capacity to serve a common celebration, not by proximity to the microphone.

5. Movement Between the Stages

5.1. Support, Feedback and Regression

The model contains five characteristic movements: from familiarity to recognition, from recognition to interpretation, from interpretation to intentional response, from response to ecclesial coordination and from coordination to discernment. Each transition requires both support and feedback. Without support, the next task becomes inaccessible; without feedback, adults cannot know whether communication has occurred.

Support should be calibrated rather than simply increased. At enculturation, it consists mainly in presence, repetition and emotional safety. At symbolic comprehension, it includes naming and comparison. At communicative agency, it provides bounded choice and preparation. At ecclesial participation, it coordinates roles and makes the assembly visible as a co-subject. At reflective co-responsibility, it creates a forum for reasons and shared evaluation. A form of help that is appropriate at one stage can become controlling at another.

Regression and repetition are normal. New repertoire can return an experienced participant to basic recognition. A change of parish may unsettle symbolic competence because musical and ritual codes differ. Adolescence can reopen questions previously treated as settled. Illness, family conflict, disability or a negative public experience may temporarily restrict agency. Such movement should lead to diagnosis and renewed support, not shame.

Feedback also moves in both directions. Adults evaluate children's responses, but the response evaluates the formative environment. Persistent silence may reveal a need for interior reception, but it may also indicate an unsuitable range, unclear instruction, fear or exclusion. A model of communication becomes developmental only when those responsible for formation allow the child's response to change what happens next.

5.2. Relational Credibility, Accessibility and Continuity

Three cross-cutting conditions govern all stages. The first is relational credibility: adult practice should correspond sufficiently with what adults teach. Perfection is neither possible nor required, but a large gap between proclaimed meaning and enacted behaviour makes the musical-religious code unstable. Admitting inconsistency can itself restore credibility when it opens honest dialogue.

The second condition is code accessibility. Texts, melodic forms, instructions, rehearsal processes and physical environments must be intelligible and performable without erasing liturgical integrity. Accessibility is not an optional concession added after formation has been designed. It belongs to communication because a code that cannot be received or answered by its intended participants has not yet become fully relational.

The third condition is responsive continuity. Experiences at home, in catechesis and in worship should be connected, while each context retains its own task. Continuity does not require identical repertoire or teaching methods. It requires that children can recognise relations among what is practised, explained and celebrated, and that observations from one context inform support in another. The developmental outcome is not a self-sufficient performer but a participant capable of receiving before acting, acting without monopolising and evaluating without reducing worship to preference.

6. Implications for Family and Parish Practice

6.1. Distinct but Connected Formative Contexts

The family and parish should be understood as distinct, mutually informative environments. The home offers intimacy, repetition, emotional safety and biographical continuity. It can connect music with everyday gratitude, grief, celebration and waiting. The parish offers sacramental and ecclesial context, diverse co-participants, ordered ministries and a repertoire not chosen solely by the household. Neither context should absorb the other.

The family's importance is consistent with Francis' account of parents as active agents in the transmission of faith. *Amoris Laetitia* stresses that faith is communicated in ordinary family life through credible witness, affection, prayer and a process adapted to children's development and freedom.¹¹ Musical formation belongs within that wider ecology. A sung response cannot replace conversation or example, but it can give repeated, embodied form to what a family receives and professes.

Productive continuity arises when both environments make their purposes intelligible and exchange observations without invading one another's responsibilities. Parents can inform parish leaders about a child's needs, interests or anxiety; pastoral workers can explain the ritual function of repertoire and provide materials for preparation. Communication should protect the child from becoming a project passed between adults. Whenever possible, the child should know what is being discussed and contribute according to maturity.

6.2. Formation and Evaluation

Planning should begin with the dominant formative task rather than chronological age alone. Families with young or newly involved children may cultivate repetition and emotional safety. When children ask about words and actions, adults can use brief mystagogical conversation. Emerging agency requires bounded choice and manageable responsibility. Ecclesial participation requires coordination with the assembly. Adolescents need criteria, genuine dialogue and consequences appropriate to their decisions.

¹¹ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family*, 19 March 2016, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 108 (2016): 311–446, nos. 287–290.

A modest formative sequence can accompany any musical element. Before the celebration, adults identify its ritual function and one attainable form of participation. During preparation, they make the musical and verbal code accessible. In the celebration, they allow the child's response to be real rather than continuously corrected. Afterwards, they ask one open question and identify one next step. Repetition across time is more developmentally coherent than an occasional spectacular performance.

Evaluation should include indicators beyond attendance and correctness: recognition of ritual function; the capacity to explain meaning in one's own words; voluntary and appropriate response; attention to other participants; the ability to prepare, receive feedback and recover from error; and concern for accessibility. These indicators describe development and guide support. They must not be used to rank spiritual worth or infer the presence of grace.

Evaluation should also distinguish outcome from process. A hesitant response can arise from a thoughtful but difficult attempt; an accurate performance can arise from pressure. Adults therefore need observations from more than one event and, where possible, the child's own account. The question "What helped or hindered your participation?" often yields more formative information than "Did you sing correctly?"

6.3. Inclusive Practice and Differentiated Agency

Agency must not be measured by vocal strength, reading fluency, sensory tolerance or intellectual ability. Research on music in support systems for people with intellectual disabilities stresses individualisation, professional preparation, relational quality, acoustic safety and evaluation that includes the perspectives of participants and caregivers.¹² A direct transfer from therapeutic settings to liturgy would be inappropriate, but the principles of subjectivity and responsiveness are relevant.

Inclusive liturgical formation can use predictable structures, clear visual or gestural cues, simplified but dignified responses, additional processing time, appropriate acoustic conditions and stable accompaniment. It can recognise attentive listening, bodily orientation, repeated syllables or simple instrumental actions as

¹² Paweł Piotrowski, "Music in Support Systems for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities: Forms of Intervention and Practical Implications," *Wychowanie w Rodzinie* 33, 1 (2026): 1-14, esp. 8-11, <https://doi.org/10.61905/wwr/220735>.

legitimate responses when they correspond to the rite. Adaptation should neither isolate the child nor turn disability into a public display.

Differentiation benefits the whole assembly. A clear introduction, singable key, stable tempo and intelligible text support children, older people, newcomers and hesitant singers alike. Inclusion therefore tests whether the community understands itself as a communicative body. If only the most confident can decode and perform its musical action, the barrier is not located solely in the individual participant.

Training for parents and pastoral workers can remain practical and precise: explain one ritual function, model one form of attentive participation, offer one accessible pathway, observe one response and ask one open question. Over time, these small practices connect family credibility with ecclesial participation and allow responsibility to grow without forcing visibility.

7. Limitations and Research Directions

The model is a theoretical construction grounded in Roman Catholic liturgical theology and a selective interdisciplinary dialogue. It does not establish age norms, causal effects or universal sequences. The empirical studies cited concern religious transmission, family music listening, instrumental learning and disability support; none directly tests the complete model in liturgical settings. Their use is analogical and must remain subordinate to the specific aims and structure of worship.

Cultural setting, family religiosity, parish resources, disability, language and musical tradition may alter both sequence and expression. The model may also require modification in communities where domestic and parish repertoires differ sharply, where children participate in more than one linguistic or ritual culture, or where family involvement is absent or unsafe. “Family” should therefore include the actual network of caregivers and significant adults rather than assume one household form.

Empirical research should test the model through longitudinal observation, interviews with children and caregivers, and comparison of family-parish environments. Studies could examine whether symbolic comprehension mediates the relation between repeated exposure and voluntary participation; whether autonomy-supportive feedback predicts sustained engagement in adolescence;

and whether accessible design increases both participation and perceived belonging. Children, including children with disabilities, should participate as co-interpreters of meaning and accessibility rather than only as recipients of intervention.

Further theological work should clarify how developmental language relates to grace, initiation and ecclesial vocation without making maturity a prerequisite for participation. Comparative research could also explore how the model functions across rites and cultures. Such work would test whether the five stages identify transferable communicative tasks or merely reflect one pastoral setting.

8. Conclusion

Children's musical-liturgical formation is best understood as a developmental communicative trajectory rather than as repertoire acquisition or the assignment of visible roles. By integrating the theology of *participatio actiosa*, relational communication, the structure of the musical act and insights from family and music education, the proposed model identifies five overlapping stages: musical-religious enculturation, symbolic comprehension, communicative agency, ecclesial participation and reflective co-responsibility.

The model's contribution is threefold. Conceptually, it distinguishes familiarity, understanding, agency, ecclesial coordination and discernment without treating them as fixed age bands. Theologically, it locates the child's response within an action received from Christ and enacted by the Church, thereby protecting both genuine agency and the non-performative character of worship. Practically, it translates development into forms of support and feedback that families and parishes can observe, discuss and revise.

Across the stages, the family's role changes but does not disappear. It first provides emotional and ritual credibility, then language, scaffolding, support for autonomy and a space for critical reflection. The parish situates these capacities within sacramental action, ordered ministries and a diverse assembly. Their continuity is productive when neither context imitates nor replaces the other, and when children's responses genuinely inform subsequent formation.

The decisive criterion is neither visibility nor technical accomplishment. It is the emergence of a free, intelligible and

relational response appropriate to development and ability. Such a response may take the form of singing, listening, silence, preparation, leadership or enabling another person's participation. This criterion can be examined and refined in different family, parish and cultural settings without turning it into a scale of spiritual worth. When sound is connected with symbol, intention with response and personal capacity with responsibility for others, musical formation becomes both a dimension of family upbringing and an apprenticeship in ecclesial *communio*. The model thus reframes formation from producing young performers to accompanying young co-participants whose agency matures through reception, relation and service.