

# Exploring the Devotional Practices to Sto. Niño at the Archdiocesan Shrine of Sto. Niño

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**Abstract-** *The researcher conducted the study during the celebration of Senior Sto. Niño at the Archdiocesan Shrine of Sto. Niño in Midsayap, North Cotabato, to investigate the prevailing devotional practices. This paper offers a preliminary account of the devotional rituals associated with the veneration of the Santo Niño. The researcher utilized a descriptive-qualitative study design. The survey included individuals who were followers of Senior Santo Niño at the Archdiocese Shrine in Midsayap. A total of 10 individuals enthusiastically took part in the Senior Santo Niño feast. The course instructor verifies the self-designed survey questionnaires to assure the dependability of the study. The researcher employed a direct, in-person method utilizing a mobile to capture and analyze data from the study participants, employing thematic analysis for interpretation. The study found that the participants' religious rituals during the Santo Nino festival involved a nine-day novena, volunteering at the church, attending masses, participating in the act of kissing the statue of the senior Santo Nino, reciting the novena and rosary, performing traditional dances and engaging in the practice of stomping on the body of Santo Nino for healing purposes. Engaging in these rituals enhances connections with the divine, enhances the quality of life, and enhances the vigor of the religious tradition. Engaging in trusts, dances, youth service, invoking Saint Therese and Senior Santo Nino, reciting the rosary, witnessing miracles, attending mass, and partaking in the Eucharist contribute to the enrichment and satisfaction of spiritual journeys. The study findings have resulted in the following recommendations: the goal is to maintain and promote traditional devotional practices by offering educational materials and giving importance to cultural expressions; organize spiritual growth activities such as retreats, workshops, and study groups; strengthen trust and devotion to Senior Santo Niño through prayer, reflection, and active involvement of young people in devotional practices. Additionally, uphold the tradition of seeking spiritual support by invoking saints.*

**Keywords:** Culture: Devotion: Practices: Sr. Santo Niño.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Santo. Niño is a deeply ingrained symbol in Filipino culture, representing the Child Jesus. Despite their widespread popularity, there is a need for a deeper exploration of the spiritual significance of these practices.

For centuries, Filipinos have celebrated the devotion to Santo Nino as a significant aspect of their culture. It is a fusion of Catholicism and indigenous beliefs, symbolizing hope, healing, and miracles. This essay will discuss the history, practices, and significance of the devotion to Santo Nino, highlighting its importance in Filipino tradition and faith.

The devotion to Santo Nino originated in Cebu, Philippines, tracing its roots to the arrival of Ferdinand Magellan in 1521. When Magellan gifted a statue of the Holy Child to Queen Juana, it became a symbol of the introduction of Christianity to the Philippines. The statue, believed to be miraculous, survived fires and natural disasters and has since become a symbol of hope and faith for the Filipino people. Today, thousands of devotees venerate the original statue at the Basilica del Santo Nino in Cebu City every year.

Every January, the Halad festival, a grand celebration honoring Santo Nino, takes place. It features a colorful parade, with participants wearing vibrant costumes and dancing to the beat of traditional drums. The festival attracts millions of visitors from all over the world, making it one of the largest cultural events in the Philippines. Additionally, devotees observe a nine-day prayer period called the Novena before the feast day. During this time, they offer prayers and petitions to Santo Nino, seeking guidance, healing, and blessings. Processions and parades featuring the Santo Nino statue are also common, with devotees carrying it on their shoulders and offering flowers and candles.

The devotion to Santo Nino represents the fusion of Catholicism and indigenous beliefs, reflecting the rich cultural heritage of the Philippines. It represents hope, healing, and miracles, with many devotees attesting to Santo Nino's miraculous interventions in their lives. The devotion to Santo Nino also unites the Filipino people in faith and tradition, transcending regional and cultural differences. It is a source of inspiration and strength for many Filipinos, providing them with a sense of identity and belonging.

The devotion to Santo Nino is an integral part of Filipino culture, reflecting the country's unique blend of Catholicism and indigenous beliefs. Its history, practices, and significance highlight its importance in Filipino tradition and faith, bringing together millions of devotees each year in celebration and prayer. The devotion to Santo Nino serves as a reminder of the power of faith and the resilience of the Filipino people in the face of adversity (Borre, 2021).

This paper aims to explore the intricacies of the devotional practices surrounding Santo. Niño, shedding light on their origins, evolution, and theological underpinnings. Also, the paper aims to contribute to the body of knowledge in contemporary society. The goal is not only to deepen understanding of the devotional practices of the Santo Niño but

also to honor the profound spirituality and cultural heritage that they represent. By illuminating the richness of this tradition, there's hope to foster a greater appreciation for the diverse tapestry of Filipino religious expression and inspire further exploration into the depths of faith and devotion. The researchers' motivation to delve into the devotional practices of Santo Niño at the Archdiocese Shrine stems from a desire to unravel the complexities of faith, culture, and community. By embarking on this journey of exploration, the researchers not only enrich the understanding of religious devotion but also pay homage to the enduring legacy of faith embodied by the Santo Niño. The problem that I've seen is the commercialization of religious events, like the Feast of Santo. Niño, where commercial interests overshadow the spiritual significance of the occasion. This can manifest in excessive merchandising, advertising, and profit-making prioritization over religious reverence.

1.1 Research Questions (RQ)

This study aims to determine the practices of devotion to the Santo Niño in the archdiocese shrine of Santo Niño. Specifically, this study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What devotional practices do you observe during the feast of St. Niño?
2. What effects do these devotional practices have on your faith?
3. How does your faith grow through your devotion to St. Niño?

II. METHODOLOGY

The present study provides an exploratory description of the devotional practices of the Santo Niño. The researcher employed a descriptive qualitative design. The participants of this study were the true devotees of Senior Santo Niño at the Archdiocese Shrine in Midsayap. True devotees of Santo Nio demonstrate sincere belief in His teachings and presence, rooted in a deep spiritual connection. Their lives mirror His virtues of humility, compassion, and forgiveness, which spread love and kindness. They maintain consistent prayer and devotion, seeking communion with Him daily. Actively engaging in acts of service and compassion, they uplift the marginalized, embodying Santo Niño's example. With humility and gratitude, they recognize His blessings and share them with others. They participate actively in their faith community, supporting fellow devotees. True devotion transforms their character, inspiring authentic living and spiritual growth (Balbastro, 2022). There are 10 participants composed of 1 minister, 3 elders, 2 health parishioners, 2 knights of the altar, and 2 youth members who actively participated in the feast of Senior Santo Niño. To ensure the study's reliability, field research experts validated the self-made interview guide question. The researcher used a face-to-face approach with cell phones to gather data from the respondents to the study for almost a month.

Using thematic analysis, the researcher recorded, analyzed, and interpreted the data produced by the research instrument.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the findings of the study.

RQ 1: What devotional practices do you observe during the feast of Santo. Niño?

TABLE 1. Devotional practices devotees observe during the feast of Santo. Nino

Respondents	Code	Theme
R 1	“Sa tuwing kapistahan ni santo niño ako ay nanampalataya sa kanya sa pamamagitan ng pagsayaw hindi lamang basta sayaw. And sayaw na aming gingawa ay sumisimbolo na kami ay sumasamba sa kanya.”	Believing Sr. Sto Niño Dancing while holding Sr. Sto Niño
R 2	“9 days novena, trust, no problem”	9 days novena, trust
R 3	“Ang ginahimo nako sa adlaw sa kapistahan sa among patron ni senior santo nino, bilang isa ka kaabag naga serve kami sa mga katawhan nagacommunion minister kami isip usa ka sulugoon ni kristo, nagadto gani ko dri kay nagkuha sa schedule,schedule gani nako karong udto,unya pdu alas 5 hangtud alas 7, mao nang kami nga mga kaabag magsacrifice gyud, 8 years nako nga kaabag diha gayud makita kung unsa gyud ang ginatawag nga pagalagad sa ginoo.”	Serve Sacrifice
R 4	“Nagsaulog, nagsimba para sa kaayuhan,nagpasalamat nga gitagaan mi niya og taas pa nga kinabuhi og kaabtik, kabaskog sa kalawasan aron makapadayon me sa among gimbuhaton.”	Going to church Thanksgiving
R 5	“Among ginahimo kay nagapahalok og nagapatapak sa imahe ni sr santo niño sa mga katawhan.every gyud na siya.”	Kissing, stomp of the statue
R 6	“Magsimba tapos magsabat og panagadye og novena, tapos magsilulog aron hatagan ta sa ginoo og maayong lawas”	Going to church 9 days novena Pray
R 7	“Nagpahalok, nagsimab kada gabii”	Kissing the statue of Sr. Sto nino Going to church
R 8	“Nalipay gyud”	Happy
R 9	“As an altar server po ang ginagawa nagserve nag assist sa preside sa pagcelebrate sa mass”	Serve every mass
R 10	“Nag ampo aron pagatubagon nya akong mga pagampo ag wish sa inabuhi ko,nagserve”	Pray Serve every mass

Table 1 shows what the devotees do during the feast of Senior Santo Niño. Respondents 2 and 6 said they attended 9 days of the novena; respondents 3, 9, and 10 said they serve at the parish, respondents 4, 6, and 7 said that they go to church;

respondents 5 and 7 said that they facilitate the kissing to the statue of senior Santo Niño; respondents 6 and 10 said that they pray; respondent 1 said that she dances every feast of Sr. Santo Niño because she believes in the miracles; respondent 2 said

that he trusted God through his devotion to Sto. Nino; respondent 3 said offering sacrifices is his way of expressing his devotion, respondents 4 said that she did thanksgiving by offering masses; while respondent 5 said she facilitates to stomp the statue to the body of the devotee, and lastly respondent 8 said that he was happy.

The Sinulog Festival, also known as the Feast of St. Niño, is a significant religious and cultural event in the Philippines, especially in Cebu City, while it was called the Halad Festival in Midsayap, North Cotabato. In honor of the Holy Child Jesus, followers perform various devotional ceremonies, including the research location (Sitchon, 2023). Santo Niño devotees attend special Masses during the celebration, and processions featuring Santo Niño pictures are customary. Dancers led the children around the streets with vibrant dances and melodies (Ibone et al. 2016). Devotees frequently pray before and during feasts, often performing novenas, expressing gratitude, making petitions, and seeking help from the Santo Niño for various reasons (Sagarino, 2021). Followers of the Santo Niño perform devotional activities by presenting candles, flowers, and food, and sometimes pledge blessings or express gratitude for

fulfilled prayers (LeFlore, 2009). The Sinulog Festival is renowned for its vibrant street dancing, where participants wear colorful costumes and perform ancient dances in memory of the Santo Niño. Adolescents symbolize commitment and cultural expression (South Pole Central Hotel, 2018). Pilgrimages to shrines and churches dedicated to the Santo Niño. During the feast, where devotees worship the Holy Child for spiritual benefits (Landy, 2017), Santo Niño songs and music are sung and performed during religious events like processions and masses, honouring the Holy Child with love, trust, and devotion, just like Bato Balani and Pit Senyor (Powers, 2023). The Feast of St. Niño is a significant religious and cultural event that brings families and communities together for feasting, festivities, and sharing traditional Filipino cuisine, highlighting the event's cultural significance (Patti, 2020). The Feast of St. Niño is a spiritually joyful event that combines local customs, liturgical ceremonies, and displays of love and devotion to the Holy Child Jesus (Borre, 2021).

RQ 2: What effects do these devotional practices have on your faith?

TABLE 2. Effects of the devotional practices to Santo Niño

Respondents	Code	Theme
R 1	“Marami ang naging epekto nito sa amin mga magagandang epekto habang tumatagal mas lalong lumalalim ang aming pananampalataya sa kanya.”	Deepen my faith
R 2	“Powerful, inspired, not doubting called being catholic”	powerful, inspiring
R 3	“Dako kayo ang epekto niini sa akong kinabuhi or pagtoo kay tanan nakong bisyo nawala; sa tinuod lng, sauna lain kayo ko kay gainom ko, gapamanikas ko, pero karon wala nako gapamanikas sa akong anak dagko na akong mga anak, ako lang nga nagpasalamat ko sa ginoo, nagpasalamat gyud ko nga nakasulod ko nga naging kaabag og nagpasalamat pud ko sa among patron nga si saint therese the child of jesus kay gimilgruhan gyud ko, dili man unta ko musulod day biskan unsaon pakog storya, dli unta ko musulod sa pagkakaabag pero kung ginoo gyud diay ang mutawag sa imoha dili gyud ka kabalibad .gitanggap nako ,ikapila nako giharanahan sa mga kauban nako nga mga kaabag. Mar pagsulod na ana akong mga kauban, kay mario man ko. Mangutana sako sa akong misis kay kong mo dili siya aw wat ay mahimo, pangit man sad nga magserbisyo ta nga dli uyong akong misis. kinahanglan magtambayayong gyud ming duha ,karon kay nag oo man siya ‘sige kung kaya nimo aw sudli’ pagkahuman niana nagkuha ko og form ,nagpirma ko, tapos nagseminar ko sa stem pagkahuman nakog seminar pirteng lipaya nako tapos naordinahan ko after three months nangalagad nako sa katawhan. sa karon kaluyan sa ginoo.”	Conversion
R 4	“Gan akong panghuna-huna og ang among buluhaton dali lang masulbad. “	Light suffering
R 5	“Dako gyud kaayo na syang tabang sa akong tungod kay, sa tanang nahitabo sa akong kinabuhi nga namatay akong anak, namatay akong bana, gaan lang sa akong ban ga akoang gihalad kay niño nga tabangan ko niya. may mga milagro gyud nga nahitabo sa akong kinabuhi. nindot gyud na sya kay biskan man sa kalisud ,kaguol og kasakit nga niabot sa punto ng ana depressed ko .pero karon na overcome gyud nako, mao nang kanunay gyud kong muingon og pit señor biskan dili pista mao na akong gibuhad hangtud karon.”	Miracle
R 6	“Ok eh tagaan tag grasya tagaan tag maayong lawas taas nga kinabuhi og pati atkong mga og apo og unsa atong gipangayo ihatag niya “	Abundance of grace
R 7	“Makawagtang sa problema, sa among pagserbisyo adunay mi mabati pero among ginahangyo nga maayo ko”	No problem
R 8	“Ang akong lang daghan pa unta nga kapistahan nga muabot”	Hoping
R 9	“Lumalaki pa po yung paniniwala ko kay sto nino at sa diyos”	Deep faith.
R 10	“Nabago aong kinabuhi kapag nakikita ko sya mas lalong lumalalim ang aing pananampalataya”	My life change

Table 2 shows the effect of their devotion to their faith. Respondents 1 and 9 said that their faith was deepened, respondent 2 said that it was powerful and inspiring, respondent 3 said that he experienced conversion, respondents 4 said light suffering, Respondent 5 said that miracle, respondents 6 said that abundance of grace, respondents 7 said that she has no problem, respondents 8 said that he is hoping, and respondent 10 said that his life has changed.

The spiritual activities associated with the Santo. Niño has a significant impact on individuals, communities, and society. Devotees can experience spiritual nourishment through devotional activities like prayer, Mass, and religious processions, which enhance their spiritual contentment, and tranquility, and strengthen their faith and relationship with God. The Feast of Santo. Niño is a significant cultural event in Cebu, showcasing the rich heritage of Filipino culture by preserving customs and traditions, thereby fostering a sense of pride and

cultural identity among the Filipino people. Santo Niño fosters community, strength, and togetherness through spiritual practices like feasts, processions, and cultural performances, promoting unity among people from diverse backgrounds. Devotees often engage in charitable and outreach activities, such as food campaigns and medical missions, as part of their devotional practices, demonstrating the compassion and selflessness exemplified by Jesus Christ. The local economy is greatly impacted by the Feast of Santo Niño, a major tourist destination, because of increased tourism and devotional activities. This leads to higher consumer spending and advantages for local businesses, housing facilities, restaurants, and merchants. The Santo Niño celebration promotes cultural tourism, attracting travelers from local and foreign countries to

witness Filipino religion and traditions, fostering cross-cultural communication, and boosting the Philippines' cultural tourism industry. The Feast of Santo Niño, a significant religious event, can lead to personal transformation and development, as it encourages people to practice devotional traditions, live more moral lives, and cultivate a stronger sense of humility and thankfulness. The Santo Niño's spiritual activities are intricate, encompassing aspects of spirituality, culture, society, and finances, enriching the religious and cultural history of the Filipino people and significantly influencing their followers' lives (Borre, 2021).

RQ 3: How does your faith grow through your devotion to St. Niño?

TABLE 3. Growth of faith through the devotion of Santo Niño

Respondents	Code	Theme
R 1	“Ang aming sayw ay aming inaalay sa kanya sapagkat kami ay naniniwala kay santo niño.”	Believing in him through dancing
R 2	“Balik loob from stress depression, always pagina ng kandila, thanksgiving, service to the youth, happy”	Serving the youth
R 3	“Pinaagi kay sto nino kay kung ano ang mga problema sa amo musangpit lang ko sa among patron nga si santa teresita ,santo niño,daw gaan kaayo akong pamatyag ug huna huna .muingon na karon si misis mario wa tay kwarta, ingon nako walay tay problema, ang ginoo gani nga dako kaayo ang problema ,kinsa may nagluwas sa atong mga sala?, diba ang ginoo. Ang tanan nga pagpaubos anaa sa iyaha tapos giingnan nakoi sya kung ikaw gipamalkisan ka sa tao, unsa man ang imong ituibag? Ang imong i-tubag lang salamat.biskan kinsa man ang manakit sa imo ayaw paapekto.tungod kay isa lng gyud ang ginoo nga maoy naghatag og kinabuihi kanato.”	Calling Saint Therese and senior Santo Nino
R 4	“Kanang naa among gi palambo pinaagi sa among pagrosaryo, adlaw og gabii nga pagpahinungod sa iyaha , kay dako kaayo na syangtabang sa amoa labi na sa amoang mga kabus dali ra makahuna huna nga mga maayong pamaagi og asa ta dapita makalingkawas sa atong kawadon.”	Rosary
R 5	“Sa akong kinabuhi nasinati gyud nako.akong anak puro babae man, katong time nga naghanyo ko kay sr santo niño nga hatagn ko niyag lalaki nga anak, gitagaan gyud ko ni sr santo niño.naglambo gyud akong debosyon sa iyaah hangtud karon ,biskan nagasakit ko nagasayaw ko dri pit señor. Grabi gyud akong debosyon kay sr santo niño gikan pa gyud sa una.”	Miracle
R 6	“Naglambo tungod kay sige tag simba sige paminaw sa pulong sa ginoo makarelata tag maayong binuhatanog maayong kinaiya sa atong isigkatawo kanang mahigugmaon ta.”	Always attending mass and listening to the Word of God
R 7	“Nagtoo gyud ko kay sr santo niñomao gyud na akong gina,kung unsay akong problema mangayo kog tabang kay sr santo niño.nga mawagtangan me sa mga problema nga dli me magpadaog sa mga pagsulay “	Trust
R 8	“Ang akong pagtoo sa sr sto nino nga daghan pangkapistahan nga muabot ug hatagan mi niyag maayong lawas”	Many feasts will come
R 9	“Every day nga pagserve or every week, akong pagkainteresado sa eucharist ay mas lumalalim at mas lalo aong nainlve sa eucharist”	Always serve at the church and interested in the eucharist
R 10	“Sa pamamagitan ng pagtiwala sa kanya,at sa pamamagitan ng mga imahe na syang nagpapaalala sa akin lagi syang nasa aing buhay.”	Trust

Table 3 illustrates the increase in their religious belief as a result of their unwavering dedication to Senior Santo Niño. Respondent 1 expressed her faith and enjoyment in dancing. Respondent 2 mentioned her dedication to serving the youth. Respondent 3 mentioned her devotion to Saint Therese and senior Santo Nino made her faith grow. Respondent 4 mentioned his practice of praying the rosary. Respondent 5 shared stories of miracles. Respondent 6 emphasized his regular attendance at mass and attentiveness to the Word of God. Respondents 7 and 10 both emphasized the importance of trust. Respondent 8 mentioned the anticipation for the feast of Sto. Nino.

The devotion to Santo Niño can contribute significantly to the growth of faith in several ways: Niño involves building a close relationship with the Holy Child Jesus through contemplation, meditation, and prayer about his life and teachings. This interaction strengthens people's relationship

with God and their religion, promoting loyalty and nourishing their faith. Many followers believe Santo Niño has the power to intervene on their behalf, Niño, and give credit for their devotional efforts, such as benefits, miracles, or answers to prayers, strengthening their belief in God's love and providence. Community support for spiritual development can be achieved through devotional activities with fellow believers, inspiring those to strengthen their faith and devotion to the Santo Niño through hearing about others' experiences, joining in group prayers, and witnessing their faith. Thanksgiving and Gratitude Devotees express gratitude for the benefits they have gained from their dedication to Stan. Adolescents, which promotes spiritual development, maturity, optimism, and a greater sense of God's kindness and presence in their lives. Devotion to Santo Niño can lead to profound transformational experiences, resulting in profound changes in individuals' faith, knowledge of God's mercy, and love, as they experience peaceful, joyful,

and spiritually rejuvenating experiences. Devotion to St. Niño involves more than prayers and ceremonies; it involves upholding moral principles taught by Jesus Christ. Devotees are encouraged to imitate Stoic attributes like simplicity, humility, and faith in God's providence. This dedication can lead to a more genuine manifestation of religion and spiritual development. Many people, driven by their love for St., feel compelled to help others and spread God's love globally. Engaging in acts of charity, service, and evangelization can strengthen their faith and contribute to God's mission of love and reconciliation. Devotion to St. Niño can significantly accelerate spiritual growth, promoting Christian principles, closer relationships with God, and positive world change (Borre, 2021).

#### IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, results of the study have led to the following recommendations:

Uphold and preserve through education the traditional devotional practices, such as the 9 days of novena, attending masses, praying the novena and rosary, and facilitating the kissing of the statue of Santo Niño.

Encourage individuals to engage in devotional practices like attending masses, praying novenas, and rituals like kissing the statue of Santo Niño to deepen their faith and strengthen their relationship with the divine.

Deepen trust and devotion to senior Santo Niño through regular prayer and reflection, fostering a personal relationship with the child Jesus, and involving youth in devotional practices.

Recommendations for further studies include:

Increase the number of respondents to enhance the representativeness of the findings.

Utilize quantitative surveys to collect data on the prevalence and frequency of devotional practices across various demographic groups.

Explore the historical background of different devotional practices to provide context and depth to the analysis.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Parishioners observe the following devotional practices on the feast of Santo Niño: serving at the parish; attending masses; facilitating the kissing of the statue of senior Santo Niño; praying the novena and rosary; offering dance; and stomping the body of Santo Niño for healing. Believers express their reverence for the Child Jesus and seek spiritual blessings for themselves and their communities.

The devotional practices have deepened, strengthened, and inspired the respondents' faith, leading to conversion, light suffering, miracles, an abundance of grace, no problems, and hope. By actively participating in these practices, individuals not only strengthen their relationship with the divine but also enrich their lives and contribute to the vitality of their faith tradition.

Their faith grew through their devotion to Senior Santo Niño through dances, serving in the church and receiving the eucharist, offering flowers and candles to Senior Santo Niño, reciting the rosary, praying for miracles, attending mass, and

listening to the Word of God. Through these avenues, individuals find enrichment and fulfilment in their spiritual journey as they walk in devotion to the Child Jesus.

#### APPENDIX A

##### Interview Guide Questions

1. What devotional practices do you observe during the feast of St. Niño?
2. What effects do these devotional practices have on your faith?
3. How does your faith grow through your devotion to St. Niño?

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