

## Leeds Cathedral . . . We don't do outreach!

*Ben Saunders, Director of Music at Leeds Cathedral, explains why:*

It's Monday morning and the phone rings: "Hello, Ben – I'm from X Cathedral and I've been reading about your wonderful outreach programme in primary schools. I'd like to pick your brains, because we want to do the same here." I thank them for their kind words, take a deep breath – and begin to explain that we don't have an outreach programme, that we have never had an outreach programme, and that is the main reason we are successful.



Senior Boys' Choir of Leeds Cathedral – Photos: Rowan Morton-Gledhill

You may think I am quibbling over semantics here, and of course we really *do* have an outreach programme, but just call it something different. That would be a mistake. Instead, we have a completely different approach to charitable action, and it is the polar opposite of an outreach project.

Outreach is something which judiciously (and sometimes patronisingly) extends a hand over its institutional walls while keeping the body safe and secure in its fortress. Such approaches are often concerned with reaching a few primary schools to aid dwindling chorister recruitment, or to attract a grant for a new 'project'. There can follow evidence of success, such as "Well, we got one ethnic minority child from a very poor background to join the choir, and he's now a choral scholar at Cambridge."

For me, this simply isn't good enough. I don't see in an outreach project the expression of the radical Christian belief to preach and teach the gospel to all nations. The fishing rods of outreach projects didn't feature heavily in the New Testament, but fishing on a bigger scale certainly did: 'After he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch." Simon said in reply, "Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets." When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing.' (Luke 5:4-6)

The image of tearing nets bursting with the catch is a good metaphor for our schools' singing and keyboard studies programmes. Ours is an ambition on an industrial scale – we are looking to fish in the deep expanse of the ocean rather than in the easy-to-reach shallows. Christian charities are moribund when they construct fishing rods from the anxieties of defensive interest groups that outreach over unyielding cathedral walls.

The fact that we now have so many little fish (over 4,560 at the last count) is because of a structural benefit hit on some 17 years ago. A cathedral music department is narrow and limited in its scope and influence, so we have a diocesan one instead. Our six Leeds Cathedral choirs (as well as a further 12 in Wakefield, Bradford, Halifax, Huddersfield and Pontefract) are auditioned from the diocesan see (or sea, to continue the metaphor!) of the Schools' Singing Programme. Any musical excellence they achieve is not an end in itself, but rather a consequence of the more important work of education and evangelism.

The year 2020 has been a very tough one for us all, and there are some well-publicised and also craftily disguised casualties in our sector. I couldn't help but follow some of these developing tragedies with growing despair, especially when clergy and others from pseudo-professional organisations talk strategy rather than take action. Of course strategy is important, but there is a time and place for it. When you are in a crisis, and trying to survive, spending time and energy developing a strategy is possibly the last thing you should be doing. Instead, you need an organisational structure that is fit for purpose and the right people in place. At that point, you can work out what to do and trust colleagues to get on with it. Here, I take my hat off to Peter Allwood and his fellow trustees who have done exactly this through the new Cathedral Music Trust, engaging quickly and effectively with structural reform and getting people in post to deliver on their charitable objectives and values.



Choral Director Alex Kyle leading a singing session in a Bradford primary school

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Financial management also comes to the fore in a crisis when cash is tight. If there is money to be spent on church music, is it really efficient to buy bespoke fishing rods? Surely it would be better to purchase trawler nets to catch a generation of young children whose hearts and minds are at their most open, and to whom the future of church music belongs? Is £10k most charitably spent retaining a superb professional bass or can it instead support the salary for an expert choral director to work with 500 children on free school meals in a cluster of local primary schools with very little access to quality choral music?

Christianity is a radical, revolutionary belief with a moral imperative. We are not a building preservation society, or an elite social club entrusted with the preservation of the status quo. Cathedral churches are centres of prayer, patrons of musical excellence, leaders in education and a locus of spiritual enrichment seeking to address poverty in all its forms. We are either *Church* musicians or we aren't. If we are, then we surely need to keep that moral clarity in our work and focus on those truths creatively. And we need to heed the call to action intrinsic to our faith.

*In November, the Diocese of Leeds Schools' Singing Programme was awarded a Royal Philharmonic Society Inspiration Award for their work during lockdown. Our congratulations to all concerned!*

*Ben Saunders comments : "It's been a real boost for our team of choral directors under the leadership of Tom Leech to see how their hard work and innovation during the lockdown has been recognised in these 'musical Oscars'. It is a privilege to share a stage with some of the greats of the international music industry."*

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## The Cathedral Choirs' Emergency Fund

*Christopher Gower reports:*



Hymns have always been important to me, and 'Ye that know the Lord is gracious' is among my favourites, for, like all great hymns, it speaks to our time. The author was Cyril Alington, a priest and a distinguished educationalist and scholar, who, after headships at Shrewsbury and Eton, was Dean of Durham from 1933-51. The first verse includes the lines 'towers that may tell forth salvation, walls that may re-echo praise'. For many centuries, in good times and in bad, our cathedral choirs have sung those praises, day by day maintaining the *opus Dei*. This last year, however, their music has been silenced, at least for a time. Articles in the previous edition of *Cathedral Voice* underlined the crisis facing cathedral music and explored how foundations were coping with a unique situation. The setting up of the Cathedral Choirs' Emergency Fund (CCEF) and the responses that it evoked were set out in Peter Allwood's article 'Responding to a crisis'. Over the past eight months,

a number of us have been closely involved with the fund, so now is a good time to expand on the background that Peter gave to you and to report on progress.

In March, at the time of the first lockdown and before the first furlough scheme was announced, it quickly became apparent that cathedral music, as we know it, was seriously under threat. I immediately began contacting directors of music and deans and compiling details of the difficulties they were experiencing. Along with accounts of inevitable shortfalls in finance came many individual responses, two of which I quote: 'difficult decisions will have to be made when work returns as the cathedral faces bankruptcy' and 'social distancing rules will affect cathedral bookings and add additional pain to our desperate financial situation'. Despite their anxieties, all expressed their thanks – thanks that we had been in touch with them and that we had expressed concern for their situation. Cathy Dew, CMT's Operations Director, collated the replies I received and produced them in a tabulated form. As was to be expected, no two cathedrals had taken the same actions, but in all cases their music teams could not continue to work normally. Even at this early stage, requests were coming in for immediate financial help. We were not in a position to be able to offer this, but we did promise that we were working on some sort of support package, should funds allow.



As the information came in, I shared it with Stephen Darlington, Chairman of the Ouseley Church Music Trust (OCMT). It was from this initial collaboration, and following discussions between our Chairman and Stephen, that the CCEF was formed. Peter set out the background in his letter to Council on 9 April – both organisations had agreed to commit £250k, in our case 'using grant reserves and other funds already agreed by Council last year'. The decision was made that CMT would host the fund under the management of our Treasurer, Neil Page, and that CMT would also handle all the administration. Peter's letter went on: 'Directors of music fear significant financial difficulties once restrictions are lifted and choirs reform. Many singers face returning to cathedrals that will have suffered severe financial strains and will be under strong pressure to make cuts to pay essential staff and fabric maintenance costs.' (How true that observation has proved to be.) Some five days later, the Choirs Schools' Association (CSA) also joined us and agreed to contribute a further £250k to the fund. It was at this point that representatives from each organisation came together to form the committee.

As soon as the fund was open to the public, generous donations from individuals began to come in, often with words of support. These, combined with many innovative fundraising initiatives, lifted the total. At the time of writing (November 2020) two more projects – *Compline*, and the *Toccata and Fugue extravaganza* – are nearing completion,