

The Social Impact of Creative Arts Activities in Liverpool Cathedral

Abstract

This paper examines the social impact of Creative Arts activity in Liverpool Cathedral. Research has shown the value of engaging in arts and crafts activity for personal wellbeing. The focus in today's paper is that of two small-scale studies of volunteers involved in prayerful arts and craft activities in the Cathedral, namely Threaded Together a multi-craft, stitched artwork and prayer pathway created for the 2024 centenary and the prayer shawl ministries, a ministry that involves crafting gifts for beneficiaries in need. The research is being conducted as part of a Knowledge Transfer Partnership between Liverpool Cathedral, Innovate UK, and Lincoln Bishop University. The findings, viewed through the lens of Fisher's spiritual health measure, reveal the benefits for the volunteers engaged in these activities. The benefits perceived by the volunteers were a sense of personal achievement, a gaining of new skills, the sense of belonging both to the activity and to the Cathedral, and thirdly for some an opportunity for a deeper connection to God.

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The Role of Cathedral Music in Shaping Community and Spirituality

Abstract

This paper introduces my PhD research exploring the impact of the work of Liverpool's Cathedral music departments on their worshipping communities and particularly focusing upon the spiritual development of its participants. Exploring the challenging practical context which cathedrals and their music departments find themselves in both financially and culturally. Recognising the role which additional research can capture the impact and social value which cathedral music has which can help cathedrals to address these challenges. Due to the complex, interdisciplinary context which this research is rooted in, this paper also establishes the core academic disciplines of cathedral studies, philosophy and the sociologies of music and religion as key fields which can allow for this research to develop a nuanced and technical understanding of the impact and significance of cathedral music departments in shaping their environments. This paper invited feedback from the diverse audience at the Liverpool Postgraduate Learning Community to help to shape this research at an early stage.

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How Actors Co-Create Public Value in Cathedrals: The Enabling Role of Digital Technology

Abstract

This PhD research examines digital technology co-creation at cathedrals and the consequences of digital co-creation on public value. Different elements of public value are considered, including aesthetic, educational, economic, environmental, social and spiritual. Co-creation in a cathedral context is the collaboration between actors in the cathedral community (staff and volunteers) and the cathedral public (people who attend services, visit the cathedral or interact online). This is a comparator study using case studies from four different cathedral types, geographically spread and based on 64 cathedral interviews, a walk-through digital audit and insight from research into the heritage sector. A conceptual model (ACTAP) was developed using the theoretical framework of the research – actors, co-creation, technology acceptance, the APPI model (artifacts, processes, persons and interfaces) and public value. Transcripts from data were coded and input into NVIVO. Thematic analysis has been completed and the research is in the write-up stage.

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Between the Drums and the Silence:

A Ghanaian Anglican's Liturgical Encounter in Liverpool Cathedral

Abstract

Adopting an anthropological lens, the Ghanaian author immersed himself for almost a year within the life of the Diocese of Liverpool and Liverpool Cathedral. Having been shaped within the Diocese of Kumasi, a community, he argues, that has learned to carry the cross of colonial liturgy while infusing it with the soul of the homeland, he reflects on the Liverpool experience, analysed within seven themes: vestments, authority, and the symbolic tensions of reverence; silence, sound, and the cultural politics of worship; the eucharist as ritual and relational space; theological conflict and ecclesial identity in debates on human sexuality; clothing identity and Sunday culture; post-service culture and what happens after the Amen; and sacred space and commercial function – the Cathedral as venue and vessel.

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Spiritual Development, But Not as We Know It

Abstract

Jeff Astley suggests that ordinary theology is the God-talk of those 'who have received little or no theological education of a scholarly, academic or systematic kind.' Lacking any clarity of doctrine, frequently inconsistent, or simply incoherent, ordinary theology may seem to be a hindrance to those who would seek to promote spiritual development as it has been traditionally conceived. However, if spiritual development may be regarded in the terms presented by James Fowler and not necessarily as a growth in religious belief or practice in the manner that has been sought by members of religious traditions, then ordinary theology has the potential to fulfil a significant role. In their ordinary theology, students may confront the existential realities of their lives and shape their own responses without sensing any need for metaphysical beliefs or formation in particular religious traditions.

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The Council of Nicaea: Milestone or Millstone?

Abstract

The 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, framed as a welcome step towards a statement of right belief, backed up by state sponsorship has been greeted with enthusiasm and a lack of the normal critical scrutiny. Framed against the background of recent state persecution, allowing doctrinal differences to act as proxies in a wider context, different questions emerge. The stated aims of the Council were not achieved, and the proposed creed of the Nicene party struggled to gain acceptance on the ground. There were substantial regional differences between East, West and North Africa which were to play a large part in subsequent history. An understanding that propositional statements wrapped in Greek philosophical constructs was the best way to capture the essence of Christianity is rarely questioned, whilst new questions are being raised about how Christianity is best expressed in a post-colonial world. A more nuanced response is required.

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Insights Into Wellbeing, Happiness, and Human Flourishing

Abstract

This study employs The Index of Balanced Affect Change (TIBACH) and the Francis Index of Spiritual Health Change (FISH) to assess the perceived impact on 518 participants who attended the *Starlight* pre-Christmas *son et lumiere* in Liverpool Cathedral. The Index of Positive Affect Change demonstrated that up to two-thirds of the participants went away feeling more positive about life. The Index of Existential Spiritual Health Change demonstrated that around two-fifths went away feeling more positive about relationships with themselves, with others, and with the world. The greater impact on existential spiritual health was among younger people. The greater impact on psychological wellbeing was among those without connections with a religious worldview. In other words, the installation is enabling the cathedral to extend the Church's reach among the young and among the unchurched.

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Faith formation: Choral Evensong and choral scholars Part 2

Abstract

This presentation evaluates the University Choral Scholar model for establishing Faith Development through Choral music rehearsals for singing Evensong Services as implemented over an 18-month period at Lancaster Priory, through the lens of a Reflective Journal kept by the Director of Music operating as Ethnographer. The Reflective Journal was resourced by 45 weeks of Choral Scholar rehearsals in preparation for 45 weeks of Choral Evensongs attended by the Public, Worshipping Community. Insights from the Reflective Journal highlight key themes of Motivation to engage in the activity of being a Choral Scholar at University. Retention of the University Choral Scholar, what keeps them engaged with the Worship and rehearsal activities. Faith and its place in the experience of being a University Choral Scholar is it incidental or core to the activity and experience. This reflective piece challenges the role of Director of Music and the Choral Scholar experience being primarily Musical rather than Spiritual.

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Singing in the City: Liverpool Cathedral's Schools Singing Programme, Educational Outcomes and Human Flourishing

Abstract

At a time of significant pressure on music education in England, cathedral choral outreach programmes offer a distinctive and often overlooked contribution to children's learning, wellbeing and sense of belonging. This article draws on research conducted on Liverpool Cathedral's choral outreach programme between 2020 and 2025, specifically examining the Cathedral's Schools Singing Programme (SSP) as a site of participatory music-making embedded within a socioeconomically disadvantaged urban context. Using a mixed-method sociocultural approach, and drawing on the theoretical frameworks of music and human flourishing, cultural capital and community music, the research investigates how sustained engagement with choral singing shapes participants' musical development, educational confidence, social connections and wider wellbeing. Findings reveal that the SSP functions not only as a vehicle for musical learning but as a meaningful space of inclusion, aspiration and community, offering experiences of cultural participation that many children would not otherwise encounter. The research considers the implications of these findings for music education policy, cathedral outreach practice, and the ongoing case for sustaining and expanding access to high-quality singing programmes in English schools and communities.

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Contours of Controversy: Ali al-Munayyar on Christianity and Judaism in Early Modern Egypt

Abstract

This paper addresses the content of an unedited seventeenth century Egyptian manuscript attributed to Ali al-Munayyar about whom very little is known. The manuscript takes the form of a legal fatwa against engaging Jews and Christians in official positions in seventeenth century Egypt. It reacts against what is perceived by the writer as a laissez-faire attitude by both the authorities as well as the peasants towards Christians and Jews and their accommodation in public life. Apart from being a little-known document, the paper highlights the significance of such debates for the seventeenth century and the implications for today regarding the place of religion for social and political cohesion.

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The Teacher Voice Project: RVE in the Curriculum of Wales

Abstract

Until recently, statutory Religious Education in Wales largely shared the same legislative framework as Religious Education in England, although clearly differentiated Welsh and English education systems became increasingly visible across three decades when responsibilities for education and training were devolved to Wales. The latest curriculum review in Wales saw the implementation of the radically new Curriculum for Wales in 2022 for all learners from age three to sixteen, enabled through the passing of the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021. Radical features of the new curriculum include: an integrated approach to learning and teaching in which Religious Education (renamed Religion, Values and Ethics) is for the first time legally embedded in the curriculum; and the principle of subsidiarity with a shift of responsibility for curriculum design, progression and assessment to individual education settings, giving teachers new professional autonomy. At the beginning of a period of great change for religious education teachers in Wales, this project aims to capture a 'snapshot' of teacher experience of and engagement with curriculum change through a survey of teachers across Wales, reflecting a variety of education settings. Research findings will provide insight into teachers' attitudes towards Religion, Values and Ethics within the Curriculum for Wales, their understanding of the Curriculum's vision and values, their confidence levels and challenges they face, and their hopes for the future.

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