



LIVERPOOL CATHEDRAL AS CONTEMPORARY COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL HUB

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ABSTRACT

This research project highlights how the Liverpool Cathedral plays a role as a contemporary community space and cultural hub. It is focused on the lived and shared experiences of the volunteers and the visitors of the cathedral and aims to investigate the Cathedral's perceived contribution to community cohesion, cultural engagement, and spiritual reflection. This project is also aimed to enhance existing programs to strengthen community bonds and cultural research.

This research draws primarily on qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews, it is also supplemented by secondary data from official Liverpool cathedral reports, Cathedral research reports, and literature reviews. This research used thematic analysis to interpret participants' perceptions of services provided by the Liverpool Cathedral.

The findings revealed that the Liverpool Cathedral is not just recognized as a beautiful architectural landmark, or as a traditional place of worship, but also as a sacred and socially engaging space that holds a diverse significance in contemporary life. Beyond cathedral's religious function, the cathedral plays an active role in fostering inclusion, cultural enrichment through art, music, heritage, offering moments of spiritual resonance, emotional and shared connection. The Liverpool cathedral stands as a dynamic environment that encourages reflection, nurtures creativity across diverse groups which together contribute to the social and cultural growth of the wider Liverpool community.

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Project background

This research project was put together by the University of Liverpool's Interchange program, a registered charity that connects Voluntary and Community Organizations (VCOs) who require research to be undertaken with social science students in higher education looking for research project opportunities. As an Interchange student, I chose to be partnered with the Liverpool Cathedral in order to collaboratively produce a report evaluating the impact of the organization in the Liverpool city area.



1.2 The Client Organization

The Liverpool Cathedral was completed in 1978 and is managed by Dean Sue Jones. It is the largest cathedral in Britain and the fifth largest in the world. It is first and foremost a place of worship and prayer, and plays a central role in the religious, social, and cultural life of Liverpool city. The Liverpool Cathedral is committed to inclusivity, offering daily services and educational programs. It offers a diverse range of services such as weddings, funerals, graduation, civic events, etc. It aims to be a welcoming place for reflection, celebration, and social justice. It is funded by the Church of England, heritage, music trusts, donations.



1.3 Project Aims and Objectives

The aim of the research project was to carry out an in-depth analysis of the different views held by individuals who encounter the Liverpool Cathedral, whether a tourist, a frequent visitor, or a volunteer. It explored their perception of the Cathedral's role in strengthening social cohesion, supporting cultural development, and providing a space for spiritual growth. This research also sought to explore:

- The extent to which a particular event or space of the Cathedral contributes to individual and community social and social well-being in the 21st century.
- What are the most significant benefits of visiting the Cathedral for visitors?
- What should a Cathedral's role be in the Liverpool City Region?

The findings of this research project would assist the Cathedral's mission to engage with new and existing audiences in ways that benefit them and the communities of Liverpool more broadly.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Over the past decade, Anglican cathedrals across England have experienced a “quiet renaissance,” where they have welcomed increasing congregations, widening participation in Christian festivals, and have opened their doors to more visitors seeking spiritual fulfilment (Muskett & Francis, 2015). They have been said to have “blossomed and shown signs of growth for the Church of England (Muskett & Francis, 2015, p.240).

The Liverpool Cathedral was built not merely as a large parish church but as “a common meeting ground for the Diocese” (Vere, 1924, p.11), to symbolize the unity and functionality of the whole organization. It was intended to be “a place where great corporate services can be held” (Vere, 1924, p.11), to visibly affirm the role of religion and sustain private and grand collective worship in order to foster unity, inspire generosity, and enhance the spiritual and musical life of the Church across Liverpool and Southwest Lancashire. The Liverpool Cathedral has maintained its foundational mission of unity, spiritual and public outreach by adopting new strategies to serve the evolving and diverse community it receives. The Cathedral’s mission today goes far beyond traditional worship; it actively engages with its community through various initiatives such as those aimed at enhancing social justice, employability, and cultural enrichment. An example of this is the Liverpool Cathedral’s collaboration with the Metropolitan Cathedral and St. Bride’s Church in 2016 to set

up **Micah Liverpool**, “a social justice charity that aims to help people out of poverty” (Ecorys, 2021). Micah Liverpool runs a



local food bank and operates a community market that serves over three hundred people each week, ensuring that vulnerable people have access to affordable food, clothing, and basic and critical resources they need (Bridge, 2022). Furthermore, it offers a ten-week-long employability programme designed to assist those who have faced long-term unemployment, equipping them with the necessary skills and confidence to re-enter the workforce. This program, which includes vocational qualification and voluntary work experience, has been successful, with half the participants finding future employment opportunities (Ecorys, 2021).

In addition to the Liverpool Cathedral's commitment to its social outreach, it hosts a wide range of accessible events, from art exhibitions to music outreach programs. Such community-based and social events include the recent "Threads through the Bible- Love, Life, Tragedy & Triumph by artist Jacqui Parkinson¹ which ran from 16th January to 2nd March 2025. This Textile-style artwork resonates with the Cathedral's evolving mission as its accessible and universal



visual language. "It speaks to you regardless of language, culture, or religious belief" (SMYTH, 2025). It turns the Cathedral to function as a meditative and communal space



– this time through art. Other events include "the Gaia (2019) - Giant Earth,"² and the Luxmuralis son et Lumiere installations (Feb 2022), which hoped to attract an eclectic range of audiences (Kirby et al.,2023). This example highlights the Cathedral's capacity to soften the Traditional and Contemporary aspects of Christianity within a place offering protection for exploration and contemplation. The

Cathedral is particularly invested in youth engagement, particularly through its music programme. The outreach component from the Liverpool Cathedral's School of Music facilitates a variety of music activities which involve over 1500 participants each year. The outreach functions with a wide range of diverse groups comprised of both children and adults, but with the ultimate objective of building self- esteem, creativity and

¹ Threads through the Bible- Love, Life, Tragedy & Triumph, (2025) Liverpoolcathedral.org.uk. (2025). Available at: <https://shorturl.at/kQHet>

² Gaia-Giant Earth.jpeg (2019) Available at: <https://c8.alamy.com/comp/TTG32C/gaia-by-luke-jerram-art-installation-of-planet-earth-inside-liverpool-cathedral-liverpool-england-uk-TTG32C.jpg>.

emotional intelligence (Bridge, 2022). For example, choir practice not only develops musical ability but also promotes social inclusion and belonging as well.

The Cathedral's collaboration with local universities also demonstrates its dedication to community development. The Cathedral has provided students with a framework through which to showcase work and explore the social history of the Cathedral, PhD students (Ecorys, 2021). The Cathedral also serves as a venue for graduations from local universities. As a result, the Cathedral has set itself ambitious targets designed to encourage more local visitors, increase more local community presence, and strengthen its position as a cultural and spiritual foundation for Liverpool, with the intention for the foundational aspiration to remain relevant and impactful for the subsequent generations to engage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cathedrals in England have historically been the focus of theological, architectural, and ecclesiological study. However, a critical change came in the 1990s with the release of the Archbishops' Commission on Cathedrals' report, *Heritage and Renewal* (1994), where cathedrals were reconceptualized not just in terms of sanctity but also in terms of public utility (Francis & Mansfield 2022). This report created a bifurcated audience: visitors drawn by spirituality and those seeking experiences that were either cultural or spiritual. It defined the cathedral buildings in terms of “shop windows” of the Church of England and identified their potential in evangelism and appealing to people by non-coercive means such as inquiry and wonder (Kirby et al., 2022, p.579). This conceptualization was a turning point in cathedral research, with a focus placed on spirituality, heritage, and community engagement. Pike (2021) describes cathedrals as a fluid space, where sacred and contemporary events not only comes together but also intersect and complement each other. He outlines the ways in which cathedrals function in modern society as dynamic spaces, serving worship, heritage, visual arts, and even digital media. Such reinterpretation allows cathedrals to remain relevant for a diverse group of people, which involves not only religious practices (Bridge, 2022). Their purpose in contemporary society, and especially in an urban setting, is to allow both contemplation and active participation.

Liverpool Cathedral is a prime example of this shift. It serves as a place of Anglican worship but also has a multicultural function. One sees this dual purpose played out at the Holly Bough Service and the *Luxmuralis son et lumière* lighting. The Holly Bough, designed by Frederick William Dwelly, combines liturgical drama, music, and symbolism. As Francis et al. (2020) point out, those attending experience a sense of belonging that is not inextricably bound up with normative worship, but with the ceremonial nature of this recurring service. As reported in a study by Kirby et al (2023), visitors were drawn by the aesthetic allure of the event but described their experience using deeply spiritual language. The vast majority found the Cathedral “awe-inspiring and uplifting, while others felt a “sense of peace” in the Cathedral (p. 586). Most

notably, the Liverpool Cathedral's style of architecture, featuring Gothic features, added to an increased sense of sacredness.

The event Luxmuralis, focused on space, the universe and everything, attracted more than 60,000 visitors in one week, a large majority of whom were visiting the building for the first time (Kirby et al., 2023). This installation was not seen merely as an artistic installation but also as a place of contemplation and wonder. A striking seventy-three percent of participants agreed with the statement that “we need both science and religion in our lives,” while 94% saw a cathedral as a suitable place for hosting such an event (Kirby et al., 2023, p. 589). These results suggest that sacred spaces continue to be highly relevant, even when engaging with contemporary media. Moreover, they contradict the suggestion that cultural programming reduces spiritual depth. The struggle between evangelism and entertainment, and that between sacred authenticity and commercial appeal is a multifaceted problem without easy answers. Francis and Lankshear, (2015) suggest that cathedrals generate what they call spiritual capital, a resource that, although distinct from doctrinal compliance, is essential for social and psychological well-being. This was explained further, in Bridge’s (2022) study of digital music outreach during the COVID-19 pandemic, where participants reported experiences of resilience, connectedness, and meaning. Music was not simply an ancillary component but a relational medium for spiritual encounter.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a qualitative approach, primarily using semi-structured interviews with both volunteers and visitors of the Liverpool Cathedral. Primary data collection was supplemented with additional secondary data sources including quantitative and qualitative materials from the Liverpool Cathedral Official website, visitor feedback reports, both past and present, as well as relevant academic resources. Each of these provided representative evidence regarding more generalised patterns of engagement and cathedral studies.

A Qualitative approach was selected because it can address and explore people's lived experience, perceptions and understandings that are necessary in order to provide insight into human engagement with their environment (Bryman, 2003). Qualitative data is seen as valuable and subjective knowledge and is the best fit when examining complexity, depth and context (Sayrs, 1998).

I chose to use semi-structured interviewing as I felt it was a strategy that offered me a range of options between formality and spontaneity. Semi-structured interviewing provided opportunity for the participants to reflect on their experiences while also allowing me the researcher to investigate issues that may have emerged in a natural and relational way (Bryman 2000). My approach to semi-structured interview methodology was informed by Sayrs's (1998) metaphor of "traveller" as it represented my journey as an interviewer travelling deeper into the offence's lifeworld, co-creating meaning in the dialogue rather than extracting established facts.

My semi-structured approach provided an established relationship between the participants and I, their researcher especially the volunteers. My pre-interview observations were made prior to interview and based on my previous visits to the Cathedral. It was relatively easy to establish informal relationships with the participants through frequent visits and continued informal interactions. This made the formal

interview process accessible and comfortable for the participants. The multiple interactions increased familiarity with the environment and increased feeling of closeness providing an opportunity for open responses as well as in-depth reflection of their feelings. Participants were thus able to express emotional and spiritual attachments to the Cathedral in an open fashion and give more profound responses that may not have arisen after one meeting with them.

Five people participated in the interviews: three volunteers and two visitors, recruited on-site by personal invitations and posters. Each participant was either a present volunteer or frequent visitor to the Cathedral and was over 50 years of age. Interviews lasted from 15 to 20 minutes and were conducted in Welcoming and Accessible and quiet areas of the Cathedral complex. Audio recordings were made of the interviews with my smartphone, to transcribe them and thematically evaluated the transcribed interviews to consider deeper possibilities of the ideas that were emerging including aspects concerning social cohesion, cultural engagement, and spiritual life. This approach allowed stitched together both primary and secondary sources which supported differentiated and more nuanced understandings of the evolving role of the Cathedral in contemporary society.

Limitations

As with any piece of research done, limitations may arise from specific research methods used to gather data for the study. This study has faced some constraints regarding the methodology and the scope of the research. Even though the semi-structured interviews and the observations provided the necessary details for the qualitative data, the sample size was small and only included volunteers and visitors over 50, which limited the generalization of the results. A broader range of participants, including younger demographics or those engaging with the Cathedral solely for tourism, could have provided a more representative view.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical integrity is at the centre of qualitative research, particularly in relation to individuals while taking empirical data (Silverman, 2013). According to the BSA (British Sociological Association), researchers must ensure that participants are giving their fully informed consent, which should concern understanding the nature of the research and how it involves them as participants (2017). It was therefore mandatory to place, along with the invitation to all the participants, the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Forms (see Appendixes A, B, and C), which stated all about the research, procedures involved, benefits and risks of participation, and promises of confidentiality and anonymity.

All participants were informed that taking part in the study was purely voluntary; the participants were also informed that they could withdraw at any time during the research without any consequence. In addition, verbal consent was acquired prior to the start of each interview to reaffirm voluntary participation, a step Bryman (2016) refers to as reinforcing ethical transparency. For data storage, the encrypted password-protected system of the University of Liverpool was used in compliance with data protection standards.

Although there was no personally identifiable information in the transcripts or field notes, the specificity and targeting of the sample staff or volunteers at the cathedral meet the possibilities of indirect identification. This was made clear to all participants, thus allowing them to draw informed choices about their participation, an ethical duty to minimize potential harms (Silverman, 2013). All the participants were adults capable of giving informed consent by themselves. The study steered clear of sensitive issues, did not concern vulnerable groups like children, making it less complex from the standpoint of ethics in safeguarding participants. This conforms to Bryman's (2016) emphasis on transparency and sensitivity in fieldwork recruitment strategies. In this way, obtaining consent might be termed freely given, informed, and unambiguous (BSA, 2017), taking on very comprehensive preventive steps to ensure confidentiality, thereby holding forth the primacy of its principles on ethical research conduct. This research

received ethical approval from the School of Law and Social Justice Ethics Committee at the University of Liverpool.

FINDINGS

The findings of this report emerge from in-depth interviews with a sample of volunteers and visitors at the Liverpool Cathedral, and secondary data primarily from reports from the 2025 Threads of the Bible, **Love, Life, Tragedy & Triumph** art exhibition. (Casson and Phillips, 2025) and a research report on The Digital Turn: Exploring the Social Value of Liverpool Cathedral's Online Music Outreach Programme during the Covid-19 Pandemic (Bridge, 2022). The insights from the report were examined to understand how the Liverpool Cathedral operates as a space for social cohesion, cultural engagement, and spiritual life. Responses were thematically grouped according to the guiding research questions, and the analysis explores both patterns and tensions in participants' perspectives. For the research and the interest of participants interviewed, I have decided to give pseudonyms, Participants A to E.

Theme1: Liverpool Cathedral as a Contemporary Community Space.

The following questions were asked in relation to our first theme, social cohesion.

Q1. What role does the Liverpool Cathedral play in supporting the local community?

Participant A (volunteer): *"It plays a much bigger role than it used to be involved in. I have been working here for over 10 years now. I know it is involved in local issues and draws in people for many different reasons"-some come for prayer and peace, most come in for the tourism and for the social events that are currently available." We do not just serve tea and coffee; we make friends and family to those who need some."*

Participant B (volunteer): *"People come for the exhibitions, quiet time, or just to explore the architecture. The events help introduce people to the Christian faith. You get a lot of people from around the world, you get to see new faces every day and learn a lot."*

Participant C (volunteer): *“It is a place of worship which brings people together, promoting unity. People come in to appreciate the building while also sharing a meal with family and friends, and I believe that a shared experience that brings people together.”*

Participants D (visitor): *“The cathedral acts as a hub attracting people not only for religious reasons, but also for the history, graduation, and tourism. My kids enjoy coming here. They enjoy looking at artwork, so we make it a family outing.” It is a mix of worship and culture.”*

Participant E (visitor): *“The cathedral now has children’s activities, art exhibitions, and lots of other events which my kids and I enjoy.”*

So, what are the similar threads here? Among the participants, we can agree that the cathedral has diversified its role and increased its visibility, bringing a sense of togetherness and community. There is this use of relational language, “architecture, family, togetherness, shared experiences,” which reinforces the idea that shared routines, small talk, and familiarity contribute to the social value and social cohesion of the Cathedral. These threads were being divided into sub-sections.

- *Architecture and Cultural Engagement:*

The participants viewed the Cathedral as a culturally significant landmark. Participant B (volunteer) stated *“People come for the exhibitions, quiet time, or just to explore the architecture.”* This framing positions the cathedral as both a place of personal reflection and an artistic space that invites a diverse audience. Similarly, Participant D (visitors) reflected on this cultural dimension by stating, *“The cathedral acts as a hub attracting people not only for religious reasons, the history, graduation, and tourism.”* These statements suggest that cultural and civic functions are integral to the Liverpool Cathedral’s image and are perceived as being just as central as its religious values and offerings.

- *A shared communal space:*

The Liverpool Cathedral also serves as a space that fosters shared experiences and community bonding. Participant C (volunteer) describes the Liverpool Cathedral as “*a place of worship which brings people together,*” adding that visitors “*come in to appreciate the building while also sharing a meal with family and friends.*” This quote reflects the cathedral’s role in creating opportunities for informal interactions that support social cohesion. Similarly, Participant A (volunteer) said, “*We do not just serve tea or coffee; we make friends and family to those who need some.*” These kinds of frequent acts of hospitality, casual encounters, are what give the Liverpool Cathedral social grounding within the local community.

- *Family and Community:*

This thread of family and community experiences was also prominent in the responses by the participants. Participant D (visitor) noted, “*My kids enjoy coming here; they enjoy looking at artwork, so we make it a family outing.*” This comment highlights how the cathedral creates a setting where spirituality, education, and leisure coexist. Participant E added, “*The cathedral now has children’s activities, art exhibitions, and lots of other events which my kids and I enjoy.*” This shows recognition of how the cathedral accommodates modern lifestyles, offering accessible spaces that include children and adults.

These responses have indicated that the Cathedral has responded to the shifting landscape of religion and social life by extending its relevance beyond traditional Sunday services, which all contribute to social cohesion.

Q2: What challenge does the Cathedral face in engaging with the wider community?

Participant A (volunteer): “People stroll past and think it is not for them, it looks beautiful, but also intimidating, you do not know what goes on inside. Most people also focus on the controversial history of the building.”

Participants B (volunteer): “We do not get as many visitors from Liverpool itself. A lot of locals say it is on my doorstep; I will do that later. – Young people are not drawn in unless it is a school trip.”

Participant C (volunteer): “It is hard to get people to engage with a faith space, and besides, if you want to reach a wider younger audience, you will have to offer something engaging and unique.”

Participant D (visitor): “Some see it as an elite place, not open to everyone. – I do not think people living as far as St. Helens or Toxteth think, let us go to the cathedral today unless there is a specific event.

Participant E (visitor): “A lot of people do not engage with things like this. If the cathedral wants to get more people to engage with the events, I believe they should be advertised”- “And people don’t feel connected to religion anymore.”

A key thread running through the response shows that while the physical structures stand tall in the city’s landscape, many suggest that it feels socially distant to residents, especially amongst younger generations. This could be lack of public enlightenment, historical controversy, or the lack of connectivity to religion and faith in society. These threads were being divided into sub-sections.

- *The perception of exclusivity*

The participants acknowledged that while the Cathedral’s architecture is grand and visually compelling, it may contribute to a sense of intimidation. Participant A (volunteer) stated, *“People stroll past and think it is not for them, it looks beautiful, but also intimidating, you don’t know what goes on inside.”* Participant D (visitors) also

stated, “Some see it as an elite place, not open to everyone. – I do not think people living as far as St. Helens or Toxteth think, let us go to the cathedral today unless there is a specific event.” Here, both architectural form and social perception intersect to alienate potential local visitors. This perception of the building as imposing rather than welcoming can be a barrier, especially for those who are not Liverpool locals.

- *The Disconnection from Local Residents*

The participants pointed to the difficulty of attracting locals in the area to the Cathedral, despite its central location. Participant B (volunteer) observed, “*We do not get as many visitors from Liverpool itself.*”. A lot of locals say it is on my doorstep; I will do that later.” The perception that the Cathedral is “always there” reduces urgency or appeal, weakening its pull for nearby residents who do not feel a strong emotional or cultural tie to the Cathedral.

- *Disengagement from Religion*

The responses from some participants showed a waning connection to religious spaces and events, especially among the younger population. Participant C (volunteer) stated, “*It is hard to get people to engage with a faith space, and besides if you want to reach a wider younger audience you will have to offer something engaging and unique*” This shows the challenge of making the Cathedral engaging to those who don’t normally engage with institutional religion. Participant E added, “*And people don’t feel connected to religion anymore.*” This observation points to a deeper cultural shift. Spiritual spaces are not just struggling to draw in people, they are contending with a loss of symbolic meaning within the population.

Theme 2: Liverpool Cathedral as a Cultural Hub

The following questions were asked in relation to our second theme: Cultural engagement.

Q3: Do you see the cathedral as more of a cultural landmark or a place of worship, or both?

Participant A(volunteer): “It is both an architectural and historical landmark, but also a place of worship. We get visitors who come for prayer, but also those who come but for the building itself.”

Participant B(volunteer): “People might come for an exhibition but see our 12 o’clock prayer happening”.

Participant C (volunteer): “It is a combination that can't separate it from being a piece of God, but many come for tourism.”

Participant D (visitor): “Many people see it as a museum, some walk in during a service and don't realise what is happening.” “I am not a fan of having a cafe in the cathedral, but I have made peace with it.”

Participant E(visitor): “It is more or less both, I come in for self-reflection, then after I have a meal -I’m not religious.”

To assess the cultural significance of the Liverpool Cathedral, participants were asked whether they perceived it as a religious site or a historical monument. Their responses consistently acknowledged the duality. We can notice in this response that “cultural engagement” has become a form of soft evangelism, or at least a bridge between secular and sacred. The Gothic-like architecture of the Liverpool Cathedral can feel museum-like, leading people to approach it as a historical exhibit rather than a living place of worship. These threads were further divided into sub-sections.

- *Liverpool Cathedral as Both Sacred and Cultural Space*

A few of the participants praised the Cathedral for being good at balancing these two roles. Participant A(volunteer), "*It is both an architectural and historical landmark, but also a place of worship. We get visitors who come for prayer, but also those who come but for the building itself.*" This was also expressed by Participant C (volunteer), who said, "*It is a combination that can't separate it from being a piece of God, but many come for tourism.*" This dualism shows that the Cathedral can engage culturally with community, while at the same time serving its religious function.

- *The Blurry lines between Worship and Tourism*

Participants highlighted unintentional syncretism between religious and cultural activities. As Participant B(volunteer) observed, "*People might come for an exhibition but see our 12 o'clock prayer happening.*" Participant D(visitor) stated, "*People think of it more like a museum, people enter while there is a church, and they have no clue what is going on.*" Additionally, Participant D stated, "*I am not a fan of having a cafe in the cathedral, but I have made peace with it.*" This response goes to show that there is not any distinct line that divides what is cultural and spiritual at the Cathedral which causes people to wonder if it is going against its traditional values.

Theme 3: Liverpool Cathedral as a Sacred Space.

The following question was asked in relation to our third theme: Spiritual Life.

Q4. Does the cathedral meet both traditional and modern spiritual needs in religion?

Participant A (volunteer): *“It is progressive. New services have been introduced without replacing the old traditional ones.” – “The cathedral balances both, it allows for worship and quiet reflection while also hosting religious events.”*

Participant B (volunteer): *“It remains traditional, some hymns are hard to understand, but that’s part of its charm.”*

Participant C (volunteer): *“I prefer traditional services, many people come because of the choir and old style of worship, faith experience.”*

Participant D (visitor): *“It meets both needs- there are traditional services and the ones for the younger ones.”*

Participant E (visitor): *“I think sometimes the traditional services are forgotten, but the society is progressive, so I understand them wanting to catch along.”*

These responses suggest the dual approaches to spirituality at the Liverpool Cathedral: preservation and adoption. The cathedral is trying to modernize while keeping tradition intact. However, traditional services remain the main attraction, and few visitors come for the choirs, and old hymns. The participant responses show “balance and coexistence, respect for tradition and an acknowledgement of societal change.” This thread was then divided into sub-section

- *Balance Between Tradition and Modern*

The participants recognized that Liverpool Cathedral strives to maintain its roots as traditional while incorporating modern elements. Even as the Cathedral adapts to contemporary society, the importance of retaining traditional forms of worship (like the choir, hymns, and the liturgical services) remains a strong sentiment with participants.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this research have shown that the Liverpool Cathedral is a hybrid institution in the 21st century, it is a religious and cultural space hosting a wide range of community-oriented activities that aim to promote social cohesion, encourage cultural engagement, and support the spiritual life and well-being of the Liverpool area. The participants' interviews and feedback gathered show that the social value of the Cathedral extends beyond its traditional values to a more diverse form to encourage civic identity and inclusivity in society.

A key finding in this area refers to the strong impact of the Cathedral's cultural activities, such as the exhibitions, music programs, and volunteer culture. The participants had made quotes such as, “*I know it is involved in local issues and draws in people for many different reasons,*” and “*The cathedral now has children’s activities, civic events, and corporate events which I enjoy.*” These findings show that the Cathedral expands its constituency to align with a diverse social environment. We can also notice this theme expressed in the Thread through the Bible, the visitors were attracted through the fascination of the textile art exhibition, referring to the Cathedral as “a beautiful, peaceful place,” “very pleasant and chilled,” “Made very welcome” (Casson & Phillips, 2025, p.1). The visitors also talked about how the staff were very welcoming, and how they were also able to take in the architecture and the space of the cathedral afterward. This shared experience is what can bring about relatability, which is one step away from creating bonds and strengthening community.

According to Bridge (2022), the Liverpool Cathedral outreach initiatives, especially through music, created a sense of belonging that was sustained even during the COVID-19 lockdown. During the pandemic, Cathedral conducted virtual choir rehearsals, instrumental rehearsals, and the Virtual Festival of Music, providing a platform for social interaction between those who were otherwise isolated. One participant in The Digital Turn spoke about it, “Nothing compares to in-person rehearsals... but it helped in some ways. It kept me going” (Krüger, 2022, p. 31). By offering a virtual alternative, the Cathedral managed to reach people who were

afraid to go to church buildings, thereby expanding its social reach. “The weekly online rehearsals provided routine, belonging, friendship, enjoyment, and, above all, real hope, particularly to those choir participants” (p.31). This online outreach music program encourages interpersonal connections through music, facilitating a collective social fabric across all ages and races.

Some participants acknowledged that there were challenges in engaging with the wider community. Participants stated, “*A lot of locals say it is on my doorstep; I’ll do that later.*” Some stated, “*It is hard to get people to engage with a faith space,*” and “*some see it as an elite place, not open to everyone.*” This discussion of the cathedral being a space targeted for the elite, middle class individuals, helps us to understand that the sheer scale of the building and its perceived formality can alienate segment towards its community engagement especially towards people who aren’t familiar with the history and context of the cathedral, also towards those who aren’t locals of the area. This is an issue for outreach popularity when considering the importance of “relational access-where engagement is fostered through personal connection rather than institutional programming alone.

Regarding cultural engagement, the Cathedral appears increasingly successful at positioning itself as an adaptive space. This is reflected in responses such as “*It is both an architectural and historical landmark but also a place of worship. We get visitors who come for prayer but also those who come but for the building itself,*” in “*People might come for an exhibition but see our 12 o’clock prayer happening.*” These responses highlight the sacred ambiance of the Liverpool Cathedral, where the architecture, music, and atmosphere communicate spiritual presence even to those who are not religious. These feelings were reinforced in greater measure in the Threads through the Bible, where frequent visitors were attracted not only by the art exhibition. A visitor stated it is a “splendid experience,” and others experienced pleasure by just casually strolling through the space (Casson & Phillips, 2025, p. 2). The very presence of the Cathedral is instrumental in enabling this cultural exchange. Few visitors are drawn in entirely by the beauty of the place. “Just walking in the door and seeing the vast space

was breathtaking.” This aesthetic power serves as an entry point into deeper reflection or simply as a form of quiet retreat; what Bridge (2022) terms the “wellbeing value of sacred space” (p. 47).

The findings continue to stress that spirituality involves elements other than conventional worship forms. When participants were asked - Does the cathedral meet both traditional and modern spiritual needs in religion. The participants gave responses such as *“It meets both needs- there are traditional services and the ones for the younger ones.” I prefer traditional services, many people come because of the choir and old style of worship, faith experience.*” The integration between traditional and modern spiritual aspects of spirituality closely mirrors the comments expressed in Threads Through the Bible, in which many visitors described the show as a fresh way in which it engaged with biblical scripture. Multiple participants showed that they were inspired toward reading the Book of Revelation or reflecting on “wonder of God’s love” (Casson & Phillips, 2025, p. 3). One respondent expressed that the show opened “a new aspect of the Bible” such that new understandings of divine principles can enrich religious awareness, even outside classic liturgical contexts.

The study of virtual worship and music is significant here. Bridge (2022) illustrated how the use of virtual sites during the coronavirus epidemic, especially in virtual choirs and music theory classes, contributed significantly to participants' experience of “agency, purpose, and connection.” For many, especially those in quarantine or socially distanced, this accounted for their main source of spiritual and social nourishment during lockdown sessions. This finding is indicative of an overarching trend: sacred experience is no longer dependent on physical presence at conventional sacred spaces; on the contrary, it can be facilitated via digital sites that can build emotional resonance and shared meaning.

What are the similarities and differences in response between the volunteers and visitors? First off, we can see that across the three themes, the volunteers and visitors

consistently emphasised the Cathedral's evolving community role. Participant A stated *"It plays a much bigger role than it used to be involved in"* highlighting how it draws in people for various reasons, spiritual, cultural and social activities. Similarly, Participant D stated, *"The cathedral acts as a hub attracting people not only for religious reasons, but also for its history, graduation, and tourism."* Both groups also agreed on the dual cultural and religious nature of the Cathedral. Participant A described it as *"It is both an architectural and historical landmark, but also a place of worship."* while Participant E, a visitor, stated, *"It is more or less both, I come in for self-reflection, then after I have a meal -I'm not religious."* In terms of spiritual life, there was agreement that the Cathedral offers both traditional and modern forms of engagement. Both the volunteers and the visitors believe that Liverpool Cathedral strikes a good balance between its traditional and modern means of promoting spirituality. Participant A described the cathedral as "progressive", and said *"New services have been introduced without replacing the old traditional ones"* which means both can occur without losing its tradition. Likewise, Participant D said, *"It meets both needs- there are traditional services and the ones for the younger ones."* indicating that the Cathedral accommodates people of various ages to seek meaning. Volunteers such as Participant C also highlighted that numerous people still like to maintain the traditional approach to worshipping and that, *"I prefer traditional services, many people come because of the choir and old style of worship, faith experience."* This is also what Participant E said regarding traditional services being impossible to always need, *"I think sometimes the traditional services are forgotten, but the society is progressive, so I understand them wanting to catch along."* There was an agreement between both groups that Liverpool Cathedral remains traditional while incorporating new means of spirituality. This is an indicator of respect for the dual spiritual function of the Cathedral and that regular and new people view its reason for being to be accessible to all and not only to a select group.

What are the differences? Volunteers more commonly viewed the spiritual meaning of the Cathedral as an institution to preserve and cultural heritage to protect. For instance, Participant B highlighted the need to preserve traditional hymns and commented, *"Some hymns are difficult to understand, but that's part of its charm,"* a sign of a

reverence for enduring custom. By way of contrast, site visitors were more amenable to recognizing the need for the Cathedral to evolve according to changing societal conditions. Participant E commented, “*The traditional services are sometimes forgotten,*” while admitting that the Cathedral was adapting its practices to remain pertinent within a contemporary context. Moreover, while volunteers highlighted the timelessness of choirs and tradition, site visitors described their experience using language that connoted adaptability, reflection, and openness. This suggests volunteers value the Cathedral social world, value the protection of heritage and identity, while the visitors, who tend to experience the Liverpool Cathedral more personally and distinctively, are more responsive to innovation and change within the domain of spirituality. These differences reflect the volitional proximities that volunteers and visitors have to the Cathedral and thus how both groups perceive the ongoing interplay between traditional and contemporary times.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings revealed that the Liverpool Cathedral is not just recognized as a beautiful architectural landmark, or as a traditional place of worship, but also as a sacred and socially engaging space that holds a diverse significance in contemporary life. Beyond cathedral's religious function, the cathedral plays an active role in fostering inclusion, cultural enrichment through art, music, heritage, offering moments of spiritual resonance, emotional and shared connection. The Liverpool cathedral stands as a dynamic environment that encourages reflection, nurtures creativity across diverse groups which together contribute to the social and cultural growth of the wider Liverpool community. However, there were several limitations identified, making it possible to suggest the following recommendations such as.

- **Developing a Community Ambassador Programme**

One effective strategy by which Liverpool Cathedral can increase its presence in and outreach to the wider community is by initiating a Community Ambassador Program. This program would entail hiring local citizens of different areas around Liverpool to be ambassadors representing the Cathedral where they live. The ambassadors would be tasked with disseminating information regarding upcoming events, encouraging visitors, and passing along feedback or issues to and from the Cathedral. The visible presence of individuals undertaking outreach efforts can potentially rid the Cathedral of its reputation as aloof and austere, especially among members of communities where individuals do not usually go. In addition, this strategy would grant access to the Cathedral of valuable information regarding the unique needs and wants of different groups with regards to the space. In contrast to more flashy forms of advertisement, this strategy focuses on relationship development and works to present the Cathedral as a

communal space and not just religious or historical. In addition, it has the ability to create higher rates of participation among communities that feel disconnected.

- **Diversifying Inclusion**

The respondents elaborated how there are those who still view the Cathedral as an elite space for a subset of society to which they do not feel they belong. Part of rectifying this comes through the implementation of set periods of regular open days aimed at celebrating and showcasing the different communities and cultures of Liverpool. Activities can be organized to celebrate African heritage, host interfaith musical events, or provide storytelling clubs that reflect local historical stories. Such procedures would make the Cathedral meaningful and welcoming to those who would otherwise be deterred. Furthermore, the Cathedral would be able to partner with local community groups to co-organize events and thereby promote a collaborative activity aimed at celebrating and recognizing diversity culture. The encouragement and promotion of diverse practices within the environment of the Cathedral can help to promote sense of ownership extending beyond the typical congregation. This is an opportunity to bring different individuals of varied backgrounds together, where they can be allowed to interact and develop deeper relationships.

- **Improve Transportation Support to Facilitate Event Accessibility**

Several participants noted that those living in areas like Toxteth and St. Helens often feel disconnected from the Cathedral, a situation compounded by both distance and transport-related issues. The possession of personal transport or ability to conveniently travel is far from an every-person option, especially concerning evening concerts or events. An effective solution to increase wider participation would involve the Cathedral partnering with local authorities, community groups, or educational institutions to provide transport to planned events. This may include initiatives to set up shuttle

transport to notable events or to provide travelling vouchers to those who otherwise may feel excluded. Making access to the Cathedral physically possible can greatly help to boost numbers and promote an increase in ownership and feeling of inclusion. If individuals feel they can access the Cathedral with minimal stress and cost, they are more

These recommendations are entirely at the discretion of the Liverpool Cathedral and can be enacted to the degree in which they wish. They could be taken forward as small or large initiatives. In conclusion, these recommendations are ultimately designed to support the cathedral to continue to contribute to cultural engagement, social cohesion and the spiritual life of the community within the Liverpool area.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

For an Interview (student researcher)

For volunteers:

Title of study: Liverpool Cathedral as a Contemporary Community and Cultural Hub

Version 1 (11th November 2024)

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask us if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. We would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

Thank you for reading this.

1. What is the purpose of the study?

As part of my undergraduate degree, I am undertaking an interchange research project with Liverpool Cathedral to explore how various forms of interaction with the cathedral, such as worship, civic events, and cultural activities, impact the social and spiritual well-being of individuals and communities in the Liverpool City Region. The findings will guide the cathedral in expanding its activities, meeting the evolving needs of its diverse audience, and securing sustainable support for its mission and outreach efforts in the 21st century.

2. Why have I been chosen to take part?

You have been chosen to participate in this research project because you are a volunteer at the Liverpool Cathedral.

3. Do I have to take part?

No, it is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part.

4. What will happen if I take part?

Methods: This study will involve you participating in a semi-structured interviews to understand your thoughts and experiences regarding Liverpool Cathedral's role in the community.

Researcher: I am Ibitamuno Sekibo, the researcher conducting this study.

Procedure: I will conduct the interviews, asking open-ended questions to encourage your perspective. The interview will be audio-recorded with your permission to ensure accuracy, and detailed notes will be taken.

Duration: Your interview will take approximately 15-20 minutes and will be scheduled at a time convenient for you.

Participant Responsibilities: You'll be asked to share your experiences and views. Participation is voluntary, and you may skip any questions or withdraw at any time without any impact.

Recording: Audio recordings will be used for data accuracy and will be stored securely. Your privacy and anonymity will be respected at all times.

5. How will my data be used?

The University processes personal data as part of its research and teaching activities in accordance with the lawful basis of 'public task', and in accordance with the University's purpose of "advancing education, learning and research for the public benefit.

Under UK data protection legislation, the University acts as the Data Controller for personal data collected as part of the University's research. I, Ibitamuno Sekibo and Dr. Lynn Hancock act as the Data Processor for this study, and any queries relating to the handling of your personal data can be sent to **Dr. Lynn Hancock**- ,[lynn0406@liverpool.ac.uk]

Further information on how your data will be used can be found in the table below".

How will my data be collected?	Via an interview which will be audio recorded.
How will my data be stored?	On the university of Liverpool encrypted drive (M drive).
How long will my data be stored for?	Until July 2025
What measures are in place to protect the security and confidentiality of my data?	Your data will be anonymised at the onset, the transcripts will be stored on the M Drive and only the researcher will have access to your data.
Will my data be anonymised?	yes
How will my data be used?	For research purposes
Who will have access to my data?	The interviewer
Will my data be archived for use in other research projects in the future?	No
How will my data be destroyed?	It will be deleted automatically after researcher's graduation

6. Expenses and / or payments

Not Applicable.

7. Are there any benefits in taking part?

There are no direct benefits for you. However, you will be contributing to a greater understanding of how Liverpool Cathedral can respond to the needs of the population of the Liverpool city region.

8. What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of this study will be published on the Liverpool Cathedral Data website. Participants will have access to the findings, but all data will be anonymised. This ensures that participants' identities remain confidential.

9. What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

You can withdraw from the study at any time without explaining your decision. If you choose to withdraw, you can specify whether any data collected up to that point may still be used. You can request that your data be destroyed and not used further. To withdraw or discuss data removal, please contact Dr. Lynn Hancock, [lynn0406@liverpool.ac.uk].

10. What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let us know by contacting **Lynn Hancock**, [lynn0406@liverpool.ac.uk] and we will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with then you should contact the Research Ethics and Integrity Office at ethics@liv.ac.uk. When contacting the Research Ethics and Integrity Office, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

The University strives to maintain the highest standards of rigour in the processing of your data. However, if you have any concerns about the way in which the University processes your personal data, it is important that you are aware of your right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office by calling 0303 123 1113.””

11. Who can I contact if I have further questions?

If you have any questions further questions about any aspect of the study, you should contact the lead researcher Lynn Hancock who will do their best to answer your questions,

Email: lynn0406@liverpool.ac.uk

Telephone: 0151 794 2980

Alternatively, if you wish to speak to someone outside the research team you can contact The University of Liverpool Research Ethics department:

Email: ethics@liverpool.ac.uk

Telephone: 0151 794 8290

Thank you for wanting to know more about this study.

Appendix B

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

For an Interview (student researcher)

For visitors:

Title of study: Liverpool Cathedral as a Contemporary Community and Cultural Hub

Version 1 (11th November 2024)

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask us if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. We would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

Thank you for reading this.

1. What is the purpose of the study?

As part of my undergraduate degree, I am undertaking an interchange research project with Liverpool Cathedral to explore how various forms of interaction with the cathedral, such as worship, civic events, and cultural activities, impact the social and spiritual well-being of individuals and communities in the Liverpool City Region. The findings will guide the cathedral in expanding its activities, meeting the evolving needs of its diverse audience, and securing sustainable support for its mission and outreach efforts in the 21st century.

2. Why have I been chosen to take part?

You have been chosen to participate in this research project because you are a visitor of the Liverpool Cathedral.

3. Do I have to take part?

No, it is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part.

4. What will happen if I take part?

Methods: This study will involve you participating in a semi-structured interview to understand your thoughts and experiences regarding Liverpool Cathedral's role in the community.

Researcher: I am Ibitamuno Sekibo, the researcher conducting this study.

Procedure: I will conduct the interviews, asking open-ended questions to encourage your perspective. The interview will be audio-recorded with your permission to ensure accuracy, and detailed notes will be taken.

Duration: Your interview will take approximately 15-20 minutes and will be scheduled at a time convenient for you.

Participant Responsibilities: You'll be asked to share your experiences and views. Participation is voluntary, and you may skip any questions or withdraw at any time without any impact.

Recording: Audio recordings will be used for data accuracy and will be stored securely. Your privacy and anonymity will be respected at all times.

5. How will my data be used?

The University processes personal data as part of its research and teaching activities in accordance with the lawful basis of 'public task', and in accordance with the University's purpose of "advancing education, learning and research for the public benefit. Under UK data protection legislation, the University acts as the Data Controller for personal data collected as part of the University's research. I, Ibitamuno Sekibo and Dr. Lynn Hancock act as the Data Processor for this study, and any queries relating to the handling of your personal data can be sent to **Dr. Lynn Hancock** - ,[lynn0406@liverpool.ac.uk].

Further information on how your data will be used can be found in the table below”.

How will my data be collected?	Via an interview which will be audio recorded.
How will my data be stored?	On the university of Liverpool encrypted drive (M drive).
How long will my data be stored for?	Until July 2025
What measures are in place to protect the security and confidentiality of my data?	Your data will be anonymised at the onset, the transcripts will be stored on the M Drive and only the researcher will have access to your data.
Will my data be anonymised?	yes
How will my data be used?	For research purposes
Who will have access to my data?	The interviewer
Will my data be archived for use in other research projects in the future?	No
How will my data be destroyed?	It will be deleted automatically after researcher’s graduation

6. Expenses and / or payments

Not applicable.

7. Are there any benefits in taking part?

There are no direct benefits for you. However, you will be contributing to a greater understanding of how Liverpool Cathedral can respond to the needs of the population of the Liverpool city region.

8. What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of this study will be published on the Liverpool Cathedral Data website. Participants will have access to the findings, but all data will be anonymised. This ensures that participants' identities remain confidential.

9. What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

You can withdraw from the study at any time without explaining your decision. If you choose to withdraw, you can specify whether any data collected up to that point may still be used. You can request that your data be destroyed and not used further. However,

once data has been fully anonymized, it will not be possible to remove it. To withdraw or discuss data removal, please contact Dr. Lynn Hancock, [lynn0406@liverpool.ac.uk].

10. What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let us know by contacting **Lynn Hancock**, [lynn0406@liverpool.ac.uk] and we will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with then you should contact the Research Ethics and Integrity Office at ethics@liv.ac.uk. When contacting the Research Ethics and Integrity Office, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

The University strives to maintain the highest standards of rigour in the processing of your data. However, if you have any concerns about the way in which the University processes your personal data, it is important that you are aware of your right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office by calling 0303 123 1113.””

11. Who can I contact if I have further questions?

If you have any questions further questions about any aspect of the study, you should contact the lead researcher Lynn Hancock who will do their best to answer your questions,

Email: lynn0406@liverpool.ac.uk

Telephone: 0151 794 2980

Alternatively, if you wish to speak to someone outside the research team you can contact The University of Liverpool Research Ethics department: Email: ethics@liverpool.ac.uk
Telephone: 0151 794 8290 Thank you for wanting to know more about this study.

Appendix C

Participant consent form

Version number 1, 12th November 2024

Research ethics approval number: 15614

Title of the research project: The Liverpool Cathedral as a Contemporary Community and Cultural Hub.

Name of researcher: Ibitamuno Sekibo

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated [12/11/24] for the above study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactory. ☐
2. I understand that taking part in the study involves an audio-recorded interview. ☐
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to stop taking part and can withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason and without my rights being affected. In addition, I understand that I am free to decline to answer any particular question or questions. ☐
4. I understand that I can ask for access to the information I provide, and I can request the destruction of that information. I understand that following anonymization I will no longer be able to request access to or withdrawal of the information I provide. ☐
5. I understand that the information I provide will be held securely and in line with data protection requirements at the University of Liverpool until it is **fully anonymised**. ☐
6. I understand that signed consent forms will be kept in a locked drawer in the Principal Investigator's office and original audio recordings will be retained in the University of Liverpool's encrypted drive, with access restricted to the researcher and relevant supervisors, until Summer 2025. ☐



7. I agree that I am 18 years and above.

☐

8. I agree to take part in the above study.

☐

Participant name

Date

Signature

Name of person taking consent

Date

Signature

Principal Investigator

[Lynn Hancock]

[University of Liverpool]

[lynn0406@liverpool.ac.uk]

Student Investigator

[Ibitamuno Sekibo]

[University of Liverpool]

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