

Reimagining Evangelism

The Choral Revival

In churches around the UK, evangelism is receiving fresh focus. Whether through a higher profile, sustained financing, new initiatives or simply a groundswell of Spirit-filled courage, individuals and church communities are finding fresh ways to share the good news and are seeing people come to faith. The recent Quiet Revival report from the Bible Society indicates an increase in young people exploring and embracing the Christian faith. In this series, we'll hear from people around the UK who are Reimagining Evangelism.

For our first instalment, Melanie Cave interviews Julia Daintree, a teacher and artist who has set up five choirs on the south coast of England, leading to many adults coming to faith. Melanie subsequently speaks with Chip Kendall, known for his high-energy musical and evangelistic performances and earlier work with 'the band with no name', to find out about a vibrant new choir initiative he's spearheading in the UK: Soul Children.



Finding Faith Through Community Choirs

In a world marked by loneliness and disconnection, community choirs are emerging as powerful spaces where individuals can find not only belonging and joy, but also faith.

Julia Daintree, a musician and artist from the south coast of England, has been at the forefront of this movement for over a decade, having founded multiple community and gospel choirs that serve as unique outreach initiatives for local churches.

Julia first established a gospel choir in her local church in 2008, after a distinct call from God to reach out to teenagers. The vision was to connect with young people and give them the opportunity to build friendship and be impacted by Christian song lyrics, as many had never met Christians before. This choir was so popular it soon expanded to include a children's choir and adult gospel choir.

'Gospel music', Julia notes, 'is one of the few acceptable faces of church in the community', allowing for 'heartfelt, gut-wrenchingly beautiful words' to be sung, even by those who don't yet believe. These choirs unapologetically use gospel lyrics, interspersing them with popular soul songs to broaden appeal.

Julia went on to launch the Sing Well Community Choir as a business, comprising four daytime groups. These choirs primarily use pop songs with positive messages, although Julia is keen to weave in gospel songs and share her personal testimony. The vision remains consistent: to invite people into a loving, supportive and friendly church environment through singing.

Why choirs resonate: Addressing loneliness and offering dignity

Choirs have gained a positive reputation in the media, recognised for their mental health benefits and ability to foster community connection. Julia highlights that many participants, especially in her daytime choirs, are lonely – often young retirees, new mums, or those who are bereaved – seeking company and a sense of personal fulfilment. For some, like Julia's own mother, choir day is the only time they leave the house.

At the heart of the choir's success is the warm welcome extended to newcomers. Volunteers from the church see welcoming attendees as their ministry, ensuring everyone feels accepted and nurtured. The choirs embrace all, including those with dementia, physical disabilities, or hearing impairments, and even offer free attendance to those who cannot afford the weekly fee.

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Beyond simply providing a service, choirs offer participants dignity and agency. Choir members contribute with their singing and get to perform for the community, becoming active participants rather than passive recipients. This collaborative nature creates a 'little church culture' within the choir, fostering a sense of ownership, with some participants referring to the church building as 'my church' even when they don't come to services.

The path to faith: Connection and faith conversations

The core of how people find faith through these choirs lies in relationships and genuine connection. Friendships naturally blossom between people within the groups, leading to offsite coffee meetups and mutual support, such as offering lifts. Through these relationships, people can observe the lives of those who believe, challenging their preconceptions about faith. Singing itself plays a role, as it can open people up emotionally, allowing for spiritual moments even through pop songs, breaking down barriers between participants and God.

Julia and her team actively invite participants to church events and Alpha courses, which serve as crucial follow-up opportunities for exploring faith. She's seen remarkable fruit, including recent baptisms of choir members. One man, who had attended the gospel choir for 10 years without believing, described finding 'his tribe' and later found Jesus after attending an Alpha course. Another man, isolated by disability, found friendship, and reconnected with his childhood faith, eventually being baptized. A man with learning disabilities, who enjoys attending even though he rarely sings, found belonging because people were kind and accepting. He also found faith that led to his baptism.

Practical advice for starting your own choir

For those inspired to start a similar initiative, Julia offers a range of practical advice:

Pray and listen: Julia stresses that her choirs began from God's prompting.

You don't need to be a musician: If you have the vision, you can hire a choir leader (the ABCD.org.uk website advertises choir posts) or even use CDs and Spotify for sing-alongs.

Start small: A sing-along group can work with as few as seven or eight people, and you can invite church members to boost numbers and sound.

Cultivate an inclusive culture: Emphasise 'no auditions' and a welcoming atmosphere in all your advertising.

Marketing: Facebook advertising on local community pages is highly effective for reaching the target age group. Word-of-mouth is also a powerful tool.

Define your vision: Decide if your choir will be a high-performance group or a more relaxed, inclusive, well-being focused experience, and stick to it.

Gain experience: Julia recommends joining an existing choir first to understand how they operate from the inside.

Choirs provide a powerful and accessible avenue for churches to connect with their communities, offer meaningful friendships, and provide a gentle pathway for people to explore and find faith in Jesus.



Soul Children Choirs

Chip Kendall didn't set out to become the leader of a children's choir. His discovery of Soul Children began unexpectedly when he was touring with his band at the Sjartegård festival in Norway. During the festival, 1,000 children from different choirs

came together to perform as the opening act, singing powerful truths through gospel music. Chip was awestruck. He later discovered this group was the International Soul Children Choir.

Chip was so inspired that he agreed for his band to perform at their next International Soul Children Festival. He passionately describes the impact of this experience: 'Two and a half thousand kids in Spectrum Arena was just amazing. I couldn't believe these guys were our audience, let alone a choir performing with us.'

Despite being a successful international movement with branches in Scandinavia, Bangladesh and Ecuador, Soul Children had no presence in the UK. Notwithstanding his initial hesitation, a series of events led Chip to embrace the challenge. A partnership with a local archdeacon brought funding for a choir leader to come over from Norway and begin running choirs in UK secondary schools, connecting with young people. That year, Chip was introduced to Tim Etendell, whom Chip lauds as 'one of the greatest choir leaders on the planet'. Chip and Tim have partnered together to grow Soul Children as a charity in the UK. Seven years later, the movement is thriving, with nine choirs running in the UK and 40 people recently attending the International Soul Children Festival in Norway.

Transforming young lives through music and faith

The core vision of Soul Children, both in the UK and globally, is introducing young people to a lifelong friendship with Jesus through music and songs they can relate to. They do this by bringing children together to sing gospel music in the choir, but also with a dedicated time for spiritual input, such as reading a Bible story and reflecting together.

Chip recounts a story of an adopted boy who joined a choir after seeing them perform at an event. 'He finds Jesus in the choir. He's coming every week... he ends up becoming our Bible champion... handing out the Bibles before we share a Bible story. Through being part of the choir, he found a place to belong and grow.'

Another story involves a boy who wanted to bring a friend who didn't know God. The friend joined, was captivated by the song lyrics, and encountered Jesus, asking him into his heart the very next week.

According to Chip, choirs are a 'microcosm of church' where individuals gather regularly to worship, learn that everybody has their part to play, and develop harmony, both musically and socially. For children and young people, a choir can offer a place of belonging and form the foundations necessary for spiritual growth, from which can stem renewal for individuals and for the nascent community to which they belong.



Join the Soul Children family: How to get involved

Soul Children UK aims to make starting a choir as accessible as possible. Its ideal is a 'community choir' for 10–16-year-olds often named geographically, such as Soul Children Stockport. They partner with schools, churches, and academy trusts. The movement is built on five core values: to glorify God, to honour people, to influence society, to see and be seen, and to have real, honest joy. For those interested in starting a choir, support is readily available:

- Online resources:** The website soulchildrenuk.com provides a 'back door entrance' for registered choirs, songs, vocal tutorials, game tutorials, and videos of actions for songs.
- Three pillars:** Every Soul Children gathering incorporates three essential elements: 'music, faith and fun'.
- Training for leaders:** Soul Children UK provides comprehensive training delivered by Tim Etendell. Chip is a testament to this, stating, 'I never thought I could lead a choir until I had Tim's training. I'm evidence that Tim's teaching works.' This support ensures that individuals don't need formal musical qualifications to lead a choir.

- Soul Children UK is keen to see the transformative power of music, faith, and community impact the lives of young people across the UK. If you're thinking of running a youth or children's choir in your church or local school, get in touch with them at office@soulchildrenuk.com.
- Microphone icon** Hear the full conversations with Julia and Chip, including tips and more stories and answered prayers, on the Roots podcast.