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## Education Feature



# Confident, cultural and Catholic – how one diocese beat the lockdown with online music classes

As schools and Cathedrals across the world were busy furloughing or even laying-off their professional music staff, one Catholic diocese kept all musicians fully employed.

Diocese of Leeds Music continued to deliver weekly schools singing tuition and choir rehearsals online with no break in provision, much to the delight of thousands of young people, their parents and staff at Catholic schools across the Diocese.

Thanks to funding from a charitable foundation, Diocese of Leeds Music is now expanding still further, recruiting for a number of new full-time positions to further the programme of evangelisation through Music and Liturgy.

The £2.3million funding, from the Hamish Ogston Foundation, is restricted to the specific purpose of financing Choral Director, Instrumental Tutor and Assistant Director roles to double the number of schools in the Diocese of Leeds Schools Singing Programme, as well as enabling Catholic schools in other dioceses across the UK to share in the seed funding to create or enhance their own programmes of evangelisation through music.

The educational, social, and health benefits of children's choral singing are well researched by educationalists, and in areas of the greatest socio-economic deprivation, parents and teachers alike have been delighted at children's increased confidence, engagement and academic attainment, including literacy, numeracy, behaviour, teamwork – plus an excellent record of Oxbridge successes.

One head teacher of a Catholic primary school in Leeds said of the in-person classes: "Our morning sessions fill the school with beautiful

singing that uplifts all who hear it. The difference made to the quality of the children's singing, self-esteem and confidence is immeasurable. The programme has had a brilliant impact on the quality of work from the pupils, in all subjects – not only in music and church life."

Another message of thanks from a Catholic parent enjoying the post-lockdown singing sessions via the Royal Philharmonic Society Award-winning innovation of the Diocese of Leeds Schools Singing Programme's YouTube Channel said: "I can't thank you enough for the engagement and creativity and wonderful singing of your virtual singing lessons. I have passed on your links to all I know in education.

"I so SO wish my children could access daily singing lessons in school. It has been so good for confidence and diction and fun for the two nine year olds I'm helping to home educate."

Director of the Schools Singing Programme across the Diocese of Leeds is Tom Leech. Together with Diocesan Director of Music, Ben Saunders, and their team of professional Choral Directors he has seen the effects of low self-esteem and low aspirations caused by 'poverty of opportunity' overturned, watching young people's self-belief grow as they enthusiastically embrace high musical standards in their school sessions, and in the six, regional after-school choirs across the Diocese.

Children who choose to join those after-school choirs enhance the worship in their parishes, at Leeds Cathedral, and in regular BBC broadcasts. As the basis of sacred music is to convey understanding of the words, meaning and theology through the phrasing and dynamics

of the music, children gain a deeper comprehension of, and engagement with, their faith. Singing in broadcasts, concerts and in their own parish also encourages and welcomes their school-friends, parents and families into (or back into)

church and into the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

The Bishop of Leeds, the Rt Revd Marcus Stock, himself an educationist and Chair of the Catholic Education Service nationally has said: "Our diocesan school music programme is one of the most effective forms of evangelisation I have seen and experienced. Through the beauty of the Catholic Church's treasury of sacred music our young people are being formed in the

Christian faith; they discover a new confidence in themselves and, by learning to work closely with others, they progress in those virtues which lead to collective flourishing and foster individual aspiration."

• To receive more information and an Application Pack for the new vacancies for music specialists to become part of this successful and expanding music and education programme contact: [office@dioceseofleedsmusic.org.uk](mailto:office@dioceseofleedsmusic.org.uk)  
Closing date: 5pm on 22nd February 2021

**Diocese of Leeds Music**  
**Schools Singing Programme**  
**& Keyboard Studies Programme**  
Inspiring young people across Yorkshire

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- Full time Organ, Classical Accordion and Piano Tutors
- Assistant Director of the Schools Singing Programme
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