



Camp Duncan Bluegrass Festival

Choral Group Challenge August 15, 2026

Camp Duncan is inviting Choir Groups to participate in a gospel song section of the upcoming bluegrass festival at Camp Duncan. This dimension provides several, often overlooked, social justice benefits that connect historical, community, and thematic elements of this genera's roots music.

Here is some background on why you might want to consider the Challenge:

1. Honoring African American Roots and Influences

- **Acknowledging Historical Roots:** While often associated with white mountain culture, bluegrass has deep, fundamental roots in African American blues and spiritual traditions, which were part of the rural landscape where the music developed.
- The foundation for Black spiritual music in The United Church of Canada is rooted in a rich tradition of resilience, merging African musical heritage with Christian hymns, which historically served as a means of communication and a cry for justice for enslaved people and their descendants.
- **Celebrating Black Musical Contributions:** Including gospel highlights the foundational role of Black spirituals in shaping American roots music, acknowledging a history of cultural exchange rather than just segregation.

2. Promoting Unity and Community (The "Beloved Community")

- **Fostering Inclusivity:** Gospel music acts as a unifying force, bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds and transcending barriers.
- **Creating a "Beloved Community":** The "gospel impulse" within the music supports the creation of a "beloved community"—a concept from the Civil Rights movement that emphasizes inclusivity and mutual support is relevant in The United Church of today.
- **Healing Through Shared Experience:** Gospel offers a "soul-soothing" experience that promotes a sense of peace and unity in a divided world.

3. Expressing Themes of Resistance and Social Justice

- **Historically Rooted in Freedom Struggles:** Gospel songs (and spirituals) were historically used as anthems for freedom, providing courage and strength during the Civil Rights movement.
- **Addressing Social Inequality:** Many bluegrass gospel songs address themes of hardship, poverty, and struggle, challenging listeners to think about their role in creating a more equitable society.

- **Voices for the Marginalized:** The genre provides a platform for stories of the marginalized to be heard, offering hope and resilience to those facing adversity.

4. Encouraging Inclusivity in Programming

- **Welcoming and Inclusive Lyrics:** Modern bluegrass gospel can be curated to focus on messages of acceptance and "coming as you are," focusing on love rather than condemnation.
- **Appealing to a Broader Audience:** Gospel music has broad appeal, allowing a festival to connect with audiences across different faiths, ideologies, and races.

5. Reflecting Appalachian Culture and Resilience

- **Symbol of Resilience:** Gospel music in Appalachia is often tied to the resilience of communities facing economic hardship.
- **Connecting to Tradition:** It honors the cultural history of the Appalachian people, providing a space for reflection on community, faith, and mutual support.

By contributing to this gospel section, a festival can move beyond just entertaining to honoring the deep, often complex, history of the music and promoting a message of solidarity and hope much needed in today's world of turmoil. This is an excellent opportunity to showcase your Choir's social awareness and creativity; sharing the relevance of the Christian stories and values through music.

We invite you to get involved, to experience Camp Duncan in a new dimension. Help us to share the miracle that is Camp Duncan with other.

Choirs wishing to participate are asked to submit an application before 15 June 2026.

Suggested music categories include:

- **Gospel:** Traditional bluegrass gospel, which is a staple of the genre.
- **Protest & Social Justice Songs:** Historic folk-based songs that speak to social movements, often featuring themes of unity or struggle.
- **Singer-Songwriter:** Contemporary pieces that have a folk feel, such as "The River" by Susan LaBarr.

Participating groups will have about 15 minutes (3 pieces)

Gospel Challenge Application:

Name of Choir:

Address:

Number of Singers Male: Female:

Singers range in age from: to:

Contact person:

Phone:

Email:

Music Director/Conductor:

Phone:

Email:

Music Selections:

1/

2/

3/