# churches unite to transform Wheeling’s Gospel Fest into a riverside sanctuary



Wheeling’s Ohio River waterfront will come alive with gospel music once again on July 20, as the city hosts the third annual Gospel Fest at Wheeling Heritage Port. Beginning at 10:30 a.m., this free community event promises spirited praise and worship, complete with singing, dancing, and inspiring performances by local gospel artists. In case of inclement weather, festivities will move indoors to the WesBanco Arena lobby, ensuring the show continues regardless of rain.

Marked by a unique spirit of unity, this year’s Gospel Fest has seen at least four area churches—Bethlehem Apostolic Temple, Greater Zion Temple, Apostolic Faith Temple, and Shiloh Apostolic Faith Assembly—making the rare decision to forgo their usual Sunday morning worship services in favour of gathering together at the site of the festival. Bishop Darrell Cummings of Bethlehem Apostolic Temple in Wheeling highlighted this special gesture, emphasising the importance of community uplift over tradition. “When is the last time you heard that? Sunday morning worship is the church’s main event, and they are closing their main event to say community and lifting the spirits is more important than individual needs,” he reflected.

The festival is more than just a musical event; it serves as a spiritual and communal celebration held outdoors beside the river, which some ministers like Clarissa Speaker, interim pastor at Greater Zion Temple, described as a “greater sanctuary.” Speaker expressed enthusiasm about the atmosphere, noting, “We are going to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There’s going to be singing and dancing and just enjoying the Lord outside so that others can come be a part.” While she will not be performing herself, Speaker plans to actively support the festival through prayer and by engaging with members offering outreach ministry to visitors who might seek spiritual comfort during the day.

This gathering reflects a deliberate shift from the traditional church sanctuary setting to an open community space, where worship is extended in a more public and inclusive manner. Not all members may be comfortable with this change, particularly given potential weather challenges, but the commitment from participating churches underscores a collective desire to praise and serve beyond conventional walls. “Inside or outside, Jesus is still Lord. It makes no difference,” Speaker affirmed.

Gospel Fest has grown steadily since its inception three years ago when city officials proposed the idea to Bishop Cummings. Starting modestly, the event has expanded in reach and attendance, drawing visitors not only from Wheeling but also from Pittsburgh, Columbus, and Cleveland in recent years. The festival schedule showcases a mix of gospel music with a message, including interpretive dance, flag dancing, guitar and trumpet solos, and performances by groups like the Apostolic Faith Temple Choir of Martins Ferry and the Bethlehem Apostolic Praise Team Ministry of Wheeling.

In addition to music and worship, food trucks will be on hand to create a full festive atmosphere, inviting attendees to bring lawn chairs and umbrellas as they prepare for what organisers hope will be sunny skies and abundant blessings. Admission is free, though offerings collected during the event will go toward supporting local victims of recent floods, blending faith, fellowship, and community aid.

The festival sits among a host of summer cultural and community events taking place in Wheeling, which also features activities such as Waterfront Wednesdays and FunFest Fridays, along with various ethnic heritage festivals like the Grecian and Italian Heritage Festivals scheduled later in July. This broad calendar of events reinforces Wheeling’s commitment to vibrant outdoor gatherings that foster community bonds and celebrate diverse heritages.

Local gospel music enthusiasts and performers who wish to participate are encouraged to contact the organisers at Bethlehem Temple, ensuring that the event remains an open and inclusive platform for worship through music.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.timesleaderonline.com/news/local-news/2025/07/gospel-fest-coming-july-20/), [[2]](https://www.timesleaderonline.com/news/local-news/2025/07/gospel-fest-coming-july-20/), [[4]](https://wheelingcvb.com/festivals/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.timesleaderonline.com/news/local-news/2025/07/gospel-fest-coming-july-20/), [[2]](https://www.timesleaderonline.com/news/local-news/2025/07/gospel-fest-coming-july-20/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.timesleaderonline.com/news/local-news/2025/07/gospel-fest-coming-july-20/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.timesleaderonline.com/news/local-news/2025/07/gospel-fest-coming-july-20/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.timesleaderonline.com/news/local-news/2025/07/gospel-fest-coming-july-20/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.timesleaderonline.com/news/local-news/2025/07/gospel-fest-coming-july-20/), [[2]](https://www.timesleaderonline.com/news/local-news/2025/07/gospel-fest-coming-july-20/), [[7]](https://www.intelligencer.net/news/community/2024/07/gospel-fest-happens-sunday-at-heritage-port/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.timesleaderonline.com/news/local-news/2025/07/gospel-fest-coming-july-20/), [[2]](https://www.timesleaderonline.com/news/local-news/2025/07/gospel-fest-coming-july-20/), [[4]](https://wheelingcvb.com/festivals/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.timesleaderonline.com/news/local-news/2025/07/gospel-fest-coming-july-20/), [[4]](https://wheelingcvb.com/festivals/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.timesleaderonline.com/news/local-news/2025/07/gospel-fest-coming-july-20/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.timesleaderonline.com/news/local-news/2025/07/gospel-fest-coming-july-20/> - The article announces the third annual 'Gospel Fest' scheduled for 10:30 a.m. on July 20 at Wheeling Heritage Port, with a rain location at the WesBanco Arena lobby. Admission is free, with offerings to support local flood victims. Four churches—Bethlehem Apostolic Temple, Greater Zion Temple, Apostolic Faith Temple, and Shiloh Apostolic Faith Assembly—are relocating their Sunday services to the event to foster community spirit. The festival will feature gospel music, interpretive dance, flag dancing, and performances by local artists. Attendees are encouraged to bring lawn chairs and umbrellas.
3. <https://www.timesleaderonline.com/life/living/2024/06/activities-all-summer-long-in-wheeling/> - This article outlines various summer events in Wheeling, including the return of 'Waterfront Wednesdays' at Wheeling Heritage Port and 'FunFest Fridays' at Wheeling Park. Oglebay also hosts weekly live music events such as the 'Sunday Funday Concert Series' and 'Patio Parties.' Additionally, the 'Toe Tappin’ Tuesdays' concert series has moved to Warwood Garden Park, and 'Pride on the Plaza' is set for June 8 at the Heritage Port Plaza. The article provides dates and locations for these and other festivals and activities throughout the summer.
4. <https://wheelingcvb.com/festivals/> - The 'Festivals & Annual Events' page on VisitWheelingWV.com lists upcoming events in Wheeling, including the 'St. Michael Parish Community Festival' from July 10-12, 2025, featuring live music, games, and food. The 'Grecian Festival' is scheduled for July 23-26, 2025, celebrating Greek culture and heritage with church tours, Greek cuisine, and traditional music. The 'Upper Ohio Valley Italian Heritage Festival' will take place from July 25-27, 2025, at Wheeling Heritage Port, highlighting Italian culture with food, music, and entertainment.
5. <https://www.greaterloveministrieswv.org/calendar/upper-ohio-valley-gospel-fest-2024/358> - The 'Upper Ohio Valley Gospel Fest 2024' event page details the festival held on July 14, 2024, at Heritage Port, Wheeling, WV. The program featured various gospel artists, including Min. James McDonald, Min. Anthony O’Neal, Percilla Speights, Julia Oakley, and others. The event was live-streamed over the church’s media page, Bethlehem Apostolic Temple and Shiloh Apostolic Faith Assembly Facebook pages, and the church's website. The page provides information on the performers and the live-streaming options for the event.
6. <https://www.gospellifewc.com/events/> - The 'Events' page of Gospel Life Community Worship Center lists upcoming events from June 15 to July 7, 2025. While specific details for July 2025 are not provided, the page indicates that events are scheduled during this period. The page is regularly updated to reflect the latest event information, and visitors are encouraged to check back for more details as the dates approach.
7. <https://www.intelligencer.net/news/community/2024/07/gospel-fest-happens-sunday-at-heritage-port/> - This article reports on the 'Upper Ohio Valley Gospel Fest' held on July 14, 2024, at Heritage Port in Wheeling. Organised by Bethlehem Apostolic Temple and Shiloh Apostolic Faith Assembly, the event featured gospel music, inspiration, and ministry. Performers included James McDonald, Anthony O’Neal, Julia Oakley, Percilla Speights, and others. The event aimed to bring gospel music back to Wheeling, with attendees experiencing a great blessing and joy through hand clapping, foot stomping, and gospel singing.