



Singing to millions –  
and with Obama

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The Leo High School Choir performed on "America's Got Talent" in 2025. Photo credit: "America's Got Talent"

When Kevin Wilson, a senior at Leo High School in Chicago, enrolled as a freshman in 2023, he was well aware of the choir's stellar reputation. He'd been singing since elementary school, but during the pandemic, he lost his motivation to sing.

The Leo High School Choir would draw him back in.

"My first-period freshman year class was right across from the choir room," Wilson explains. "I was singing in the hallway; I was singing everywhere to get the choir director's attention. She heard me, and I auditioned for it. In my sophomore year, the door opened right up for me."

In 2000, LaDonna Hill joined as Leo High School's choir director. For 25 years, as the choir director, she led the students in performances at school, community and sporting events. On June 10, 2025, Hill directed the Leo High School Choir as they took the national stage, performing a rousing rendition of "Born for This" by The Score on TV's "America's Got Talent."

Hill, although retired from her position in May 2025, led the 22-member choir in a choreographed performance. All four AGT judges voted yes to move them forward in the competition. Leo High School Choir finished in fourth place in the Season 20 finale.

"One thing I learned is about having faith in growing," Wilson says. "In every rehearsal we had, it was about believing. Faith without work is nothing. You can believe all day, but you've got to put the time in. If we hadn't put in the time, we wouldn't have been successful in the competition."

Airtime on AGT brought a lot of attention to the choir. Former President Barack Obama surprised them with a visit



The choir's repertoire includes choral music, classical anthems, pop and R&B. Photo credit: Yolanda Sandifer-Horton

on Dec. 14, 2025, while they were practicing in the school's choir room. Obama sang along with the choir to "U Will Know," a song by D'Angelo.

## Building harmony

The Leo High School Choir is a non-audition ensemble: Students don't need singing experience to participate. Lonnie Norwood, choir director since fall 2025, places students according to what they need to reach their potential.

"We bring all of those kids – wherever they are, whatever their level – together," Norwood says, "to form something very special."

The choir's repertoire includes choral music and classical anthems to pop and R&B. They sing African American sacred music and global African diaspora songs from Ghana, Nigeria South Africa. Music from Corsica, Cuba, Italy and Republic of Georgia is part of their selections.

The choir sings at the school's mass services and assemblies, and has performed for dignitaries, senators, at the state Capitol, and for local and national parades. In the past year, they've traveled to Florida, Washington, D.C., and San Diego, California.

"It's amazing to see a high school choir working at this magnitude," Norwood says. "I even have to pinch myself, and say, 'They're still students first.' We are grateful to have that spotlight on us but also understand and know the importance of honoring the well-rounded education they receive at Leo."

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**On the cover:** The Leo High School Choir with former President Barack Obama. Photo credit: Dr. Shaka Rawls. Article by Vanessa Infanzon. Published 10 times per year, *Unity* is exclusively distributed to clients of Thompson Hospitality and Compass Group, both world leaders in foodservice. To contact us, send an email to [marketing@thompsonhospitalityjv.com](mailto:marketing@thompsonhospitalityjv.com). ©2026 Thompson Hospitality and Compass Group. Produced by [Content Spectrum](https://www.content-spectrum.com).

