I hear that Choral Evensong is being revived in some Episcopal parishes. What is the history of Choral Evensong and its significance today?

The Canonical Hours are daily times of prayer, historically offered in an orderly course eight times each day. As services apart from the Eucharist, these Daily Offices include psalms, canticles, antiphons, responsories, hymns, verses and responses, readings, and prayers.

Since 1549, with the first prayer book of the Anglican Communion, this cycle of eight offerings of daily prayer has been simplified and telescoped to form liturgies called Morning and Evening Prayer, or Matins and Evensong. This corporate worship, offered twice a day, includes the recitation of psalms, the reading of Scripture, the singing of canticles and prayer. A hymn may be sung after the collects.

Choral Evensong is sung Evening Prayer; the choir sings the preces and responses, the psalmody, the canticles (Magnificat and Nunc dimittis) and an anthem while the congregation participates vicariously -- listening attentively to the choir's and precentor's offering of music and to the proclamation of the Scriptures.

In the Daily Office, the church offers perpetual praise, thanksgiving and prayer to God. Time is sanctified by this continuous offering. In the Baptismal Covenant, we promise, with God’s help, to continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in these prayers.

The significance of the service today, in addition to sanctifying the day with an offering of praise and prayer, is as a means of outreach and evangelism. Where Evensong is well done, people will climb every step of a cathedral or church to hear it. It is also a means of edification -- the “beauty of holiness” is nowhere more easily to be found than in this rite when it is carefully sung, when the readings are thoughtfully proclaimed and when ceremony is provided exquisitely. What is more, our ears and souls can be bathed in beautiful music; some of the most significant Anglican choral music has been written for Evensong.

A statement from Coventry Cathedral says:

"Evensong ... is a very tiny fragment of something else: It is a fragment of the worship which is offered to God by Christian people every hour of the 24 in every part of the world. When you come to Evensong ... it is as if you were dropping in on a conversation already in progress -- a conversation between God and [people] which began long before you were born and will go on long after you are dead.

Evensong is drawn almost entirely from the Bible. Its primary purpose is to proclaim the wonderful works of God in history and in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Its secondary purpose is to evoke from the worshiper a response of praise, penitence, prayer and obedience.”