

**AMERICAN FEDERATION
PUERI CANTORES
Conductors Seminar
Sunday, August 3, 2008**

**The Nuts and Bolts of Choir Organization: Structuring to Enhance Community
Presented by Mandy Brigham, Associate Artistic Director
Los Angeles Children's Chorus**

Choir as Community

A choir is an artistic community
A church or parish school choir is a sacred community

"Good Teaching is Good Organization"

Thoughtful organization is inextricably linked to development of a strong, vital
artistic and sacred community

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Recruitment and sustaining membership

Word-of-mouth: sense of community, sense of belonging
Recruitment letters - with registration form, schedule and highlights of
upcoming season
-to former singers
-to Sunday School students in appropriate grades
-to parish school students in appropriate grades
"Audition" during school day
Pastor, teachers, administrators - educate and enlist
Bring a Friend to Choir Day
Open House

Planning: long range

Early summer: meet with appropriate person (pastor, principal) to
determine Sundays children will sing, dates of concerts
Set every weekly rehearsal, looking to school calendars, holidays, etc.
Coordinate with other departments in the church to avoid conflict
Reserve all spaces for weekly rehearsals, rehearsals in sanctuary, etc.
Schedule Parent Meeting/Orientation
Schedule events that enhance community
Retreat
Choir exchange
Tour
End of year event
Repertoire - select all of your music and order it during the summer

Beginning the year: Parent Orientation/Meeting-opportunity to educate and involve

Introductions, explanation of philosophy, expectations, policies
Distribute and go over folder/packet with the following information:
Calendar for entire year, highlighting special events
Choir handbook
Attendance policy
Choir roster, birthday roster

(Beginning of the year packet, continued)

Snack schedule - include specifics about what to bring

Uniform protocol (concert and casual uniforms)

Go over Chorister Agreement - important!

Sign-up sheets for parental involvement/assistance (also on registration form)-
utilize their skills and abilities!

Rehearsal assistants (sign up for one week per month); also assist when
singing in church

Chaperones for off-site events - may be limited to rehearsal assistants

Web site, email, communications

Receptions; food for longer events

Assemble folders/materials for beginning of year

Parent instrumentalists

Open Rehearsal

Part of Parent Orientation or hold early in year; perhaps combine with dessert

Opportunity to educate parents on what children are learning and experiencing

Demonstrate the spiritual, intellectual, artistic, and physical aspects of what
goes on in rehearsal

Planning: weekly rehearsal - before the rehearsal begins

Meticulous planning is a powerful strategy!

Arrive very early to have all at the ready well before choristers arrive so that you are
available to them

Seating cards on seats (see below)

Crates:

Folders in music crate (choristers retrieve) or on seats

Rehearsal crate-extra folders; extra music; pencils, etc.

Handout crate

Choristers bring water; extra water in room

Rehearsal agenda on board: choristers put music in order

"Assignment" on board for those ready early

Gathering time: utilize depending on your situation

-snack, sing with individuals

Attendance: sign in sheets; younger children like an attendance board with stickers

Begin on time no matter how many are there

Gather attention with a signal such as | u | (also used during rehearsal)

Planning: seating

A careful seating plan is an invaluable asset!

Considerations: arrangement of stronger/weaker singers to get best tone

Strong singers on ends of rows, in middle (between sections), in back of others

Seat with mentors or partners: younger by older, experienced by inexperienced,
a singer who can't match pitch next to/between one(s) who can

Height is a factor, but not most important determinant

Consider personality and behavior issues

Use a file folder with names on colored post-its to make changes easily

As performance/concert approaches, rehearse in order in which you'll be standing

Planning: making the most of rehearsal time - plan every minute!

Prayer

Stretching – time to center, focus (no chat)

Warm-ups – select carefully; use diagnostic/prescriptive approach;
create warm-ups isolating difficult passages in music

Begin with something they know well

Place most challenging pieces near beginning when energy is high

Alternate between more accessible/more challenging pieces

Use a planning sheet that establishes goals for each piece

Consider using Latin canon/round as “etude”

Be sure to move in rehearsal: kinesthetic involvement enhances learning; at
least stand up, sit down, use arms; more if space allows

Utilize parent assistants; let them know whether or not you would like them to
circulate in room

Continually assess what’s going on, student involvement; modify plan as
necessary

Have a few quick “change of pace” activities at the ready

Dismissal:

Go over announcements on board

Thank choristers; let them know you appreciate their efforts

Seat cards remain on seats; folders on seats or return to crate

Pick up handouts, choir letters on way out

Beginning the year: first rehearsal

Introductions (may take more than one week)

Establish rehearsal procedures from the beginning!

Chorister agreement-go over

Communication

Handouts –color for each choir; distribute and post on website

Email – use for anything that’s not part of the regular routine

Weekly choir letter

Announcements on board

Website

Chorister Leadership

Librarians, equipment managers, section leaders, mentors (formal or
informal)

Choir council

End of year event

End of year picnic, party

Awards – Perfect and “Almost perfect” attendance

Present each member with certificate

Graduating members – honor, speak

Invaluable resource: *Lifeline for Children’s Choir Directors* by Jean Ashworth Bartle

“The sound of children’s voices, when trained correctly and artistically, speaks directly
to the human soul.”

-Jean Ashworth Bartle, Founding Conductor, Toronto Children’s Chorus