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SAINT NICHOLAS SCHOLA CANTORUM
(Diocesan Children's Choral Program)

CHORISTER HANDBOOK

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Mission Statement: *Saint Nicholas Schola Cantorum* (Diocesan Children's Choral Program) – The *Schola Cantorum's* ("school of singers") aim is to teach, prepare and form children and young adults in grades 3-12 to participate in music ministry and life long praise of God through sacred song. By focusing on singing hymns, part-singing, Gregorian chant, polyphonic and choral works, the goal of this choir is the cultivation and further development of: musicianship, sight-singing, music history, religious education, liturgical formation and the spirituality of sacred music.

"The treasury of sacred music is to be preserved and fostered with great care.
Choirs must be diligently developed, especially in cathedral churches."
Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy, Article 114

"Music is the means of recapturing the original joy and beauty of Paradise."
St. Hildegard von Bingen



WELCOME! And congratulations on your decision to become a choir member!

Choir membership, like all things of real value, is based on a serious purpose. Your choir experience will be a happy one, filled with fun, fellowship and many new things to learn and do. But it is important that you understand the basic purpose for participation. You can discover that reason in this handbook.

Here are two important questions for you to think about and to answer:

1. Do you understand your role as a choir member?
2. Do you believe, down deep in your heart, that you can be an important part of your choir and that you want to do all that you can to serve God and your church community as a choir member?

Perhaps, after reading carefully and thinking about the next few pages, you will be able to respond better to these questions.

For the common things of every day,
God gave us speech in the common way.
For the deeper things we think and feel,
God gave the poets thoughts to reveal.
For the hidden depths these words cannot reach,
God gave us music, the soul's own speech.

Anonymous

WE WORSHIP WHEN WE SING

Our choir exists for one very special purpose: the *worship* of God. And what is worship?

Someone has said that worship is becoming aware of the presence of God all around us. Worship is the joyful recognition of the greatness of God's love for us. Worship brings joy because it brings us to God and God to us. Worship is an honor which is reserved for God alone. As Catholics, we are privileged to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The Mass is our highest form of prayer and is the official prayer of the Church. The Church teaches the Mass is our "source and summit" and is the *most* important of everything we do. In addition to the Mass, we also have other types of prayer, such as the Liturgy of the Hours (sometimes called Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer) as well as devotionals such as Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and Stations of the Cross. Worship – in all its forms – is very important for us as individuals and as a group.

When we worship, we usually make music either by singing or by playing an instrument. Music helps us to feel close to God, to be quiet and listen for God's voice, to be able to talk with God and pray. We bring our thankful offering through the beauty of the sounds that we make as we sing and play.

The happy fellowship that we feel when we sing together leads us to worship as a group, too. Sometimes, as a group, we can create and experience a special worship feeling not possible to us as individuals. It is then that assembly, priest, choir and organist all worship *together*.

We join our hearts and voices in choir to worship God.

WHY DO WE HAVE CHOIRS?

1. Singing is a special way in which we worship God.
2. When a choir sings songs of praise, devotion and prayer with beauty and sincerity, it helps the entire assembly worship, too.
3. Music is a language and we use it to express the thoughts and ideas we have of God, the church, the world and all people.
4. God created music and gave us the gift of a singing voice. God expects us to make use of that talent given to us.
5. Many times music helps to understand and to respond to the message of God's word.
6. Sometimes, through music, the choir speaks to God for the assembly, as in hymns, responses and songs of praise such as the *Gloria*. Sometimes, through special songs and anthems, the choir helps to bring deeper understanding of the message of God who speaks through scripture.

7. One of our obligations as Christians is to support the Church with our prayers, our gifts and our services. The choir is a very special way in which children and young people can use their gift of music to serve the church.
8. Choirs form a group in which we can respond to God's commands which are found in scripture:
 - Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into the Lord's presence with singing. (Psalm 100:2)
 - Sing the glory of God's name; give to God glorious praise! (Psalm 66:2)
 - Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with the grace of God in your heart. (Colossians 3:16)

WHAT DO WE SING?

Chants and Liturgical Music – The choir leads and supports the assembly in the singing of psalms and canticles. These do not have a distinct melody and are really musical speech. The choir also leads the assembly in singing the Act of Penitence (Lord, Have Mercy or Kyrie), Gloria, Psalm, Gospel Acclamation, Sanctus, Mystery of Faith, Great Amen and Agnus Dei (Lamb of God).

Choral Responses or Dialogues – Usually very short acclamations, or responses, sung in dialogue with the Priest or Deacon. An example would be when the Priest sings "the Lord be with you" and our response would be "And with your spirit."

Hymn – A song of praise or adoration to God. Usually it has three or four stanzas and is sung by the choir and assembly. It has a clearly marked rhythm in both music and words.

Anthem – A composition set to words which tell some spiritual truth or words which are taken directly from the Bible. It is longer and more difficult than a hymn and is sung by the choir alone.

We sing many different kinds and styles of music. Some may be in English and others may be in Latin, Greek, German, Italian or other foreign language. Some music may be in unison, sometimes we sing a descant or even in two or three parts. The music has been written at many different times in church music history and range from the earliest written hymns and chants to the anthems being written by great composers today. Some music is rhythmic and joyous, some is quiet and thoughtful, some uses instruments such as the organ, flute, or trumpet and some is for voices alone (a' cappella). But all of it is beautiful and is sung to worship God.

Besides the music we sing in worship, we also learn special music for programs, concerts and other seasonal celebrations.

WHAT DO WE LEARN?

Your choir rehearsal will be a very busy time. You will be expected to listen carefully to your director and to do your best to follow directions. It will be a time of learning to do many interesting things. Here are just a few of them.

We learn:

- How the choir can add to the beauty and meaning of the Mass.
- To sing and to love many of the great hymns and chants of the church.
- To sing with a beautiful tone and to develop good singing habits.
- To sing in tune and to match pitches accurately.
- To feel and to respond to many rhythms.
- To listen carefully to the music and to respond to it.
- To read music.
- To learn how the music is designed.
- How to pronounce the words of the text so everyone listening can understand easily.
- To sing expressively.
- How music can add enjoyment to our lives.
- How music adds fun to the fellowship of the group.
- To learn about the different seasons of the Church's year.
- To learn texts in a different language.
- How we find deep satisfaction as we serve Christ and the church.

HOW DO I FIT IN?

Now that you have become a member of the children's choral program you have many new responsibilities. We want our choir to sing and serve well. In order to meet the high standards we have set, every chorister must be responsible.

Here are some things that will be expected of you and your family:

Make every effort to attend all rehearsals and liturgies as scheduled.

- If you are sick or there is an emergency in your family, notify your director ahead of time.
- Bring home any notices or schedules given you by the director at rehearsal or at Mass.
- With your parents, mark on the calendar the dates you are scheduled to sing.
- Choir is important! Don't let other activities interfere with your being in your place.
- Be on time.

- Be attentive and cooperate during rehearsals and help to establish a learning atmosphere. Pay attention to the instruction of your director.
- Learn your music, both words and notes, so you will be well prepared.
- With your parents, listen to various recordings of the music you are singing! Most of our music can be found on YouTube.
- Always watch your director while you are singing.
- Be quiet and reverent in church. If your choir is to lead in worship, you must do so by your music, your appearance and your attitudes.
- Tell your parents about the things you learn in choir. Invite them to visit during the rehearsal.
- Take good care of your music and keep it in order.
- Invite your friends to join the choir.

CHOIR BASICS: EXPECTATIONS FROM REHEARSAL TO MASS

Registration:

- All choristers must have a completed registration form prior to singing.

Calendar:

- Please refer to your calendar for all scheduled rehearsals and liturgies. If a rehearsal or liturgy is added to the schedule, you will receive an e-mail and a follow-up memo in rehearsal.

Music:

- Please purchase a 1 ½ inch black three ring binder. Please have 10 dividers clearly marked: "Processional"; "Kyrie"; "Gloria"; "Psalm"; "Gospel Acclamation"; "Offertory"; "EPA" (abbreviation for "Eucharistic Prayer Acclamations"); "Communion"; "Anthems" and "Recessional".
- Once you get the music in rehearsal, listen to your directors and file the music under each divider. Your music will already be punched.
- Your music is on loan to you through the Cathedral Music Ministry. You may mark your music if needed in pencil. Do not use pen or marker.
- If working on a difficult piece of music, try to look at the music between rehearsals and listen to recordings. If you can play an instrument, try to review your part!

Absences:

- If you know you will be missing a rehearsal or Mass, please let your director know via-email or phone call. Having more than two (3) *unexcused* absences in a semester will result in a parent/director conference.

Rehearsals:

- Security and safety is our top priority, therefore all children *must not* be "dropped off" at the Cathedral nor be expected to "wait outside" for pick-up. We thank you for your strict adherence.
- All choristers must be signed in and signed out of every choir rehearsal by an approved guardian. No child will be released out of the choir rehearsal

without an approved guardian. If you are picking up children other than your own, please sign out every child you are collecting.

- Rehearsals are held on Thursday afternoons from 4:00-5:00 p.m. in Bishop Bradley Hall (“Lower Hall” of the Cathedral). Please use the wheel chair access ramp door located on the Bishop Bradley Lane side of the Cathedral. All other doors will be locked.
- Sometimes, rehearsal may not be held in the Lower Hall and may be held in either the choir loft, chapel or the Cathedral Library. We will try to note this on the calendar. If a rehearsal is not to be held in the Lower Hall, we will notify you in advance via e-mail and a sign will be posted on the Bishop Bradley Lane side door indicating where to go.
- Rehearsals are canceled whenever the Manchester public school system cancels or the Cathedral parish cancels. An e-mail will be sent, a notification placed on the Cathedral website and a message left on the Music Office phone extension. If in doubt, please call 603-622-6404, x31.
- Parents are welcome to sit and observe the rehearsal from the back of the hall. We kindly ask that there be no use of cell phones or loud conversations during this time.
- Please make sure you **bring your binder to rehearsals!**

Masses:

- Singing at Mass is an important part of the choir’s mission and must be taken seriously.
- Proper behavior is to be kept at all times during the Mass and while in the Cathedral.
- Make sure you bring your binder with you to Mass!
- We may have room in the choir loft for any parents who would like to chaperone. Any adult assisting with supervision must have completed all Diocesan safety requirements. Please speak with the directors prior to the beginning of Mass.
- An important term to learn is “choir call time.” The choir call time is the time you need to be in your seat and ready to begin singing: it does not mean the time you are *arriving* at the Cathedral. We typically do not have a lot of time between the call time and the start of the Mass, so please be punctual. Typically, the choir call time for Sunday morning is 8:00 a.m. to warm-up and prepare for the 8:30 a.m. Mass. Other call times are announced at rehearsal.

Dress:

- *Mass* and other liturgies: In order to achieve a uniform look, all choristers will wear a solid white top (no lettering or images) with black bottom. Girls may wear a black skirt below the knee. Appropriate footwear is required (no flip-flops, sneakers, etc).
- *Concerts* and other events: Depending on the event, the choristers may wear either the white/black dress (identical to Mass) or solid black.

- We will investigate the option of having an inexpensive polo shirt with embroidered *Saint Nicholas Schola Cantorum* logo. We will keep you informed.

MISCELLANEOUS

Pueri Cantores:



- *Saint Nicholas Schola Cantorum*, being based at the Cathedral of Saint Joseph and being the Diocesan Children's Choral Program, is affiliated with the American Federation Pueri Cantores. Pueri Cantores is an International nonprofit and is the official choral organization for the Catholic Church. AFPC organizes Choral Festivals and masses for parish and school choirs in cathedrals and other churches around the United States. Local choirs learn the same repertoire, so that festival concerts feature a large chorus of young people who sing together as one. Currently, 400 choirs throughout the world belong to the organization and represent 10,000 children. For additional information, see their website at: www.pcchoirs.org

St. Nicholas:

- Our *Schola Cantorum* is named after Saint Nicholas (15 March 270 – 6 December 343). The great veneration with which St. Nicholas has been honored for many ages and the great number of altars and churches all over the world that are dedicated in his memory are testimonials to his wonderful holiness and the glory he enjoys with God. Because of the many miracles attributed to his intercession, he is also known as "Nicholas the Wonderworker". He is revered and commemorated among Anglican, Catholic, Lutheran and Orthodox Christians. He is the patron saint of children and students.

Choristers Prayer

Bless, O Lord, us Thy servants who minister in Thy temple.
Grant that what we sing with our lips we may believe in our hearts,
and what we believe in our hearts we may show forth in our lives.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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THE CHOIRSTER'S PLEDGE

I accept membership

in the

Saint Nicholas Schola Cantorum.

I will use the talent, which God has given me,

to sing praises during the upcoming year.

I realize the important tasks and responsibilities
associated with the choir and fully commit myself

for the Music Year of 2016-2017.

Chorister's Signature