

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

\* \* \* \* \*

**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