



AMERICAN FEDERATION PUERI CANTORES

The Vatican based official student choral organization of the Catholic Church



Fundraising Tips for Your Choir

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My otherwise phenomenal professors in graduate school did me a grave injustice by failing to mention that as a professional church musician I would not only need to be a serviceable organist, conductor and vocal coach, but additionally, I would have to possess all of the knowledge and traits of the best sports psychologists, teachers, parents, communicators, disciplinarians, financial officers and... FUNDRAISERS! It is possible that I would rather have labored my life away on a Roman galley ship than to have been placed in charge of fundraising for any institution. However, the Lord is full of surprises.

In May of 2014, the Foundation for the Sacred Arts and Music invited our choristers (Most Pure Heart of Mary Schola Cantorum) to go on pilgrimage to Rome. Not one to be bothered by details, I readily accepted the invitation before giving a thought to how the choir would pay for it. By the Grace of God we made it happen.

I still don't qualify as a specialist in the field, nevertheless, I offer the following suggestions to my fellow musicians in hopes that someone, somewhere, toiling and struggling to raise more money than his house is worth, might find in them a ray of hope.

Prayer: However cliché it might sound for the Catholic musician to give a perfunctory nod to the necessity of prayer, I cannot stress enough how important prayer is to your cause. I was faced with the task of getting 43 choristers to Rome, most of whom needed serious financial help, and for a year-and-a-half my daily Rosary intention was for the success of raising the necessary funds. I offered Our Blessed Mother a sincere prayer of thanksgiving after returning from Rome and learning from our finance office that I had \$17 and some odd cents left in the account!

Ask for Help: Call together a small group of parents who have experience fundraising and ask for their assistance. Not only does it spread around an otherwise overwhelming responsibility, but it creates a sense of ownership that they will pass on to other parents and ultimately to the entire choir. I would caution that however you go about fundraising, be sure to work closely with your pastor and financial office and any other necessary parties, otherwise you could quickly find yourself in hot water with no way out save resignation.

Involve the Entire Choir: Whether a chorister needs financial assistance or not, he/she is part of a

musical family and bears the responsibility to pitch in. There is nothing like international travel to bring your choir and chorister families together and the process of getting there is often as unifying and as much fun as the trip itself.

Bakes Sales are Useless: I realize that Sacred Tradition almost behooves one to have a bake sale to pay for anything in the Catholic Church, from fixing the leaking roof to taking the choir to Rome, but they simply aren't worth the time and effort for the small return they provide. I would suggest the following:

The Scholarship Letter: Without a doubt, the scholarship letter was the most successful fundraising tool I encountered, one which allowed three choristers from the same family to raise the entire cost of their trip.

My assistants and I created a stock letter briefly describing the choir and the trip, which choristers could send to anyone they wished, including family, friends and acquaintances. In the letter, singers asked the recipients if they would be willing to sponsor them for so many trip miles. Choristers included a picture of themselves in the letter (printed on parish letterhead) along with a small card detailing how much it would cost to sponsor the chorister for certain mileage amounts, with boxes for the receivers to mark and send back in a return envelope (included in the letter) along with their checks. Every letter went out in a parish envelope to make it look very official.

The Scholarship Letter could easily be your choir's main form of fundraising, but I would save it for only the most important of trips.

Special Per-Plate Spaghetti Dinners: People love to eat and are often willing to buy a \$15, \$20 or \$25 per-plate spaghetti dinner (spaghetti is cheap) if they know it is for a good cause. If your choristers are fundraising for a trip within the United States this is a great route to take. One child might easily sell sixteen \$25 tickets to extended family and close friends alone and raise \$400. All the better if you gather old wine bottles and candles and purchase inexpensive checked tablecloths for decorations. Ask each chorister to bring a strand of white Christmas lights to hang and ditch the glaring overhead lights in the parish hall. Everyone will have a great time, especially if the choristers sing a couple of numbers for entertainment. Money cannot buy the goodwill this will create in parishioners toward the choir.

Recording a CD: Lastly, I would consider recording a CD, perhaps of Christmas music, to sell. Family and friends are happy to hear their children and neighbors "on recording" and are willing to donate to the cause. Recording a CD also gives you the chance to hear what your choir really sounds like if you don't record them already. You will hear things you haven't heard before, more often bad than good, and provide you with the chance to fix them. I found that between recording a CD and the extra rehearsals for Rome, our choristers grew musically in a way they wouldn't have otherwise. Be aware, though, that you will need professional help recording a CD, which could be expensive if you don't have knowledgeable parents and friends willing to assist.

I can't stress enough how much I encourage directors to travel with their choirs if they haven't yet done so. Just don't put the cart before the horse and bite off more than you and your singers can chew. Like anything in life, I would go about our trip to Rome differently if I had to do it over again (God willing), but I wouldn't trade the experience for the world. *Bon Voyage!*