

***HELP!***  
***I have to lead the choir***



**HOW A RELUCTANT ORGANIST  
CAN BECOME  
*A COMPLETE CHURCH MUSICIAN***

**OR: How not to quarrel with your Vicar,  
and: What to do when you don't know what to do!**

by

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**'John Bertalot's books ... are winners.'**

**'If we all acted on your advice our choirs would be flourishing  
and undoubtedly the best in the world.'**

*A review by the Royal School of Church Music*

## Dedicated

to the Vicar and members of the choir of  
St Anne's Church, Fence-in-Pendle, Lancashire

who,

after my retirement from

full-time music-making in churches and cathedrals on both sides of the Atlantic  
and around the world,

were such wonderful friends

during my most happy and rewarding 11 years with them  
as their organist and choirmaster.

***The fruit of much of our creative co-operation can be seen throughout this book.***

*See their photo on the front cover:*

Back row: James (leader on Cantoris), Philip and Andrew (basses),

Geoff, Geoffrey and Brian (tenors),

Front row: Dorothy, Edith, Emmie, Pat and Becky (altos),

JB

(Sopranos) Kathryn, Jenny, Jean, Margaret and Caroline (leader on Decani)

and to Joyce who so enjoyed our music that, in 2010, she gave us £500 for a choir outing.

**After the dedication of our new organ, 15 September 2002**



Vicar Richard, Church Treasurer Stuart, JB,  
Ernest Hart (MD Copeman Hart organs), John Hawley (Archdeacon of Blackburn),  
and Organ Committee Chairman Geoff.

***With my thanks to The Revd & Mrs Richard & Gwyneth Adams for their careful and so constructive proof reading,  
and to The Revd Dr Ian Stockton, Canon Chancellor of Blackburn Cathedral, for his assistance with Chapter 11.***

***And my thanks to Andrew Stringer who enabled this book to be published online.***

# ***HELP! / have to lead the choir***

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# 1: Five Essential Preliminaries

***So, you've been asked to lead the music at your church: congratulations!***

But you may not be an organist or a choir-trainer.

Or maybe you are, and want to make sure that you do a good job at your new church.

How can you make a real success of this new venture?

There are **five** matters you need to address immediately:



**1** Cultivate a creative and happy working relationship with your minister.

***This is vital*** and cannot be taken for granted, so it needs to be worked at – like a good marriage!

*This will be one of your ongoing top priorities. See [pp 45-48](#)*

**2** Agree the financial details – contract, etc. See [page 5](#)



**3** The choir (if there is one) may be small and probably disheartened.

Discover how you can transform them (and yourself) into a *vibrant* part of the church's spiritual, musical and social community.

See [pp 20-44](#)



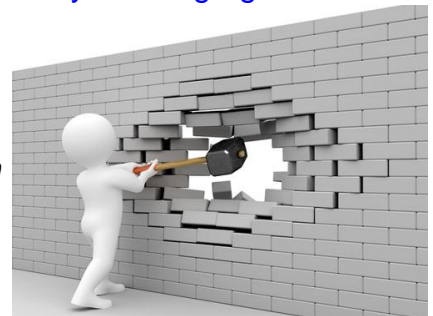
**4** Work at promoting **creative relationships** with the members of your congregation.

Why?

Because there's a 'them-and-us' syndrome built into your job as music-leader: the robed people in the Chancel and the 'other' people in the Nave.

***This invisible, yet very real wall needs to be taken down brick by brick*** so that you can be seen as a person who creates harmony not only in music, but also in personal relationships within your whole church.

*That's what this book is about, especially [p.13](#)*



**5** If you're not an organist you need to learn to play the organ – that's obvious.

Discover how best to achieve this. See [pp 6-19](#)

But let it be said that there's no better instrument to encourage a congregation to sing rhythmically than a **piano**! So it's OK for you to play the piano (if the church has one) until you are more comfortable with playing the organ.



***So, let's get started!***

*PS: Inclusive language:*

*I've tried to be inclusive, but where 'he' is written, please feel free to read it as 'she'... etc.*

## 2: Finance – Contract and More

*'Surely I don't need a contract? I'm only a part-time organist.'*

Oh yes, you do!

For example, what will be the arrangements when you are on holiday? Will it be your responsibility to find a substitute?

And what about remuneration? Will you play for free, or just for expenses, or will the church offer you a salary?



*I don't need a salary; I'm happy just to help out!*

But that won't be fair on your successor who may well need a salary. If your church gets into the habit of not paying you, they are unlikely to want to pay your successor.

*When I, JB, became organist of a village church in my retirement, I offered to play just for travelling expenses (the round journey by car was 30 miles). **Expenses are not taxable.** So I pledged that same amount to the church plus Gift Aid (which brought in an extra 25%). This meant that the more the church paid me in expenses the more they received in income!*

And what about fees for weddings and funerals? [See chapter 16.](#)

There are many things that need to be agreed between you and the church authorities.

And so you need to agree with your minister and the church treasurer precisely what your own duties and responsibilities are, for this will involve church finance, and more.

It may seem obvious that you are to play for services and train the choir (if there is one). But how far do your responsibilities extend for the choir? Who will choose the hymns? How often could anthems be sung? Who will take responsibility for arranging the tuning of the organ?

### **Immediate assistance is readily available:**

The Royal School of Church Music is very helpful in providing suggestions for all these questions – and many more. This is a body which was set up last century specifically to help local churches with their music, and its influence is now worldwide.

[www.rscm.com](http://www.rscm.com)    [www.rscmamerica.org](http://www.rscmamerica.org)

Your local Organists' Association could help with suggesting a scale of fees for Weddings and Funerals. And they will have a list of organists who could step in to play when you are away. See their parent body: [www.iao.org](http://www.iao.org)

In the USA the American Guild of Organists offers similar helpful advice and so does the Association of Anglican Musicians.

[www.agohq.org](http://www.agohq.org)    [www.anglicanmusicians.org](http://www.anglicanmusicians.org)

And in Canada contact the Royal Canadian College of Organists. [www.rcco.ca](http://www.rcco.ca)

And in Australia and New Zealand: [www.anzco.org](http://www.anzco.org)

It would be very helpful if your church were affiliated to the RSCM, for not only would you receive the fullest help in these matters, but also you would receive a quarterly magazine in which there are many articles to help you and your choir to 'worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness'. The AGO and the AAM also publish helpful magazines.

You should also go through the orders of services with your Minister and mark exactly when and what you should play, because the smooth flow of the services is the responsibility of both of you, in fairly equal measure. [See also Chapter 18](#)



### 3: Learning to Play the Organ

(If you're already an organist, skip these next two chapters)

Many organists began their careers as pianists – some of them became distinguished recitalists, so take heart: you're in the right place to begin to become a practical organist. There are several steps you need to take from your very first day.

#### i GET TO KNOW YOUR CHURCH ORGAN



#### Tidy

Almost certainly your predecessor will have accumulated piles of books and papers around the console. Many of us, alas, treat our organ consoles as musical dustbins. So spring-clean the console: wash the keys with a damp cloth; find what books are absolutely necessary – such as your hymn book and prayer book – and put everything else into neat piles in the vestry to be gone through later with a helpful member of your choir.

#### Box

Provide yourself with a small box in which you can keep a pen and pencil, a sharpener and an eraser, some tissues, some semi-adhesive labels (for marking music), a small pair of scissors, and also some mints. A mint taken (for medicinal purposes during sermons!) is a great picker-upper.

Also in the box there should be **two notebooks**.

**The first notebook** is for ideas which will occur to you on Sundays: ideas to help the choir sing even better, ideas to try for yourself, ideas to discuss with your minister. You'll forget these ideas if you don't make a note of them immediately.

Also you should make a note of things that went badly in the service, which need to be addressed at your next choir rehearsal – and also things that went well, so that you may congratulate your choir at their next rehearsal.

**The second notebook** is for writing down faults which the organ has developed and which the tuner should rectify. Write the tuner's name, address, phone number and email in that book. Discover, from your minister, how often the organ has been tuned and what the financial arrangements are for the organ's upkeep.

## ii GET TO KNOW YOUR CONSOLE

*(NB: The console of a pipe organ and the console of a digital organ are similar. Unless the pipe organ has been rebuilt recently, the digital organ should be more up to date.)*

Is the placing of the organ bench comfortable? Is it the right height so that you can reach the bottom note on the pedals easily with your left foot, and the top note with your right?

Is the light adequate for you? Does it shine into the eyes of your choir or congregation? If it does, do something to correct it.

You need to sit comfortably. One distinguished organist told me that organists should 'sit like a singer' – poised. When you are sitting comfortably, you'll play better.

## iii A QUICK GUIDE TO THE STOPS

Sit at the console and pull out the stops one by one to discover which stops work on which manual and what sounds they make.

1 Stops marked 8ft are stops which play at pitch. i.e. When you play middle C, it sounds middle C. (This is not necessarily obvious.) It's called 8ft because the pipe of the lowest C on the keyboard is 8ft long. The C an octave higher is 4ft long, and the C an octave above that is 2ft long. Stops are marked in feet length. (*Organs haven't gone metric!*)

2 When you want to play louder, don't add an 8ft stop to another 8ft stop on the same manual, but add a 4ft and then a 2ft.

3 The main stops which you should use when playing hymns for the congregation are the Diapasons. They are sometimes called Principal or Octave or Fifteenth. A play-over of a hymn could be on 8ft and 4ft stops. Then add the 2ft to lead the singing.

There's another Diapason stop which plays a selection of very high notes. It's generally called Mixture. This stop adds sparkle to the organ sound and could be used for triumphant verses of hymns – but use it sparingly. (Some organists have a power-mad syndrome and play as loudly as possible as often as possible. Resist this temptation!)

4 The flutes are, of course, quieter, and could be used for playing softer music before a service. These can have any number of names. One of them could be Stopped Diapason. It's not a Diapason at all, but a flute.

5 And then there are the reed stops: Trumpet, Oboe, Cornopean... These could be used for really triumphant hymns (*Jesus Christ is risen today*). They're also jolly useful as solo stops. i.e. with a hand on one manual playing the accompaniment with softer stops, whilst the reed stop plays a solo melody. The Oboe and Clarinet stops are very useful for gentle solos.

6 Look up on the web names of organ stops. There you will find a comprehensive list, not only of names, but also a description of the sounds that the different stops make.

## iv PISTONS

Some organs have pistons, which are generally round buttons below each manual (keyboard). Try pressing these, one at a time, starting on the left (which is generally marked '1'). You should find that stops will 'come out' automatically so that, when you're playing a piece of music and want to change the combination of stops, all you have to do is to press the correct piston – instead of taking one hand off the keys to pull out (or push in) the stops you want (or don't want).

If the pistons on your organ are adjustable (and many of them are, these days), it's helpful to

arrange the pistons so that there's a crescendo, starting with piston No. 1 and going through to the last piston. To adjust a piston, use the 'setter piston' which is usually at the far left end under the lowest manual. Pull out the stops that you want, say, on piston No. 1, press the setter piston first, and hold it down while you press piston No. 1. Release both pistons, and you should find that your chosen set of stops comes out when you press piston No. 1.

And so make your own choice of stops for each piston:

On the **Great manual** you might choose:

1. Flute 8ft
2. Flutes 8ft and 4ft
3. Open Diapason 8ft
4. Add 4ft Principal (or Octave)
5. Add 2ft Fifteenth
6. Add Mixture

You may not be fortunate enough to have so many pistons, so you'll have to make a compromise choice while still making a crescendo.

On the **Swell manual** you might choose:

1. Gamba and Celeste. (This combination makes a restful sound.)
2. Gamba on its own, plus 8 & 4ft flutes
3. Add 8ft Diapason
4. Add 4ft Octave & 2ft
5. Add Mixture
6. Add Reeds (at 16, 8 and 4ft pitches – if the organ is a large one)

The Swell manual is so called because the pipes are in a box which can be opened or closed by using the Swell pedal. Put your whole foot on this pedal and open the box with your toes (to make the sound louder) and close it with your heel (to make the sound softer).

### **Stops on the Pedals.**

On most organs there's a helpful stop marked '*Great and Pedal Combinations coupled*'. When this stop is out, it means that when you press a piston on the Great manual, suitable pedal stops come out as well. So you can make a general crescendo on the Great and Pedal by using just the Great pistons.

So you need to return to adjusting the Great pistons but, this time, with the '*Gt. & Ped. Combs. Coupled*' stop out. Choose a steady crescendo for the pedal stops which will match the stops on the Great manual.

- 1 Bourdon or Subbass 16
- 2 Add 8ft Flute
- 3 Add Principal or Open Diapason 16
- 4 Add 8ft Octave. These stops should suffice for the remainder of the Great pistons.

But if you have a 16ft reed on the pedals, you might want to leave it alone for a while, for it is very loud and you need to be able to play very accurately with your feet before risking that stop!

**Stops on the Choir (or 'Positive') Manual.** (The Choir organ is usually the lowest of the three manuals – the Great being the middle manual, and the Swell the top manual.) Sometimes the Choir organ is also enclosed in a box to make the sounds more expressive.

These Choir stops are generally softer. So when adjusting the pistons on the Choir manual, begin with an 8ft Flute, add 4ft, then 2ft. It's helpful to have a Clarinet on its own on one of the last pistons should you need a soft solo reed stop for an organ piece.

When leading hymns, it's best to stay with just the Great and Swell – coupled. (Draw out Sw.



to Gt.) And with the Great and Swell coupled to the Pedal. (*Gt. to Ped., and Sw. to Ped.*)

## v PLAYING THE PEDALS

Buy yourself a pair of shoes which are light and as narrow as possible. If you play the organ in wide, heavy shoes, or in trainers, you will tend to play two notes at once, and also you'll be unable to feel where the notes are before you play them. (It would be like playing the piano with gloves on.)



You'll need to practise finding where the notes are on the pedal board.

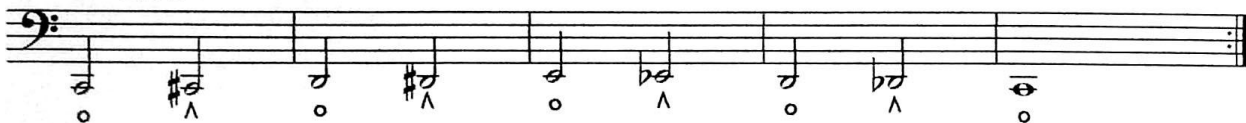
First, check your position on the organ stool; you should be sitting directly above middle D on the pedal board. For the moment, when finding out how well you can play the pedals, you may look at your feet and, to help you balance, hold onto the organ bench with both hands.

(Mendelssohn, when composing his organ sonatas, wrote them for organists whose pedal technique may not have been 100%. Therefore whenever he wrote a difficult pedal passage he always ensured that the music for the hands could either be played with one hand, whilst the other hand held onto the organ seat or, for especially difficult passages – such as the end of the first movement of his 3<sup>rd</sup> Sonata, both hands could hold onto the seat!)

Draw an 8ft pedal stop ... (why 8ft instead of 16ft? Because you want to hear what you are playing clearly; incessant 16ft tone can get very wearisome). Now try playing a few notes with your left foot. Can you play bottom C with your toe, and then equally easily with your heel? If not, then adjust the seat until you can.

Now try playing a few notes ***very slowly indeed*** with your left foot – heel on the 'white' notes, toe on the 'black' ones. Keep the foot forward so that you only need to swivel your ankle to play *legato*. (The sign for the heel is a circle, and for the toe, an inverted V.)

Ex. 1



Do this many times until you feel really comfortable. You will know that the essence of practising is to play so slowly that you know that the next note will be correct. If you practise too fast you will begin to make mistakes – and that's a waste of time.

Now try the next exercise, equally slowly.

You will notice, below, that the heel/toe signs for the left foot are placed under the note, whereas the signs for the right foot are placed over the note. So you will play the middle C on the pedal board with your right toe:

Ex. 2



Once you are comfortable with playing these two exercises, play them an octave higher with your right foot many times, ***very slowly indeed***:



Beware, when playing the higher C with your right toe (Ex. 4), that you don't let your foot slant sideways. Instead, swivel on your right heel when playing the B, and play the C feeling that your big toe is 'in charge'.

Play these exercises very many times until you feel really secure. To give yourself some variety in sound, try coupling the Great to the Pedal and draw a 4ft stop on the Great. This will enable you to hear even more clearly how you are doing.

### Feel for the gaps:

Now try playing these exercises without looking at your feet. Sit up straight and keep your eyes on the music. Feel, with you left foot, the space between bottom E flat and F sharp. Let you foot slide into this space. And then, still without looking, but feeling very confident, play low E with your left toe.

Then feel for the lowest C sharp with the right side of your left foot so that you can find bottom C. Play that bottom C with your toe. Then play it with your heel. Then, play the first exercise (Ex. 1) with your left foot – without looking.

Organists tend not to look at their feet, for they know where the notes are. Once you've begun to feel for the gaps it will become almost automatic, and so your confidence in playing the pedals will increase.

Now feel for the lower E flat-F sharp gap again with your left foot and play the second exercise, without looking (Ex.2).

And when you feel comfortable with that, try the two exercises with the right foot, (Exs. 3 & 4) without looking – feeling for the lower middle gap (B flat-C sharp) and the upper middle gap (E flat- F sharp).

By the way, when playing hymns or organ music, you can play the pedal notes with the nearest 'available foot'! These exercises are to help you feel where the pedal notes are.

And so when you feel you are ready, try playing chromatic scales in octaves with both feet very slowly indeed. First, by looking, and then, feeling for the appropriate gaps, and playing without looking, **very, very slowly indeed**.

Ex. 5

Exercise 5 consists of two staves in bass clef. The top staff shows a chromatic scale from G2 to B3, and the bottom staff shows a chromatic scale from F2 to G3. Each note has an accent (^) above it.

You will notice that you have to play two sets of consecutive white notes; the first is E natural to F. In order to get to the F sharp smoothly, when playing the F change gently from toe to heel, and then slide your heel slightly forward so that you can play the F sharp with your toe. The second is B natural to C. You might need to practise this movement with each foot on its own, and then, when you are comfortable, play these pairs of notes in context.

These exercises will enable you to know where the notes are even more securely. But when playing organ music, or hymns, much of your playing will be with your toes.

Two of the most important techniques for playing accurately are

- i Get to the note well before you have to play it. This applies not only to the hands, but also to the feet. A useful technique, for the fingers, is to practise the actual movement of the hands from one set of notes to the so-called difficult notes, without actually playing them. By doing this movement slowly, three or four times, you will find that those notes are no longer difficult. The same technique also works for the feet.
- ii Get into the habit, so that it is almost sub conscious, of feeling for the gaps with your feet to help you find the next note. Once you can do this, playing the right notes with your feet will become almost second nature.

And, of course, being a pianist, you could learn the music for the hands at home so thoroughly that you could almost play it from memory. This will enable you to concentrate more on playing the pedals.

## **ORGAN LESSONS**

**But there is no substitute for having a course of organ lessons.** If you are to become really comfortable as the organist of your church you will need some one-on-one guidance. Your local cathedral organist, or the assistant cathedral organist, should be able to help you. Your local organists' association would also be a good resource for finding a teacher. The parent organisation is The Incorporated Association of Organists. 'Google' [www.iao.org.uk](http://www.iao.org.uk)

The Royal College of Organists is an international body which could also help you. [www.rco.org.uk](http://www.rco.org.uk)

If you live in the USA contact the American Guild of Organists. [www.agohq.org](http://www.agohq.org)

And in Canada contact the Royal Canadian College of Organists. [www.rcco.ca](http://www.rcco.ca)

And in Australia and New Zealand: [www.anzco.org](http://www.anzco.org)

Many day- and week-long courses are held in the UK, and also in the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and in other parts of the world, designed specifically for the needs of choirs, choirmasters and also organists of all degrees of ability. Discover what is available in your area, through the above web sites and by contacting the Royal School of Church Music [www.rscm.com](http://www.rscm.com)

Discuss with your minister to discover if your church would help you with financing your attendance at some of these courses. They would be of benefit not only to you but also to your church, for you would come back full of ideas and with renewed enthusiasm to increase your own abilities.

But your main responsibility at the moment will be to lead the singing of hymns. See [chapters 5 & 6](#).

## *Skip if you're already an organist*

### 4: Preludes & Postludes

There are any number of collections of organ music for manuals only which you could play before and after services. 'Google' [manuals only](#).

You will find that you have to learn to play *legato* for, of course, there's no sustaining pedal on the organ – unlike the piano. So practise your manuals-only pieces on the piano first, without using the sustaining pedal. Once you have the notes firmly in your fingers, try playing them on the organ.

Again, a major difference between organ playing and piano playing is, of course, on the organ, however hard you press the keys, there's no difference in the volume of the sound.

But, once you have become more used to playing music on the organ, especially if you are having organ lessons, you may like to begin playing organ music with pedals. Again, there are many collections of these, so look up [easy organ music with pedals](#) on the web.

And then, after a time when you have become more proficient, try playing some of the [Short Eight Preludes and Fugues](#) attributed to Bach. Almost all the pedal parts are easy, and the music can be downloaded free from the web. (Bach used his toes for playing most of the pedal notes.)

And later, another most useful collection is Bach's [Orgelbüchlein \(Little Organ Book\)](#), which is a collection of chorale preludes for the church's year. Bach composed these for organ students to give them interesting music for the pedals. You will notice, if you buy an edition with the original chorales (hymn tunes and words) printed alongside, that each chorale prelude reflects the meaning of the words. For example, *Komm, Gott Schoepfer, heiliger Geist (Come, Holy Ghost)* is written in a triple metre, with the pedal playing a single note on every third beat – the Holy Spirit being, of course, the third Person of the Trinity! (Bach loved to paint pictures in his music.)

Another delightful chorale prelude in that set is based on the *Nunc Dimittis* when the aged Simeon greeted with joy the baby Jesus in the Temple. Bach uses his 'joy' motif in the hands (sets of three notes: long-short-short) but for the feet he seems to paint a picture of an old man hobbling along, who has to rest every so often. Yet another is *Durch Adam's Fall (When Adam fell)*. The pedal part is made up of sets of two notes which continually fall! It's all there to be seen and enjoyed if you know what the words mean.

Bach was always meticulous in conveying the spirit of the words – not many organists are aware that he did this – so make sure that the editions you buy have the chorales and the words on which they are based readily available. It's also worth exploring these chorale preludes because some of them are written for manuals only.

Most of us find, when playing music before and after services, that the congregation tends to talk. Therefore in my village church, when I retired from leading the music in cathedrals and major churches, I didn't play any music before services for the talking was pretty loud.

And as the congregation also wants to talk immediately a service is over, I limited my postludes to very short pieces, such as a movement from Handel's *Water Music*, or a Purcell *Trumpet Tune*.

Congregational talking also occurs in the most prestigious churches and cathedrals, so let your postludes be short.



But you might like to look at this:

### **Congregational notes**

There will be occasions when a special postlude is called for.

My congregation found that it helped them to appreciate postludes when I prepared a short programme note for them, explaining what it was that they are about to hear. (These were run off on the church's photocopying machine, and handed out as worshippers arrived.)



For example, when a new pedal stop was added to our organ I played Bach's Great A minor Prelude which displays the pedal department so effectively.

Therefore I wrote the briefest description of the music so that everyone could understand what was happening as the music proceeded.

### **Anthems, too**

I sometimes did the same when the choir sang anthems.

It's not always easy for people to hear all the words when a choir sings, let alone understand the message they are trying to convey, so I **photocopied the words** for the congregation to follow including a **short note about the composer**.

I was told that the congregation found these explanatory notes to be helpful.

Skip not!

## 5: Leading Traditional Hymns *is a skill!*

Leading the singing of hymns is, perhaps, your most important and most influential duty as the pianist/organist, for you will be leading your whole church in its musical worship. **Hymns proclaim in the clearest language basic theology for the person-in-the-pew.**

(‘Hymns’, by the way, denote the *words*,  
hymn *tunes* are the melodies to which those words are sung.)



Hymn theology states great truths in simple words which everyone can understand. For example, *‘There is a green hill ... where the dear Lord was crucified who died to save us all’*. That, in a few words, is the heart of the Gospel.

*‘All my hope on God is founded’* – expresses a Christian’s faith for daily living.

*‘Here, O my Lord, I see Thee face to face’* – describes a Christian’s prayerful state of mind when taking communion.

And so, as these texts are central to helping the congregation understand some of the great truths of the Gospel, the pianist/organist needs to play the music to these texts in such a way that helps the congregation realize (in the fullest meaning of that word – *‘make real’*) what they are singing.

### **Autopilot?**

Alas, it is true that many of us – whether we are singers in choirs or members of the congregation – turn our minds off when we’re singing hymns. I’ve certainly found that to be so when I’ve been a member of a congregation, for I tend to go onto autopilot far too easily, and I believe this to be true for many others. *‘What have I just been singing? I’ve no idea, but I enjoyed the tune!’* Therefore, what can you, the organist, do to help us understand the meaning of the words we sing?

1 **Read the words yourself**, before you lead your rehearsal – even if you think you know what the words mean. For example, why should the King of heaven praise my soul? (*‘Praise, my soul, the King of heaven,’*)? The commas lead us to a completely different meaning.

Similarly in Luther’s great hymn, *‘A mighty fortress is our God’*, about whom are we singing in the last line of the first verse: *‘On earth is not his equal.’* Is it God? No, it’s not!

And many times when I’ve heard organists accompany verse 3 of *‘Just as I am’* (*‘Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;’*) they begin the verse on quieter stops – which is appropriate. But they stay quiet for the next lines: *‘Sight, riches, healing of the mind, yea all I need in Thee to find...’*. The mood suddenly changes in the second line – but they have not noticed, and so the congregation is not helped to understand the truths that, in the Lamb of God, I can find ‘all I need’. Those words should be accompanied triumphantly, not softly. So **do your homework!**

2 Then **learn to play the music** so well that you can almost play it **from memory**.

In other words, when you’re leading hymns, you should follow the **words** as closely as the playing of the music. And if you are not very experienced in this, you will need to practise it.

I once heard a multi-talented organ scholar of King’s College, Cambridge, practising the playing of hymns in his glorious chapel. If that was necessary for him, how much more is it essential for us?

3 In services it may be that your congregation doesn't stand up until they're supposed to begin singing. This inevitably leads to a poor start. Therefore you should do two things:

- i. Ask your minister, when he announces hymns, to say, 'Hymn number XXX – **please stand.**'
- ii. Play the first couple of lines in the tempo to which they will be sung. And play it on stops which set the mood for the hymn. For example, '*Jesus Christ is risen today*' could be played on reeds, whereas '*The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended,*' could be played on flutes.

4 The great secret of leading hymn singing is to treat the whole singing of the hymn – from the playing over of the tune, to the final note of the last verse – as though it were **a continuous piece of music.**

For this you will need a strong sense of rhythm.

Having played over the first two lines, take off the final chord in strict tempo, count exactly two beats' rest, then begin playing strongly for the congregation to begin singing.

Ex. 6: Praise, my soul

Play over (in harmony)

All sing

One, Two. Praise, my soul, the King of heaven, (etc.)

And then, at the end of the first verse do the same, hold the final chord for its exact length (many organists, alas, hang on to that last chord thus destroying the sense of forward rhythmic movement), count two beats' rest, and then start playing the next verse.

Ex. 7

end of verse 1

Verse 2

Praise the ev - er - last - ing King. One, Two, Praise him for his grace and fa - vour

### How to play rhythmically

Feel those two strong beats' rest between each verse, and start the next verse in strict time. By all means slow down fractionally at the end of the last verse, but not too much – it's not the end of Wagner's *Ring!*

A useful way to '**kick-start**' a congregation in singing hymns is to **make the first note slightly detached**. The small rest between the first and second notes gives them a necessary feeling for rhythm, which legato playing does not do.

Some organists play hymn tunes *legatissimo* throughout; this makes it very difficult for a congregation to sense where the strong beats come. When a tune begins on the last beat of a bar, such as *St. Clement*, ('*The day thou gavest*'), that first note should certainly be played detached.

### Feel minim beats, not crotchet beats

Tunes which are in quadruple time (4/4) should be felt, by the organist, to be in 2/2 time. This doesn't mean that they should be played faster, but it does mean that the organist will play with a forward sense of movement. There's nothing so static as a tune, such as *Easter Hymn*, ('*Jesus Christ is risen today*'), being played with a relentless four strong beats per bar. Feel, instead: JE-sus CHRIST is RIS'N to-DAY.

Similarly, hymn tunes which are in triple time should be felt, by the organist, to be one-in-a-bar. Therefore the play-over and the rests between verses should make a continuous piece of music in 3-time.

#### Ex. 8

The musical notation for Ex. 8 is on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first section is labeled "Play over (in harmony)" and consists of a series of eighth notes with accents, followed by a quarter rest. The second section is labeled "All sing" and consists of a quarter note followed by a quarter rest. Below the staff, the lyrics "Three, One, Two, The day\_thou" are written, with the underscore under "day" indicating a breath mark.

### Enabling the singers to breathe

But there are certain hymn tunes which move so continuously that they don't give any opportunities for the singers to breathe. In these exceptional cases an extra beat needs to be provided. A good example is '*Eternal Father, strong to save*', when sung to *Melita*, which is in 4/4 time. This is in almost continuous crotchet (quarter-note) movement. Therefore **an extra beat needs to be inserted** at the end of every alternate line of words – even though this means turning the occasional 4/4 bar into a 5/4 measure.

The musical notation for Ex. 9 is on two staves in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The top staff is labeled "Ex. 9" and "5/4" and shows a continuous sequence of quarter notes. The bottom staff is also labeled "5/4" and shows a similar sequence of quarter notes, but with a double bar line and a quarter rest at the end of the first line, labeled "Extra beat for last note". This is followed by the lyrics "One, two: Next verse" and another sequence of quarter notes.

Notice, also, that the final note (which is written as one beat in your hymn book) has been lengthened into a 2-beat note. This is necessary, for otherwise the end of each verse would be too abrupt.

But the essential two beats' rest between each verse in quadruple time remains – even though this, in practice, wreaks havoc with the number of beats per bar at this point.

Notice, again, that the first note of this tune needs to be played slightly staccato, to give a necessary strong beat on the next note.

All this may sound somewhat complicated, but try playing it like this, and you'll see that it does make sense.

### Playing hymns on the piano

If you are playing hymns on the piano it would be very useful if you could play chords in the right hand whilst playing the bass part in sub octaves in the left hand. In other words, not playing the notes exactly as written – for they were generally composed in 4-part harmony to be sung by a choir. It's the bass notes which the congregation hears more easily for support, with the right hand leading the rhythm.



So, something like this would be appropriate:

Ex. 10



### Play-over

The play-over for hymns needn't necessarily always be in four vocal parts (as written in your hymn book). Sometimes try playing the first couple of lines of the tune in sub-octaves. (e.g. '*Light's abode*' to *Regent Square*.) This will add variety to your playing which, in itself, will be refreshing to your congregation.

In time you may even want to try soloing out the tune on a louder stop whilst playing the lower parts on a second manual. Again, let it be said that your play-over will set the mood for the hymn which is about to be sung, and so you will help the congregation not only in their singing but also in their *understanding* of the words of the hymn. This cannot be overstressed.

Another helpful way to encourage your congregation to sing is to ask your choir (if you have one) to sing first and last verses in unison.

### Play with colour

Once you become really experienced in playing the organ for hymns, it would be good to **alter your registration slightly from verse to verse** to add more variety of colour to the meaning of the words.

But let your changes be subtle.

For example, in '*While Shepherds watched their flocks*', verses 2, 3 and 4 quote the words which the angel said to the shepherds. So, if you were to play the first verse on Great 8, 4 and 2 Diapasons coupled to the Swell 8, 4 and 2 ... (always couple the Swell to the Great when playing hymns, for you could make subtle crescendos and diminuendos during a verse by using the Swell box) ... then you might add the Swell Mixture for these three verses. Then verse 5 ('*Thus spake the seraph*') could be played on full Swell with the box open. The last triumphant verse ('*All glory be to God on high*') could be played on the Great, still coupled to the full Swell.

But it's important that the volume of your playing – the loudness and the softness – **must not be too contrasted**, for this will dissuade your congregation from singing confidently. So let your guiding thought be: Not too loud, not too soft, but just right. The Goldilocks volume!

By the way, nearly always couple the Swell to Pedal and Great to Pedal when playing hymn tunes. This will give definition to the pedal line.

Another tip for rhythmic hymn-playing: don't play repeated notes in the pedals. Tie them instead, but make your manuals even more rhythmic. The same could apply to some inner parts:

Ex. 11

Ex.11

But if you find it difficult to play the pedals when leading the singing of hymns, draw a 16ft stop on the Great after the play-over and play the bass notes very smoothly. This will give a necessary feeling of depth to your playing which, in its turn, will help the congregation to sing with more assurance.

### Faith!

It takes courage to lead the singing of hymns; you have to believe that the congregation will come in with your first note. This is called faith!

If you don't believe that they will come in with you, they won't.

I know of one organist who always plays the first note of verses a full beat before he expects the congregation to start. And so that's exactly what happens. They never come in with him, but always after him. This makes for an unmusical experience.

Whatever you do, **don't wait for them to come in** – i.e. playing the first chord and hoping that someone in the congregation will start singing. You are **the leader** and it is by your rhythmic playing that you will tell them when to start singing, not vice versa.

*I came across this helpful illustration on the web:*

The differences between



a **BOSS** and a **Leader** 

Drives employees	Coaches employees
Depends on authority	Depends on goodwill
Inspires fear	Generates enthusiasm
Says "I"	Says "we"
Places blame for the breakdown	Fixes the breakdown
Knows how it's done	Shows how it's done
Uses people	Develops people
Takes credit	Gives credit
Commands	Asks
Says "Go"	Says "Let's go"

## 6: Playing Modern Worship Songs *is Even Skillier!*

An organ is not the most helpful instrument to lead the singing of worship songs for it is not a rhythmic instrument. These songs are essentially rhythmic, for they have generally been composed with a group of instrumentalists in mind – guitars, wind instruments and drums.



And so when you are asked to lead these rhythmic songs, it would be far more effective if you were to play them on a piano. Many churches have digital pianos – they aren't very expensive and it is quite easy to add extra loudspeakers, with an additional amplifier, to enable you to give a really strong lead.

We had such a piano in my little parish church in the heart of Lancashire, and I delighted in subtly changing tone from verse to verse when we sang modern songs – depending on the sentiments of the song.

What you, as the principal musician, need to do (if your church doesn't have a group to lead the singing of these songs) is to play the music on the piano with **very precise rhythm** – for these songs feature a lot of syncopation – singing some syllables just before the main beat.

They are quite tricky to play, so you will need to practise them at home on your own piano. Choirs and congregations are not usually adept at singing these rhythms accurately. No matter. As long as you play the written notes, they will do their best to fit in with your accompaniment.

It's important, when playing music which is syncopated (i.e. with notes which come off the beat) that these **off-the-beat-notes are accented**.

But if this syncopated music doesn't appeal to you, why not ask your minister if a group of young people could be formed to lead the singing of these worship songs? There's bound to be someone in the congregation who would be willing to take this on.

This would be very good for the young people – for it would involve them more closely in the church's worship, and it would also provide variety in the styles of music which are being offered. And, of course, the digital piano could also be used in the music group. And if you were to play with the group, that would be the ideal solution.



After Elton John had played and sung at Princess Diana's funeral in Westminster Abbey none of us can ever say again: 'We don't do that sort of music in our church!'

But should you not like this 'new' music – it is still up to you, as the resident musician, to give it your best shot.

We're all different; whilst some Christians can worship God through traditional hymns, others find it easier to worship through this new music. '*In my Father's house are many*

*mansions...*' (John 14. 2).

May there be many styles of music in our Father's house, too.  
But all of it should be carefully prepared and offered worthily.

## 7: Forming a Choir – Recruitment

A choir is made up of two factors:

- i Musical – ‘A choir is a disciplined body of singers.’
- ii Social – ‘A choir is a social body of friends.’

After a while, your choir will become a true reflection of yourself!

If they are prone to be late, it’s because punctuality isn’t important to you.

If they don’t give you their full attention, it’s because you aren’t giving your full attention to them.

But if they arrive for choir practices feeling excited, it’s because you are feeling even more excited. (Some of us do!)



**So...**

### **Be wholly positive**

In everything to do with your choir be wholly positive, for they will most surely – subconsciously – model themselves upon you.

### **Forming a choir?**

If there is no choir and if you and your Minister feel that a choir would help the worship of the congregation, one of the best opportunities to gather a group of singers together would be for a carol service.

Choose a few fairly straightforward carol arrangements. *Carols for Choirs 1 & 2* published by Novello, have many such settings.

See <http://www.musicroom.com>

**And free copies of easy music** for your choir can also be found at the end of this book.

There are two ways of recruiting singers:

- (i) by approaching members of the congregation one by one. People tend to respond when asked directly. ‘*Will you come and sing with us for our carol service?*’  
But NOT, ‘*Will you join the choir?*’
- (ii) When you have the nucleus of a choir, then announcements at services should be made – stressing that a choir has already been formed and if other singers would like to join, now is the time. Stress that there will be, say, only two rehearsals and a final rehearsal before the service – for folk will not be prepared to join an open-ended situation.

By the way, when advertising, always word your appeal from the standpoint of the customer – not yourself. So, if you were to say, ‘*We desperately need singers*’ – that gives the immediate impression of failure. You may indeed ‘desperately’ need singers, but you should never say so.

People respond to success and challenge. Say instead, (i) we already have a choir, (ii) now is your only opportunity of joining!

You need to set the parameters of what is acceptable.

It’s essential that folk commit to the number of rehearsals you have booked. To have most singers committing to all rehearsals, but a few coming to only some immediately lowers the standard of what you are aiming to achieve.

People respond to high expectations.

And then, once you've formed your choir, and once they've sung for your carol service, it's up to you whether or not they become your regular choir. *See the next chapter* for practical hints on how to lead rehearsals successfully and raise your singers' enthusiasm.

### **New singers?**

If, on the other hand, you already have a choir, but need more singers, **the best people to help you to recruit are your present singers themselves**. They belong to your choir because they enjoy the experience. Therefore encourage them to recruit some of their friends in the congregation, and their neighbours.

### **There are four things you should do when seeking new singers:**

**1.** At every choir practice for at least **six** weeks mention the need for more singers. (See chapter 14 why **six** times tends to work.)

**2. Offer to teach your singers how to sight-sing.**

When I became organist of my village church, the choir hadn't rehearsed for over a year! But at my first rehearsal I offered to teach them, little by little, how to sight-sing, and I found that half a dozen members of the congregation immediately joined us, for they wanted to acquire this skill.

**3.** Always set high standards in punctuality, attendance and accuracy, always give your singers challenges which they can reach at every rehearsal. (*See the next chapter again*).

**4.** Give your singers worthwhile music to sing. It needn't be difficult; simple music sung well will give your singers a feeling of 'a job well done', and that, in itself, will increase your singers' enthusiasm to raise their standards even higher.

*See again '36 very easy anthems for your choir' – at the end of this book which may be copied free.*



## 8: Forty-Two Helpful Hints for Leading Successful Choir Practices

*“If you dedicate yourself to this most rewarding vocation, it will absolutely consume all of your waking hours!”*

(Justin D. Miller, a Choir Director in Ohio, USA)

### SUCCESSFUL ORGANISATION

#### 1 Get to know your senior chorister

In every choir there's one singer who's been there the longest. It's vital that you discover who that person is and get to know them as quickly as possible. Once that person is 'on your side' everyone else will follow his or her lead. Every choirmaster works solely through the goodwill of the singers, so make this your number one priority!

#### 2 Get to know your singers' names

And not only their names, but also the names of their families.

You'll almost certainly discover that some of their spouses are members of the congregation, and that some will have professional skills which can be helpful to the church.

#### 3 Prime Rule

Once you've got to know your singers, **greet every singer** in your choir by name, be they child or adult, as they arrive for your practice, and also when they arrive on Sundays. This way you will show that you care for each of them individually as well as corporately. And so you will make an impact on your singers by your care as well as by your leadership. For **you are there to lead at all times and in every way**. *But see item 9, below!*

**NB: People want to be led;** it's a human characteristic. They've joined your choir to be led by you, so you need to lead in everything – punctuality, high standards, musicianship, self discipline (not imposed discipline), friendliness and something worthwhile achieved at every practice. So the first thing to do is to demonstrate that you are their leader – by greeting every one of them as they enter your practice room. (That means, of course, arriving before anyone else!)

#### 4 Punctuality

And so you will aim to **be the first person to arrive** at church for your rehearsals. Why? To see that everything is in order, neat and welcoming for your singers. A choir is not only a musical body, but also a social body, so your welcome to each chorister is an essential part of your pastoral responsibilities.

#### 5 Start on time

To stress your insistence on **punctuality** (alas, not too many choirmasters do this), I suggest that, five minutes before the rehearsal is due to start, you say in a clear voice, as the singers are gathering: *'Five minutes before we start!'* And then make a similar announcement four minutes' later: *'One minute before we start!'* And on the hour, say a cheerful, 'Good evening; thank you for coming so punctually.'

Does the church have a radio controlled clock which everyone can see?



## 6 Late-comers

**Never** say, 'We must wait for a certain person before we can start the practice,' for once you do that, the spirit of punctuality will immediately disappear. You are saying, in effect, 'Punctuality doesn't matter – we'll wait for that person for however long it takes.'

This, alas, is currently the situation with a nearby church choir I know.

Some years ago I was invited to lead one of their rehearsals. 'What time do you begin?' I asked. 'We're supposed to start at 7.30, but we never do.'

But now, several years later, their timing has slipped back to 8.15 – but they still never start on time! And it's all due to the choirmaster still waiting for certain people to arrive. He doesn't realize that by waiting for them, he's given them permission to be late – so they are – always.

## 7 100% attendance

It is possible to achieve 100% attendance *if* you insist that absences should be notified in advance.

Singers who tell you when they have to be away are helping to maintain the sense of corporate discipline for which you, and they, are aiming. So, when *you* have to be away, give your choir plenty of notice. (Do as you would be done by.)

But when someone unexpectedly doesn't turn up for a practice or service, ask your singers, 'Does anyone know where Mr Brown is?' If they don't, call him on your phone when you get home expressing the hope that everything is OK and tell him how much you all missed him.

He will get the message that his attendance is important to you all.

If you feel you can't do this yourself, appoint a member of your choir who would. If an unexcused absence is not followed up immediately, permission has automatically been given for that person (and others) to be absent again without notice.

**Dr Lionel Dakers**, former Director of the RSCM, made a helpful statement about voluntary choirs. He said, 'The only thing that is voluntary when joining a volunteer choir, is the voluntary act of joining. After that, everything else is compulsory.'

*Three retired cathedral organists at a lively lunch in Salisbury, 2003:*

*L-R: Dr John Birch (Chichester), Dr John Bertalot (Blackburn) and **Dr Lionel Dakers** (Exeter)*



## 8 email & phone numbers

Compile a list of your singers' email addresses.

This list should also be distributed to every singer, and it should include your own email address too. This will be needed should there be an emergency, such as an unexpected service when the choir is needed, or a cancelled rehearsal because of bad weather.

Let it be agreed between everyone that they will let you know when they have to be away. And the same should be true for you, too. Having their emails will also make it easy for you to write thank-you messages to them all after they have sung particularly well. Some choirs have a sign-up sheet so that singers can give good notice when they have to be away.

Such attention to courteous detail repays enormous dividends for building up the spirit of a choir.

You should also make a list of your singers' telephone numbers – for not everyone reads their emails religiously! And you'll need their telephone numbers so that you can call them if they're absent without telling you or, when they're unwell, to find out how they are progressing.

In other words **your responsibilities to your choir are not only musical but also pastoral.**

When you are faithful in both these responsibilities you will have built up such a fund of goodwill (*see point 3 above*) that you will find that your singers will love you and they will be willing to do almost anything you ask of them – such as extra rehearsals for Christmas services as well as becoming a source of ready and willing helpers to arrange outings and other social events.

### 9 Appoint a leader on each side of the choir

I found it most useful in my village church to appoint a leader on each side of the choir – someone whom the other singers respected.

Their job was to indicate when the choir should stand and when the choir should sit.

All it needed was a slight intentional 'leaning forward' and subtle nod of the head.

A good way to introduce this is to ask your choir if they think that they should stand and sit together.

Most will agree, so appoint your leaders and ask your choir to follow their lead in standing together (without a further instruction from you) and then to sit together.

When my village church choir first tried this they collapsed in laughter – but they were keen to do it correctly and, after a few attempts, they succeeded.

Standing and sitting together in practices and services gives an immediate sense of self discipline to your choir which eventually pervades everything they do.

My leaders also indicated how long the final note of a hymn should be – and I followed my leaders (whom I could see from my console) which added to their authority. I commend this wholeheartedly. (*See chapter 17*)



## SUCCESSFUL SINGING

### 10 Warm-ups

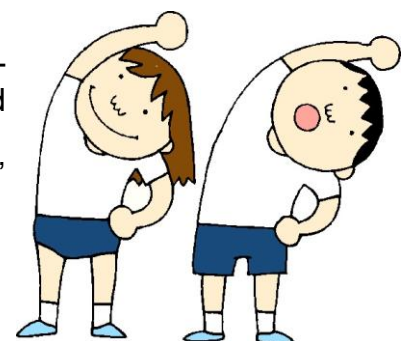
Warm-ups at the beginning of a rehearsal achieve two positive aims:

- (i) They immediately weld the individual singers into a corporate body.

*Warm-ups help your choir to become a 'disciplined body of singers'. If it's not disciplined – self-disciplined – it's not a choir but a collection of people who may, or may not, sing together.*

Many choirmasters encourage their singers to do physical warm-ups – stretch their bodies, raise their arms and (for some mixed adult choirs) even to massage their neighbours' backs!

This is to be encouraged; everyone enjoys those 'physical' sessions for they help singers to relax.





At the end of the physical warm-ups, ask your choir to sing a 5-second 'sigh' starting from the highest note they can individually pitch (even falsetto) and descending to the lowest note they can reach.

This also helps them to relax – and it leads naturally to the vocal warm-ups.

### **Vocal warm-ups.**

When you appoint a leader on each side of the choir to indicate when the choir should stand and when they should start singing, ([see also Chapter 17: Not conducting from the console](#)), all you need to do is to ask your choir: 'Sing this note [*I play a G*] to *Ah* for twelve beats.'

But always, always get them immediately to try even harder. 'Did we start together? Let's try it again.' 'Is everyone's jaw really dropping to produce a deep *Ah*? Try again.'

**The standard you reach during these warm-ups is the standard your singers will achieve during the remainder of the practice. So aim high.**

Don't let them get away with singing untidily or not giving you their full attention during these warm-ups. They will, unconsciously, be testing you to see what you expect of them. So, insist on high standards immediately.

Each successive warm-up should challenge them a little more: singing a semitone higher or sustaining a held note for an extra couple of beats, and so on. 'Who managed that in one breath?' Let's practise breathing deeply. Like this...'

- (ii) Their voices will quickly become 'lubricated' by singing this easy music, and so when you start rehearsing hymns and anthems they will be more able to sing them well.

***ALL WARM-UPS should be sung unaccompanied!***

***Why? Because their purpose is to encourage your singers to take responsibility for their own singing.***

*When you accompany them, YOU are taking responsibility and THEY are following.*

*Choirmasters may feel that their playing is helping the singers. But singers don't need 'help' when singing warm-ups – they need CHALLENGE. 'Did you start together?' 'Is everyone standing like a singer, leaning slightly forward with your weight mainly supported on your right foot?' 'Are your eyebrows raised? (This will help produce better tone.) 'Did you all breathe together? 'How are your diaphragms?' ...*

*And if there are some singers who are not inclined to give 100%, you, by the act of playing, will not notice and so those singers will never give of their best, and the whole choir will suffer.*

*Alas, I know of several distinguished choirmasters who always accompany warm-ups, and they wonder why some of their singers never show enthusiastic 'sparkle'. It's because the choirmaster enjoys accompanying warm-ups and thinks that if he or she is enjoying them, everyone else must be enjoying them, too. NO!!*

*If my village church choir of grand-parents could sing warm-ups unaccompanied, how much more should your singers!*

*All warm-ups should stretch the singers. They won't be stretched if you accompany them!*

Start by singing a simple scale from C going down an octave – to *Ah* in one breath. [See next page](#). Then double it, coming down and then going up again in one breath, sustaining the last note for four beats. (Your leaders, by subtle nodding, should indicate when to start and when to finish. The more you can encourage them to lead, the better will your choir sing.)

Again, when you are satisfied by the way they sang that first double scale, go up a semitone, and ask them to sing it again reaching, eventually, to an E flat major scale.

And then, really to challenge your singers (for that's what rehearsals are all about – challenging your singers to reach an achievable goal) to sing those scales in canon. One side starting and the other side coming in two notes later.

To be sung, steadily, to 'Ah' in one breath

Side 1, or women

Side 2, or men

Another useful warm-up to encourage blend, tone and balance is to ask your choir to sing the first chord of a hymn tune (any hymn) to the vowel 'Ee' (with lips *pushed forward* so as to produce a round smooth tone) and sustain it quietly for 10 seconds, listening to themselves.

'Are we all in tune? Altos, sing a fraction higher. Tenors, can you hear the singers in front of you? That's better – sing a little softer....'

Then sing the first word of that hymn on that chord – is the sound the same, or have we lost our feeling of blending? (*i.e. does our singing still sound pleasant?!*) 'Let's try it again.'

## 11 Look cheerful

When your choir is singing these warm-ups, many of them will look solemn. This isn't helpful, for singing is a joyful experience.

So to correct this, first ask them to sing a simple scale looking very solemn indeed, and then ask them to sing the same scale looking happy.

They will immediately find that singing with a smile actually produces better tone!



You may have to remind them several times during your rehearsal to do this. If you're not a trained singer, this is the easiest way to produce pleasing tone. **Raising eyebrows** (to look slightly surprised) also improves singers' tone. ([See No. 16, below](#))

## 12 More warm-ups

Introduce increasingly challenging warm-ups – perhaps a new one every few weeks.

But first sing them yourself at home to discover exactly what you require of your singers.

Raise each warm-up by a semitone at a time, but discover how high you should stretch your choir so that they sing easily – they must **enjoy** singing these warm-ups!

### WARM-UPS - unaccompanied - introduce gently, one at a time.

Stand up together: watch the leader on each side at all times. Sing in strict time.

Sing only two or three warm-ups at any one practice.

An easy way to introduce warm-ups: Sustain one note (middle G?) for, say, 10 beats, watching the leaders. Sung at 'Ah', then G sharp, A, to C.

All warm-ups to be sung in one breath. Aim at absolute unanimity. Singers to *listen* to each other.

Vary the vowels: Ee - oo - eh - aw - ah. Hum: loose tickly lips. Mmee - Mmoo ... etc. Push lips forward. Loose jaw.

Dominant 7th of new key! Choir to feel the rhythm of the rests

Breathe exactly one beat before you sing, to ensure unanimity

All these warm-ups should be regarded as a **fun** way to begin every practice, creating a sense of achievement as your singers are welded together as a 'disciplined body'.

### 13 Cut the talking

#### ***Many choirs don't really listen to what their choirmasters say.***

I was told of one University choir which had trained its professional, highly-qualified director of music to give all his instructions **twice!** *And their director doesn't realize it!*  
One of his choral scholars told me!

A reason for this, perhaps, is that what the choirmaster says isn't really worth listening to! My choirs listen to what I say because (a) I cut down all unnecessary chatter, and (b) I believe that what I say is worth their full attention.

And that's not boasting – it's how things ought to be!

How does this work in practice?

When I announce the number of a hymn we're about to rehearse I **give the number just once**, in a clear voice, and wait for them to find it.

This takes, say, ten seconds, but *those ten seconds of silence help to weld the choir into a disciplined body.*

I then give the first chord and say, 'Sing the first verse in unison.' The leader on each side indicates that the choir should breathe together, by a slight nod of the head, and then they sing unaccompanied under their leaders' minimal direction.



At that point I have to decide whether or not to say anything. Usually I do, for it is my job to challenge them to raise their standards. So I say, 'You'll agree that that first note was a mess! Let's try it again.'

And so they start again, but they try harder and therefore sing better because of my challenge. Other questions I may ask include, 'Are you feeling a minim [half-note] beat or a crotchet [quarter-note] beat?' They know that minim beats make for a more musical performance. Or, 'Did someone breathe in the middle of that line where they shouldn't breathe? Let's try it again.'

All these questions are asked with a **smile**; they know that I am on their side and so they want to sing better for me. Our rehearsals are, therefore, packed with hard, enjoyable work which produces immediately noticeable results, and so everyone is pleased.



Should someone begin talking when I'm talking I immediately stop and wait, courteously, for that person to stop. Why? Because I really want to enable **every** singer to achieve his or her best, and that means concentrating on the directions I give.

They all know that I'm there to help them – that's why they've come to this rehearsal.

### 14 Slow is best

When teaching your choir a new piece of music and, hopefully, you will have begun to teach them to read music – so they should be able to begin to clap the rhythm of the first page, and then to speak the words in rhythm whilst still clapping – (see my book [Teaching adults to sight-sing](#)) always let them try to begin to pitch the notes slowly.

When you or I learn a piece on the piano, we always play it slowly first – several times – to ensure that we play the right notes instead of the wrong ones. It's exactly the same when

learning a new anthem or song; let your choir sing the right notes slowly, rather than the wrong notes quickly. And once the right notes get more secure, only then should you think of gradually speeding up.

### 15 Gestures! (*But this may not work for every choir!*)

Occasionally, *in rehearsals*, I asked my adult singers to make gestures with their arms whilst singing, to enable them to feel the strength of crescendos or the importance of certain words.

If, for example, they are singing 'Praise thou the Lord' to a rising arpeggio, I asked them to punch the air with a clenched fist, in a quasi salute, on the word *Lord*. This immediately gives that word a strong significance.

In other words I invited them to play a children's game on certain texts, *just once* during a rehearsal, so that they could feel, more creatively, the significance of the words they were singing. They seemed to enjoy this – even the undemonstrative singers.

### 16 Facial expression

Similarly, I encouraged my choir to show, by the expression on their faces, the meaning of the words they were singing.

The importance of this was brought home to me when I first took up my position as Director of Music of Trinity Episcopal Church in the University town of Princeton, NJ.

At a staff meeting the Rector said to me, 'Do you realize that when your adult choir processes in singing the first hymn on Sunday mornings, an air of depression comes over the congregation?'

This was because, while they were singing the opening hymn of praise, the crucifer, processing from the East end to the choir stalls at the West (i.e. she and the choir were facing the congregation) always looked majestically solemn and the choir looked as though they were studying for an examination in Greek!

We therefore worked hard at trying to look joyful when singing joyful entrance hymns. This made a tremendous difference to the quality of our singing, and it sent the right message to the congregation.

This is not easy to achieve, for church choirs, almost by definition, are not expected to show emotion. Secular choirs and concert soloists are supposed to show on their faces the message of the text they are singing, and what a difference it makes to the sounds they produce and to their whole presentation!



### 17 Look!

Look at your **choir** when giving musical directions.



It's easy to look at your *music* when giving musical directions, but you may not be aware that some folks aren't listening to you *because you aren't looking at them!*

It took me years to learn this lesson – for I thought that I did look at my singers when rehearsing them – but I wasn't. You may think that you look at your choir when giving instructions – but, dare I suggest it? – almost certainly you aren't, for probably you're looking at your music. That's why they don't give you their 100% attention!

***So, do something about it!***

## 18 Breathing

Singers in church choirs (and some cathedral choirs) breathe twice too often. Many singers' breathing is too shallow. Deep breaths are almost unknown.

And so most singers take a breath in the middle of every line of words of a hymn. A most common example is '*When other helpers (breath) fail, and comforts flee*'. So, next time you rehearse a hymn, notice how many singers breathe in the middle of lines when the sense demands that they shouldn't breathe. This is not only unmusical, but it sometimes makes nonsense of the text:


*Keep thou my feet, (breath) I do not ask to see (breath)*

Or sometimes they may not breathe in the middle of a line – where, in fact, they ought to:

*In pastures green he leadeth me (breath)*


(No! He makes me **lie down** in pastures green, and leadeth me **the quiet waters** by!)


This faulty breathing is so universal that when my village church choir fell into that trap I told them that they were singing like every other C of E choir! They knew what I meant!

The secret of conquering this fault is to **do something positive** to overcome this common tendency. So ask your singers to make a slight *crescendo* where they would have taken a breath. *When other helpers*  *fail, (breath) and comforts flee...*

## 19 Sing with understanding

This attention to correct breathing will help your choir to begin to sing more notes in one breath which will enable the meaning of the words to shine through the music:

*O strength and stay*  *upholding all creation. (Crescendo up to the important syllable – 'hold'.)*

*Be still and know*  *that I am God. (Crescendo up to 'I'.)*

Ask your singers to mark these places in their hymn books – otherwise they'll forget during the service and return to their old ways.

## 20 Practise breathing

Your choir needs to know how singers should breathe.

When you ask them to take a deep breath almost all of them will raise their chests and shoulders. This, of course, is what they should *not* do.

Try it so as to demonstrate for themselves how not to do it, (i.e. do it *incorrectly* first) and then show them how they themselves should breathe correctly, with inhaling air deep down – using their diaphragms – rather like pouring water into a hot water bottle. Have them put their hands on their tummies so that they can feel the air filling them down below.

Some singers will be able to do this immediately, but others may still pull in their tummies when they breathe.

So ask them to practise deep breathing when they're at home. They should lie flat on the floor with their hands on their tummies (diaphragms), and breathe in and out. They'll find that when inhaling their tummies will rise, but not their shoulders.

When they've done this several times they should try to do it standing up. This is more difficult, but they'll know what to aim for at your next rehearsal. Try it yourself so that you know from personal experience what your singers should do.

**Good breathing is fundamental to good singing.** An organ may have superb pipework but unless the wind supply is plentiful and steady, the tone will suffer. It's the same with singers. **You'll need to address this several times at every rehearsal.** 'Are you breathing deeply enough to be able to sing that long phrase? Let's practise taking a few deep breaths and try it again.'

## 21 Words, words, words

When you ask your choir to speak out loud the words of a new anthem, ask them to find the most important word in a phrase and slightly crescendo towards it.

Sometimes, by doing this, they will discover a new way of interpreting a work.

For example, when choirs **sing** Stainer's lovely '*God so loved the world*', they stress the word, 'so'. '*God so loved the world*'. But when your choir **speak** these words, and feel the deep meaning of them, they will automatically stress the word 'loved'. '*God so loved the world*'. When they transfer this interpretation to their singing of this anthem, they will find that it comes alive to them in a new way.

Similarly, at the bottom of the second page we have the words, '*But that the world through him might be sav-ed.*' This is generally sung in a mournful way, because it is marked 'soft'.

But these words are at the heart of the Gospel, and so they should be sung with awe and wonder and joy, not depression.

To achieve this the choir needs to try whispering the words very clearly first, and then to sing them in the same urgent way. (See '*Phrasing 25 v*' below)

## 22 Talk, talk, talk.

What is the balance between your talking during a practice and the choir actually singing?

I was amazed, when I attended a dress rehearsal in another church recently to discover how many talking gaps there were between the times when the choir actually sang. I timed it. The conductor talked for over 50% of that short practice – which meant that the singers didn't have enough time to rehearse all their music.

How much time do you spend talking during a rehearsal?

The maximum should be no more than 20% - but really efficient conductors can so hone their instructions that they take less than 10% of their allotted time.

Thus those conductors give their singers 90% of the practice time to singing. Your singers have come to your rehearsal to sing well, through minimum, very clear guidance!



I dare you to ask a friend with a stop watch to time how long you talk during a rehearsal. Make sure that he tells you in confidence, for you may be dismayed by the answer!

Or better still, **record the whole of one of your rehearsals** (put the recorder some way from the choir so that you can't hear what you say).

You'll almost certainly be horrified to discover how much you talk and how little the choir sings.

## 23 Repeat, repeat

Words are frequently repeated when set to music.

Words are frequently **repeated** when set to music!

Should the phrase to which the repeated words are set be sung more softly, the same, or a little louder?

You only have to speak the phrase, 'Never, *never* do that again', to discover the answer.

A good example is the beginning of Stainer's '*God so loved the world*' (again) - for those words are immediately repeated and therefore should be sung a little louder (as marked) and also with more **energy**. This will make the meaning of the words immediately more apparent.

This matter of repeated (**repeated**) words also applies to some hymns.

For example, the Easter hymn '*Jesus Christ is risen today*', has an *Alleluia* at the end of every line. Singers' enthusiasm for each repeated *Alleluia* tends to wane, whereas the opposite should happen: each *Alleluia* should sound more joyful and triumphant than the last.

This will mean that your singers will have to sing with graded energy – and this will not be easy. Challenge one side to sing a verse, then ask the other side to try. You'll find that the spirit of competition will immediately make your point for you. This works as well for adults as it does for children.

## 24 Rule of three

I find it very helpful, when I'm correcting a mistake made by my choir, to ask them to sing the corrected passage again three times. But not just to sing it again and yet again but, each time, to direct their attention to a different detail which needs polishing.



**First**, of course, having sung it incorrectly once, they do need to sing it correctly more than once, otherwise there's a 50/50 chance of them singing it incorrectly on Sunday. That's where the *Rule of Three* comes in.

So suppose they've sung a wrong note. Ask them if they know what the mistake was – if they know, then perhaps they could attempt to correct it (which would be admirable). If they don't, play the right note for them and ask them to sing that note *by itself*, so that they know what it should sound like.

Do you realize that *there's no such thing as a difficult note*? The difficulty always lies in getting to that note.

So singers need to know 'where they're going' – i.e. what the right note should sound like.

So get them to sing that one note on its own – helped by having it played on the piano first.

Then, once they realize that that note is 'friendly' (and it's surprising how many singers approach 'difficult' notes with a sense of worry) ask them to sing the note immediately before the 'difficult' note – perhaps even playing those two consecutive notes on the piano so that they can hear what the progression sounds like.

They should do this two or three times so that they can feel easy about the situation.

Then ask them to sing the entire phrase which includes that problem note.

This, again, should be sung three times, for the whole point of rehearsals is to enable your singers to feel that they actually can *enjoy* singing right notes.

Finally, ask the whole choir to join in singing just that short passage. For each repetition ask them to concentrate, say, on pronouncing a word more clearly: 'I can't hear the 'D' in 'anD'. Or ask them if they really started together. (The answer's always 'no'!)

Many choirmasters make the mistake, once a note is corrected, of going back several pages. No! Practise that short passage only, and then, once that is secure, you can go back a page or so, so that everyone feels that that section is really secure.

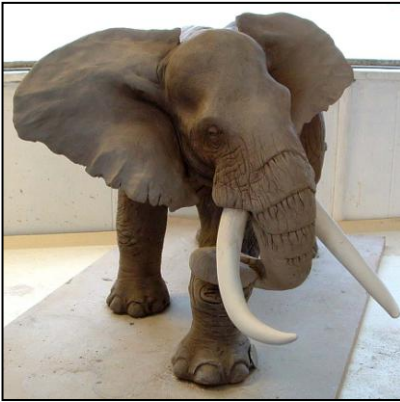


It seems obvious to say so, but singers really do want to sing right notes and not wrong ones. They will thank you for enabling them to do this.

## 25 Create a thinking choir by asking questions

Many of us choirmasters spend all our rehearsals telling our singers what to do.

This, surely demeans our choristers, whether they be adults or children for, if they've sung with us for a few months, they will surely know what musical points are important. Therefore to repeat the same instructions is a sure way to dissolve their attention from what we are saying.



There's a story told about a sculptor who sculpted a lifelike elephant out of a block of marble. 'How did you do it?' he was asked. He replied, 'I just looked at the block of marble and chipped away everything that didn't look like an elephant!'

*That's not as far-fetched as it may sound because Michelangelo said a similar thing: "I see in every block of marble a statue as plainly as though it stood before me, shaped and perfect in attitude and action. I have only to hew away the rough walls that imprison the lovely apparition to reveal it as mine eyes have seen it."* (*The Agony and the Ecstasy*, Irvine Stone)

Well that's how I go about rehearsing an anthem with a choir!

I know, so clearly, how I want the music to sound, that I 'chip away' anything that doesn't sound right! **One chip at a time!**

The first 'chip' is **wrong notes**, then comes 'lazy' **rhythm** (which incorporates singing exactly together), and so on.

Here's a list of the **NINE 'chips'** which should be put right in a practice, which you achieve, **one 'chip' at a time**, by asking the appropriate questions:

**i Notes.** Wrong notes must be corrected immediately; if they are left until next week, they will be more difficult to rectify. They will have become hardened, like concrete.

**ii Rhythm.** Very few church choirs sing with compelling rhythm. Ask your choir to clap the rhythm of a passage, then to clap it again whilst saying the words rhythmically. This will help them to add rhythmic life to their singing.

**iii Expression.** Many choirs are so intent on trying to sing the notes correctly that they seem to have little time to think about expression – especially singing softly, which can be so effective.

But instead of telling them to sing that passage louder (or softer), ask them to 'look at the expression mark and do what it says.' That way you will be encouraging them to think for themselves and perhaps they'll notice the next expression mark without you having to point it out to them.

**iv Balance.** We choirmasters may be so used to the sounds that our choir makes that we may not be aware that, say, the tenors always sing too loudly.

We need to listen to our choir with fresh ears. Have you recorded them recently? This could

be very helpful. Better balance may be achieved by asking singers to *listen to themselves*.

**v Phrasing.** This involves breathing in the right places.

*Phrases should generally be twice as long as your choir usually sings them.*

This will involve a firm discipline and marking of copies where they should or should not breathe.

So give your choristers pencils to mark where breaths should and should not be taken. Always **crescendo** to the important word in a phrase, and **diminuendo** after it. Very few choirmasters ask this of their singers. e.g. 'Serve the Lord with **GLAD-ness...**'

Such attention to expressive detail will transform your choir's singing.

**vi Tuning.** Again, we may not be aware that the altos, perhaps, may tend to sing a little under the note. Or it may be that one singer sings flat.

It takes only one chorister to sing out of tune to make it sound as though the whole section is out of tune.

So define precisely what the problem is and, again, ask the singers to *listen to themselves*.

**vii Clarity of diction.** Very few choirs sing with clarity of diction.

We choirmasters should always ask our singers to note words which need **knrrissper konsonants**. 'How many Ds did you really sing in, 'AnD GoD saiD...?' Let's try it again.

**viii Singing together.** I know of only two choirs which **always** sing absolutely together – one's in the UK and the other's in San Francisco!

So we can always ask, 'Did you start together? No! Let's try it again.'

**ix Making a pleasant sound.** There are two sorts of choirs: those that one would pay good money to listen to, and those which one would pay good money *not* to listen to!

Which is yours? Again, the solution is to ask one side to *listen* to the other side!

Therefore you could eventually save a lot of time if you educate your singers to spot these shortcomings for themselves by asking them these questions:

**i** *Is there a wrong note in the tenor part? What note did you sing? What should you have sung? Let's try it.*

**ii** *Was that rhythm really precise? Let's clap the rhythm of that passage – with energy, absolutely together. Now sing it with the same precision.*

**iii** *Who's noticed the expression mark there? Let's do what it says.*

**iv** *Tenors, can you hear the tune which the sopranos are singing? Let them soar above us all with their beautiful tone.*

**v** *Where did you breathe in that phrase? Where shouldn't you have breathed? (Same answer.) Let's try it again. Did everyone do it? Let's try this side of the choir singing it first, and then the other side to see who can do it better.*

(The spirit of competition works for adults as well as for children as I've mentioned before.)

*vi* Altos, are you singing that phrase slightly too high or too low? Listen to the first note as I play it on the piano and then sing right in the centre of the note.

*vii* Can I hear all the consonants in that line? Which is the letter you're missing out?

*viii* Did we really start together? Let's try it again.

*ix* Sustain that first chord gently and listen to yourselves. Are you making a pleasant sound?

(Choirmasters should know that soft singing cures a host of faults. Once singers begin listening to themselves, their tone will improve immediately.)

**26 Sing the first note!** Try this when you've begun to teach your singers to read music.

**The essence of sight-singing is to encourage your singers to look at the notes intelligently**, for most singers look only at the words - *did you know that?*

So a constructive challenge throughout every rehearsal could be to ask them to **look at the first note of a hymn or anthem and try to pitch it, without any help from you.**

I found, when working with children that, after a time, they could achieve a 90% success rate, and this gave them a tremendous thrill. There was always a spirit of healthy competition to see who could sing the first note of a new anthem before it's checked on the piano!

With adults the percentage may not be so high, but they will feel pleased when they're nearly right. This takes only a few seconds of your rehearsal, for it gives them a reason to **look at the notes creatively**, which is the secret of successful sight-singing.

### **27 Rests 'Rests are rhythmic!'**

Some choirmasters feel that rests are places where the music stops.

No! Think of rests as places in the music where the choir can gather energy and momentum to sing with even more forward movement. *You must feel **movement** in rests!*

**Forward movement** is the essence of making music alive – when this is lost, the flow of the music stops. Your performance can be likened to a plane taking off – it has to reach enough momentum to fly, and once it is flying, its forward movement must continue, otherwise it will fall to the ground.



### **28 Crescendos and diminuendos**

Similarly, *crescendos* and *diminuendos* should always be sung with a sense of forward movement – crescendoing towards a particular word or syllable. (See 25 above, section v)

This is particularly true for *diminuendos*, for many choirs tend to get too soft too soon – the forward movement collapses like a pricked balloon. So, when singing *diminuendos*, keep louder longer.

### **29 Piano piano**

As has been mentioned before, a piano is the best keyboard instrument from which to direct a choir practice, especially if it is a digital instrument which can be placed between the



choirstalls for your rehearsals. One cannot direct a choir from the organ console, especially if it is behind the choir.

So, if you can find someone to give the church a digital keyboard, this will help you so much in your leading of rehearsals, for you will be right there in the middle of your singers.

But there are three dangers in having a keyboard readily available during choir practices.

(i) Many choirmasters play the piano far too much! When your choir rehearses hymns, let them sing them unaccompanied. (I know some cathedral organists who always play the piano when rehearsing hymns with their choirs! I cannot understand why do they do it, because the choirs are following, not leading! They are singing passively.)

I've said it before and I'll say it again: let your choir sing their warm-ups unaccompanied, too. This will give them so much confidence once you've given the responsibility to them to do the singing.



(ii) And many of us play the piano far too loudly anyway, thinking that this helps our singers.

It doesn't help and it won't help, for by playing the piano loudly we aren't enabling our singers to hear themselves, and we aren't enabling ourselves to hear our singers.

It's our job to perceive what our singers are doing, and we can't do that if we're playing the piano all the time. And by playing the piano for them all the time means that we are not enabling them to

take the responsibility for leading the singing.

Very few choirmasters realize this!

(iii) Most of us choirmasters stay behind our piano for the whole of rehearsals. Why? Because we feel 'safe' within our personal space.

Personal space has been defined as an emotionally charged bubble which surrounds us.

Singers also have their 'bubbles', **but it is our duty to enter their personal space** – to stand immediately in front of them several times during our rehearsals, to challenge them to sing even better. A smile and a quiet 'Well done!' will encourage individual singers so much. This takes courage on our part – but it works! (I learned that from Sir David Willcocks!)

### 30 Phrasing

Most singers breathe twice too often. (See 18 above)

That's already been mentioned. But this is so common that you will need to bring it to your singers' attention at every rehearsal – not only when rehearsing hymns, but also when singing anthems.

When they begin to sing twice as many notes in one breath, they will begin to sing musically, with phrasing. Phrasing generally implies making a slight *crescendo* towards an important word or syllable, and then making a slight *diminuendo* afterwards. This will need a lot of focused work on your part and creative thinking on the part of your choir.

For example,

*Bread of heaven, on THEE we feed,  
We plough the fields (breath) and scatter the GOOD seed on the land  
O little town of Bethlehem how STILL we see thee lie  
Jesu, joy of man's deSIRing*

An effective way to encourage your choir to sing with phrasing is to ask them to read the words in the rhythm of the music, making a crescendo to that important syllable, and then gently relaxing the tone afterwards.

This creative speaking needs to be subtle, but it does require effort from everyone. Then ask them to sing those words with equal intensity and care.

Many choirs seem to struggle just to sing the notes correctly, but singing with phrasing and meaning will add a whole new dimension to their interpretation of the music they sing. Try it!

### 31 Consonants

Singing consonants requires a deliberate focused effort from your singers.

Consonants don't just happen, they have to be pronounced with conscious effort and with clarity. The letters T and D are omitted most frequently:

*Lor, now lettuce thou thy servan...*

*On Jordnz bang the Baptiss cry...*

A useful way to encourage your singers to pronounce Ts and Ds and to roll their Rs, is to ask them to sing a downwards scale to such words as 'Break Bread', or other paired words:



Break bread, break bread, break bread, break bread, break bread, break bread, break bread, break bread.  
Drink wine, drink wine, drink wine, drink wine, drink wine, drink wine, drink wine, drink wine.  
Praise God, praise God, praise God, praise God, praise God, praise God, praise God, praise God.

They will realize that they have to make an effort to make those consonants heard.

Ask one side to sing the phrase on which you're working, and ask the other side if they can hear the consonants. Then reverse their roles.

*Competition between sides really does work for adults as well as for children!*



### 32 Spoken parts of the service and the second law of thermodynamics!

Your choir is there to help the congregation in its worship. This applies not only to the music but also to the spoken parts of the service.

When your Minister finishes a prayer, is there a strong 'Amen' from the congregation, or just a faint mumble?

Let your choir be rehearsed regularly in saying firm Amens as well as confident responses which come at other times in services. When the Gospel is announced, does your choir respond with a firm, 'Glory be to you, O Lord'?

When responses are said with a measure of commitment and enthusiasm, this gives a wonderful momentum to the pace and atmosphere of services.

By the way, does your choir know what 'Amen' means?

Many people think that it means 'So be it'. Yes, it does. But what does 'So be it' mean?

An Amen is the response by the faithful to a prayer which has just been offered in their name, and that response should be, 'Yes, I believe that this prayer will be answered.'

**Amen?**

In other words, *Amen* means 'I believe that it will happen'.

I found, in practice, that said parts of the service (congregational responses, or the saying of the creed, for example) need brushing up about once every two months.



There's something called the **second law of thermodynamics** which means that **everything tends to disorder unless active steps are made to recreate order.**

So the said parts will gradually deteriorate, the singing will become less focussed, punctuality will cease to be 100%, and the singing of right notes will not occupy the thoughts of choir or choirmaster **unless something is done about it right now to correct the rot!**

So let your choir's *Amens* give this message loud and clear by rehearsing them every few months – for the second law of thermodynamics will have its way with *Amens*, too!

### 33 Your choir is there to lead the worship of the whole church

Take a careful look at your singers during the service when they're not singing.

Do they look interested when lessons are being read? (See chapter 12)

Do they look bored during the sermon?

Do they look as though they really are praying during the prayers? (See chapter 13)

Many choirs are so placed in the church building that they are, in a real sense, 'on show'. And so the congregation will tend to look at them pretty frequently during services.

If your choir members look as though they are thoroughly involved in the worship – listening to the reading of the lessons, being interested in what the preacher is saying, really praying when the prayers are being led, then their example will be a strong influence on the members of the congregation who are sitting in the pews.

Their example will be equally strong if they show, by the expression on their faces and their general demeanour, that they are not really committed to the worship.

#### What can you do about that?

Well, we've already mentioned the importance of speaking the responses firmly, saying *Amens* confidently and, when the minister preaches a dynamic sermon, they will naturally tend to look interested.

But suppose the lessons are not read with the spirit of understanding, and it may be that the sermon is not as riveting as it might be. Well, a word from you to your singers during the pre-service rehearsal may be needed to draw their attention to the importance of their leadership in every part of the worship – and not just the singing. (See [chapter 11, 'Worship'](#))

### 34 Singing with colour

**A word has, within itself, the essence of its own meaning.**



In other words, 'white' has the essence of lightness; 'calm' has the essence of peace; 'fight' has the essence of strife, and so on. Therefore singers need to realize (make real – bring to life) the meaning of the words which they sing.

If it's important to feel the meaning of the words when we read lessons, it's also important

that we feel the meaning of the words when we sing. If we don't, then all that the congregation hears is a beautiful tune, but there's no message with it.

Canon Mary June Nestler (see [chapter 11](#)) tells of a singing lesson she had when she was a student. Her solo was Handel's, *I know that my Redeemer liveth*.

After she had sung it, her teacher asked, 'Do you really know that your Redeemer liveth?' for apparently she hadn't conveyed this by her performance.

We all need to convey to the congregation and to each other that we believe what we sing. The Choristers' prayer asks: *Grant that what we sing with our lips we may believe in our hearts...*

And a way to begin to do this is to **colour** the words we sing:

To start with, try **reversing** colours: ask your choir to say 'black' in a *bright* way, then 'white' in a *dark* way. Or 'down' in an *up* way, or 'here' in a *there* way. (That will stimulate laughs!)

They will suddenly realize that words can be spoken in colour – with creative inflections. And so the reversing of the meaning of words by inappropriate inflections makes nonsense of those words.

Then try this with your choir, changing some words in well-known hymns.

Ask them to sing, 'There is a **blue** hill far away **within** a city wall'. They will automatically make that hill blue by the way they sing it. Then ask them to sing the original words, and, immediately the hill becomes a beautiful **green**, and it's **outside** the city wall.

There are endless opportunities to do this in your efforts to encourage your choristers to sing the meaning of the words, rather than just to use them as a peg on which to hang notes.

*In the **hot** mid-**summer**, frosty wind made moan,  
**Half** my hope on God is founded,  
**Lazy** shepherd of thy sheep,*

By doing this once or twice during a choir practice, your singers will suddenly discover that singing in **colour** gives exciting new dimensions to their singing.

### 35 Rehearse only one or two verses of hymns

There's no need to rehearse a whole hymn with your choir. They'll find it boring. So just rehearse, say, the first verse and the beginning of the second, **making sure that**

- i they start together with a sense of rhythm
- ii they breathe in the right places
- iii they sing throughout really together
- iv they pronounce the words clearly
- v they understand the meaning of that verse (get them to read the words with expression and then to sing them with equal commitment and **colour**).
- vi they sustain the last note for its full length, breathe together and then, after two beats' rest, just start the next verse together.

Take each point one at a time and get them to achieve what you have asked them to do.

By the way, **never give more than one instruction at a time**, for your singers won't remember them.

*'The bottom of page 3 needs tidying up, the top of page 4 is out of tune, and we all need to take more care on the bottom line of page 5!'*

How frequently have I heard choirmasters give multiple nonsensical instructions like this! They don't realize that their singers' attention has been turned off by such a list of foggy

instructions. And, what's more, those instructions, apart from being vague, don't tell the choir how to correct them!

**Your instructions must always be wholly practical (*precise*) and given *one at a time*.** 'Can you sing that phrase in one breath?' ('Did you all do it? No! Then let's try it again.')

When you give an instruction, *everyone* must eventually achieve what you are asking of them – and this often means singing that phrase three times.

Once you show that you didn't really mean them all to achieve what you ask, the message you will have given is, 'He didn't mean it, so we needn't try so hard.' And standards will immediately drop, and so will the enthusiasm and commitment of your singers.

***By the way, never get angry with your choir – venting anger means displaying weakness.***

### **36 Do your homework – to achieve a steady *MOMENTUM!***

Always prepare meticulously the music you wish to rehearse.

*Do you do this?*

Choristers will quickly lose their enthusiasm if you don't know how to correct a fault, or if you aren't sure what to rehearse next. We need to speak with the voice of authority, and that comes, primarily, from **knowing exactly what we will rehearse and how we will rehearse it.**

For your first few weeks in your new church pay close attention to the hymns – for they are the main music for your services. Mark in your own hymnal where breaths should and should not be taken, and then ask your singers where they should or should not take breaths.

If they are asked to think about the meaning of the words, this will be a major step in transforming your choir into a really enthusiastic body of singers. As with children, adults will also tend to remember what they told you, but they will tend to forget what you told them.

It is essential that your rehearsals move with a sense of ***momentum***. In other words, there must be no gaps – no 'What shall we do next?' This is where your homework comes in.

Plan your rehearsals so that you will spend, say, 5 minutes on **warm-ups**, 15 minutes on certain **hymns**, 3 minutes on rehearsing **spoken parts** of the service, 3 minutes on **choir notices** and the remainder on **anthems**.

**Always finish on a positive note** – something that the choir will sing well – even if it's only one page of an anthem.

Your singers should leave your practice feeling that the evening has been thoroughly worthwhile – that they really have sung better this week than they did last week – and that will come about through your infectious goodwill to your singers and to your meticulous preparation.



### **37 Starting confidently**

If there's one fault which very many choirs share, both professional and amateur, it is that they hardly ever sing the first note of a hymn or an anthem with confidence.

Many singers feel that the conductor should bring them in more firmly. But it's not the conductor's job to do their singing for them – they are the singers, therefore it is they who must do the singing, not the conductor.



Therefore I found it helpful to tell my village church choir that it is the *individual responsibility of every singer* to come in with the first note of everything they sing. Your leaders on each side may well indicate when the choir should start singing, but unless the singers themselves accept the responsibility to begin with confidence, they will always tend to start slightly late.

A practical secret to help this is to ask the singers to breathe, together, exactly one beat before the first note. This will need meticulous rehearsal on the part of the choirmaster, but it's worth it.

### 38 Give praise, accept blame

When your choir sings well on Sunday, be sure to thank them at your next practice.

They have worked hard for you, and 'thank you' are two of the most encouraging words we can ever say.

But if the choir sang badly, or if something went wrong, be sure to apologise to them at your next practice for, ultimately, it was your fault, for you should have prepared them more carefully. By accepting the blame, the sense of guilt that they might have had will automatically dissolve, and they will work even harder for you!

### 39 Guest director

Once you have been established as your church's music director, you might like to consider inviting a guest director to lead one of your practices.

It has been my privilege to 'guest direct' church and cathedral choirs and many choral societies all over the world and I've always found that a warm welcome awaited me coupled with high expectation from the singers. Perhaps you would like to invite your local cathedral director of music or some other respected choirmaster to do this.

**We can all learn from watching others** – not only what to do and how to do it, but also, sometimes, what *not* to do!

So, enquire what your guest's fee or expenses might be, and arrange to have refreshments after the rehearsal, so that all your singers may chat with your guest. If your choir already sings to a high standard you might like to invite other choirmasters and singers to watch and to enjoy what happens. They could be asked for a donation to help with expenses.

We all need fresh inspiration from time to time, and this is a great way to achieve it.

### 40 Your next choir practice

How important is your next choir practice to you?

If it's just 'another' practice, your singers will also feel that there'll be nothing special about it. If, on the other hand, you look forward to it with an infectious measure of excitement coupled with careful preparation, your singers will come to your rehearsals with similar high expectations, and you'll achieve so much together. It's up to you.

When I'm about to lead a choir practice I consciously think, '**This is the most important hour of my life.**' If it's not that important to me, it certainly won't be important to my singers.

*That's not overstating the case. See chapter 31 of my book: [How to be a successful choir director](#). I tell of a creative encounter with Sir David Willcocks which influenced me positively for the rest of my life, which resulted in my always having choirstalls filled with enthusiastic singers!*

#### 41 Mix standing and sitting

A useful way to keep your singers' attention is to mix standing and sitting during your rehearsal.

Always start by getting them to stand for warm-ups (to stand together by watching the leader on each side). Then, when they are working on a particular passage, ask them to sit (to sit together!). Then after a few more minutes, to sing that passage standing.

#### 42 Dispensable or indispensable?

Many choirmasters, even some fully professional choir directors, believe that they are indispensable for their choir's singing; many cathedral choirmasters even conduct hymns!

(If one's choir cannot sing hymns without being conducted, I suggest that there's something very wrong somewhere! Furthermore, those conductors don't seem to realize that the choir is not following them, but following the organ!

In other words, the choirmaster is training his or her singers to take little or no notice of the conducting!)

My own little parish church choir could and did sing hymns without a conductor. How? Because I rehearsed them in singing hymns unaccompanied. They just watched the leader on either side who gave imperceptible nods when a verse should start, and when the last note should finish. This, of course, required rehearsal during our practices.

A few years ago I had a bout of flu and was unable to be at my church for two Sundays – and there was no-one else who could play the organ. What did they do? They asked someone to give the first chord on the piano for each hymn, and then the leader on each side of the choir gave gentle, but firm, nods, when they should start singing. And it worked.

They also sang our usual simple congregational Gloria and Sanctus without accompaniment.

In other words, I had trained my choir to take total responsibility for their own singing – which they did splendidly, so I was told afterwards. And they were rightly proud of themselves. I had made myself dispensable.

You may well say, 'That's OK for him, but not for my choir!'

Oh yes, it is! A large proportion of my village church choir were grandparents, except for some who were great-grandparents! So if my singers could do it, so can yours.

**Read this chapter again,  
and choose one of the suggestions to try at your choir practice next week.**

## 9: Psalms?

If your choir is proficient enough to sing psalms (and psalm-singing to Anglican chants seems to be less common these days – to the church’s loss) rehearse your choir so that they **sing the words in the same manner as though they were speaking them – at a deliberate pace** and understanding the meaning. Not too fast, not too slow, but just right. (Another ‘Goldilocks’ guideline!)

To ease the flow of the singing, make your accompaniment continuous. i.e. Do not make a break at the end of verses or half verses, for that would automatically halt the forward flow of their singing. (See my *Immediately Practical Hints for Choral Directors* available on Amazon.)

The English language is exceptionally rhythmic. And so, when you ask your choir to speak a verse steadily, almost certainly they will agree where the natural stresses come:

*My soul doth MAGnify the Lord.*

*... in God my SAVE-yuh.*

*... for he hath re-GARD-ed the lowliness of his hand-MAID-en.*

On the other hand, if they haven’t spoken the words in natural rhythm, almost certainly they will stress some unimportant syllables when singing:

*... in God my Save-YOUR.*

*... for he hath regard-ED the lowliness of his handmaid-EN.*

But once you have drawn their attention to this they should quickly understand what you are asking them to do. (‘Did you notice which syllable you stressed when you sang that verse? Try speaking it, and notice which syllable you ought to stress ... now try singing it in the same way.’) This will take a lot of self control and re-thinking on their part.

### CHANTS

When you are accompanying your choir for psalms, it is essential that you know the chant so well that you can play it from memory. Why? Because your whole attention needs to be on the words of the psalm and how they fit into the chant. Your accompaniment (if the choir is singing on its own) should be on the quiet side so that the congregation can hear the choir easily. But if you are leading the congregation in singing psalms, you need to play louder, for they will need your help.

You do know how chanting ‘works’, don’t you?

*My soul doth / magnify the / Lord : and my spirit hath re-/joiced in / God my / Saviour.*

The bar lines in the chant coincide with the bar lines in the verse. (The colon indicates a double bar line.) You sing the first set of words - up to the first bar line - to the first note: *My soul doth*, then comes the first bar line with two notes in the next bar. You sing the words between the next two bar lines to those two notes, *magnify the*, and so on.

But please note that the length of the written notes in the chant are not to govern how fast those notes should be sung when singing the words! This is the great exception to the rule that written rhythm should be observed meticulously. It is the natural rhythm of the words which governs the length of the notes.

There are many recordings of choirs singing psalms: invest in a CD to hear how they should be sung. (The whole Psalter has been superbly recorded by the choir of St. Paul’s Cathedral under the direction of John Scott. *Look it up at your favourite music store.*)

Your choir also needs to be able to sing the chant from memory, for their whole attention will also need to be directed to singing the **right words** to the **right notes** at the **right time** – in steady ‘speech rhythm’.

Therefore let your choir sing the chant through at least three times, wholly accurately and easily, before they attempt singing the words. They could sing each note to a clear *Lah*, or sing each quarter to a continuous *Ee*. They should breathe at every double bar. (The double bar indicates either the mid-point of a verse or the end of a verse.)

John Bertalot



But encourage them to sing the chant musically; that is, with expression. Some choirmasters seem satisfied if the choir sings the notes accurately but unmusically – not realizing that there should be a strong feeling for their musicality.

So, when rehearsing the notes, let there be a gentle *crescendo* from the first note of every quarter, and make the last note of each quarter to be sung softly and lightly – even cutting that final note slightly short. (*Perhaps sung to ‘Lah’ – one ‘Lah’ per note.*)



This will help them to feel that the actual singing of words will be a musical experience, rather than a mathematical game of musical chess.

The psalms contain great spiritual truths (the disciples, led by Jesus, sang a psalm at the end of the Last Supper – *Matthew 26:30*), so let the spiritual message come through clearly. And this will only begin to happen when the choir knows the notes so well that they can sing them musically and easily.

I’ve said it before, and I’ll say it again, encourage your choir to sing the words with **colour**. i.e. to sing the meaning of the words: ‘*strength*’ should sound strong, ‘*mercy*’ is gentle, ‘*praise*’ is joyful, and so on. That way they will realize the meaning of the words and make their singing a spiritual as well as a musical experience.

Similarly, when you are more used to playing the organ, you can add subtle colour to your accompaniments. Flutes can be used for gentle verses, the Oboe is useful for dark verses which talk about sin, the Celestes (i.e. Celeste plus Gamba) can be used for verses about mercy.

In other words, psalms can be used as a creative opportunity both for your choir and for yourself to proclaim spiritual truths expressively to your whole congregation. If Jesus thought so highly of psalms, so should we!

## 10: Relationships with the Minister – and Managing **Conflict** Creatively

*“25% of churches experience serious conflicts”*

*“More than 19,000 congregations in the USA experience a major conflict every year”. (See page 46)*

You may think that, because your minister has asked you to lead the music in your church, your relationship with him or her will always be smooth.

That is not necessarily so.

At initial meetings with the ministers of two of my major churches, each of them addressed me as though I were my predecessor: they thought I must have my predecessor’s faults.

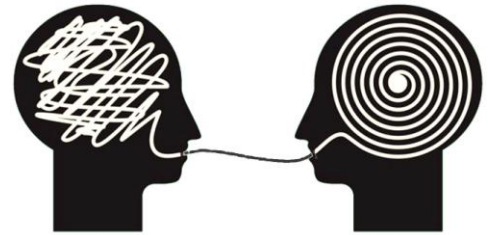
For example, the first said, ‘If you ever fine a chorister 6 pence for bad behaviour, I shall fine you 6 pence!’ I didn’t know what he was talking about!

Clearly that minister didn’t approve of the way my predecessor had organised the children’s choir – and he thought that I would do the same.

My other minister at our very first meeting after I had been appointed, said, ‘Sign this piece of paper which says that you promise to tell me whenever you have to be away!’

My predecessor clearly hadn’t informed the minister of his absences, and so my minister wanted to make sure that I would notify him of my absences. In other words, he was talking to the shadow of my predecessor and not to me!

That didn’t get our relationship off to a good start – but it gradually improved as he and I discovered who each other really was! We had to work very hard at our relationship.



We may tend to think that because our minister is ordained, he or she must be perfect.

***NONE of us is perfect!***

For example, you may like to discover (tactfully) why your predecessor left.

And so, however cordial your relations are right now with your minister, there will come times when you will have differences of opinion, and it is essential, when these times come, as come they will, that those differences are resolved quickly. Why? Because you are the two main leaders of the worship of your church – the leader of the Word and leader of the music.

How can your church worship in the spirit of holiness when the two leaders are in dispute?

You may think that this won’t happen to you. Oh yes it will! Therefore to minimize the possibility of such differences arising, arrange to meet with your Minister regularly, say, once a month, one-on-one.

In my little parish church, where I was organist when I retired from fulltime professional music-making, I enjoyed a most happy relationship with my Vicar for I had learnt, over the years, how to work with colleagues.

And so I met with my Vicar every four weeks over a convivial lunch in a nearby pub. We took it in turns to pay. This immediately created a relaxed atmosphere which encouraged ease of



communication, and many were the creative ideas we explored. I commend this to you.

### Conflict management

But when differences of opinion do arise between you and your Minister (or anyone else), how should you approach him or her?

May I share an experience I had when I was directing music in my church in Princeton?

A choir parent and I had a sharp disagreement concerning the way I was doing my job. One day we had a shouting match which ended with us stalking away from each other! The next morning that parent phoned me to ask if he could come to see me. When he arrived at my office he sat down in a chair and, for the next five minutes, he told me how much he and his family appreciated and valued all I had been doing for the choir and the church! Their two children loved singing in my choir, and his wife was a most helpful member of our choir parents' committee.



He certainly captured my full attention by the way he said these things. (He was a wise man!)

And then he said, '**But ...**' and he still had my full attention. When he had finished saying what he really wanted to say I realised how I should reply.

So I responded in like manner, saying how much I valued his and his wife's active support and how talented his children were and what a great job they were doing in my choir. And then I asked, 'Would you like to hear how I see the situation which has arisen?' And he listened

to me as quietly and attentively as I had listened to him.

At the end of 30 minutes we both knew each other much better than we had before, and respected each other's opinions. He is now one of my closest friends – all due to the way in which he led the way in which we should air and resolve our differences.

### Pay a genuine compliment

Therefore, when (not *if*) you have a difference of opinion with your minister (or anyone else), ask for a meeting and begin by saying something honest and true about them which you appreciate and value. 'Thank you so much for last week's sermon...' 'Thank you for ...'

And, once you have their attention, approach the subject of the problem by saying, '**I** have a problem for which I'd like your help.' (Never say, 'You have a problem,' for this will immediately declare 'war' – '*I'm right and you're wrong.*')

Always have in your mind, '**What do I want the outcome of this meeting to be?** Do I want to prove him wrong and myself right?' (That's what many folk think when they approach conflict situations.) No! What you want is to end your meeting by understanding each other's views more clearly and respecting each other's ministry more strongly.

### Conflicts will happen

Recent statistics from USA report that 25% of churches have experienced serious conflicts which had a lasting impact on congregational life (see [churchconflictforum.org/](http://churchconflictforum.org/)), and that 98% of these conflicts involve interpersonal issues.

There were even conflicts in the very early church. See the disagreement between Paul & Barnabus, *Acts 15: 39*.

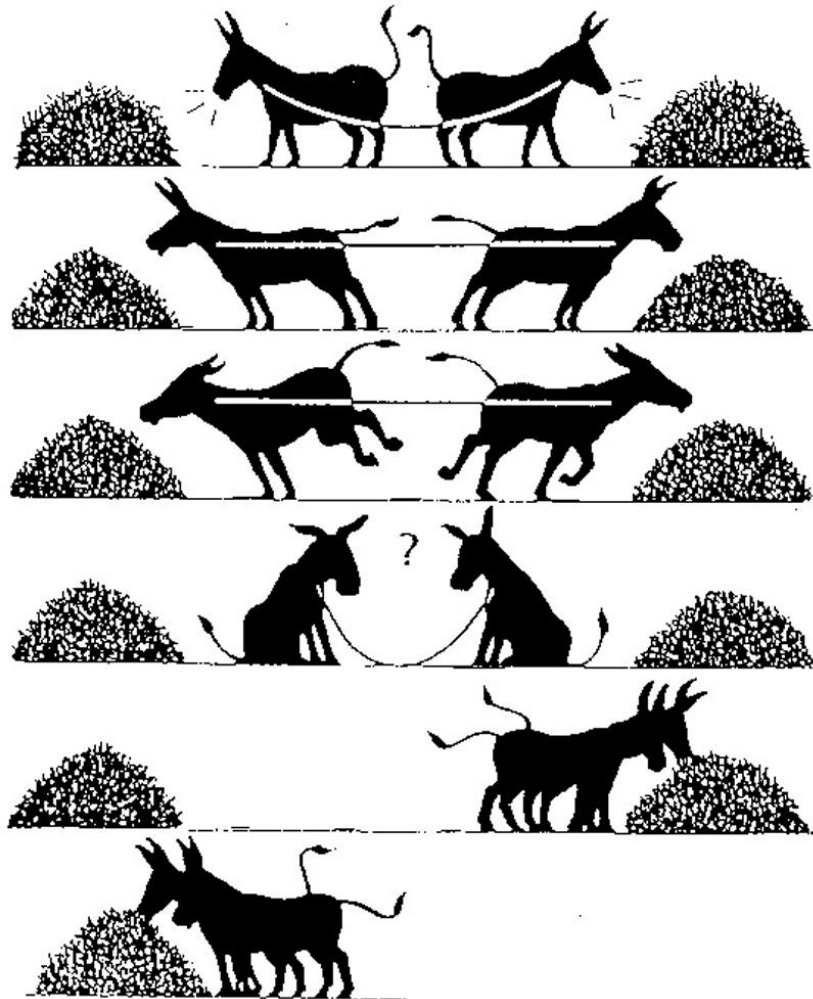
So, always have in mind, when you meet someone, even briefly, to build that person up:

'You do look well!' 'How is your family?'

By the way, it's not kind or helpful to say, 'You do look tired,' for that immediately makes that person feel worse!

In the Church people's feelings are much nearer the surface than in the business world. Therefore it's far easier to hurt someone, and also to be hurt, by a chance remark.

**So, when there is conflict in your church, work to RESOLVE it!**



From the web.

## 11: Worship

One of the most helpful definitions of worship was made by **William Temple** (Archbishop of Canterbury, 1942-44):

*To worship is*

*to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God,  
to feed the mind with the truth of God,  
to purge the imagination by the beauty of God,  
to open the heart to the love of God,  
to devote the will to the purpose of God.*

*Quoted in William Barclay's Gospel of Matthew, volume 2, p 117,  
published by the Westminster Press.*



Worship is an act of devotion directed to God. The word, 'worship' comes from an Old English word meaning 'worth-ship' – giving worthiness or respect to someone.

Evelyn Underhill defines worship as *"The adoring acknowledgement of all that lies beyond us—the glory that fills heaven and earth. It is the response that conscious beings make to their Creator..."*

**Worship is the central act of a Christian's life, the purpose of which is to give honour or worth to God.**

And this worship in today's Christian churches varies considerably in style – from a glorious high Mass meticulously rehearsed, with rich vestments, incense, ritual, colour and superb music, to an informal house meeting, with the singing of Christian songs to a guitar and praying as the Spirit moves us. It has been my privilege to take part in both these styles of worship, and in many others in between.

The spirit of the formal service finds expression in Psalm 95.6: *O come, let us worship and fall down: and kneel before the Lord our Maker.* And Psalm 96.9: *O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness: let the whole earth stand in awe of him.*

The informal house group's worship can be summed up in the words of Psalm 100.1: *O be joyful in the Lord ... and come before his presence with a song.* And Matthew 18.20: *Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*

The type of worship in which we participate today portrays, in large measure, the aspect of God's character which we attribute to Him. He is not only Omniscient and Almighty – a God before whom we fall in adoration, but he is also our loving Father, ('Abba' is the word that Jesus used, which means 'Dad'), who loves his children so much that he sent his Son to live and die for us.

We can therefore respond to our *Abba* as children, rejoicing and singing songs and dancing before him, as David danced before the Ark. (2 Samuel 6. 14)

Worship, whatever its form, flows from our hearts – from Christians who know their God, both as Almighty *and* Abba. But Isaiah has a warning for us; (29:13. NIV) *The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship is made up of rules taught by men."*



And so what are we, as our church's directors of music, going to do about this?

## (i) Discovering our own beliefs

It was my privilege to win organ scholarships both to Oxford and Cambridge. And it was whilst at these universities that I met fellow students for whom Christianity was a living, joyful and an ever-present way of life.

It was through those Christians, and many others whom I have met over the years, that my own life has been continually challenged, and this is particularly true for me as a choirmaster.

For my task, like yours, is to recreate some of the very finest music ever composed inspired by words which proclaim timeless truths. It is the **words** which are inspired: the **music** is the vehicle through which that inspiration is transmitted.

It is our vocation to lead the music for worship – and to care deeply not only for the music, but especially for the **words** to which the music is set.

It is our vocation to lead the congregation and choir not only in the singing of hymns, but also in the understanding of the words that they sing. We need to jog them out of the autopilot mind-set to which we are all too easily prone.

And this need to interpret the words comes primarily from our own Christian commitment. The Choristers' Prayer says it so well: *'Grant that what we sing with our lips we may believe in our hearts...'* So we choirmasters need to believe in our hearts first, so that our choirs may sing from their hearts as well as with their lips. What we believe will show automatically by the way that we lead our rehearsals. (*'... and what we believe in our hearts we may show forth in our lives...'*)

### The Gospel

Someone once said, *The only music minister to whom the Lord will say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," is the one whose life proves what the lyrics are saying.*

Now this is a hard saying, and who can live up to it? None of us. But if we understand and believe the Gospel (the 'Good News') that Jesus died for our sins – for my sins, for my shortcomings and for all my inadequacies – then we can rejoice that, through him alone, our lives are made worthy – sanctified. But it takes the step of faith to make this real for us.



### Faith

Faith is a word over which many of us stumble.

The Christian is told to 'have faith'. But what does that mean practically? It may surprise some of us to realize that our everyday lives are lived by faith. **Faith means putting one's active trust in someone or something** – and we can't do anything about it, except actively believe that that trust will be fulfilled.

For example, when we get into our car to go to work, we have faith that the engine will start – and it usually does, and so we have committed ourselves to our car – we have faith that our car will take us to where we want to go.

When we take a train we have faith that the train driver, whom we've never seen, will take us safely to our destination. And the train driver himself has faith that the staff in the signal boxes will give him the correct signals to ensure that the train's journey is safe.

When someone asks us to dinner we believe that they mean what they say, and so we put our belief into action: we exercise our faith by going to their house, where we find a warm welcome. Our faith was justified.

### Belief?

But there's a difference between belief and faith.

We can believe that our car will take us to work, we can believe that the train will carry us to our destination, but until we actually get into our car, or get into the train, our belief will do nothing for us.

Faith is doing something actively in response to our belief. The act of committing ourselves to our car, or to the train, is putting belief into action – and that is faith. In the Creed we say 'I believe in God...' We don't say, 'I believe about God...'. Believing in God means putting our belief about God into action.

There's a crucial question in chapter 9 of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, which asks, how can we say that we believe in Christ when we don't see our need of him?

The Bible is full of God's promises. When we read (in John 3.16) that, *God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son... that all who believe IN him should have eternal life*, we need, actively, to believe this – to put our belief into action. In other words, to live our daily lives as though it were true!

Someone once said that *to be a Christian is to bet one's life that God exists*. That is faith.

### I will

The Baptism and Confirmation services are all about faith.

When we renew our Baptismal promises and are asked, '*Do you turn to Christ*', our answer is, '*I turn to Christ*.' But did we say that because that was what we were supposed to say, or because we really meant it?

It's similar to the wedding service; 'Will you take this man / this woman. to be your wedded wife / husband?' And we said, 'I will.' Did we say it because that was what we were supposed to say, or because we meant it?

If we meant it (as we surely did) then our life was changed, and our new life, with our partner, began. That's faith – stepping out into the unknown with our committed belief in our partner. But it wasn't roses all the way – we had to work at it, day by day.

In confirmation we made a promise to someone we cannot see, believing that he has made a promise to us, which he will keep. In *Hebrews 11.6* we read: '*... without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists...*'. That's not easy.

God in Christ is our Saviour, Lord and Friend. He stands awaiting our response, as a married couple look to each other for support and love. In the Christian life we accept our Lord's offer of love and Divine strength. The Christian life is not always straight forward – no more than marriage is. It requires attention and devotion; and then it begins to make sense.

### Beware

But beware of imposing our own particular Christian beliefs onto our choir, (*'Everyone should believe what I believe!*'). Once we begin to do that, we will create a barrier between us and our singers, and that is not what we are there for. We are there to create harmony. Our life will speak louder than our words. Therefore let the words which are sung enter the hearts of our choirs by the importance we give to them.

### There's more

There's more to leading a Christian life than going to church on Sunday and trying to be a good citizen. (That, alas, is what many of us subconsciously think.) I once heard an Archbishop of York give a sermon in which he said that the Christian life was like a meal. *'Many people eat the appetizer, but very few go on to enjoy the main course.'*

I also heard his predecessor give a sermon in York Minster at his enthronement.

In front of the Archbishop sat about 500 of his diocesan clergy, many of whom would have worked hard in their parishes, but perhaps with little to show for it. So the Archbishop encouraged them by saying, *'The Christian life is like a man going for a walk in the country. He looks down and sees at his feet a beautiful sprig of heather, which he stoops down to pick. And as he stands up he sees that the whole countryside, from horizon to horizon, is filled with heather!'* In other words, there's much, *much* more to the Christian life if we only open our eyes to see.

## (ii) Putting our beliefs into practice

### The Bible

Many Christians start their day by reading a short passage from the Bible and saying a prayer. i.e. God talking to us through the Bible, and we responding to him through our prayer.

(Married couples start their day by talking to each other; that's one way in which their marriage flourishes!) A variety of helpful notes are published to help us with these devotions. Look up [Bible reading notes](#) on the web.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Century evangelist, Dwight Moody, once said, *'We ought to see the face of God every morning before we see the face of man.'*

### Prayer

I found it very helpful, on Sunday mornings before I drove to my village church, to pray for my Vicar and for every member of my choir, by name. That way I built up in my mind a spirit of goodwill towards each one of them. That, in itself, is powerful. And if there were any misunderstandings between us, the act of praying for that person steered my own heart towards reconciliation. And that, too, is a very positive thing.

### Starting and finishing our choir practices.

Many church choirs begin their rehearsals by saying a prayer together. Perhaps the *Choristers Prayer*, (available on the web). This could be said by everyone – and this in itself is a great way to begin our rehearsals, for it tends to create a sense of unity; that's what a choir should be – a unified body.

Similarly, to end our practice with a prayer – perhaps *The Grace* – is a positive way to send our singers home feeling good about each other. This will further unify our singers in their interpersonal relationships. Some groups, when saying *The Grace*, keep their eyes open to look at each other. This is also very powerful.

If you don't feel that you can lead these prayers yourself, find someone in your choir who would like to do it. This will bless them in their own Christian lives.

### Lay chaplain

When I led the 80-voice adult choir of the Crystal Cathedral, Los Angeles, one weekend when deputizing for Dr. Fred Swann, I discovered that their Thursday evening rehearsal began with a 5-minute act of worship, led by one of their choristers who had been elected lay chaplain.

She read a short passage from the Bible, followed by prayers for members of the choir who had special needs, and thanksgivings for blessings received. There were prayers for tonight's rehearsal and for the coming Sunday. Then she introduced me to the choir.

I shall never forget those inspirational five minutes for, by that simple act of worship, that choir integrated itself into the spiritual life of the whole church, and it showed.

### Leading our rehearsals

**The music we rehearse is a vehicle for the words to which it is sung.** Therefore, as has already been affirmed, in order to perform adequately the music we rehearse, *it is the words which should inspire our interpretation.*

### Words first

I found it helpful, when introducing a new anthem to my choir, to ask them to read the words first so that they would understand what they are singing about.

Alas, it took me many years to realize this. (By the way, whenever you ask your choir to read anything they will always mumble. So stop them and say, 'No – speak up, proclaim it as though you meant it!')

### Words last!

Once, in my early days as a choral conductor, I rehearsed one of my secular choirs in a part-song called *Lay a garland* by Robert de Pearsall (who also arranged the well-known setting of *In Dulci Jubilo*). I thought it was a happy song about flowers, and so did my Singers, for we had concentrated on singing the music so intensely that we gave no thought to the meaning of the words.

When we were about to perform it I said to the audience: 'This is a beautiful song – and these are the words'. And I read, '*Lay a garland on her hearse of dismal Yew...*' I was stunned for I had had no idea that it was a song about death! That taught me a lesson!

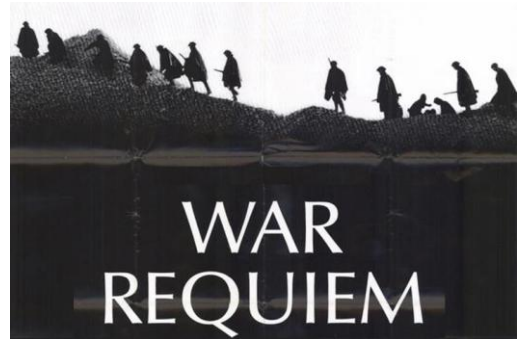
So if you rehearse new music with your choir, concentrating only upon getting the notes right, it may well be that most of your singers will have no idea what they're singing about. And so the whole reason for singing that anthem, or singing that hymn, will be lost.

### Robert Shaw

A choirmaster colleague of mine in the USA attended a week's choral workshop in Princeton, NJ, to prepare for a performance of Britten's *War Requiem* under the inspirational direction of Robert Shaw. Mr Shaw was one of that country's greatest choral conductors, and so I asked him how Mr Shaw had led the first rehearsal.

He said, 'Mr Shaw spent the entire 90 minutes getting us to read and understand the words. We didn't sing a note.'

And then he added: 'But by the end of that first rehearsal we were in tears because we understood what we would be singing about; we understood from where Britten had found his inspiration to create this world-class composition.'



And, of course, their performance, which I remember to this day, was incomparably moving, for the choir sang from their hearts as well as with their lips.

### What's it about?

#### The same needs to apply to our own rehearsals.

'What is this hymn about? What is the message of this anthem? How should we feel when we sing the first chorus of *Messiah*?' I saw a choir sing the first chorus – '*And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed*' – looking depressingly earnest; and so there was no glory of the Lord to be seen. The words which inspired Handel to compose the music didn't get through.

Recently I saw a school choir sing the carol, '*Joy to the world*'. They sang the right notes, they sang the right words, but the message of **joy** wasn't apparent because their serious faces showed that they were concentrating on *singing the notes correctly*. Their parents thought that their children were wonderful – but that wasn't the point of their performance; the audience should have felt joy that the Lord had come. Instead, they thought, 'Isn't my child clever!'

### Dr Barry Rose



Barry's choirs in Guildford Cathedral, St Paul's Cathedral and St Alban's Abbey, were amongst the very finest in the world. Why? Because, among other things, he laid enormous stress on the importance of words – not only pronouncing every letter clearly, but singing the words in the spirit of their meaning.

He told me how he used to ask his new probationers to recite the first two lines of *Baa baa, black sheep, have you any wool?* This they did, and it was OK.

But after only two weeks under his inspiring leadership he asked them to recite those words again.

And the result was:

*Baa baa* **BLACK** sheep, have you **any** wool???

**YESS SIR! YESSS SIR!!**

**THRRREE BAGS FULL!!!**



When giving me permission to include this story, Barry wrote:

'I always said that every chorister of mine understood every word they sang, and knew how to paint

them, so that they had some meaning. I've taken three choirs recently in the USA (one is very famous over here) who sing the Magnificat regularly and in which the majority if not all of the members had no idea what the word 'holpen' means !!! I rest my case.'

### First things first

When an internationally acclaimed soloist led a singers' workshop in the UK recently, she was asked how she learnt a new song.

She said, 'I study the words first to find out what they mean; once I understand the words, the music takes care of itself.'

# WORDS FIRST

This stress on the importance of words for our own choir will spring from our own Christian conviction.

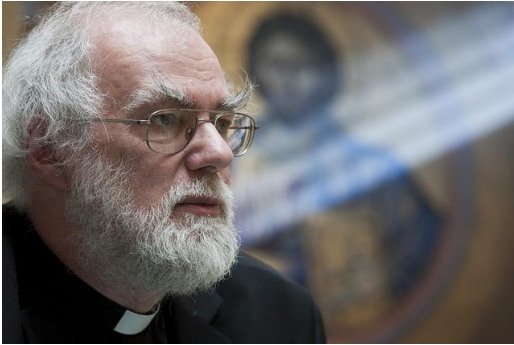
Which is more important to me – the message of the words, or the excellence of the singing? If it is the latter, then the former will hardly signify. But if the words become important to me and to my singers, the excellence of singing will follow almost automatically.

That's how we can actively help our choir and congregation to 'worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness', for that's why we are there.

### Why did God call you?

**Canon Mary June Nestler**, an Episcopal priest in Los Angeles, once delivered a sermon to an annual gathering of the American Guild of Organists. There were about 1,000 organists and choirmasters there, and she told of an encounter she had had with **Archbishop Rowan Williams**.

The Archbishop had been addressing about 200 priests in her diocese. I quote from her sermon (with her permission):



The Archbishop's brilliant mind and humble spirit made for awe and delight among us. At one point in his talk he said, "Do you know why God called you to be priests?"

Why, you could just feel every chest in the room swelling, every mind responding, "Of course I know. I'm *special*. I'm good. I'm chosen. I'm a great preacher, a skilled pastor, a humble presence in the midst of my flock."

The puffed-up-edness in the room was palpable.

"Do you know why God called you to be priests?" We waited for his answer.

"Because God couldn't save you any other way."

Two hundred balloons popped across the room. I daresay none of us had looked at our vocation to ordained ministry quite that way before. He then proceeded to guide us down a sometimes dark path into the depths of our souls, to that place where puffed-up-edness cannot stand alongside the presence of God, to that place where we are carved away and stand so very much in need of salvation, to that place where we are able to say with the psalmist, "Surely it is God who saves me," not the goodness of myself or the wonders of my abilities.

Canon Nestler continued:

### ***Do you know why God has called you to be organists?***

Go ahead, get puffed up! Swell those chests (isn't that a good line for a sermon to a bunch of organists?) and say after me, "Because I love music." "Because I love God." "Because I praise God in my music." "Because I can praise God LOUDER than anyone else!" "Because I can help *other* people praise God." "Because I love practising in the dark."

Or just maybe God has called you to be organists because God couldn't save you any other way....

And God has called you to live more and more fully into this vocation, into this place where your deepest calling and the world's deepest needs form an intersection of praise and service. For music-making is more than instrument or skill; it is the exercise of the heart and hands and, in your case, feet, participating in the great dance of Creator and creature, a dance which brings all things out of bondage into a new life and a new song.

Meditate from time to time that practice makes perfect, and that you are called to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.

How many of us think working in places of worship would be just ducky were it not for the other people there? Is it possible that God has placed us in an environment most in need of our exercise of compassion and the practice of mannerly conversation? Meditate from time to time on the eclectic group of folks Jesus called to be his disciples, and on the power of the resurrection that formed them into a community despite all differences.

Maybe hearing the good news of salvation depends on our being placed in just such ordinariness, finely tuned to our needs, so that we become spiritually fit to serve as well beyond the confined spaces and limited audiences our music usually reaches.

In this place we musicians must hear the words of Leonard Bernstein:

“This shall be our reply to violence: that we make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before.”

May our music-making lead us, and the world, into all peace.

## 12: Lesson Reading

In many churches the lessons are read, and some prayers are led, by members of the congregation.

This is good, for it involves the 'person in the pew' taking an active part in the act of worship. But how often do we inspire our fellow worshippers by the way we read and the way we pray?

You, being a musician, should therefore be alive to the poetry and meaning not only of the music but also of the words we say or sing in church, and so you could be a great help to your Minister by becoming a leader in this lay ministry.

### 90-year old

The most inspiring reading of a lesson I ever heard was read by a 90-year old man in my cousin's parish church. He had long been retired but, to keep his mind active, he memorized his weekly lesson. By doing this he was able to look at the congregation the whole time.

Can you imagine what it was like when this man looked at us and said,

*'When Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee  
he saw Simon and Andrew casting their nets into the sea.  
And he said to them, "Follow me."'*

He employed no histrionics but just told it as it was. But the act of telling the story from memory, whilst looking straight at each one of us, gave the impression that he had been there when Jesus had called Simon and Andrew. That was most powerful.

I've never forgotten the impression he made on us all by his careful preparation and gentle, creative delivery.

### Do likewise

In my own little parish church the Vicar generously invited me to lead a Saturday morning's workshop for our own lesson readers, for I had mentioned to him, during one of our monthly lunches, that not all our lay volunteers seemed to be able to communicate the message of the lessons they read.

When we had gathered I illustrated to them **the importance of four things:**

#### 1 SHOW THAT WE MEAN WHAT WE SAY BY THE TONE OF VOICE WE USE.

There were about a dozen folk there, and I started the session by asking each person to wish their neighbour 'A very good morning', and to notice the way they said it.

Some of them understood what I was aiming for, but others just said the words without any sparkle of enthusiasm. This had to be addressed. So I changed the message to, 'I'm so glad you're here!' Little by little this message of a higher pitched voice got through to convey a meaningful message.

There had to be energy in the way that we spoke these words in order to validate that they meant what they said.

#### 2 LOOK AT CONGREGATION

Then I asked them to repeat this message to their neighbour but without looking at them. Did their neighbour really believe that they were being welcomed? No – it was only by *looking at their neighbour in the face* that the message became alive.

How could this apply to the reading of lessons? Not many of us could recite a whole lesson from memory looking at the congregation like the 90-year old man, but all of us can give time to prepare the lesson appointed for us to read so that 'looking' could be as important as 'reading'.

#### Write it out

When it was my turn to read a lesson for a service I wrote it out on my computer and printed it in a large font, with each phrase on a different line. I underlined the important words of each line, and made a break at the end of paragraphs or sentences, so that the congregation could understand the slight changes of subject:

*God announces in the garden of Eden  
that the seed of woman shall bruise the serpent's head.*

*[pause]*

The man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God  
as he was walking in the garden in the c o o l of the day,  
and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"  
 He answered, "I heard you in the garden,  
 and I was afraid ... because I was naked; ...  
 so I hid."

And he said, "Who told you that you were naked?  
 Have you eaten from the tree  
 that I commanded you not to eat from?"

The man said, "The woman you put here with me –  
she gave me some fruit from the tree, and ... I ate it."

Then the Lord God said to the woman,  
"What is this that you have done?"  
 The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

### Rehearse

Then I rehearsed at home, *speaking these words out loud*.

This is very similar to practising a piece of music on the piano. You can look at the notes for ever, but until you actually begin playing them, your fingers won't know what to do.

Reading your lesson aloud enables the muscles in your face, and your vocal cords, to experience the physical feeling of saying those words.

### 3 PRACTISE LIFTING THINE EYES

And whilst still at home I practised raising my eyes from the printed page once every line, so that I could eventually look at the congregation frequently.

This is probably the most difficult technique for readers to acquire, for very few of us are public speakers. But by holding the copy with one hand, and following the line I am reading with a finger from my other hand, I know where to look for my next sentence.

In other words, I glance at my copy, but look at the congregation.

### Tempo

Many readers, especially young people, tend to read too quickly.

Most of us, in everyday life, speak too quickly anyway. But, when reading lessons in church (or even making a speech), one needs to *slow down*.

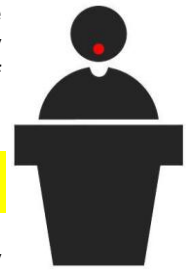
This is good advice which inexperienced readers will find difficult to put into practice. But persevere.

### Microphone

Many churches have an amplification system, but not everyone knows how to use microphones effectively.



Some people tend to speak *to the microphone*, as though they were confiding a secret into someone's ear, and not addressing the *people*. They speak with a lowered, 'holy' voice, and think, 'The electronics will take care of this, so I needn't speak up.' *Wrong!*



**The secret of using a microphone effectively is to speak as though the microphone were not there.**

Project your voice – i.e. raise the pitch of your voice – so that an imaginary aged Aunt, who is sitting in the back row of the church, could hear you clearly. Whoever is sitting at the controls of the sound system can always reduce your volume if necessary, but they can't do anything if you keep the pitch of your voice low.

### Read it as though you were there

That 90-year old man read his lesson as though he were recounting something he'd actually seen, for he spoke the words so clearly and his eye contact with the congregation brought his story to life. He was really



interested in what he was saying; he could see what Jesus and the fishermen were doing, because he'd taken the trouble to *rehearse* his reading, and so he naturally communicated its immediate relevance to us.

So we need to read our lesson as though we were there, too, describing something we can actually see – speaking Jesus' words in the tone of voice he would have used. For ***if we can't see it, then those who are listening to us certainly won't be able to see it either.***

In other words, readers have to understand what they are reading about and, having understood it, they need to convey this understanding to the congregation.

How often have we heard the Christmas story told as though it were an every day occurrence?

*'And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them,  
and the glory of the Lord shone round about them:  
and they were sore afraid.'*

'What did you see at the supermarket today?' 'Oh, only an angel.' 'What was he doing?' 'Getting in my way!'

No! This was an amazing occurrence, for not only was there an angel there (we've never seen an angel before!) but the Glory of the Lord shone around us all! 'That must have been a mind-blowing experience!' 'Yes, we were scared to death.'

I shall never forget one evening in Lent when I was at Princeton. The church staff had gathered in the church to read the whole of St. Mark's Gospel. We were each allotted one chapter. The first chapter was read by a lovely Christian lady. And what were the first words she read?

*'The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.'*

But she read it in a tone of voice which she might have used when telling us that she had to go to the dentist the next day, or that the milk was sour!

She didn't realize ('make real') that this was the introduction to the greatest story ever told.

I was deeply disappointed, for these words would set the mood for the rest of the evening. We should have been galvanized by what she read and by the way she read it. But we weren't. That was a golden opportunity lost. 'We've heard all this before.'

I confess that when it came to my turn to read [Chapter 6](#), I did employ some histrionics, for it included the bloodthirsty passage about the beheading of John the Baptist.

"I want you to give me  
***right now(!)***  
the head of John the Baptist  
on a **PLATTER!!**"

Halfway through the evening we had a short break for coffee and cake, and many were the favourable comments I received by the way I had read! I slightly overdid it, because so few readers had really engaged us by the way they read. 'We've heard all this before,' seemed to be the general attitude of mind.

And this leads me to the last of my four major points:

#### **4 READ AS THOUGH THE CONGREGATION WERE HEARING THE PASSAGE FOR THE FIRST TIME.**

This was the advice given to UK cathedral Precentors when they met for a day's workshop recently.

This point seems to have struck a chord in the minds of many of those clerics. How often have we watched a clergy person approach the lectern to read a lesson; he often looks at the lectionary to discover what he should be reading.

In other words, he hadn't prepared the reading (which didn't encourage us to be 'prepared' to listen to him), and so he gave the impression that it wasn't really important to him, and anyway, *we'd heard all this before.*

#### **Do I understand the 'message'?**

Clergy spend several years studying the Bible when they are training for ministry.

Few of us have the benefit of such intensive study and so would be helpful for readers to ask their Minister to explain in some depth the passage they are due to read.

And we need to understand our reading in **context**.

For example, the passage in Luke (Chapter 4, 14-21) which describes how Jesus attended his local synagogue after his temptations in the wilderness: it's easy to miss the significance of the word 'power' in v. 14 - '*Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit...*'

When we look at the previous chapter we see that, at Jesus' baptism '*... the Holy Spirit descended on him...*'; and that being '*full of the Spirit*' he was led into the wilderness to be tempted.

As a result of which he came out of the wilderness strengthened - '*in the power of the Spirit.*' It's a small word, but it is significant and we, as the reader, need to notice that, to give that word its full significance.

Similarly, in v. 20, in the synagogue after Jesus had read a passage from Isaiah, '*he sat down.*'

Most of us may think, 'Well, after we've read our lesson, we sit down, too.' But we need to know that the custom in the synagogue was for the preacher to deliver his sermon sitting, not standing. So the act of sitting down meant that Jesus was going to preach, and his message was, '*Today this scripture is fulfilled...*'

Occasionally we may need to amend a word or two at the beginning of our reading: '*After this, Jesus travelled...*' (Luke 8.1) After what?

We can either start reading from the third word: '*Jesus travelled about from one town to another...*', or we can give an introduction, telling the congregation what had happened in the previous verses. ('Jesus had been anointed by a woman as he sat at dinner in a Pharisee's house, and her sins had been forgiven.' *After this, Jesus travelled...*).

Similarly, there are passages which many people don't fully realize.

For example, in Matthew chapter 8 a Centurion asks Jesus to heal his servant. Jesus says that he will come to the soldier's house. But the soldier says, 'No, for I know all about authority. You, Jesus, are acting under the authority of God, and through this delegated authority you can heal my servant.' And he gives his own position in the army as an example:

*'I am a man under authority with soldiers under me.'*

Most readers stress the second word 'under'. '*I am a man under authority with soldiers under me.*' What they should do is to stress the final word, 'me'. '*I am a man under authority with soldiers under me.*' In other words there's a chain of command: there's a General over me, then me, and then the private soldiers.

It's a small point, but very important if one is to understand the full meaning of that text, and convey it to the congregation. (See a similar passage in Mark 10.42)

The Bible has been the world's best seller for centuries, therefore what it has to say must be important, must be significant, must relate to each and every one of us.

**Let me repeat:** the reader should proclaim the message as though the listeners were hearing it *for the first time, by sharing his or her own wonder* at the depth and meaning of those timeless words.

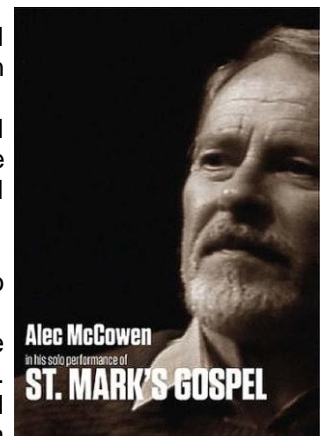
### Alec McCowen

A few years ago I had the privilege of attending a presentation of St Mark's Gospel by the Shakespearean actor, Alec McCowen. The theatre was packed, for McCowen had for 20 years given solo performances all over the world with rave reviews.

I wanted to find out why people flocked to theatres to hear St Mark's Gospel presented by just one man standing on an empty stage talking directly to the audience, for people don't usually 'flock to church' to hear the Gospel. What did McCowen have that others didn't?

He gave a brief introduction – and the only furniture was a bare table with two chairs.

He told us that it had occurred to him that the King James' translation of the Bible (1611) was made at a similar time that Shakespeare (1564-1616) wrote his plays. The English language had never been more beautiful and so if Shakespeare could attract people with stories of Kings, could the story of God's Son, which was written in similar timeless prose, also attract audiences?



St Mark's Gospel had been written, in many places, as though the author had actually 'been there', for many small details were included in the narrative: such as (Chapter 1) when Jesus called Simon and Andrew, he didn't just write: '*they followed him*' but '***straightway they forsook their nets and followed him.***'

There are countless similar examples of detailed observation throughout Mark's Gospel.

In his introduction McCowen told us that, after one performance a lady came up to him to ask where she could find the script. He said, 'In almost any hotel room!'

I confess that his telling of the story of the healing of the woman with an issue of blood had a touch of humour which had never occurred to me: (Chapter 5. 25-34). Jesus was with 'much people' and after the woman had touched him he turned and said 'Who touched me?' ***And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?*** This brought surprised laughter from the audience – and rightly so!

So how did Alec McCowen make this Gospel so riveting?

Perhaps a review (March 22, 1990) in the New York Times by Mel Gussow, of a performance by Alec McCowen will tell us:

*'The story is told every time as if for the first time.*

*'His role is primarily that of a reporter, filled with awe at the marvellous events and eager to transmit the Gospel to his listeners.*

*'More than anything, it is the **wonderment** of the experience...'*

So, when we are offered the privilege of reading a lesson,  
 whether it's from the King James version or a modern translation,  
 may we strive to present it to the congregation as though '***for the first time***'.  
 May we be '***filled with awe ... and eager to transmit the Gospel to our listeners.***'  
 And may the congregation be filled with '***wonderment***' of the Gospel we have proclaimed...

... so much so that we do have to 'sit down' afterwards to recover.

## Readings of the Passion

Many churches have the Passion read on Palm Sunday, and usually the congregation is given the part of 'the crowd' to say: *Crucify him!* This is unfortunate, for it's the last thing a Christian should say – let alone to shout!

What we did in my village church was to arrange the reading of the Passions so that the congregation could join in more meaningfully.

We chose two narrators – one read from the pulpit and the other from the lectern. They read the story in alternate short sentences.

Other readers were chosen to read the parts of Peter, Judas, Pilate and the others. The disciples' part was read by the Sunday School teachers, the soldiers' words were spoken by the youth group, and the Chief Priests' words were spoken by the clergy and wardens – and so on.

One of the members of our congregation was called Simon, so when the Matthew Passion was read, our Simon carried a large cross up the nave when the words are spoken which tell of Simon of Cyrene being forced to carry Jesus' cross. This helped to make it real for us all.



And the words of Jesus were given to the congregation to say. Why? Because the congregation was 'the body of Christ'. This was far more positive for everyone than having the congregation directed to deny him by shouting 'Crucify him!'

Detailed scripts were prepared for the readers and rehearsals were held. A more general version was prepared for the congregation, with pictures (clipart from the web) which added to their understanding. These also helped the children to follow the story more closely.

NB: Slight amendments to the order of words were necessary.

For example, where Mark's version has, "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the son of Man..." Let the narrator say: *Jesus said*, (and then the congregation, as the Body of Christ, said): "*I am, and you will see the Son of Man...*":

Such carefully prepared participation made the reading of the Passion significant and memorable and 'real' for everyone.

**You can download these choreographed Passion readings free – see the last chapter in this book.**

*And there's a simple music setting for choir and congregation of the Mark Passion for downloading free which my village church choir sang.*

*(This setting has been sung regularly by the choir of Birmingham Cathedral under the direction of Canon Marcus Huxley.)*

### When to start training readers?

Your annual carol service would be another good opportunity to introduce a scheme for helping colleagues to read lessons in a more meaningful way.

You might like to suggest to your Minister, during one of your regular meetings, that he or she might like to work with you in choosing the readers for this service. Carol services always attract people who may not be regular worshippers, therefore preparing a well-rehearsed service, both musically and with the spoken word, would be an effective means of outreach.

Potential readers should be asked to attend a practice session in church.

This should be for one hour only, for people would not be able to devote a whole evening in church during the busy lead-up time to Christmas.

Let there be two dates offered, for not everyone would be free to attend if only one were offered. You or your Minister should take charge of the evening, perhaps making the four major points listed above, and others, when necessary, and then asking each reader to read his or her lesson in turn. Let everyone feel free to offer suggestions. Coffee and biscuits would encourage ease of co-operative communication.

### Do your readers really understand what they are reading?

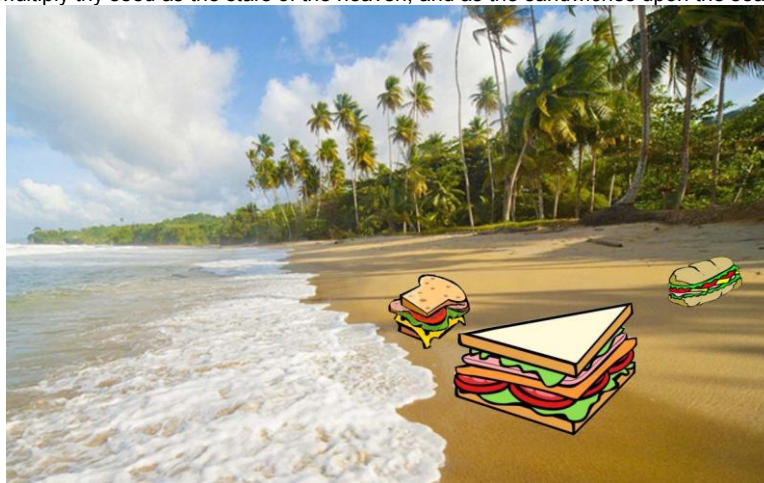
One year, when I was rehearsing our carol service readers, I wasn't sure if the reader understood the introduction to her lesson: ***Christ's birth and kingdom are foretold by Isaiah***, for she'd read it in a toneless way, which wouldn't encourage the congregation to pay attention to the lesson itself.

And so I asked her, 'Is that good news or bad news?' and she hesitated – she didn't know! (I was amazed that such a faithful member of the congregation didn't know that prophecy of Jesus' birth was 'Good News'!) Once I'd explained that this prophecy really was good news, she proclaimed the introduction in an entirely different way – showing that what she was about to read was really worth listening to.

### 'Sandwiches'

Careful preparation for the reading of lessons will help readers avoid traps, such as, in Luke 2, the shepherds finding that Mary AND Joseph AND the babe were all lying together in a manger. It should be, of course, 'Mary, and Joseph, (*pause*) and the babe lying in a manger.'

And what about the passage in Genesis, chapter 22, which implies that the beach is covered in food:  
'I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sandwiches upon the sea shore!'



## 13: Leading Prayers

How good it would be if you, the leader of the music, were occasionally asked to lead the saying of prayers. That would at the very least challenge you in your own Christian beliefs and it would also be a strong witness to your choir and congregation, for they would see you in a different role.

It's a powerful witness to the rest of us when members of the congregation are asked to lead the prayers during a service, for the leaders will have taken care to prepare their prayers.

They will know about the needs of the world through reading the newspaper; they will know about the needs of the parish and they will know about the problems of some individuals – especially the sick, and of families who, perhaps, have lost loved ones.

But prayers should not only be about asking, for they are also the opportunity to give thanks for answers to previous prayers: to give thanks for blessings received. It is good to say 'thank you' first, and then make requests afterwards. And it is also good to close either with everyone saying the Lord's Prayer or the Grace together.

### Presentation of prayers

But the intercessor should be aware of three points:

#### 1 Don't pray too long!

You may be able to concentrate on a long list of subjects, but the act of kneeling, or sitting quietly, by the congregation will mean that their ability to concentrate will be sorely tried!

Less is more.

#### 2 The congregation needs to be actively involved in the prayers you offer.

So it is helpful to ask them to respond to each short group of prayers.

Many intercessors introduce their prayers by saying, 'When I say, *Lord, in your mercy*, please respond, *Hear our prayer*.' The leader should then say immediately, *Lord, in your mercy*, which will 'rehearse' the congregation in their response.

Congregations have very short memories, and so this rehearsal of the response is necessary. Also, the intercessor should not say the congregation's response with them for, by so doing, she would imply that 'they can't say it without me'. When that message is given, the congregation's response will be less than heartfelt.

Your choir should, of course, give a firm lead in saying these responses.

#### 3 Please remember to project your voice when leading prayers.

It is so easy to think that, by speaking with a lowered 'holy' voice, one is encouraging the spirit of prayerfulness among the congregation. That is not so. A lowered voice is an unclear voice, therefore speak up – as lesson readers are encouraged to do. ([See page 57](#))

### Content of prayers

Prayers need to be specific.

There's a story told of a little boy who asked God for a bicycle, but his prayer wasn't answered. After a few days the boy realised that God had many bicycles to choose from, so he'd better make his prayer more specific. So he asked for a red bicycle with lots of gears. Two days later that red bicycle arrived.

Now whether this story is true or not, it does illustrate our need to be specific when praying for others.

It is no good just to say, 'Lord, we pray for the Vicar and congregation,' for we haven't specified what it is that we are asking of God. One may think that God knows their needs more than we do, so there's no need to tell him what their problems are. Well, if that's the case, why should we pray at all?

### Why should we pray?

John Newton (1725-1807) who wrote *Amazing Grace*, also wrote a hymn which begins,

*Come, my soul, thy suit prepare;  
Jesus loves to answer prayer...*

In the next verse he writes,

*Thou art coming to a King;  
Large petitions with thee bring...*

Jesus taught his disciples to pray and, as we know from our reading of the Gospels, he spent many hours alone in prayer. Therefore we need to realize that, in praying, we are doing something that God expects of us. And, as Newton says, God, in Jesus, '*loves to answer prayer*'.

So, prepare your prayers with confidence (a) knowing that God is listening and, (b) knowing that God wants to answer our prayers.

### Thanking

We've already mentioned the need to begin by thanking God for blessings received.

This comes under the heading of 'good manners'!

It also opens our eyes to look for answers to the prayers we made last week. If we don't expect an answer we shan't notice when an answer is given.

So let us spend time when we prepare our prayers to remind ourselves what was prayed for last week and what answers have been received. This will make our prayer time much more relevant.

### Petitions

I've often heard intercessors say, when praying for the sick, 'Lord, be near John and Sheila in their distress.' Well that's OK as far as it goes, but there's no need to pray that prayer, for God is already near to John and Sheila – that's who he is: that's what he does.

But if we were to pray, 'Lord, may John and Sheila *know your presence* with them in a special way this week,' that is a very positive thing to ask, and we know that that is a prayer that God will answer for it is at the centre of his love for each of us.

And praying such a prayer may prompt some members of the congregation to visit John and Sheila that week, and that, in itself, will be an answer to your prayer.

### Faith (again)

We need to pray well within the boundaries of our faith.

It might sound wonderful to pray, 'Lord make this land resound again to your praise,' but can you imagine that happening? Not really; that's praying without faith. Can you imagine your whole village resounding with praise? Perhaps, but not in the immediate future.

But can you visualize a member of this congregation bringing a new neighbour to church next Sunday?

Yes, I can visualize that. So let the prayer be, 'Lord, we ask that you move the heart of someone in this congregation today to bring a neighbour to church next Sunday, so that we may praise you together.'

### Large petitions...

Although we need to pray within our faith, yet we also need to broaden the scope of our prayers. And this comes from realizing who God is.

In the Book of Common Prayer there's a very useful 3-part design for composing prayers:

(i) Address God in one of his attributes, (ii) therefore, please act accordingly... (iii) so that the outcome may be...

- 1 God is addressed in one of his many attributes:
  - (a) 'O God, whom saints and angels delight to worship in heaven...'
  - (b) 'Almighty God, the giver of all gifts...'
  - (c) 'O God, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers...'

This will focus all our minds on a particular aspect of God, and so our faith in receiving an answer will be strengthened.

- 2 The three prayers above continue:
  - (a) to ask that musicians and artists may be granted a vision of God's beauty.
  - (b) to ask for God's special gifts on all who seek leadership in the church.
  - (c) to ask for strength and protection.

3 Therefore, let our own prayers be guided by this helpful pattern.

- (i) O God, who has called us to worship you in this place.  
grant us the spirit of faithfulness in our daily lives

that we may witness, both in word and deed, that Jesus is Lord.

- (ii) O God, whose Son went about doing good and healing the sick,  
We bring before you the sick of our parish,  
especially, ....  
That all who care for them may be blessed with skills  
to relieve their sufferings,  
so that they may know your loving presence with them this day,  
and give thanks to you again in this place.

Lord, in your mercy: *Hear our prayer.*

Have you ever received an answer to prayer?

If not, then perhaps you haven't looked for an answer.

*But when we start looking*, our prayer life will take on a fresh dimension, for we shall realize that our God is a God who 'loves to answer prayer'.

Two very useful books which are packed with prayers for use at any season of the church's year are [The Oxford Book of Prayers](#), and [The Book of 1,000 Prayers](#). Both are available from *Amazon*

## 14: Fund Raising

### i: Small-scale

My village church choir was instrumental in raising several thousands of pounds towards necessary extras for our small church. They did this in two ways:

1 We rehearsed only on Sunday mornings for an hour, and then had a 30-minute break in the church hall before the service during which we enjoyed coffee and biscuits, prepared by several of our choir spouses. This was a most welcome and necessary break after an hour's hard work. (It also helped to bind us together socially, for we could chat with one another informally.)

Although the coffee, milk and biscuits were provided by the spouses free, yet we agreed to pay 50p each to put into a general choir fund. However, most of us paid £1. Over the course of a year this accumulated to well over £1,000.

2 When the choir was asked to sing for weddings (which usually involved singing hymns, plus *Jesu joy* during the signing of the register) we charged £100. As most of the singers were retired we usually mustered a pretty good number of singers, and their presence was always appreciated. So this raised another useful sum annually.

What did we do with this money over the years?

We paid for the repair of an historic altar frontal; helped to pay for the mending of some church windows; paid half the cost of a new digital piano; bought some new choir robes, bought a set of new hymn books for the whole church, gave money for the church's outreach to Africa, and more.

And because there was no fund-raising effort involved, we had a supply of cash readily available for special small-scale needs.

### ii: Larger-scale

It has been my privilege to help raise money to pay for two brand new organs – one for Blackburn Cathedral and the other for my village church. I've also watched the techniques that others have used to raise large sums.

#### Blackburn Cathedral 1

Raising all the money to pay for the brand new organ for Blackburn Cathedral, shortly after I arrived there, was relatively easy!

It happened that a local millionaire, who had retired, was giving large sums of money to various worthy causes. He had already given two significant sums to Blackburn Cathedral when it was being transformed from being a dingy, roof-leaking, tired building, into a gloriously alive cathedral – with bright new windows and a ceiling which was ablaze with medieval colours. But we had no money for a new organ.

I had taken colour slides during this year-long transformation, showing the before and after, and I'd put them all together with commentary and music to make a slideshow which toured the diocese.

My Dean suggested that it would be a good idea to take this presentation to the millionaire, so that he could see what his money had created. I said, 'I'll provide the show, but you drop heavy hints about the need for a new organ.' And that is what we did. But the heavy hints fell onto the carpet, and remained there.

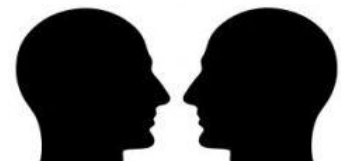
However, a couple of days later, one of the cathedral Canons said to me, 'If I were a millionaire, I'd take no notice of hints, but [I might take notice if I were asked directly.](#)'

I therefore sent a carefully worded hand-written letter to the millionaire thanking him for what he had already done for us, and telling him of our need for a glorious new organ: we were looking for a miracle.

Four days later a cheque arrived for the entire cost of the new organ.

Now you may say, 'That's all very well, but we don't have any millionaires at my church.'

Yes, but the principle of asking *directly* for money tends to work more often than not, if the circumstances are right.



#### Blackburn Cathedral 2

For example: more recently 15 large oil paintings depicting the Stations of the Cross were commissioned for



Blackburn Cathedral.

One of our Canons is very good at raising money for such causes; he knows the right people and can approach them directly. One day I was in his office and he handed me a brochure about these paintings, saying, 'You may be interested in this.' I knew what he was asking, but took no action.

A few months later we had the official dedication of these paintings in the cathedral, with wine, cheese and speeches. This Canon told us that 10 of the paintings had been paid for, and he expected the remaining 5 to be paid for that evening. (He is a forceful character!)

During an interval in the proceedings he and I happened to meet. I wanted to give one of the paintings, so I said to him, 'Thank you for giving me that brochure several months ago about the paintings.' He replied, 'Well, will you?' I said, 'Will I *what?*' He hesitated for a moment, and replied, 'Will you give one of the paintings?' I said, 'Yes!'

I discovered, from this brief conversation, that *I wanted to be asked directly*. Hints were non productive. It was the same for me, with my limited means, as it was for our millionaire.



But this only came about through the way being prepared. I would not have responded if I had been approached before I saw what was being asked for. Similarly, our millionaire needed to see that something positive was being done before he gave the money for our new organ. In fact he gave more than I asked him for. (Guineas instead of pounds – i.e. 5% extra).

### Three points

This leads me to three major points about money-raising:

i [Every fund-raising cause always costs more than the original estimate.](#)

ii [It is essential that at least \*one third\* of the funds needed is raised, quietly, before the official launch.](#)

That way, potential large and small donors can see that their gifts will be given to a project which promises to be *successful*.

I know of another organ appeal which is not successful. The reason is that, although it was launched by a prominent person, yet there was nothing to demonstrate that there was any chance of the appeal being successful. Therefore this venture has limped on for years with no end in sight.

iii [Your major fund-raising should be for a limited, clearly defined, time only.](#)

This will immediately concentrate the minds of those who are organizing it, and it will also give a necessary thrust to those who are being approached.

### My village church organ

We were aware of these issues when a brand new organ was needed for my small village church.

When I retired from full-time professional music-making – having spent 18 years at Blackburn Cathedral and the RNCM in Manchester, and 16 years in the university town of Princeton, New Jersey, I returned to England and was asked to become organist of a delightful village church.

However, the organ was falling to bits and, after consulting several builders, we were told that we needed a brand new instrument.

So the congregation and the folk in the village knew of our need. In other words, there was a spirit of expectation in the air. I was asked to write a report for the Parochial Church Council (PCC: the governing body of the church) and to present it to them at their next meeting.

### Comprehensive report

It was suggested to me that it would be helpful if I were to give copies of my report to each member of the PCC well before the meeting so that they could read it at their leisure.

This was important for, when I made my report, everyone would know what the issues were.

I included photographs of the damaged pipework and mechanism of the present organ, showing how dilapidated it was (for few members of the PCC would have



seen the inside of the instrument), and I evaluated the three estimates we had received for building a new organ.

After a few questions it was resolved that my recommendations should be accepted, and that the church should go ahead with raising funds to order a new instrument from the builder of my choice.

I confess that I was happily surprised, for I had expected that the PCC would want to hear the work of these three builders. But they trusted my judgement.

### **Demonstrate your own commitment**

I then left the meeting, for other issues were on the PCC's agenda.

But before I left I gave to the church treasurer an envelope containing my own cheque, (a) to help the appeal, and (b) to show that I was wholly committed to the project.

I was told, afterwards that, when the treasurer opened my envelope and told the PCC of my gift, they agreed to lend 1/3 of the sum required so that it could be seen immediately to be a potential success.

After consultation with the vicar I formed a small committee. Small committees are much more efficient than large ones, for everybody has to contribute constructively to the meetings, and also they will be expected to give generously themselves.

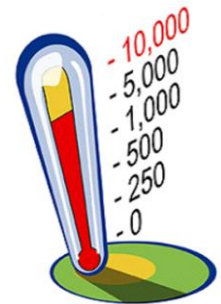
We had a lively chairman, a treasurer, two energetic members of the congregation and I was the secretary.

As secretary, I would keep everyone informed as to what had been resolved and, knowing what sort of organ I wanted, I would be able to steer everyone in the right direction.

### **Nine practical steps**

We took the following immediate steps:

1. We drew up a list of potential major donors and of others outside the church fellowship. (It is proven statistically that a few major donors usually subscribe some 70% of the total sum required.)
2. We also acquired the names and addresses of all the church members and others who may be interested.
3. We broke down the organ appeal into various financial sizes – the most expensive being the console, various stops by name and going down to a light for the console. That way, donors could see what they could afford. And we promised that their names would eventually be inscribed in a special book.
4. We worded letters to these two groups of people; had them printed on smart notepaper, and then had them topped and tailed by the vicar and chairman. Stamped addressed envelopes were included. When answers were received, they were immediately acknowledged by hand-written letters of thanks.
5. An attractive brochure was created, in full colour with photographs, showing the state of the present organ and what the new organ would be. A Gift Aid form was attached. These were included in all our mailings.
6. A large poster was placed in the church entrance, with a thermometer showing how much had already been contributed and what our eventual aim was. This was updated every week, so that the congregation could see that this appeal was a really live, ongoing affair.
7. The Appeal chairman addressed the Sunday congregation, briefly, every week, to bring them up to date on the progress of the Appeal. This helped to keep the pot boiling.
8. And we agreed that the appeal would be for three months only. This gave us all a very necessary impetus to work really hard. (A longer appeal, or one with no end in sight, would dissipate our focus and energy, and lessen our chances of success.)
9. We also applied to a charitable body for a substantial grant. (These bodies can be discovered on the web.) This was successful.



Needless to say, the original specification we drew up became more ambitious.

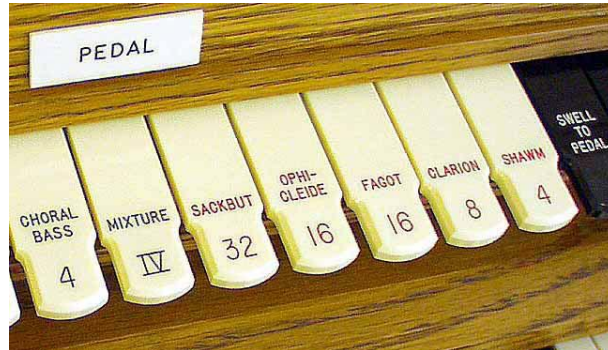
For example, we had opted for a less expensive console to keep costs down, but were persuaded to aim for a better model. This turned out to be the right decision.

### Involve many people

Members of the congregation offered to help dismantle the old organ, under expert supervision, and volunteers helped to install the necessary wiring and make other provisions for the eventual installation of our new organ. In other words, the whole parish was galvanized into action.

After three months' intensive work we had our money, the organ was ordered and a date was set for its opening - on a Sunday, which happened to be my birthday!

Invitations for the opening were sent to all donors, and a party was arranged for us all after the dedication service.



This organ is now the pride and joy of the whole parish.

### iii: Parish Pledges

Many churches make annual appeals to their congregations so that their programmes for the following year may be adequately funded.

If your Minister and his financial assistants are dynamic people, and if your church runs adventurous programmes, then it may be that extra help in raising sufficient funds is not necessary.

But few churches are that successful. So what could they do ?

#### Six times

One of my choir parents in Princeton was a member of a professional fund-raising organisation in New York. She told us that people have to be told three times about the necessity of raising funds before they take any notice. That's how we humans are programmed! But then she said that the message has to be repeated another three times before anyone begins to take any action.



When our Princeton church was endeavouring to raise sufficient funds for the coming year I suggested to the church committee that they might like to publish, every week in the parish notices:

- (i) how much we were aiming for,
- (ii) why the funds were needed,
- (iii) how much we had raised so far,
- (iv) how much more was needed, and
- (v) the challenge: *'Have you made your pledge yet?'*

After **six weeks** the necessary pledges began to come in and we eventually reached our target. **'Six times' really does work.**

The same applies to advertising concerts or special meetings. People need to hear the spoken notice and to have their attention drawn to the written advertisement six times before they will begin to do anything about it. Try it!

## 15: Children

If you have a children's choir, or if you wish to form a choir which will include children, this will involve you, and others, in a lot of work, but it will be thoroughly worthwhile, for you will be helping to raise children in a Christian environment which will influence them positively for the rest of their lives.

But **first**: not only you, but also the adult members of your choir, will need to be officially covered by the Child Protection Act. This will take time. (See [Child Protection Act](#) on the web.) You should consult the Safeguarding Officer in your church's local or national organisation, as they will have policies and procedures that can be tailored to fit your church, and will save you inventing it all from scratch. Your Minister will know about this.

Also, see the book [Everything else an organist should know](#), by Robert Leach and Barry Williams, available on the web. This book, written by two lawyers who are also musicians, is packed with essential legal information which every organist should know.

**Second**: you will need to make the children's attendance **an ongoing positive experience**.

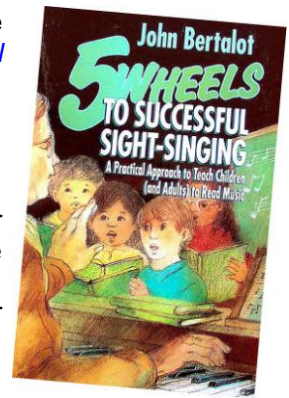
Ask yourself, 'Why should these children come to my rehearsals every week? What will I be offering them?'

**Some** children may want to sing alongside the adults for a few weeks, but unless they find that they are learning a new skill, they will tend to drop out, and they certainly won't stay through their teenage years.

I have found that [teaching children to read music](#) is a skill which will last them for the rest of their lives. And it's so simple to do. (See my book [Five Wheels to Successful Sight-Singing](#), available on Amazon.)

85% of musicians cannot read music. This is appalling.  
So make an effort yourself to rectify this situation.

**Third**: you will need to decide how old the children should be when they join your choir. Having a wide range of ages won't work, for the older children will become impatient when you spend time with the younger children, and the younger children will quickly become bored when you work with the older children. Therefore divide your children into two groups – the very young and the older children.



I suggest that the minimum time you should offer younger children is 45 minutes a week, teaching them how to sight-sing ('Guess what I learnt this week!') and vocal production (children can sing high notes – up to top G and way above – if they are shown how to relax).

Then have a 45-minute rehearsal with the older children only, who could then stay on for a further 30 minutes with your adult choir with whom they could sing some of the easier music, before they go home.

**Fourth**: **Christian education** should be included naturally.

Ask them what they think certain words mean. 'What does *trespass* mean?' By asking these questions the children will learn that the Christian faith is important to you. Ask them what the words of certain hymns mean. Even such simple (but confusing) questions: 'What does *without* a city wall, mean?' This could lead into a happy discussion – for children love to talk.

**Fifth**: you will want to get to know the **children's parents**, for their input into your choir's social life would be very helpful: organizing outings, raising money for robes, helping in so many practical ways. You will also need another adult present when taking children's rehearsals. The parents could set up a rota for this weekly task.

**Sixth**: the Royal School of Church Music publishes an excellent approach for educating and encouraging children in choirs. It's called [Voice for Life](#). (Look it up on the web.)

**Seventh**: it will be your aim to encourage your children to remain strong members of your choir when they become teenagers. They will tend to stay with you if they know, in themselves, that their contributions to the music are wholly positive and that you are interested in them as people, not just as 'singing units'. ***This will be so if you have taught them to sight-sing!***

See page [91](#) and read my articles [15](#), [16](#), [33](#) and [34](#).

### The Secret

The secret of teaching children so that they really want to learn is to **teach by asking questions**. Children love to talk, so channel their talking into answering your questions – one every 15 seconds.

Can you sing this note to Ah whilst I count four beats – six beats – eight beats?



Was your mouth as open as it could be?  
 How should you stand when you're singing?  
 Can you sing this scale in one breath?  
 What letter did you miss out of the word 'and'?  
 Are there any other words in that line which have a 'D' in them? Let's try it...

In other words, **get the children to tell you what it is that you want to tell them**. That way, they will 'own' the answer and take pride in singing well for you.

### Order and boundaries

Children prefer order to disorder.

So if you really want them to learn, you will help them to concentrate on what you are teaching them throughout your whole practice. Their growing ability to concentrate for long periods will also help with their school work. This will please their parents.

A useful thing to remember is that, when you set a boundary for a child, such as 'When I've finished talking, I want you to sit in your chairs and look at me,' **the child will immediately cross that boundary**. Why? To see if there's a boundary there!

In other words, when you give a clear direction which will enable the child to achieve something worthwhile, you must mean it. Don't get caught in 'game-playing'. *William, stop talking, please. William, I've told you to stop talking. William, how many times must I ask you to stop talking? Who's in charge here? William is!*

The way to enable both you and William to 'win' is to say (when William keeps on talking), 'William, your talking is annoying the other children, so please leave the room. But when you feel you'd like to join in with the rest of us, you may come back. It's up to you.' That way, the responsibility is given to William, and he will grow in the process.

So, when he returns, welcome him quietly, and enable him to make a positive contribution to the learning process. Children quickly realize that you will give an order only once, for they will learn to trust that that order is given for their benefit, not yours.

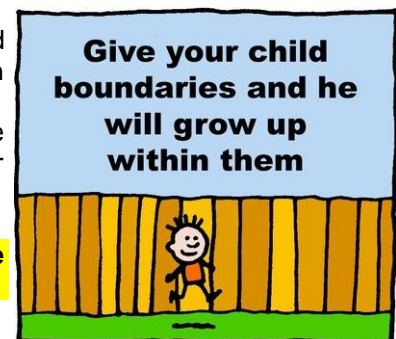
How many times have parents said to their child, 'It's time for bed.' And how often has the child responded, 'I don't want to go,' and an argument ensues which puts the child in charge of the situation.

I was in the home of a friend one evening when the mother said to her son, 'It's time for bed'. An argument began, and the child remained in the room with the adults for a further hour. That child is an unhappy child, for he's been taught (unknowingly) that the world revolves around his wishes, and that other people don't matter.

Children need to learn that **boundaries are real** – for in the grown-up world we continually have to observe boundaries: paying bills on time, driving within the speed limit, keeping the house tidy, and so on.

When children are taught that boundaries don't matter, they will experience many problems when they grow up. They will have to learn this sooner or later – and sooner is much better.

**The essence of a boundary is that it defines a space wherein excellence can be achieved.**



Think of tennis: the boundaries are clear, and tennis players' efforts to stay within those boundaries enable them to develop amazing skills. If it didn't matter when the ball crosses the boundary, then there would be no game of tennis! It's exactly the same when teaching children – or even when leading rehearsals for adults. You are saying, in effect, *'If you do it my way, you will achieve excellence.'*

**It's also important that those singers who need your help the most should be placed near you.**

A few years ago I was in California where I watched a choirmaster take a rehearsal for his boy choristers. He was a trained singer and knew exactly – almost exactly – what he was doing.

But the boys were seated on the stage of the church hall, and the choirmaster was sitting at a grand piano on the floor of the hall. After his practice I asked him why he was so far from his choristers, and wouldn't it be better if they were gathered around his piano. He looked surprised for a moment and said, 'That has never occurred to me.'

So the placing of your children is important. Let the more experienced children help the new ones, perhaps by sharing a copy of the music they are singing. But always have the newest children nearer you so that you may give them your special attention.

### Remuneration?

Some churches give their young choristers pocket money in appreciation of the hard work they do in the choir. This is usually based on their attendance and upon how far they have climbed the ladder of promotion (see the RSCM's *Voice for Life*). Children welcome such pocket money, for it gives them a sense of self worth and the knowledge that their work is appreciated by the church.

However, some other churches do the exact opposite: they charge the parents a certain sum each season (September to Christmas, New Year to Easter, Spring to the Summer break.)

This has recently been tried at Blackburn Cathedral for our very youngest singers and it works well. Parents pay only £10 (c. \$15) per season – a sum which all can afford – and this benefits both the cathedral and the parents.

- (i) When parents pay for the tuition their children will be receiving, they will make doubly sure that the children are there to receive it. i.e. high attendance is virtually guaranteed.
- (ii) The parents will make sure that their money is well spent by keeping the teachers up to the mark!

I saw this latter scheme working for secular children's choirs when I was in Australia – and it worked superbly. I commend it to directors of potential children's choirs.

But, again, if you decide to have children in your choir, you will have to work at it week by week by week, but it will transform not only their lives for good, but also yours!

### Admission Ceremony

When a child does join your choir (after you've given several weeks of training into the basic requirements – How to sing a simple hymn, how to stand well, how to sing well, perhaps saying the Lord's Prayer from memory (and explain to you its more difficult words, like 'trespass'), and how to begin to be able to sight-sing, plus having shown good attendance and good attention to your teaching – see again the RSCM's *Voice for Life* – it would be highly appropriate if the child could be formally admitted to the choir during a service – with parents and grandparents in the congregation armed with cameras!

The following should be amended to fit with your own liturgy, but your order should be photocopied so that choir and congregation may follow what is happening.

### Ceremony for admission of N into the choir

*The congregation is seated, but the choir stands.*

*The Minister and Director of Music stand at the Chancel steps and N comes forward dressed in a cassock.*

DoM: N, do you wish to become a member of our choir?

N: I do.

DoM: Will you try your best at all times in the choir?

N: I will.

DoM: Reverend Sir/Madam, I ask you to admit N into the choir of our Church.

*The Minister takes N by the hand and says,*

N, I admit you into full membership of the choir of St. XXX's Church.  
may you sing heavenly praises unto your life's end.

*N is helped on with his surplice by a member of the choir, and then kneels.*

*The Minister leads the choir and congregation in praying for N.*

The Minister: Let us pray for N.

**Bless, O Lord, thy servant N in our choir.  
Grant that what he sings with his lips, he may believe in his heart;  
And what he believes in his heart, he may show forth in his life,  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**



*N is led to his/her place by another member of the choir –  
and there may be applause.*

### **Thanking Ceremony**

Similarly, when a chorister leaves the choir (to go to College, or moves away), his or her years of service to the choir should be formally marked by a Thanking Ceremony.

*The Minister and Organist stand at the Chancel steps and the chorister comes forward.*

*The congregation is seated, but the choir remains standing.*

Organist: Reverend Sir / Madam, N has been singing in our choir for X years, and today s/he is singing with us for the last time.

*The Minister takes the chorister's hand, and says*

N, on behalf of the congregation and choir of our church I thank you for your years of faithful service to the worship of our church. May God bless you in all that you continue to do in his Name.

*All say AMEN. (And there may be applause)*



## 16: Wedding and Funeral Music

Your duties as a church musician will include playing for weddings and funerals. It would be very helpful if you were to **draw up a list of music** which you could offer for these services.

If your skills are not yet up to playing this music on the organ, you can find simple arrangements on the web for the piano for both services. It's only a short step to adapt some of these arrangements for playing on the organ, perhaps by adding just the occasional pedal note.



### Weddings

Ask your Minister if, as a matter of course, you could meet with bridal couples to discuss the music they want. (The bridegroom usually agrees with the bride's choice!)

Make sure that she chooses a short piece for her entry.

The first page of Wagner's *Wedding March* is often asked for, and it's the right length for a short procession. A Purcell *Trumpet Tune* is also ideal, for it is written in short sections which can be repeated or omitted as necessary, so that the music can stop when the bride reaches the altar steps.

Occasionally brides ask for processional music which is too long – such as Bach's *Jesu joy*, or Pachelbel's *Canon*. You could offer, instead, to play that music during the signing of the register.

If at all possible, try to come to a swift agreement about the processional music with the bride, for it is her day.

But if the bride's mother comes too, she may want her daughter to have the music that she had had for her wedding all those years ago! In such circumstances you will need to exercise tact – for it is the daughter's day, not the mother's.

Therefore you may like to record suitable music which you could play for Weddings so that the couple could consider their options at home, and thus save much time.



Music before the service should be quiet and tuneful, for wedding guests usually like to talk. Music of the Handel-Purcell period is suitable; there are many arrangements and editions available on the web.

Prepare about 20 minutes' worth, for that's when guests usually begin to take their places. But be aware that not every bride is punctual, so you may have to play five, or ten, or more minutes of extra music!

At the bride's mother's entrance, some short triumphant music would be appropriate, for she usually takes her place immediately before the bride arrives.

There is much planning ahead for weddings, and so you need sufficient time to practise the music which has been agreed.

### Soloists

Bridal couples sometimes ask for a soloist to sing or play during their wedding.

If this is the case make sure that you arrange a time when you can rehearse together. Also, make sure that the music you are given is not photocopied – for this is against the law. You should be paid an extra fee for rehearsing with the soloist. Arrange this well in advance with your Minister.

### Funerals

Funerals, of course, come with much less notice. So again, draw up a list of quiet music which would be suitable for funerals.

Handel's *I know that my Redeemer liveth*, is appropriate before the service, as is Handel's *Largo*. *The Little Organ Book* in memory of Parry (composed for his funeral and published by Banks – available on the web) has a number of short easy pieces, too. *Elgar's Nimrod* is most suitable for the recession.

### Choir for Weddings and Funerals?

Your choir may sometimes be invited to sing at weddings and funerals.

Bach's *Jesu joy* is appropriate for both and, of course, there will be hymns. Again, arrange the fee with your Minister. My village church choir charged £100 for weddings (funerals were free). These fees help to swell our choir fund.

### Fees (See Chapter 2)

You should have agreed a scale of fees with your minister for all extra services including rehearsals.



In some churches which have many weddings, it is customary for an additional fee to be charged when the bride is late, for a delayed wedding could have a 'knock-on' effect with subsequent weddings.

It is also customary for double fees to be paid when a wedding is videoed – for your playing will have been recorded on the video.

Similarly if the bridal couple want someone else to play for their service you, the resident organist, will be entitled to your usual fee, for it's 'your' organ! This needs to be clearly included in your contract.

If your church is a member of the Royal School of Church Music, they will be pleased to give you a list of fees appropriate for all occasions. <http://www.rscm.org> If you are not a member, then approach the secretary of your local organists' association to ask what fees are usual for your area. <http://www.iao.org>

The Incorporated Society of Musicians is also a useful source for every kind of help for musicians. <http://www.ism.org>

In the USA the American Guild of Organists publishes a comprehensive list of fees, and much other helpful information. <http://www.agohq.org>

In Canada contact the Royal Canadian College of Organists. [www.rcco.ca](http://www.rcco.ca)

In Australia and New Zealand: [www.anzco.org](http://www.anzco.org)

## 17: Not Conducting from the Console

### FOR THERE IS A MUCH BETTER WAY

Some organists conduct their choirs from the console. Indeed a number of music colleges, especially in the USA, run courses for their students to achieve this questionable skill!

I suggest that this is not a helpful thing to do!

Why? Because if you are playing the organ and conducting your choir at the same time, it follows, mathematically, that only 50% of your attention is on the choir and the other 50% on your playing. This gives the wrong message to your choir, whose attention should be 100% on what they themselves are doing. Playing the organ should require 100% from you, too.

What can one do? [The solution is so simple.](#)

**Train your choir to be *leaders*, not followers.** The job of the choirmaster is to make him- or herself dispensable. I've done this all my life all over the world – training children to conduct themselves, training adults to conduct themselves, training choristers who have attended my workshops to conduct themselves. And it only requires their nod of the head, not waving of arms.

Why? Because when you give the responsibility to your singers to achieve excellence on their own *the results are far better* than if you were to take that responsibility away from them by doing it yourself.

#### Switzerland

For example, when I led a massed choirs' festival in Switzerland we prepared music for a glorious Choral Evensong.

But I gave the responsibility for singing the psalm to the singers themselves, without my conducting them.

I rehearsed them first, of course, in the way I wanted the psalm to be sung, and then I appointed two leaders, one on each side of the choir, to act as coordinators, and we rehearsed the psalm again under their leadership.

In the service those two singers gave the signal for the choirs to stand and, after the organist had played the first chord, when they should begin singing.

And all they did was to give slight nods of their heads – not waving of arms.

**The effort in leadership given by those two chosen singers was riveting.**

I've never seen two singers work so hard, and this effort communicated itself to all the other singers. Those choirs sang that psalm far better than if I had conducted it myself, for then the responsibility would have been mine. But now, the responsibility was entirely theirs.

And at the end of the psalm, the two leaders gave the sign for everyone to sit – which they did, absolutely together. It was an inspiring experience for us all which I remember to this day.



#### Village Church

Now you may think that that is all very well for those singers, but not for your choir which is made up of local volunteers.

No! The adult choir in my village church was made up of local people. Many of them were grandparents and none had any training in music. I taught them to read music, as I've already mentioned, but I also appointed **two leaders**, one on each side, to indicate when the choir should stand in the services, when they should finish singing the last notes of hymns and when they should sit down.

This was the key element in encouraging all my singers to take responsibility for their own singing.

My choir led me – for my job was to play the organ, to accompany anthems and to give my full attention to my playing. The singers therefore gave their full attention to their singing, and that's how it should be! [See chapter 8, section 9.](#)

One of the very finest choirs I ever heard or saw was the choir of Melbourne Cathedral under the direction of Dr. June Nixon.

Dr Nixon's choir was made up entirely of local singers (although some had to travel long distances to get to the city centre) who sang daily services for forty years! Why? Because Dr Nixon trained them to be responsible for their own singing and so



they loved coming to their cathedral.

What did that mean in practice?

Certain boys conducted the choir for services – by putting their hands on the music desks to beat time with one finger on each hand. (This is what Dr Boris Ord did for the choir of King's College, Cambridge. I saw him do this many times when I was an undergraduate – and his choristers and all of us who studied with him revere his memory!)

Dr Nixon wrote: 'I adapted the RSCM training scheme [Voice for Life] as a starting point, emphasising leadership skills and making the tests more difficult, graded and varied for a cathedral choir, and included in the tests was some conducting.

'I also learned to ask the boys for solutions to problems, and this worked marvellously. As they matured, their sense of dedication seemed to make them aware that "we were all in this together" and this certainly made things easier for me.

'I felt I was creating a "culture" of professionalism, and new choristers just accepted that this was the way it all worked.

'We became a unified team, and I only found myself having to intervene when they became a little **too** pedantic, e.g. drilling on military corners in the processions!

'I began giving each boy the opportunity during choir practices to try his hand at conducting.

'There was a lot of competition for the privilege, and some really splendid conductors emerged.

'On some occasions, the weekday congregation would have been startled to see a small boy conducting an entire Evensong!'

In other words Dr Nixon's singers accepted the responsibility for their own singing, which left Dr Nixon free to accompany them on the organ – for she watched the boys conducting. **They** were leading **her** – and it worked triumphantly!

No wonder Dr Nixon was awarded a Lambeth doctorate of music – for hers was the only cathedral choir in the Southern Hemisphere to sing daily services. There were boy choristers and girl choristers, and most of the men were ex choristers.

And that's how it could be for your choir too, (not to sing cathedral music – but to sing simple music with 100% thrill week by week) **if** you are willing to make yourself **dispensable** by training your choir to be leaders.



## 18: Four Essential 'Nevers'

There are four things you should never do when you are in a church situation (and they apply equally strongly, of course, to the whole of one's life):

### 1 **Never say anything behind someone's back that you wouldn't say to their face.**

This is especially important within the close community of a church, for that person **will** eventually be told what you had said, and irreparable damage will have been done to your personal relationships and to the fellowship of your church generally.

Those of us within the fellowship of a church live with our feelings very close to the surface.

Therefore it is our job, as church musicians, to promote harmony, not discord – even in the most difficult situations. (*I've said it before, and I've said it again!*)

When I led a workshop for diocesan choirmasters at Hereford Cathedral many of the questions which those choirmasters asked were about personal relationships within their churches; they weren't about music!

So those choirmasters were experiencing more problems with relationships in their churches than musical problems. It takes effort and self control to bring peace – may this be one of your gifts. See my *Immediately Practical Tips for Choral Directors*, chapter 61: 'Personal Relationships'.

### 2 **Never put into writing something that you wouldn't like to see reproduced on the front page of your local newspaper.**

This applies especially to letters you may want to send.

One can always state a difficult situation in a positive manner rather than in a negative manner. (*'How can I help William become an even more useful member of our choir?' instead of, 'William is a pain!'*)

If you really want to let off steam about something, by all means write it down – **but never send it**. Leave it for 24 hours until you've cooled down, and then work out how you can bring good out of that situation, for that's what you really want, isn't it?

**3 Never argue** face to face or in writing, for arguing only strengthens your own position at the expense of the other person. And they, similarly, will seek to prove that they are right and you are wrong. **Also, it's is better to be kind rather than right.**

If an angry parent, or choir member, or anyone else, phones you with an aggressive message, never enter into an argument with them, for each of you is on your own 'home territory' and thus feels safe to 'fire at will'. No! Interrupt them to say, courteously, that this matter is so important that it would be better if 'we could discuss it face to face'. Arrange a time – and then quickly seek your minister's advice on how to approach that situation.

**4 Never ask performers, before concerts, if they feel nervous**, or even, 'How are you feeling?' for, if they are already nervous, they will feel even worse after your question.

Performers need to be left alone immediately before a concert so that they may concentrate on what they are about to do. Your question was prompted by kindness, but your job is to enable the performers to give of their best by the arrangements you have made beforehand. Their task is to do their best for you – so, let them! **But remember to thank them afterwards.**

## 19: Concerts

Concerts can be a beneficial means of outreach for your church, for they will bring into your church building some people who may not otherwise come to services. But there are essential questions to be asked before concerts are arranged:

- 1 Is there room in your chancel for a group of musicians or for a choral society?
- 2 Have you an organ which is good enough for recitals or to accompany a choral society?
- 3 Have you a good grand piano? (Such pianos are expensive to hire.)
- 4 Would your Minister and church council support financially the arranging of such concerts? (It's not easy to make a profit from concerts.)
- 5 Is there adequate car parking near your church?
- 6 Is there a church hall with adequate toilet facilities and also room for a reception after concerts?
- 7 Is there a need for more concerts in your town?

*If the answers to these questions are yes, then you will need to form a concerts committee.*

### 8 Committee.

Aim for a small committee, with a lively chairman, responsible treasurer, active publicity person, someone who can gather volunteers for moving furniture, someone who could be in charge of providing refreshments, and with yourself, possibly, as secretary so that you can keep a firm grip on what is decided.

### 9 Concert series

A series of concerts is better than an isolated one – perhaps three or four concerts in a season – for momentum is built up in the community when such a series is arranged.

That way you could ask for patrons who would pay for a set of tickets even if they couldn't attend every concert. This will give you a financial base. You could either offer patrons four tickets for the price of three, or do the opposite, charge them for four tickets plus an extra nominal amount with the promise that you will mail them their programmes in advance and include their names as 'Patrons' on the programmes.

Decide what artists you would like to invite. There should be some local choral societies who could sing for you. Christmas concerts are particularly popular. Also there may be some local soloists who enjoy a high reputation. Brass bands always attract large audiences, as do school choirs.

**Beware of clashing dates** with other concerts in your town. So discover what other events have already been arranged by other bodies. Notify those bodies of your own proposed dates so that the danger of clashes is avoided.

### 10 Publicity

There should be someone in your church who could design posters, and create attractive leaflets in colour, which will include information about the concerts, including whom to contact for tickets. Posters should be readable from a distance. But permission should be sought from owners of properties and shops where they are displayed.

Let there be a letter, attractively printed and signed individually by one or more members of your committee, enclosing a **coloured leaflet**, and mailed to all your parishioners inviting them to become patrons. Your publicity person should contact the local newspapers at least a month in advance of each concert, giving full details. **Your local press photographer** should be invited to the first concert to take photos of the artists. This will give you much needed free publicity for the series.

Paying for publicity in newspapers is expensive. There should be a member of your congregation who knows someone on the staff of your local newspaper; they could give you helpful advice on this important subject.

Also approach your local radio station to ask if they would invite your chairman, or yourself, to give an interview during their breakfast programme a few days before a concert.

**11 Finance** All this printing and consequent postage will cost money; that's where your church council's active support comes in, for you will need a financial float.

**12 Performing Rights Society.**

And once the artists and programmes for your concerts have been agreed you must contact the Performing Rights Society ([PRS](#) – look them up on the web) to whom royalty fees must be paid for works performed. (In the USA the society is The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers – [ASCAP](#).) Essential information on this and other legal matters can be found in the book previously mentioned, *Everything else an organist should know*.

**13 Programmes**, which could be printed attractively on the church's photocopier, should include photographs and biographical details of the composers and artists, plus notes on the music. Much of this musical information can be found on the web. Programmes could be created by you, the director of music, and should be sold for a nominal amount at the door. (Patrons should be sent two programmes each free.)

**14** Invite your Minister to **welcome the audience** to each concert, for that would be a significant part of your church's outreach.

**15 Light refreshments** in the church hall after the concert would enable artists and audience to meet one another. This would be another valuable means of outreach.

**16** And remember to write **letters of thanks** to those who had worked so hard to make the evening such a success; not only to the performers, but also to those who set out chairs, made cups of tea and did the 101 other jobs which were essential to make the evening flow efficiently.

'Thank you' are the two most creative words you can ever use. Use them frequently.

A large, elegant, black cursive script that reads "Thank You". The letters are highly stylized with many loops and flourishes, particularly around the 'T' and 'Y'. The 'T' has a long, sweeping tail that loops back under the 'Y'. The 'Y' also has a long, sweeping tail that loops back under the 'T'. The overall style is classic and decorative.

## 20: Coda

### Semi-adhesive labels

At my village church we sang half a dozen hymns every Sunday morning. Finding the right hymn quickly was made much simpler by cutting semi-adhesive labels into strips, writing the hymn number on the right hand edge and placing the sticky ends in order, from top to bottom in our hymn books. Therefore for services the first hymn is marked at the top right hand side of the hymn book, the second hymn is an inch lower, and so on. All my choristers (who always came early for Sunday rehearsals) put these helpful labels into their hymn books before our rehearsal began.

### Marking orders of service

Similarly, when we had an unfamiliar order of service which was printed, I marked it carefully in **coloured crayon** – one colour for the **hymns**, another colour for when the choir has to lead the **said parts**, and so on. As has been mentioned before, it's vitally important that services should run smoothly, and the director of music has as much responsibility for this as the Minister. Marking such orders of service in colour helped me to know 'what to do next'!

### Social activities, and more

It has also been said before, that a choir is not only a musical body but also a social body. Therefore let there be a number of social activities for your singers and their families throughout the year.

I've already mentioned that my village church choir enjoyed a half-hour coffee break between Sunday morning rehearsal and service. This added considerably to their commitment to, and enjoyment of, everything we did. But we also organized an annual Christmas dinner, and a summer coach outing. There were also theatre outings and two holidays in Italy!

If organizing such events is not your *forte*, there must be someone in your choir who would like to take this on. The more jobs you can find for your choristers to do for the good of the choir and the church, the better. Have you appointed a choir librarian – someone who will keep the music tidy? Also is there someone to look after the robes? Is there a choir treasurer?

### Create harmony in the church

**Our vocation, as church directors of music, is to create harmony – not only musically but also within the church's fellowship.**

There is, built into a church's structure, an almost automatic them-and-us situation: 'us' sitting robed in the chancel, and 'them' in the congregation. It is up to the directors of music to dismantle this invisible barrier by every means possible. ([See chapter 1](#))

For example, in my village church, when I made my way to the console before services, I walked up the nave greeting members of the congregation with a quiet word and a smile. This gave the message, 'we are about to worship God together: it's good to see you here'. After services there was coffee time in the church hall. It was important that I, and also members of the choir, chatted with as many people as possible to confirm the unity which we had just expressed by our act of worship. This was easy to do and it took very little time.

During my 16 years in the University town of Princeton, NJ, we had many parochial meetings every week. Only a very few of them were about music, but it was important that I, and other musicians, were present as often as possible to underline our sense of unity.

We had an annual rummage sale which involved the whole church; musicians were at the forefront, to help with fetching and carrying, providing a hot drinks for people waiting to get in, and generally to be there joyfully in the midst of all the activity.

### **So, attend non-musical events in your church as well as musical ones.**

Your presence will be greatly appreciated.



### Changes

Don't make any changes in your church's music or in rehearsal arrangements until you have earned the right to do so.

This could take six months before you are fully accepted. **You have to earn the right to make changes** and this takes time.

Everyone, especially those of us in the church, can feel threatened by changes. So when you see the need to change something (such as the time of your choir practice, or different seating for your singers) discuss it first with your minister, and then ask your choir if they would be willing to **try it for, say, four weeks**, after which you would all discuss it to see if the change was for the better.

If it's not better, then go back to the former way. If, however, some singers feel that it was better (not everyone

will!) ask if they would be willing to try the change for another four weeks.

**Dr. Hubert Middleton.**

When I was a second-year student at Cambridge I joined a small class for tutorials in composition led by **Dr. Hubert Middleton**, who was director of music of Trinity College.

On one occasion Dr. Middleton gave us a week to write a string quartet movement in the style of Mozart. As I was already an FRCO I thought I knew what I was doing, but when Dr. Middleton looked at my composition he let out a quiet *Hrrump*, which startled me.

'Look at that cello part!' he thundered gently, (I'd written a simple, undemanding cello part.) 'Would you expect a young lady cellist from Girton College to come three miles into Cambridge on the bus with her cello on a wet Monday night to play that? Give her something worthwhile to play!'



And from that traumatic experience I realised that if I wanted my choristers, be they adults or children, to leave the comfort of their homes to come to my practice room on a wet Monday night, I had to make it thoroughly worth their while.

Not to play musical games (as some choirmasters mistakenly believe) but to work really hard so that they could achieve something positive, learn something new and so feel really glad that they had made the effort to be there.

And as a result of that never-to-be-forgotten lesson, which I had learnt from Dr. Middleton when I was still a student 60 years ago, I have always had full choirstalls whatever the weather, because I make it *worth the singers' while*. The same can be true for you.

**Music Director's motto?**

'I will not offer to God that which costs me nothing.' (2 Samuel 24.24)

*If any of the illustrations in this book are in breach of copyright, please let the author know, and they will be removed.*



## 21: Thirty-Six Very Easy Anthems & 6 Simple Psalms for Your Choir – For Downloading – **FREE!**

### CHRISTMAS

Adam lay y-bounden

Ah, Lord God

Angels from the realms of glory

Away in a manger

Behold the great Creator

Every star

I saw three ships

I wonder as I wander

King Jesus hath a garden

Past three o'clock

Rocking

Silent night [\[Listen to a recording of this – see p. 89\]](#)

Three Kings from Persian lands

While shepherds watched (To 'Ilkley Moor' – for choir and congregation, or for a Carol Concert)

Good King Wenceslas (for an audience and choir Carol Concert)

### LENT

There's a wideness in God's mercy

### EASTER

Blest be the everlasting Lord

Now the green blade riseth

This joyful Eastertide

### ASCENSION

Hail the day that sees Him rise

### PENTECOST

Come, gracious Spirit

### BAPTISM

Blessed Jesus

You must be born again

### COMMUNION

As we are gathered

Author of life divine

Glory be to God the Father (for choir and congregation)

Let us break bread together

**GENERAL**

God of mercy

Have faith in God

How sweet the Name

Jesus said, 'Follow me.'

Light's abode (for choir and congregation, with an exciting organ part)

My spirit longs for Thee

O for a closer walk with God

Thou are the way

Wonderful love

**SIX SIMPLE PSALMS FOR CHOIR WITH SOME CONGREGATIONAL REFRAINS****FOR DOWNLOADING – FREE!**

Psalm 15 Lord, who may abide in your tabernacle?

Psalm 23 The Lord is my shepherd

Psalm 40 I waited patiently for the Lord

Psalm 67 God be merciful to us and bless us

Psalm 100 O shout to the Lord in triumph

Psalm 121 I lift up my eyes to the hills

**ALL this music may be downloaded FREE  
from JB's website (Book 5): [bertalot.org](http://bertalot.org)**

## 22: Four Best Selling Books on Practical Choir Training



*A librarian at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, holding JB's four books*

'John Bertalot's books on Sight Reading and Choir Training skills are winners. They are full of practical sense, and enable even the most modest to progress with confidence.'

*Professor John Harper, former Director General of the RSCM*

'You have been such an inspiration to us professionally, and I think your books should be required reading for anyone who wants to go into choir training.'

*Dr. Andrew Henderson, Director of Music, Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York City.*

'Purchase immediately John Bertalot's books on choiring. In twenty years of full-time choral directing I have never come across more helpful, practical and inspiring works.'

*Gerald van Wyck, British Columbia's Children's Choir, Canada*

'These are books which have transformed my own working with choirs.'

*Jonathan Dimmock, San Francisco*

'I re-read your books regularly, and am always referring to all four of them - to me they are still the most valuable music books that I have read in my whole degree. You can read as many history books as you like, but there is something far more rewarding in your choir-training books.'

*From a Music Scholar at Cambridge University.*

**Book 1: FIVE WHEELS TO SUCCESSFUL SIGHT SINGING**

*It's so easy to teach children to sight-sing.*

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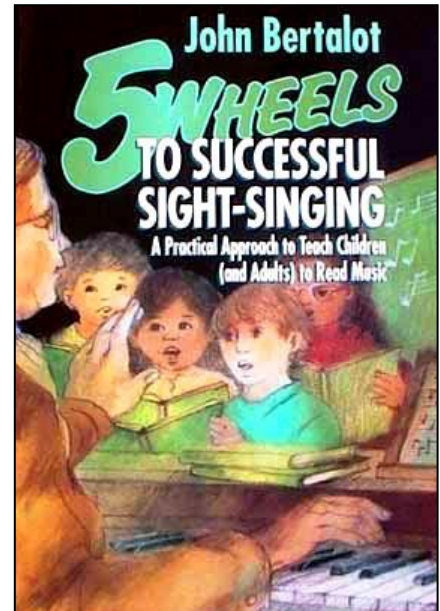
'If you buy only one book this year, this should be it!'

*Dr. Austin Lovelace,  
Choristers Guild USA*

'Few guide books on choir training present the information and the essential tools in such a concise, engaging, and practical manner as the "Five Wheels...". John Bertalot communicates techniques and methods in vivid, unforgettable terms...

'I am a director of children's and youth choirs, and I have found this material motivating, inspiring, and encouraging.'

*Amazon 5-star review*



## **Book 2: Immediately Practical Tips for Choral Directors**

*Published by Augsburg Fortress.*

<https://www.augsburgfortress.org/>

'I couldn't put it down.'

*Malcolm Archer, Bristol, Wells and St. Paul's Cathedrals*

'Neither could I.'

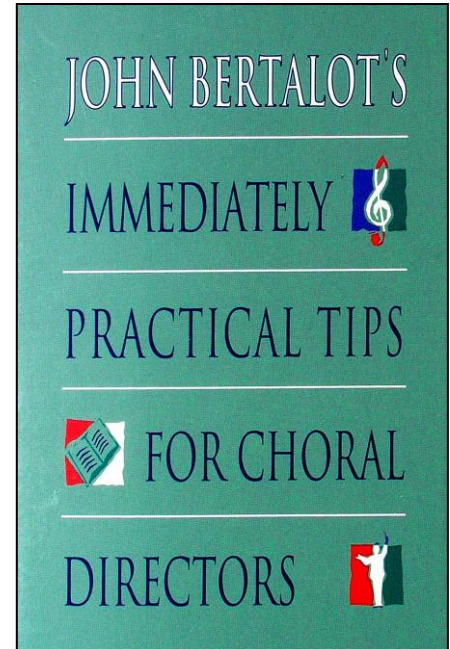
*Jeremy Suter, Carlisle Cathedral*

A day by day account of JB's creative choirtraining life  
at Trinity Episcopal Church, Princeton, NJ, USA,

*Written as an easily readable story, but with names changed.*

*Full of practical ideas for organising a church's music program.*

It covers every aspect of a choir director's life –  
with all manner of choirs and music,  
organisation, personal relationships,  
problem solving and much, *much* more.



## **Book 3: How to be a Successful choir director**

Published by Kevin Mayhew

<https://www.kevinmayhew.com/>

*What they're saying about Dr John Bertalot's*

### **HOW TO BE A SUCCESSFUL CHOIR DIRECTOR**

*(Published by Kevin Mayhew, 2002. Second improved edition, 2003)*

#### **DR. ROY MASSEY, President of The Royal College of Organists, England**

I found myself quite unable to put it down, you deserve to have a world-wide readership. It just made me wish that I was starting in the business all over again. Also, it should be required set-reading in preparation for the RCO Choral Directing Diploma. Well done you!

#### **DR. SIMON LINDLEY, Past President of The Royal College of Organists**

Your simply wonderful book arrived from Mayhew's yesterday

I am so very glad to have a copy – more glad than I can say adequately.

I read the book from cover to cover - truly! Bravo, bravissimo!

#### **DR. NOEL RAWSTHORNE, Director of Music Emeritus, Liverpool Cathedral**

It's fantastic - full of positive information.

Every choirmaster will be reading it!

#### **DR. GEORGE GUEST, former Director of Music, St. John's College, Cambridge**

Your excellent new book embodies all that I tried to do here at St. John's for over forty years. I do hope it has substantial sales!

#### **DR. JUNE NIXON, former Director of Music, St. Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne, Australia.**

Your book is fantastic! I can never understand why some choirmasters appear

to have had a commonsense bypass! This book should help to rectify the problem.

#### **Church Music Quarterly, The World-wide Journal of the Royal School of Church Music. June 2003**

It will be of value to choir trainers of all abilities, from beginners upwards. *If we all acted on the advice therein, our choirs would be flourishing and undoubtedly the best in the world.*

#### **The American Organist. September, 2003**

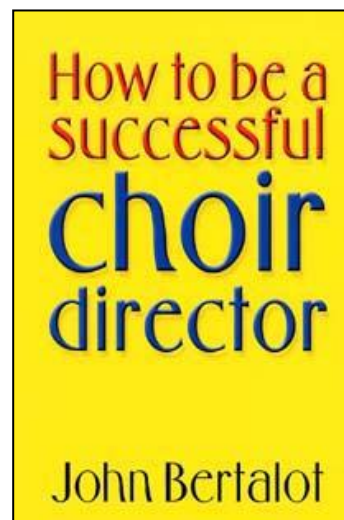
A challenging book for all choir directors and organists. This book is full of practical suggestions and musical illustrations.. [Bertalot's] vision and enthusiasm are reflected throughout this book. Highly recommended..

#### **The Music Journal of the Incorporated Society of Musicians: (ISM) 2003**

*How to be a Successful Choir Director* draws on John's distinguished 40-year career as a choir director and organist, aims to promote the highest standards of choral training and musical expression. The practical guidance is clear and detailed, illuminated by analogy, anecdote and humour, and informed by psychological and spiritual insights.

#### **GORDON STEWART, Music Director, BBC. Director of the RSCM's Millennium Youth Choir.**

I have now read it cover to cover twice and think that it is essential reading for all choirmasters and organists! The Millennium Youth Choir is in for a shock! I am sure that it will be a best seller - I have already recommended it to my students.



**cathedral-sounds.org.uk**

This book sets down in an approachable way the choir-training techniques that have served to make Bertalot one of the world's leading and most sought-after choral directors. This book is so successful because it manages to speak both to the beginner and to the experienced professional and should be read by all.

**The Journal of the Association of Anglican Musicians (USA) May 2003**

I feel that no serious person working with a choir can afford to pass by John Bertalot's *How to Be a Successful Choir Director*. Without reservation I recommend this book to old veterans like myself, musicians in mid-career, or to those just starting out. It is the work of a caring, wise, and very gifted, experienced choir director.

**The Organists' Review, August 2003**

I gladly add my recommendations to the enthusiastic comments given by many eminent choir directors. It is possibly the best such manual I have come across.

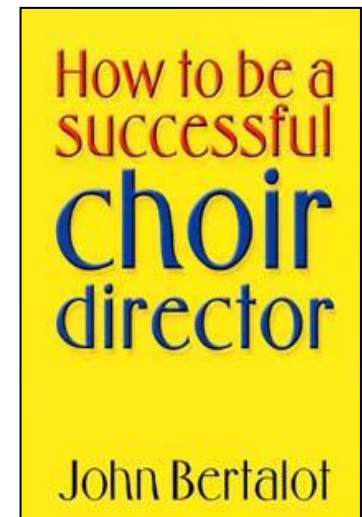
**DR. OWEN BURDICK, Director of Music, Trinity Church, Wall Street, New York, NY**

I'm reading your newest book -- and loving every illuminating word of it! Thanks be to God for your sage advice; I continue to sit at your feet and learn soooooo much. Thank you, dear fellow, for sharing your many years of experience!. You are one of the treasures in my life. Thank you again, John, for your myriad gifts!

**Cathedral Music [UK], November, 2003:**

It's not often that a good book comes along on choir training but this is one of those occasions and Bertalot is well qualified to write it too, as he has had more than 40 years' experience. Its scope is large, dealing with musical standards, warm-ups, singing in tune, dealing with clergy (surely a whole book could be written on that subject) and subjects like regular attendance and punctuality.

This is a book with the solutions to the problems that many of us face when taking a choir practice at parish church level.. It is a practical book with many musical examples . . .



Bertalot strives for excellence – the book's central theme. It is easy to read and pick up the points . . . **With Bertalot's pedigree, it should be read by everyone who stands up in front of a choir. A thoroughly useful book.**

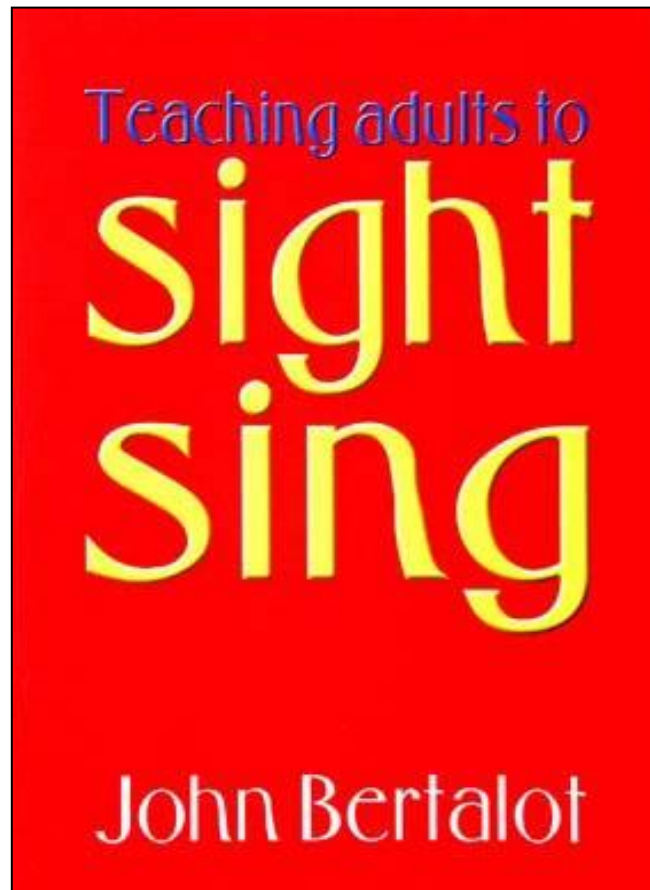
**Book 4: TEACHING ADULTS TO SIGHT SING**

Published by Kevin Mayhew

<https://www.kevinmayhew.com/>

'It is essential reading for choirmasters and singers.  
It is beautifully written, a good read and destined to become a classic.'  
*Colin Mawby, former Director of Music, Westminster Cathedral*

'I remember telling John Bertalot that  
we could get rich quick if we could bottle him and sell him by the six-pack.  
This is better than a six-pack!'  
*Dr. David Lowry, (USA)*



Written after JB had successfully taught his village church choir  
(made up mainly of grandparents and great-grandparents)  
to read music.

*See their photo on the front cover of this book.*  
In other words, **teaching adults to sight-sing really does work!**




## 23: Explore John Bertalot's Website: [bertalot.org](http://bertalot.org)

which receives more than *1,000 hits every month*

With 35 easily accessible articles on wholly practical *choir training - free!*

To access these articles, go to: [bertalot.org](http://bertalot.org) then click *Choir Training*

JB's Choir Training Articles		
Article Title		Author
01 Easy Beginnings		John Bertalot
02 How to enthuse your choir		John Bertalot
03 Look!		John Bertalot
04 Breathe		John Bertalot
05 Words!		John Bertalot
06 Rule of Three		John Bertalot
07 Conducting		John Bertalot
08 Expression		John Bertalot
09 Consonants		John Bertalot
10 Punctuality		John Bertalot
11 Rhythmic choirs!		John Bertalot
12 GREATEST COMMANDMENTS		John Bertalot
13 Words, Words, WORDS!		John Bertalot
14 A life-changing traumatic experience		John Bertalot
15 Teaching Children to clap RHYTHM		John Bertalot
16 Teaching Children to SIGHT-SING TUNES!		John Bertalot
17 TEN COMMANDMENTS		John Bertalot
18 Warm-ups		John Bertalot
19 A typical rehearsal?		John Bertalot
20 The Eyes have it!		John Bertalot
21 ANTHEMS ALIVE!		John Bertalot
22 I will sing with the Spirit		John Bertalot
23 To encourage confident singing		John Bertalot
24 One hundred per cent?		John Bertalot
25 Personal Relationships		John Bertalot
26 Choristers' Commitment?		John Bertalot
27 Encouraging children to sing		John Bertalot
28 Major Musical Influences No. 1		John Bertalot
29 Major Musical Influences No. 2		John Bertalot
30 Major Musical Influences No. 3		John Bertalot
31 LOOK AGAIN!		John Bertalot
32 Am I really dispensable?		John Bertalot
33 SIGHT-SINGING SUCCESS...		John Bertalot
34 Sight-Singing Hand-out: Exeter Cathedral 2013		John Bertalot
35 Conducting an ORCHESTRA!		John Bertalot

And relish 6 articles on *Bach's Amazing Number Symbolism in JB's blog*

and much more...

## 24: Enjoy Listening to Recordings of Some of JB's Most Popular Published Choral Compositions!

*These recordings can be found under Book 5 at [bertalot.org](http://bertalot.org)*

**Abide with me**, sung by Blackburn Cathedral Choir, with James Davy (organ) conducted by John Bertalot, at a Choral Evensong to celebrate JB's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, September 2011.

Published by Augsburg Fortress (USA)

**Amazing Grace**, sung by The Renaissance Singers at a concert in Blackburn Cathedral 19<sup>th</sup> November 2005 to celebrate the choir's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, which was founded by JB.

Lyndon Hills, organ, conducted by John Bertalot. (The audience joins in the penultimate verse)

Published by Augsburg Fortress (USA)

**Come, Risen Lord**, sung by The Renaissance Singers in Blackburn Cathedral, 19<sup>th</sup> November 2005

Dedicated to Gordon Stewart. Lyndon Hills, organ, conducted by John Bertalot.

Published by Augsburg Fortress (USA)

**Go, tell it on the mountain** sung by the choir of Trinity Church, Princeton, NJ, December 1995 in Princeton University Chapel, conducted by John Bertalot.

Published by Good Music (Roberton)

**I was glad** sung by The Renaissance Singers in Blackburn Cathedral, 19<sup>th</sup> November 2005

Lyndon Hills, organ, conducted by John Bertalot.

Published by Kevin Mayhew

**In the Bleak Midwinter (Holst)** sung by The Princeton Singers in Princeton Seminary Chapel. Timothy W. Harrell, organ, conducted by John Bertalot.

Published by Harold Flammer (USA)

**Little Baby, born at dark midnight** sung by The Princeton Singers in Trinity Cathedral, Trenton, NJ, conducted by John Bertalot.

Published by Banks of York

**O Be Joyful in the Lord** sung by The Renaissance Singers in Blackburn Cathedral, 19<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2005

Lyndon Hills, organ, conducted by John Bertalot.

Published by Aureole, USA

**O come, all ye faithful** sung by The Princeton Singers in Trinity Cathedral, Trenton, NJ, Timothy W. Harrell, organ, conducted by John Bertalot.

Published by Shawnee Press, USA – in Three Carols

**Once in Royal David's City** sung by The Princeton Singers in Trinity Cathedral, Trenton, NJ, Timothy W. Harrell, organ, conducted by John Bertalot.

Published by Shawnee Press, USA – in Three Carols

**Thy Word is a Lantern** sung by the choir of Blackburn Cathedral, with brass (optional), Greg Morris, organ, conducted by Richard Tanner. Composed for the Entry of HRH The Princess Royal for the rededication of the restored Lantern Tower of Blackburn Cathedral in 2000.

Published by Augsburg Fortress, USA

**Silent Night** sung by The Renaissance Singers in Blackburn Cathedral, 19<sup>th</sup> November 2005

Lyndon Hills, organ, conducted by John Bertalot.

Copies are available for photocopying, free, from JB's website: [bertalot.org](http://bertalot.org) / Free Music.

**The Crown of my Rejoicing**: a four-movement cantata, sung by the choir of St Wilfrid's School, Blackburn, at the school's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Service in Blackburn Cathedral, with David Goodenough, organ, directed by Howard Seymour. [See next page:](#)





**'The Crown of my Rejoicing'**

**composed by John Bertalot for St Wilfrid's School's Silver Jubilee in 1994.**

Introduction by Howard Seymour,  
former Director of Music, St Wilfrid's School, Blackburn

'A commission seemed the obvious way to mark this important occasion and I knew from the outset that John was the person I wanted to approach.

'Although at this time John was working in America, he had been organist at Blackburn Cathedral at the time the school opened. He had also been a member of the interviewing panel which appointed me. John's considerable and diverse musical talent made an indelible mark on the music of the Cathedral and beyond. I was aware of his flair as a composer and arranger, so all these factors made him the obvious choice.

'He accepted the commission enthusiastically and worked at it with characteristic energy, producing a miniature cantata in four short movements. The text was chosen in collaboration with Canon Roy McCullough. It drew upon the writings of Dean Eric Milner-White and passages from Colossians chapter 3.'

1. May all the wealth of Christ's inspiration have its shrine among you;  
Now you will have instruction and advice for one another, full of wisdom,  
Now there will be psalms, hymns and spiritual music,  
As you sing with gratitude in your hearts to God.
2. Let me learn, and love to learn, that true joy, which none can know outside thee.  
For happiness is thy will, O God, happiness, perfect eternal in thee.
3. Whatever you are about, in word and action alike, invoke always the name of  
The Lord Jesus Christ, offering your thanks to God the Father through him.
4. Let me live for all that hath thee and thine for an end  
and begin, continue and complete all to thy glory.  
Be thou the crown of my rejoicing;  
and mine the ceaseless hymn of Heaven.
- 4a. Blessing and Glory and Wisdom and Thanksgiving and Honour and Power and Might be unto God for  
Ever and Ever. Amen.

'John obviously knew the resources of the Cathedral organ intimately as well as the acoustic of the building itself. The organ part of the score was registered in detail, and the combination of John's music, voices, organ and acoustic came together in the most wonderful and insightful way. John's hugely generous letter to me after the first performance will always be part of my personal archive.'

This is a recording of the first performance in Blackburn Cathedral in 1994 at the School's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Service, sung by the choir of St Wilfrid's School with David Goodenough (organ) directed by Howard Seymour.

This cantata is published by Aureole.

See [bertalot.org](http://bertalot.org) under **Book5**

## 25: Sample Pages for the Reading (and Singing) of the Passions – For Congregation and Choir.

To access these Passions in full go to Book 5 on [bertalot.org](http://bertalot.org)

### MATTHEW PASSION for Congregational Reading Matthew 26:14-27:66 (NIV)

#### Readers:

Narrator 1 at Lectern, Narrator 2 in Pulpit

**Jesus:** (The congregation, being the Body of Christ, read the words of Christ)

***NB Everyone speaks the words of Jesus  
except when they are taking the part of someone else,  
such as Narrator, Pilate, Chief priests, etc.***

***Let those who take individual parts (when not reading their own parts)  
give a strong lead to the congregation in speaking the words of Jesus.***

Judas

Disciples (The choir – from choirstalls)

Peter

Pilate

Chief Priests

Two False Witnesses

Soldiers

Crowd 1

Crowd 2 (The choir – from choirstalls)

Girl 1

Girl 2

'Another'

Pilate's Wife

High Priest (Vicar – from his stall)

*Those taking individual voices should sit near the front  
so as to be able to take their places quickly and quietly  
to read from the central microphone.*

*Four microphones: on Lectern and on Pulpit for the Narrators,  
and one stand mike placed centrally between choirstalls  
for 'special voices.*

*Let there be a wooden Cross ready in the Narthex,  
(so that all may walk past it when they come into church)  
to be placed centrally when Jesus is crucified.*



## **PALM SUNDAY PASSION**

**Matthew 26:14-27:66 (NIV)**

***The Narrators and Judas go to their places. The congregation is seated***

### **NARRATOR 1**

One of the Twelve disciples -- the one called Judas Iscariot-- went to the chief priests and asked,

### **JUDAS**

"What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?"

### **NARRATOR 2**

So they counted out for him thirty silver coins.

From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

### **NARRATOR 1**

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread,  
the disciples came to Jesus and asked,

### **DISCIPLES [Choir]**

"Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?"

### **NARRATOR 2**

He replied,

### **CHRIST**

**"Go into the city to a certain man and tell him,**

**'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near**

**I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.'"**

### **NARRATOR 1**

So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover.

### **NARRATOR 2**

When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve.

### **NARRATOR 1**

And while they were eating, he said,

### **CHRIST**

**"I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me."**

### **NARRATOR 2**

They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other,

### **DISCIPLES [Choir]**

"Surely not I, Lord?"

### **NARRATOR 1**

Jesus replied,

CONGREGATIONAL COPYTHE PASSION OF OUR LORD ACCORDING TO ST. LUKE

Luke 22:14 – 23:56 (NIV)

In Luke's version of the Passion narrative, Jesus has more words to say than in any of the other Evangelists' Gospels. It seems right, therefore, that the words of Christ should be spoken by the Body of Christ – i.e. the Church in this place – everyone. (These words are written in **bold** letters.)

Therefore, please speak the words of Jesus as though you were Jesus – for you are Jesus in this world to others. Speak steadily and fearlessly, for His words are immortal.

Other voices will be taken by small groups: (they will have their own copies specially marked. If you are in a small group, or a 'lone voice', makes sure that you have your 'soloists' copy.)

The Disciples

The Soldiers

The Council of the Elders

And there are lone voices: Pilate, Peter, a servant girl, the two criminals . . .

There are two narrators who tell the story.

*All remain seated*

(Narrators) When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them,

Jesus (Everyone, speaking firmly)

**"I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.**

**For I tell you,**

**I will not eat it again**

**until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God."**

After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said,

(Jesus) **"Take this and divide it among you.**

**For I tell you**

**I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine**

**until the kingdom of God comes."**



And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying,

**"This is my body given for you;  
do this in remembrance of me."**

In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying,

**"This cup is the new covenant in my blood,  
which is poured out for you.**

**But the hand of him who is going to betray me  
is with mine on the table.**

**The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed,  
but woe to that man who betrays him."**



(Short pause)

They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this.

Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them,

**"The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them;  
and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors.  
But you are not to be like that.**

**Instead,**

**the greatest among you should be like the youngest,  
and the one who rules like the one who serves.**

**For who is greater,**

**the one who is at the table or the one who serves?**

**Is it not the one who is at the table?**

**But I am among you as one who serves.**

2

**And I confer on you a kingdom,  
just as my Father conferred one on me,  
so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom  
and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.**

**Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat.  
But I have prayed for you, Simon,  
that your faith may not fail.  
And when you have turned back,  
strengthen your brothers."**

But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death."  
Jesus answered,

**"I tell you, Peter,  
before the rooster crows today,  
you will deny three times that you know me."**

Then Jesus asked them,

**"When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals,  
did you lack anything?"**

They answered, "Nothing." He said to them,

**"But now if you have a purse, take it,  
and also a bag;  
and if you don't have a sword,  
sell your cloak and buy one.**

**It is written:**

***'And he was numbered with the transgressors';  
and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me.  
Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfilment.'***

The disciples said, "See, Lord, here are two swords."  
He replied,

**"That is enough,"**

Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him.  
On reaching the place, he said to them,

**"Pray that you will not fall into temptation."**

He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed,

**"Father, if you are willing,  
take this cup from me;  
yet not my will, but yours be done."**



An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. He asked them,

**"Why are you sleeping?  
Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."**

While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him,

**"Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"**

When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?"

And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. But Jesus answered,

1

**For SOLO readers and SMALL GROUP readers**  
**MARK YOUR PART WITH YELLOW MARKER PEN, and rehearse it at home**

**THE PASSION OF OUR LORD ACCORDING TO ST. LUKE** Luke 22:14 – 23:56 (NIV)

In Luke's version of the Passion narrative, Jesus has more words to say than in any of the other Evangelists' Gospels. It seems right, therefore, that the words of Christ should be spoken by the Body of Christ – i.e. the Church in this place – everyone. (These words are written in **bold** letters.)

Therefore, please speak the words of Jesus as though you were Jesus – for you are Jesus in this world to others. Speak steadily and fearlessly, for His words are immortal.

Other voices will be taken by small groups. Some of you could be in more than one group. Decide which group you should be in at any one time.

When you are in a group which is speaking to Jesus, **don't** speak Jesus' words at that point.

Jesus: To be spoken by everyone

Narrator 1

Narrator 2

Simon Peter

Disciples

Servant girl

A man

A third person

Soldiers

Council of the Elders

Pilate

Criminal 1

Criminal 2

Centurion

Epilogue

*Solo readers and members of small groups should sit at the ends of rows so that they can easily get out, when the time comes for them to speak.*

*All, except the narrators, remain seated*

**Narrator 1** When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table.

**Narrator 2** And he said to them,

**Jesus** "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.  
 For I tell you,  
 I will not eat it again  
 until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God."



**Narrator 1** After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said,

**Jesus** "Take this and divide it among you.  
 For I tell you  
 I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine  
 until the kingdom of God comes."

**Narrator 2** And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying,

**Jesus** "This is my body given for you;  
 do this in remembrance of me."

**Narrator 1** In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying,



2

**Jesus** "This cup is the new covenant in my blood,  
which is poured out for you.  
But the hand of him who is going to betray me  
is with mine on the table.  
The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed,  
but woe to that man who betrays him."

*[SHORT PAUSE to allow people to move to their places*

***Simon Peter** unobtrusively makes his way to the front between the choirstalls.*

***The Disciples** quietly make their way to stand  
below the choirstalls facing the congregation.]*

**Narrator 2** They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this.

**Narrator 1** Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.  
Jesus said to them,

**Jesus** "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them;  
and those who exercise authority over *them* call themselves Benefactors.  
But you are not to be like that.

Instead,  
the greatest among you should be like the youngest,  
and the one who rules like the one who serves.  
For who is greater,  
the one who is at the table or the one who serves?  
Is it not the one who is at the table?  
But I am among you as one who serves.

You are those who have stood by me in my trials.  
And I confer on you a kingdom,  
just as my Father conferred one on me,  
so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom  
and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat.  
But I have prayed for you, Simon,  
that your faith may not fail.  
And when you have turned back,  
strengthen your brothers."

**Narrator 2** But he replied,

**Simon Peter** "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death."

**Narrator 1** Jesus answered,

**Jesus** "I tell you, Peter,  
before the rooster crows today,  
you will deny three times that you know me."

**Narrator 2** Then Jesus asked them,

**Jesus** "When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals,  
did you lack anything?"

**Narrator 1** They answered,

**THE PASSION OF OUR LORD ACCORDING TO ST. MARK**  
*(Chapter 15, vv. 1-39, New International Version)*  
**for Congregation and Choir**

A simple setting  
 by  
 John Bertalot

*The congregation is invited to stand quietly before singing congregational hymns  
 and to sit thereafter.*

***The Congregation and Choir sing:***

My song is love unknown, my Saviour's love to me,  
 love to the loveless shown, that they might lovely be.  
 O who am I, that for my sake my Lord should take frail flesh, and die?

He came from his blest throne, salvation to bestow;  
 but men made strange, and none the longed for Christ would know.  
 But O, my Friend, my Friend indeed, who at my need his life did spend.

***Choir:***

Very early in the morning,  
 the chief priests with the elders,  
 the teachers of the Law and the whole Sanhedrin reached a decision.  
 They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate.

Pilate asked, "Are you the king of the Jews?"  
 Jesus replied, "Yes, it is as you say."  
 The chief priests accused him of many things.  
 So again Pilate asked him,  
 "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of."  
 But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

Now it was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner  
 whom the people requested.  
 A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists  
 who had committed murder in the uprising.  
 The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.

"Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate,  
 knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him.  
 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.

For the Vicar, Congregation and Choir of Fence Parish Church, Lancashire  
 A simple version of the

# St. Mark Passion

Mark: 15:1-39 (NIV - © Zondervan1985)

John Bertalot

Choir and congregation stand

Organ *mf*

Choir and congregation in unison, firmly

1 My song is love un - known, my  
 2 He came from his blest throne, sal -

Music © The John Ireland Trust. Words Samuel Crossman c. 1624-1684

Sav - iour's love to me, love to the love - less shown, that they might  
 va - tion to be - stow; but men made strange, and none the longed for

This setting is sung regularly by the choir of Birmingham Cathedral  
 under the direction of Canon Marcus Huxley



**Dr John Bertalot,**  
 MA (Cantab), Hon D.Mus, FRCO(CHM), FRSCM,  
 Hon FRCCO, Hon FGCM, ARCM  
 Organist Emeritus: St. Matthew's Church, Northampton  
 Cathedral Organist Emeritus, Blackburn Cathedral  
 Director of Music Emeritus, Trinity Episcopal Church,  
 Princeton NJ, USA  
 Contact: [john.bertalot@gmail.com](mailto:john.bertalot@gmail.com)

JB won organ scholarships to  
**The Royal College of Music, London**, studying with  
 Dr Harold Darke,  
**Lincoln College, Oxford**, studying with Dr Egon  
 Wellesz, and  
**Corpus Christi College, Cambridge**, studying with Dr  
 Boris Ord & Professor Patrick Hadley.

**1958.** He was Director of Music of **St Matthew's Church, Northampton**, for 6 years  
 (the church for which Britten composed his cantata *Rejoice in the Lamb*).

**1964.** He was Director of Music of **Blackburn Cathedral** for 18 years  
 being instrumental, with **Dr Francis Jackson**, in designing and funding the new Walker organ.  
 He founded the **Blackburn Bach Choir** (a.k.a. The Renaissance Singers)  
 which the BBC rated as the finest amateur mixed voice choir in the UK.

JB was concurrently Senior Lecturer at the **Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester**  
 specializing in music theory & history, and directing the organists' choirtraining classes.

He also directed residential courses for church musicians in **South Africa** (four times),  
**Australia** (twice) **New Zealand, Switzerland** and countless times in the **UK, Canada** and the **USA**.



**1983.** He was Director of Music for nearly 16 years of **Trinity Episcopal Church** in the University  
 town of **Princeton NJ, USA**, and was Adjunct Associate Professor at **Rider University, Princeton**.

His first four books on choirtraining,  
 published in the USA and UK, are best  
 sellers.



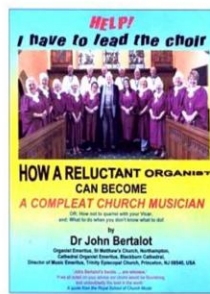
← **His Princeton Singers** made three tours of the UK, including  
 concerts to capacity audiences in **Westminster Abbey, Blackburn  
 Cathedral, the Hereford Three Choirs' Festival**, and in the **Chapel  
 of King's College, Cambridge**.



**1998.** When he retired back to Blackburn he was for 11  
 years organist of **St Anne's Church, Fence**, and was  
 instrumental in designing and funding their new  
 Copeman-Hart organ.

JB coaches Blackburn Cathedral's organ scholars for their RCO paper-work, & actively supports the cathedral's music.

JB's hobby is collecting and wearing  
 ties from all over the world (he has 350)



**JB's FIFTH BOOK** on choir-  
 training was launched into  
 outer space,  
 via my website, in February 2019.  
[bertalot.org](http://bertalot.org)

JB's new music site ([bertalot.org](http://bertalot.org)) receives  
 over  
**1,000 hits a month**  
 Contact  
[john.bertalot@gmail.com](mailto:john.bertalot@gmail.com)