

BOYS & GIRLS CHOIR

Handbook



Welcome!

Dear Parents, Singers, and Prospective Choristers,

Welcome! In this booklet, you will find comprehensive information about All Saints Church's unique music ministry, its rich traditions, and its impact both within the church and throughout the greater Richmond region. Our choir program draws choristers from various locations, with some traveling from as far as Chester, while others reside just up the street.

Our choir program is deeply rooted in the English cathedral tradition, where boys historically sing the treble (soprano) parts, while the alto, tenor, and bass parts are sung by adult voices. Our repertoire spans the centuries, encompassing Renaissance motets, grand Victorian anthems, spirituals, and newly released music by contemporary composers.

In many ways, every Sunday at All Saints is a "Youth Sunday." Choristers strive for a high level of musical achievement through a regular schedule of rehearsals, services, concerts, and tours. They quickly learn to read music, and we equip them with the tools to understand what they are singing. They receive professional training in the fundamentals of music, including sight-reading, ear training, and music theory, with opportunities for further study through private lessons sponsored by the program. Choir tours and trips are a regular and exciting part of choir life.

Beyond musical skills, choristers develop leadership abilities that last a lifetime and aid them in various aspects of their lives. They form strong friendships and learn the joy of working together. Collaborating with other church ministries, we occasionally participate in service work and other educational opportunities.

This handbook outlines the structure of the choirs and explains their operating procedures. For prospective choristers, it provides insight into our choir program and its operations. For long-time members, I hope this handbook serves as a reminder of the treasure we have in the choir and highlights the ways you can help our tradition flourish in the future.

Benefits of Joining:

- Professional music training
- Development of leadership skills
- Opportunities for travel and performance
- Strong community and friendships
- Enhanced academic skills through music education

We are excited to have you join us and look forward to a wonderful journey together!

All good wishes,

Scott G. Hayes
Director of Music
All Saints Episcopal Church

The Choirs

As we rebuild from the COVID-19 Pandemic, our choirs are working together to ensure that we provide the best experience possible for the Girls & Boys choirs. Our goal remains to have independent choirs for boys & girls, however, now they are singing together. In Fall 2023, we'll begin holding occasional separate rehearsals for Boys & Girls, with an eye toward singing as separate choirs occasionally in Spring 2024.

The Choir of Men and Boys was founded in 1899. The choir is open to boys from grades 2 - 8; teen men from grades 9-12 and skilled adult men (stipendiary and volunteer – both auditioned). The choir tours regionally annually and occasionally further - most recently to Austria in 2013. The choir sings about twice a month. Our primary rehearsal will occur on Thursday evenings, though alternate rehearsals are available on Tuesday and Sunday afternoon.

The Girls Choir was founded in 1960. A similar experience to the Boys Choir, the choir is building its own identity, planning tours and continuing its own traditions separate from the Boys. The Girls Choir is open to girls grades 2-12, with the older girls mentoring and assisting younger singers. It currently sings about twice a month. Our primary rehearsal will occur on Thursday evenings, though alternate rehearsals are available on Tuesday and Sunday afternoon.

The Training Choir is an experience for children from 1st – 3rd grades, who are looking for a way to gain some musical experience before jumping into the faster paced Girls & Boys Choirs. Rehearsals are lively, and include group music lessons on music theory, vocal production, using curriculum from the Royal School of Church Music and other music instruction authorities. The Training Choir sings with the Boys & Girls Choirs from time to time – about quarterly.

The Parish Choir is a mixed choir of primarily volunteer singers. Repertoire is drawn from all periods of sacred music. Singers in this choir come from all types of musical backgrounds – some are highly trained, others don't read music, and supported by stipendiary section leaders. Musical experience is not necessary for this group (though the ability to read music is helpful but not required), but the desire to experience and sing great music is a must. The Adult Choir rehearses on Thursday and sings two Sundays per month.

The Choir's Mission

1. Leadership of congregational singing is the most important work of our choir. All else is secondary. While an anthem is a wonderful addition to a service, it is not the primary goal by which the contribution of the choir is defined.
2. The presence of a vigorously singing choir elevates the worship experience. A well-rehearsed choir drives the music of worship, and “music is the heartbeat of a service” [Eric Routley].
3. The choir is a model, visually and aurally, upon which the congregation should be able to rely. As body of ministers, the choir must provide a positive and appropriate image in behavior, appearance and leadership.
4. Musically, we aspire to the highest quality achievable.
5. For Boys & Girls: To develop leaders, not only in music, but in life. A chorister must be engaged, responsible, accountable, organized, and attentive to detail. These skills serve our singers well in all aspects of life.

A note about “Performance” vs. “Worship”: The definition of “performance” is to bring a work to life. In that respect, every note we sing is a performance. The question is then, “for whom are we performing?” Sometimes we tend to think that we are the performers, the congregation is the audience, and God is the prompter. Rather, consider that the congregation is the performer, we are the prompters, and God is the audience.

Rehearsal Information

Boys & Girls Choir Rehearsal Times

For Fall 2024, the Boys & Girls Choirs primary rehearsal will be Thursday, 5:30 – 7:30 PM (with dinner). On singing Sundays, an additional rehearsal will take place after church (with lunch) that we hope everyone will attend. On non-singing Sundays, an alternate rehearsal will happen on Sundays, 1:30 - 3:00 PM for those who cannot make Thursday rehearsals regularly, or need a make up rehearsal.

Training Choir Rehearsal Times

Rehearsal times for the Training Choir will be determined by the availability by those participating. As we approach the Fall, the Director of Music will reach out and figure out what works best for everyone!

Rehearsal Etiquette

As rehearsals begin each year, a “Choir Covenant” will be sent home for parents and choristers to review, sign, and return. This covenant says that a chorister will:

- conduct themselves in a courteous and respectful manner to each other and to adults at all times.
- use the restroom before rehearsal. No bathroom breaks will be given until the entire choir takes a break.
- be in their seat before the rehearsal begins.
- be back in their seat on time after break.
- not chew gum or eat candy during rehearsal.
- put their phones in their assigned choir box during rehearsal.
- take good care of their assigned music.
- attend rehearsals with regularity
- be prepared to work during rehearsals.
- be flexible...the weather may be bad or schedule might change as needed.

Our rehearsal atmosphere is relaxed and fun. However, this makes it easy to be disruptive should an individual not be respectful. If this happens regularly, the Director of Music will first speak with the chorister to let them know they are being disruptive. If no improvement is made, the Director of Music will speak with the parents to determine the best way forward.

Attendance

When singing in a choir, one must think of the ensemble as a team, just as in soccer, baseball, basketball, etc. When one or two singers are absent, the group is simply different. Adjustments in teaching methods, leadership, and other aspects are necessary – and the choir is made less because of it.

Why is regular attendance necessary?

While 100% attendance is rarely possible, attendance on Sundays & other performances is one of the most important dynamics of the choir as a team. Did you know:

1. Hours upon hours are spent in rehearsal – learning how each other reacts, the sound a neighbor makes, the sounds the other parts in the choir make.
2. For larger projects (Evensongs & other concerts), it's likely we've spent at least of month of rehearsal time working toward these events.
3. Even for an average Sunday, usually the choir will have spent 2-4 hours working on a single piece of music that lasts 5 minutes. Those 5 minutes of performance are very important to the success of the group.

I have to miss, what do I do?

If you know you are to miss, please let the Director of Music know at least 48 hours in advance. The more notice you can give, the better – two weeks is even better! Emergencies happen – but please let us know what's up as soon as you are able. You can call 804.288.7811 and leave a message on Scott's phone, or email shayes@allsaintsrichmond.org or music@allsaintsrichmond.org

If I don't let you know, what happens?

If a chorister is regularly absent without notice or communication from their family, the Director of Music will reach out to determine what's going on and figure out a good way forward.

What happens when something prevents my regular participation?

Sometimes another activity (sports, school musicals, etc) conflicts with available rehearsal times. We do want those in the choir program to be well-rounded – and we know that choir can't always be the #1 priority! Other times, “life happens” – and for emotional or other reasons, full participation is not possible. In these cases, please contact the Director of Music to discuss options to allow everyone to remain a part of the group – but in an individualized way that “makes it work”. There is no reason why it must be “either/or”!

What are “Red Letter” Dates?

On the choir schedules published periodically through the year, there are dates that we've spent the bulk of our recent rehearsal time working toward. These events are the anchor point of our program and are critical for the music education of those who sing in the choir – as they are usually stretch points or places where we must put our best foot forward. These days are marked in red, and will be clearly communicated as important.

Punctuality & Choir

Punctuality is exceptionally important to the efficiency and morale of any choir.

It is essential that rehearsals begin without delay, and that everyone is in place and ready to rehearse ON TIME. Rehearsals are carefully scheduled, and important information is often relayed at the beginning. If you are late, the information you missed has to be repeated, delaying the rehearsal schedule. This affects the whole rehearsal and dishonors the punctuality of those who are on time.

To begin rehearsal:

1. Arrive early, and check the board for a rehearsal order, and do your best to organize your music. Please be seated with pencil in hand, and ready to sing.
2. Usually, rehearsals begin with a brief warm-up. Warm-up time is a very important segment of the rehearsal and needs to be approached with the same seriousness as when we are working on actual music.

Parent Expectations

As parents, your attention is nearly as important as the boys' & girls' themselves. There are a few main expectations:

1. Communicate with the director any absences (expected or unexpected) as early as possible.
2. Carefully read weekly email updates carefully
3. Be active: there are a variety of ways to help out!
 - Providing lunch/food for rehearsals that require them (most Thursdays & occasional Sundays)
 - Acting as a chaperone during rehearsals
 - Helping coordinate an event
 - Help coordinate transportation for choristers who need help getting to rehearsals
 - Other volunteer opportunities as they arise

Transportation Assistance

Assistance with transportation to rehearsals or services is available, either regularly, or as needed. If you need help bringing your child to rehearsal, please let the Director of Music know at least 48 hours in advance.

Misconduct Prevention Training

The Episcopal Diocese of Virginia requires all staff and regular volunteers in the church to complete Misconduct Prevention Training periodically. If you find yourself chaperoning the choirs from time to time, we strongly encourage you to complete this training.

You can do the training online. The link below contains directions to both. To find the most up-to-date information about the training, please visit:

https://episcopalvirginia.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/QuickStart_Guide_Updated_May_2023.pdf

Please note: If you choose to do the online training, and you are in doubt as to what "units" you should take (there are many and you don't want to take more than you need), please contact the Director of Music.

Choir Uniform

A long standing tradition of the Choir of Men & Boys is a choir uniform, and we recently included the Girls Choir in this tradition. We wear these on Sundays we sing, concerts, and other occasions. The idea is that what we're doing is "different" - so we dress differently on the days we do it.

Boys Choir Uniform

White dress shirt
Navy blue blazer
Dark grey pants
Black Socks
Black shoes
Choir tie

Girls Choir Uniform

White dress shirt
Navy blue blazer
Dark grey pants or knee length pleated skirt
Black Socks
Black shoes
Choir tie

Before you purchase anything, former choristers have often donated their uniforms as they've outgrown them, especially blue blazers. Check with Scott Hayes, and he'll direct you to where they are stored.

General Observations

1. Choirs are community entities. "The good of the many outweighs the needs of the few, or one." (Spock, The Wrath of Khan) All voices in a section should sound as one voice.
2. Be mindful of the text being sung and express that text to the listener. Sing with intentionality, energy, and vigor.
3. View yourself as professional in standards, as an amateur in the love of what you do.
4. Be open to change, variety and creative experimentation.
5. Talk to people, not about people. If you are dissatisfied with some element of the choir experience, bring it to the director's attention. Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
6. Always be friendly to all and make a point of welcoming newcomers to the choir and help them feel included. Treat one another with loving kindness and great care.

Vestments

In many faith traditions, vestments are a visual reminder to us and to those who see us that we are set apart for a specific reason in worship of God. At All Saints (and many in the Anglican tradition), there are two main parts to our vestments:

- A Cassock – sometimes called “liturgical underwear” – as it is the foundation for most any liturgical garb. All Saints our cassocks are three colors: black, red, or blue. There isn’t anything particularly “holy” about this – as it is the just the beginning of the “outfit”.
- A Cotta (or “surplice”) – this is the “sacred” part, that designates the outfit as “choir dress” – for those who are leaders and assistants in the service. Cottas are always white – an outward sign of how we prepare ourselves for worship through rehearsals and other preparation.

Cottas come in various lengths – at All Saints, shorter cottas are traditionally reserved for altar servers, acolytes, and children in the choir. Longer cottas are used by adults in the choir. The longest called “surplices”, are nearly floor length. Our clergy wear these, as will our music director from time to time. There no significance in the length.

You’ll notice that the newest members of the choir (training choir & older beginners) do not wear cottas. These are earned after about a year (beginning choristers are called “probationers” in many English choirs!), and signify when the chorister is really ready to participate as a “full member” of the choir.

How we use vestments:

- During pre-service rehearsals in the church, black, red, or blue cassocks are always worn. White surplices are to be saved until it is time for worship.
- Handle your vestments carefully and hang it up neatly in the designated area.
- At services, wear black dress shoes and try not to let your clothing show over the top of the collar of your choir robe.
- Never allow yourself or other choir members to be seen half-vested. Cassocks should always be fully buttoned once you are outside of the robing area.

From the Director of Music

Here are a few expectations of the director that you can count on:

- I will always begin and end rehearsals on time.
- I will do all that I can to make the best use of your time.
- I never will intentionally embarrass anyone or minimize anyone's efforts.
- I strive to make the best music possible, and to consistently challenge you as a choir to become better singers, better musicians, and a better ensemble.
- I will listen to all suggestions and concerns and do my best to address them.
- I will make decisions to the best of my ability and in consultation with the pastoral leadership of the church according to what we feel most benefits the choir and the parish at large.

Contact Information

PASTORAL STAFF

The Rev. Ben Robertson, Rector – brobertson@allsaintsrichmond.org

The Rev. David Curtis, Deacon – deaconjdc@gmail.com

MUSIC STAFF

Scott G. Hayes, Director of Music - shayes@allsaintsrichmond.org

Daniel Stipe, Organist – dstipe@allsaintsrichmond.org

Sam Robinson, Training Choir Instructor - srobinson@allsaintsrichmond.org

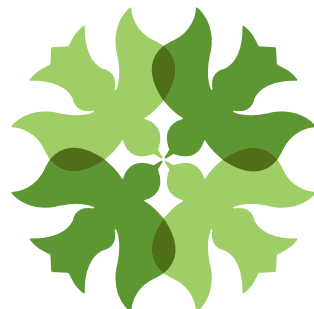
Angel Thompson, Training Choir Instructor - angelicajaymes16@gmail.com

CONTACT INFORMATION

Church Office Telephone Number: 804-288-7811

All Saints Church Website: www.allsaintsrichmond.org

All Saints Choir Website: www.allsaintsrvamusic.com



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