

# Recruiting Choir Members and Vocalists

James Tiefel

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## Defining the choir

*Unlike the congregation, the choir gathers to rehearse and prepare its music for worship.*

Standing choir	A specified group of singers that rehearses on a regular schedule
Special choir	A non-specified group of singers that rehearses only in advance of special services
Vocal ensemble	Two or three singers who form a standing or special choir
Vocalist, cantor	One singer who sings occasionally or regularly
Pastor	A pastor with an acceptable singing voice who takes some of the choir's responsibilities

## Recruiting singers

*Every congregation has its own needs.*

Reviving a Choir	A good choir is struggling for members
Birthing a Choir	A choir seems to be a wise expansion of ministry
Duplicating a Choir	A second choir seems to be a wise expansion of ministry

## The Choir is important

*The congregation's leaders need to be on the same page.*

Public worship that works well for both nurture and outreach includes

Excellent preaching

A suitable worship space

Friendly and engaged people

A solid repertoire of hymns, old, and new, which proclaim the gospel clearly and which the people sing accurately and enthusiastically

The stability of a liturgical framework without the staleness of identical worship each week

A unified service that reflects a seasonal emphasis and highlights a specific facet of the gospel in both spoken word and vibrant song

The saving gospel set to a variety of musical forms from different times and places within the Holy Christian Church

Can any of these goals be accomplished without a choir?

“The worship life of a congregation with any choir at all will be enriched in many ways, and the possibilities for the worship life of a congregation with the strong musical leadership of a well-trained choir are almost limitless” (*CW Manual*, p. 256).

## The choir has a purpose

***The choir has its own ministry; it is more than an extension of the congregation.***

Like the congregation and the pastor, the choir praises God by proclaiming the great things he has done through his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ

The choir assists the congregation in its own praise and proclamation in the liturgy and hymns

The choir adds pace and variety to the liturgy

The choir adorns the liturgy—and the gospel—with beautiful music, music pleasing to the ear

## The choir in practice

***The choir carries out its purpose in a variety of ways.***

The choir knows the hymns and liturgical music to assist less-gifted singers in worship

The choir participates in the Psalm of the Day

The choir sings the Verse of the Day or the Seasonal Response in Morning Praise and Evening Prayer

The choir sings an occasional stanza of a hymn or a hymn descant

The choir sings an anthem that enhances or applies the Gospel of the Day (text printed)

The choir participates in seasonal and liturgical rites: Stripping of the Altar, Farewell to Alleluia, song services, hymn festivals, alternative services

All choirs participating in worship have the same purpose

The choir sings at all services

***A full and varied participation choir gives the choir a significant role in public worship. Christian musicians find personal value in ministry that is both valuable to and valued by others.***

## Problems in the choir

### ***Why don't people want to join the choir?***

People today don't sing as often or as well as people once did

People are too busy and too busy even in their congregations (Beware of buying into copouts)

People like to sing, but aren't sure they can sing in parts

People don't sense the choir contributes much to worship

People don't like the music the choir sings

People find that rehearsals are all work and no play

People find that rehearsals are all play and no work

People feel shut out of the choir's social circle

People can't warm up to the director

### ***If the singers aren't singing, it isn't because they don't like to sing.***

The aging choir

The fizzling choir

The musically-challenged choir

The brooding choir

The indifferent choir

## Evaluate the situation and identify the problems

***This is a necessary task if the leaders of the congregation desire a choir.***

A few loving and discerning men and women, both musicians and non-musicians

Talk to people, including the members of the choir

Be thorough and objective; stay away from hearsay and rumors

Determine the issues that need to be addressed

## Brainstorm and create a strategy

***The critical issue in dealing with the challenge of a declining or struggling church choir is to identify problems honestly and then work together to create a strategy that can achieve solutions.***

Know the objective; seek an expert's voice

Identify the desired breadth of the choir's participation; identify resources

Be prepared to speak the truth in love

Seek professional growth opportunities for the director

Identify the music the choir is capable of singing; identify resources

Resolve rehearsal issues

Adjust social issues

Be ready for crisis management

## The pastor sets up the choir for success

***Without the support of the pastor, most choir efforts will fail.***

The pastor plans the worship year and the specific emphasis of each season, Sunday, and festival

The pastor shares worship music opportunities and resources with choir leaders

The pastor encourages leaders to support the work of the choir with a realistic budget

The pastor invites key individuals to participate in the choir

The pastor lends his knowledge of the members of the congregation for choir recruiters

The pastor identifies new members who may be interested in the congregation's music ministry and communicates this information to the choir

The pastor invites and encourages teens to participate in the choir

## **The choir does the primary work of retention and recruitment**

### ***God helps those who help themselves.***

#### **Retaining choir members**

The director needs to be part of the effort, but others can assist as reactors and recruiters

The choir schedule must be firmly established and in four to six month segments and shared with all participants

Communication is vital; establish email and text message distribution lists (phone as few people as possible)

Communicate with choir members several days before every rehearsal and singing date. Include the music that will be rehearsed and sung in worship

The pastor can send a note of thanks after a significant service

To encourage responsibility, ask members to indicate their participation at worship

Plan for an annual social event funded in part by the congregation

Plan a field trip to hear a touring professional choir

Always have bottled water available; plan for occasional treats

Encourage interaction; publish (with permission) phone and email information

Create a caregiver to send messages and cards

#### **Recruiting choir members**

Make immediate calls or send emails to new members identified by the pastor

Identify singers on the congregation's membership list and keep the list updated

Create and email and text message distribution list of "Choir Friends" and send invitations every January and August

Arrange for the choir to sing secular songs at congregational fellowship gatherings

Arrange for fitting recruitment efforts at teen functions (encourage teens to recruit to teens)

Encourage people to participate in choir “events” at Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter

## Arrange for a Special Choir

***A special choir is non-specified group of singers that rehearses only in advance of special services***

As a substitute for a standing choir when a standing choir is impractical

As a prelude to birthing a choir

As an effort to expand the choral program

As an alternative to an intransigent choir

This choir may not need a director; it will require an organizer, a resource person, and an accompanist

If the Special Choir is congregation’s only rehearsing group, schedule the choir on significant dates: Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost

Plan ahead and select music carefully; enable the choir to succeed

Select and invite participants and set a realistic rehearsal schedule

## Arrange for Vocal Ensembles, Cantors, and Vocalists

***One, two, or three singers who sing occasionally or regularly.***

As a substitute for a standing choir or special choir

As an effort to expand the choral program and serve at services at which other choirs cannot

Select singers carefully; auditions may not be practical, but there should be knowledge of the singers’ capabilities

Monitor the need to amplify vocal sound

Consider a set of special choirs, vocal ensembles, cantors, and vocalists

## Helps for the Choir Director

In more ways than one the choir director is the Pied Piper of the congregation's choir program. Many WELS choir directors, however, lack the skill, savvy, and experience to carry out their work well. Some pastors can help them, but most can't. Here are a few suggestions for those who can't (and even for those who can):

NPH offers a 120 page booklet entitled ***A Novice's Guide to Directing the Church Choir***. Author Kenneth Kosche, longtime choir director at Concordia-Wisconsin and St. John, Glendale (conservative LCMS), is a practical musician who offers good advice to inexperienced choir directors.

CPH offers ***Letters to My Choir: Reflections on Excellence in Ministry*** by veteran choir director Eldon Balko. Topics range from the purpose of the church choir to the basic mechanics of choral singing.

***Christian Worship Manual*** (NPH 1993) devotes an entire section to music in Christian worship including the music of the choir. This is a must-study primer for all Lutheran choir directors. The writing is fairly academic, however, and may strain the staying power of a new or modestly skilled director.

Buried on some shelf in the pastor's study may be a copy of ***Come Worship Christ***, a video-enhanced worship education tool produced in 1996. Not every pastor who purchased this product for his Bible classes realized that the set contains training materials for the church organist and choir director. Look in the middle of the notes. The information remains timely.

Presently, ***Worship the Lord***, produced by the WELS Commission on Worship, is running a series of articles entitled ***Challenges for the Lutheran Church Choir***. *Worship the Lord* is sent to pastors along with another publication, *Preach the Word*.