

WELCOME FROM THE PRECENTOR

We welcome you and your son/daughter most warmly to the Cathedral community. Choristers and their parents have always been a most valued part of the Cathedral Foundation and we hope that not only your child, but you yourselves, the parents, will enjoy and find fulfilment at Chester Cathedral.

These simple guidelines are issued in the light of experience and for the sake of the smooth running of the choir, and also to prevent any misunderstandings that might arise. Most of it is simple commonsense.

Your child, as a probationer, will be given a great deal. Probationers will learn much about music generally as well as how to produce their voices. They will learn to work with others, both boys and girls and adults, and will develop their confidence and self-discipline.

We will also help probationers and choristers to develop their own spiritual life, through participation in Cathedral prayer and worship. They will have the privilege of helping to lead the worship of God's people, and the values that this engenders is something that will be with them for the rest of their lives. During their time in the Choir, choristers may well want to prepare for Confirmation, and I will be glad to talk to you about this.

Once the probationary period is successfully completed, they will be formally admitted as Choristers by the Dean at Choral Evensong one Sunday afternoon. We recognise that this is a very demanding task for any child, but also for you, the parents. We are deeply grateful for the sacrifices made by parents to enable their children to assist the Cathedral in maintaining its long tradition of worship beautifully sung and offered to God. What we aim for is the very highest possible standards of worship and music, and our Music staff are charged by the Chapter to ensure that these standards are consistently maintained. These simple guidelines will help you and us to ensure that we do indeed fulfil this task.

We hope that you will feel able to take an active part in the work of our Choir Support Group, which provides a meeting point and fellowship for parents and others concerned with the well being of our choristers, as well as providing some of the little 'extras' that they receive each year.

Would you, please, on receipt of these guidelines, fill in and return to the Director of Music the enclosed acceptance slip and Personnel Form.

Finally, you and your family and friends are always welcome at any of the Cathedral services. It is of immense encouragement to our choristers when their parents support them in this way.

Canon Christopher Humphries
Canon Precentor

CHESTER CATHEDRAL CHOIR

What does the Choir have to offer?

What will my child gain from it?

Singing in the Choir is one of the few things that boys and girls can do (Acting is another) which, as they progress, becomes totally **professional**. It is one of the few things which they can do, while so young, which match and sometimes exceed adult standards. This alone instils a sense of **responsibility, dedication and pride in doing well** which can last a lifetime.

It is great fun. Boys and girls love **team work** and they love to indulge in a healthy rivalry to see who can be best. They are also very ready to share one another's enthusiasm; a healthy thing, when those enthusiasms are really constructive.

Obviously, the art of singing, and a more general knowledge of music, will be gained by those who are ready to absorb them, but even more valuable is that **self-confidence** (not arrogance) which comes from tackling something thoroughly and making a success out of it.

As a wide repertoire of music is sung on a daily basis and with limited preparation time, each chorister learns the importance of concentration and orderliness. Parents and schools report that Choristers tend to be **more organised** than non-Choristers, and **school work usually keeps up to standard or even improves**, as the orderliness, which the Choir induces, percolates through into other spheres of the chorister's life. Even the parents of quite new probationers report early **improvements in reading and comprehension**.

A love of fine music and of fine language too reaches almost all the boys and girls by virtue of daily contact with the words and music which they sing. The Psalms represent a wonderful fund of poetry, and the music sung includes some of the best written in the last four centuries and is drawn from the musical traditions of a number of different countries.

Sometimes there is the thrill of singing with an orchestra, and, above all, the thrill of singing in a glorious building which takes the voice and helps it to soar. A love of fine architecture too must inevitably be formed by daily presence in these surroundings.

The very distinctive uniform, which the Choir wears for services, becomes a symbol of the very special task which it fulfils, and the choristers grow to know from the numerous letters which we receive, how much their singing means to worshippers in the Congregation. Some are casual visitors, and some regular attenders, but almost all are inspired by the combination of the spoken word, choral sound, and a glorious building. The choristers come to realise that they are doing something which is very much **wanted and really useful**, as well as something **enjoyable**. To feel wanted and needed is an essential ingredient in the development of a young person, and the opportunity to feel this is here for many ordinary boys and girls who like music to feed on.

Obviously spiritual values are inherent in what is said and sung. The boys and girls are taught the meaning of the words they sing, and this does have a beneficial effect on them. More valuable still, they absorb all that is best in Christian worship, as they go along, and many do present themselves for Confirmation when they reach a suitable age. **Membership is not restricted to members of the Church of England**, however, and the Choir has had boys and girls from other faiths and other races have been fully integrated and contented members - often highly successful members too.

Self-confidence is a benefit which cannot be over-estimated. Many boys and girls, including sometimes those from an unsettled family background, have found that they can gain a sense of identity and self assurance from singing in the Cathedral Choir.

It is not given to all to have a solo voice, and no chorister is compelled to sing on their own in public, but we have watched many shy retiring boys and girls become assured soloists, and some have even been asked to sing for prestigious concerts as a bonus too.

The fact that the choristers have opportunities to meet people from all classes, including members of Parliament, Bishops, Archbishops, well known musicians and even (from time to time) Royalty, does ensure that they are likely to be able to meet people from all walks of life with real confidence later on.

David Poulter
Cathedral Organist and Director of Music

THE MUSIC DEPARTMENT

Cathedral Organist and Director of Music
David Poulter FRCO (CHM), GRSM, FTCL, ARCM,
Cert Ed (London University)
Previously Director of Music at Coventry Cathedral

Sub-Organist and Assistant Director of Music
Philip Rushforth M.A. (Cantab), ARCO
Previously Assistant Organist at Southwell Minster

Second Assistant Organist
Ian Roberts, B.A., ARCO, ATCL

Organ Scholar

Precentor/Music Department Secretary
Mrs Irene Pendleton

GUIDELINES

The Bursary (as it stands in January 2004) is:

£1045 per annum for Seniors - £654 per annum for Juniors

The payments will be made monthly. For this purpose we need parents' Bank Account details, as it is for the parent to decide what happens to this money.

Expenses only of £60 per term (or pro rata for part-time members) are paid to Probationers.

The foundation stone of membership is absolute regularity of attendance at all regular services and practices, together with all additional events requested by the Chapter. The detailed times are notified by the Director of Music in the form of a Choir Timetable each term which includes advance notice of term dates for the whole year.

The Choir Timetable is circulated at the end of each term for the following term and includes full details of Choir Holidays, which usually include at least 8 or 9 days after Christmas, and Easter, 5 weeks in the Summer and the normal school Half-Terms. Parents are advised that, while we make the Choir Holidays agree with School Holidays as far as possible, there are times, especially at Christmas and Easter, when the choir needs to be present at the Cathedral during School Holidays.

Choristers are required to attend as follows:-

BOYS

Monday: 4.00 p.m. to 6.15 p.m.

Tuesday: 4.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m.

Wednesday: 4.00 p.m. to 6.15 p.m.

Thursday : 4.00 p.m. to 6.15 p.m.

Saturday 1.30 p.m. to 5.00 p.m. as detailed on timetable (normally alternate weekends)

Sunday 9.00 a.m. to 12.30 p.m - 2.40 p.m to 4.30 p.m (normally alternate weekends)

GIRLS

Monday: 4.00pm to 6.00pm (*Juniors only*)

Tuesday: 4.00pm to 6.15pm

Thursday: 4.00pm to 6.00pm

Friday: 4.00pm to 6.15pm

Saturday 2.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m. as detailed on timetable (normally alternate weekends)

Sunday 9.00 a.m. to 12.30 p.m - 2.40 p.m to 4.30 p.m (normally alternate weekends)

Probationers are normally only required to attend on weekdays.

Parents are asked to inform the Director of Music at the start of the "probationary period" of any holidays that have already been booked. Such arrangements will be honoured, but once that notification has been made the Dean and Chapter expect that all future holiday arrangements will be made in strict accordance with the Choir timetable.

Except for illness, absence at other times is only possible under exceptional circumstances. We have a Scheme which covers this, and the occasional need for absence for School trips etc. Where circumstances seem to justify special consideration in this respect, the correct courses of action are:

- i. To write well in advance to the Director of Music, requesting permission for absence; giving

him time to consider the request carefully and to see how it relates to decisions taken in respect of other choristers. It is important for the happiness of the Choir as a whole that the Director of Music is seen to treat everyone as equally as possible where special requests are concerned.

- ii. To await the Director of Music's reply before making any special commitment or special arrangements.
- ii. In case of illness, it is important to telephone the Director of Music at the earliest opportunity to give as long notice as possible of the problem. (Tel: 500974 or 500977 or Precentor's secretary, Mrs Irene Pendleton: Tel. 500953).
- iv. Messages may on occasion reach the Director of Music indirectly, or there may not be time to note the details when the message is received, so it is important to write a brief note on the boy's/girl's return, for the sake of a complete health record, and to certify freedom from infection.
- v. Except in emergency, it is important to try to make appointments for medical/dental purposes or for haircuts etc. on days when the boys/girls are not expected to be at the Cathedral.

Punctuality:

In School Term, boys and girls are asked to arrive by 4.00 p.m., or as soon as possible after this time, on weekdays.

During School Holidays and at weekends boys and girls should arrive **not less than 10 minutes in advance of the advertised times** to enable them to put out music, visit the toilet and to robe before rehearsal begins. We understand that there are traffic problems, even at weekends, but please try and anticipate these, as late arrival can cause us serious problems and disturb the concentration of those who are already singing.

Transport:

Responsibility for transport to and from the Cathedral, whether from school or from home, lies with the parents of the boys and girls. There are a number of shared arrangements which take place to lessen the burden of this, and there are, from time to time taxi arrangements which we subsidise. Nevertheless, the number of boys/girls from any one school can vary and a taxi may not always be economic. We try to help set suitable arrangements up where this is possible, but cannot take responsibility in any way for transporting the boys/girls.

Tenure:

Providing that behaviour, health and general progress are satisfactory, boys are expected to remain in the Choir until, in the opinion of the Director of Music, their voice is breaking. Girls may remain in the choir until the age of 17/18. If withdrawal seems important for any special reason, a Term's notice should be given.

Absence from School:

We very rarely make requests for the choristers to be absent from school, and the possible causes for this are limited to Broadcasts, very special services and occasional Funerals. In such a case the procedure is as follows:

- i. The Precentor writes to Head Teachers of the schools.
- ii. The Director of Music notifies the parents.

- iii. In case messages have not been passed within each school, parents are asked to write a note to their child's class teacher requesting absence and giving details of the times involved.

Singing elsewhere:

Sometimes parents receive requests for their children to sing in Choirs or at events outside the Cathedral. Singing at School is always permissible, but it is very important to protect the Choristers from becoming overtired and it is also vital to uphold the reputation of the Cathedral Choir. For this reason it is necessary to consult the Director of Music before making commitment to outside events. He will be ready to advise on the wisdom of any proposal of this kind.

To avoid confusion over voice production methods, parents are asked to leave all singing tuition in the hands of the Cathedral music staff and not to arrange any additional tuition outside the Cathedral without advance consultation.

Associated Board Exams:

Please ask instrumental teachers to request times outside Choir hours (The Associated Board do not guarantee to arrange specific dates and times, but are, in fact, very helpful, if a request is made at the time of entry). If there is a problem, please get in touch with the Director of Music at the earliest opportunity.

We undertake tuition of Music Theory, but we do not enter boys/girls for Associated Board Theory Examinations.

We strongly recommend that boys and girls learn to play musical instruments. This helps to reinforce and complement all that is learned in the choir, especially with regard to reading music. However, we do not provide instrumental lessons as part of our curriculum. We are always glad to give help and advice, and members of our staff do give instrumental lessons themselves when possible.

Invitations/gifts (Safety precaution):

Boys and girls **should not** accept gifts or invitations from members of the Congregation without consulting the Director of Music.

Uniform:

We provide robes, but we ask the boys and girls to wear black shoes, dark socks, and school uniform (weekdays) or white shirts, dark trousers or skirts, dark ties, black shoes and a choir sweatshirt* (weekends) . No jeans or trainers, please.

**Choir sweatshirt available from Choir Support Group and costs £7.50 - £10.00*

Health:

We need to know if a boy/girl has any health problems - e.g. asthma, or if he/she takes regular medication for any reason.

Promotions with the Choir:

Boys and girls can be promoted from a Probationer to a Full Chorister when they have proved that they can cope with the full timetable, that their behaviour is good, that they have made satisfactory musical progress, and when they have demonstrated an elementary knowledge of Musical Theory (equivalent to Grade 1 Associated Board).

With continued satisfactory progress and, ideally, Grade 3 level of Theory, they can become, when a vacancy occurs, a Leading Chorister. For this purpose, they must have reached the age of 11 years, and promotions to this grade will be based on achievement. Length of service is not in itself a criterion, but is borne in mind amongst other factors.

To become Deputy Head Chorister, continued achievement and, ideally, Grade 4 Theory level are needed. In other respects the Deputy Head Chorister is chosen on the same basis as the Head Chorister - set out below.

In listing our criteria for the appointment of Head Choristers, we recognise that no one boy or girl could achieve 100 per cent in every respect, but we do believe that those who are appointed should reach a reasonable rating under all headings.

Taken in order we look for:

1. An enthusiasm for singing and commitment to it in practices and services which would inspire other boys and girls to give of their best.
2. A sense of dignity and reverence for the Services and the Cathedral itself.
3. A good sense of organisation.
4. A general sense of leadership and team work.
5. An appropriate Theory qualification (ideally, at least Grade 4).
6. Length of service is not a primary qualification, but regular attendance over a reasonable period is a necessity.

CHILD PROTECTION AT CHESTER CATHEDRAL

Arrival at the Cathedral

It is the parents'/guardians' responsibility to ensure that the children are delivered safely to the Cathedral Song School for rehearsals and services.

We will ensure that at least one member of staff (preferably two) is on duty in the Song School at least fifteen minutes before the start of rehearsals and services.

If only one member of staff is present when the first child arrives for rehearsal, it will be considered good practice to leave the Song School door open....

- until such time as another adult arrives,
- or until at least a handful of boys/girls are present,
- or until the rehearsal actually starts.

Children will be instructed never to stay in the Song School on their own, but to keep in groups of two or more.

Absence

Parents/Guardians should notify the Music Department in the case of absence

Should those choristers who make their own way from school to the Cathedral be inexplicably absent, we will contact the parents/guardians as a matter of urgency.

Parent supervisors

Choir parents/guardians are welcome to sit in and observe rehearsals at any time, subject to a maximum of two parents in the room at any one time, on the understanding that their presence does not prove to be a distraction.

In addition to the music staff, the Cathedral Chapter aims to recruit other adults to help supervise the choristers from fifteen minutes before the start of rehearsals and services until the last child has been collected at the end of a rehearsal or service. *All adults who have any regular or direct contact with the choristers are required to complete a Confidential Disclosure and, also, to apply for a Criminal Records Bureau disclosure.*

Small group work

Occasionally, small groups of children (e.g. probationers) or individual children (e.g. soloists) will be taken to the Chapter House, or into the main part of the Cathedral, for tuition by a member of staff. These areas are, of course, open to members of the public and they are also frequently accessed by other Cathedral staff (e.g. clergy and vergers). Such small group work therefore takes place in full view of all who pass by.

Discipline

Should any child's behaviour warrant stern words of discipline away from the main group of children, such a meeting would take place with two adults present.

Finishing times/collecting children

At the end of a rehearsal/service, the children will not be released until all the routine jobs have been carried out.

Parents or guardians are asked to collect their children punctually at the end of practices/services, preferably from directly outside the Song School.

If the children are not collected from outside the Song School after a service or rehearsal, they will gather:

- either in the car park area in Abbey Square,
- or, in Summer, on the Cathedral lawn outside the Song School where they may play football (on condition that they are supervised by an adult)

Whenever possible, two adults will be present outside to ensure that the children are collected safely. It is also a great help if parents are on hand to help to supervise outside the Cathedral.

If parents/guardians are unavoidably delayed, a message to this effect should be left on the Song School answer phone.

In the event that one child is left waiting to be collected, the member of staff on duty (or a parent supervisor) should take the child to wait at the house of the Precentor, Canon Christopher Humphries, and his wife:

9 Abbey Square, Chester
Tel: 01244 500967

The parents can then be contacted and/or a private taxi hired to take the child home.

Although it may seem the Christian thing to do, under no circumstances should a member of staff give a child a lift home by car (unless accompanied by the parent / guardian).

Sickness and First Aid

First Aid boxes are available in the Song School and in the Vergers' department.

Medicines will not be given unless written permission has been obtained from parents/guardians.

All parents/guardians should complete and return a sheet giving important medical details (e.g. allergies etc, details of family Doctor, emergency telephone numbers, permission for simple medicines to be given, permission to take child to Hospital etc if parents are unavailable - *in which case, a member of staff or parent supervisor would accompany the child to Hospital*)

Should any bandage/plaster need to be applied, such "treatment" will be undertaken with at least two adults present. The adults should take all reasonable caution (e.g. the wearing of plastic gloves) when treating an open wound.

All the Vergers are trained in First Aid, and at least one verger will be available at all times that the choristers are present. One of the Lay Clerks is also qualified.

The vergers are always on hand should a chorister fall sick during the course of a service. Parents/guardians attending services are also encouraged to be proactive in looking after sick choristers. The cloakroom situated in the Clergy Vestry is always available during services. If

choristers are not seriously ill, they are permitted to wait in the organ loft until the service has ended.

Music staff

In accordance with the ruling from the House of Bishops of the Church of England, all current post holders and volunteers are required to apply for a Criminal Records Bureau disclosure if they have regular or direct contact with children and vulnerable adults in the course of their work.

In addition, The referees (normally three) of new members of Music Department staff (including Lay Clerks) are specifically asked whether, to the best of their knowledge, the person concerned can be trusted to behave correctly in the presence of children.

Problems:

Please feel free to consult the Director of Music or his Assistants at any time.

The Precentor and the Director of Music have a joint responsibility for the Music of the Cathedral. Each takes a great interest in the work of the other. As far as the Choristers are concerned their responsibilities are as follows:

The Precentor - All matters spiritual and pastoral.

Communications on these matters should be addressed to:
12 Abbey Square, Chester CH1 2HU (Tel: 01244 500967 or 01244 324756)

The Director of Music - All practical matters concerning the boys'/girls' health, attendance, musical progress.

Communications should be addressed to:

The Director of Music, 12 Abbey Square, Chester CH1 2HU.

Telephone messages on 01244 500974

Email: organist@chestercathedral.com

Fax: 01244 341110

Gordon McPhate (*Dean*)
Christopher Humphries (*Precentor*)
David Poulter (*Director of Music*)

CHESTER CATHEDRAL CHOIR

I am glad that my son/daughter

has been offered a probationary place in the
Choir of Chester Cathedral.

I have read and subscribe to the
Code of Practice set out in the Guidelines.

Signature: _____

Date: _____