

**ST. JOHN VIANNEY
CATHOLIC CHURCH**

**CHOIR
HANDBOOK**



“Leading people to Christ through Music in worship”

Greetings,

First of all, I must tell you that I am very excited to join your music and spiritual family! I have always wanted to direct a church choir but not just any church choir a Catholic Church Choir. So when this opportunity crossed my path, I knew this was for me!

I am looking forward to working with the great liturgical leaders here at St. John Vianney, the music staff, and of course all of you. As we begin this journey together, it is my hope that we can grow this ministry and take it to new heights. Through team work and open communication between the singers and the music staff I am confident that we will exceed our goals. I am very aware that being a choir member is a big commitment but I promise you will find it to be very rewarding. We have so much to look forward to this year with new choir members, revisions of Missal and all of the various musical presentations.

It is my personal mission to foster an environment of great musical experience for all those involved from the novice to well trained singer. Our mission as a choir is to provide music for worship that exemplifies and focuses on the good news of Christ and edifies His church; after all we are “Leading people to Christ through Music in Worship”. We are liturgical ministers and we play a vital role of the worship service. We are so happy that you have responded to the call and have

made the commitment to be a choir member. May you receive the blessing of Christ offered in the gift of music and share it cheerfully with your church family.

Sincerely,

Michael

CHOIR MISSION

Our mission is to serve our God and our congregational community through the joyous gift of music. By using the musical talents God has bestowed on us and by working to develop those talents to the best of our abilities. We strive to lead the congregation in sung worship each week, to provide inspiration through concerts and special events, and to help raise the hearts and voices of all in praise and thanksgiving.

I. GENERAL PARTICIPATION EXPECTATIONS

St. John Vianney Sanctuary Choir is scheduled to sing at two Sunday morning Masses (9:30 and/or 11:00). The choir is also scheduled to sing at the various special presentations throughout the liturgical year and volunteer at parish activities. Normal rehearsal time is Wednesday evening from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m., in the choir room. On Sunday mornings, we meet in the choir room 1 hour prior to 9:30 Mass and 30 minutes before 11:00 Mass for preparation.

Volunteer opportunities will be needed throughout the year in the following areas:

- ❖ Choir Robes
- ❖ Sunshine Committee
- ❖ Music Library

II. CHOIR RESPONSIBILITIES

Be on time for all rehearsals, Sunday Mass preparations, and any other scheduled services or concerts. "If you are early, you are on time. If you are on time, you are late".

Sign out in the Sign-out book, located in the music bookcase, in the choir room, whenever you know you will be absent. If you forget to sign out or something comes up at the last minute, please inform your directors.

Because this is a family, sometimes we like to “catch-up” with family members but we must be disciplined enough not to let it obstruct our rehearsal time.

Please bring your music and a pencil to EVERY rehearsal.

Vestments must look presentable with no wrinkles or stains.

Please inform your directors if you need help with a piece of music.

III. CHOIR ETIQUETTE

In order to maintain a prayerful atmosphere during mass and to participate more fully in the liturgy:

Please observe “quiet time” 10 minutes prior to the start of Mass, for individual meditation and preparation. The overhead microphones are on, and noise from the choir area is heard throughout the sanctuary.

To maintain a professional/uniformed group, we will all need to enter as a group through the same door located on the south side of the Sanctuary.

All choir members will need to be fully dressed in their vestments before entering the Sanctuary. All personal belongings can be placed in the room just behind the choir area.

Choir members will only need to bring their black folder with the music needed. Please do not bring the music file box or other cumbersome items.

Please remain seated, if possible, during instrumental preludes and postludes.

Please refrain from “socializing” during Mass. Other choir members may be trying to engage and participate in the Mass. And we are visible by everyone.

Please refrain from eating or drinking anything other than water in the choir area. Water in bottles may be used. No chewing gum.

Please refrain from using perfumes/colognes but deodorant will be appreciated.

IV. Our Attendance Requirements

Attendance of each member at each rehearsal and Mass is of vital importance in achieving excellence. Anything less than full attendance result in a less than our best. Absence from rehearsals results in lack of preparation to do our best.

As the choir grows it may become easy for members to feel they are not as important as they were when the choir was smaller. The "I am not needed" syndrome should never be experienced by any choir member. Each individual is important. The talent and spirit of each member participating together in ministry to the group as a whole, and to the church body is needed and vitally important to our total team effort.

A member who misses a number of consecutive rehearsals should notify the directors as soon as you can and should attend at least one rehearsal before performing on a Sunday.

An occasional absence from a rehearsal should not prevent a member from participating on Sunday morning. Since most of the songs are rehearsed weeks in advance, an absence from one rehearsal will not prohibit participation in a worship service, especially if the choir member is familiar with the music. A member should not be afraid to sing on any Sunday merely because a previous rehearsal was missed.

Throughout the year we will have additional rehearsals to help us prepare for major feast days with instruments and help us prepare for other special presentations. These rehearsals will be announced with plenty of advance notice and will be kept at a minimum. In addition there will be times when we are asked to volunteer our time for parish activities.

V. TEN ATTRIBUTES OF A SUCCESSFUL CHURCH CHOIR MEMBER

1. Do whatever it takes to make each choir meeting a happy occasion for you and for the other members
2. Come to rehearsal regularly and on time.
3. Share any concerns with the Music Directors at the appropriate time...but make sure you share them with a positive intent!
4. Always focus on what is good for the entire group.
5. Be prepared to start singing at rehearsal time.
6. Be willing to give it an honest effort even if it means going outside your comfort zone.
"In order to harvest the fruit you must be willing to go out on a limb"
7. Practice at home too.
8. Think of ways you can provide for the internal and external "family".
9. Always remember that your job is to lead the congregation in worship.
10. Seek help if you need it and want it.

VI. HELPFUL HINTS ON READING MUSIC

- ❖ Attempt unfamiliar notes with wholeheartedness and with confidence even at the expense of gross error. Remember I cannot fix the problem if I cannot hear it.
- ❖ Keep alert! Try to hear and think new tones before you actually sing them. Force your eyes to read ahead.
- ❖ Often one can find his/her beginning note for an entrance by listening to other sections or retaining the sound of the last note you sang.

GLOSSARY OF MUSICAL TERMS

1. A capella – to sing in church style; generally unaccompanied.
2. Accelerando (Accel) – to go faster.
3. Accidentals – a sharp, flat, or natural inserted in the notation for the purpose of altering the pitch of a written note for the remainder of that measure.
4. Anthem – a sacred composition based on a Scriptural text, or with a joyful, worshipful theme.
5. A tempo – a return to the original rate of speed that preceded a change in tempo.
6. Cantata – a short, sacred, dramatic composition consisting usually of a number of various movements such as arias, recitatives, duets, choruses, etc., all of which are based on a continuous narrative text.
7. Chorale – a hymn of Lutheran origin sung in a stately, devotional style.
8. Chord – the sounding of two or more tones together.
9. Chromatic – to move up or down by half steps.
10. Coda – a closing movement which brings the song to a finale.
11. Con – with.
12. Crescendo (Cres. or <) – to swell or gradually increase a tone in loudness.
13. Decrescendo (Decres. or >) – to decrease a tone gradually in loudness.
14. Diatonic – to move step-wise either by whole or half steps, but moving to some form of the next lettered note of the scale.
15. Diminuendo (Dim.) – to diminish gradually in power of tone.
16. D. C. (da capo) – repeat from the beginning of the song.
17. D. S. (dal segno) – go back to the sign and repeat.

18. Falsetto – the artificial tones of the voice making the voice considerably higher than its normal range.
19. Fermata – means that a note is to be prolonged.
20. Forte (F, FF, FFF) – loud, louder, loudest.
21. Half-voice – keeping the natural quality of the voice but using only one-half of the normal volume of tone.
22. Intonation – the production of tone as it applies to giving a tone the right quality so that it is exactly on pitch or in tune.
23. Key – a pattern of notes built around one central note known as the tonic note.
24. Legato (Leg.) – to perform the passage in a smooth and connected manner, with no break between the tones.
25. Octave – a distance of eight tones.
26. Oratorio – a lengthy, sacred, dramatic composition for solo voices, chorus, and orchestra, depicting some biblical story without employing acting or scenery.
27. Passion Music – music that depicts the story of Christ's suffering and crucifixion.
28. Phrase – any short melodic figure or passage complete in itself and unbroken in continuity.
29. Poco – little
30. Rallentando (Rall.) – to grow gradually slower and slower.
31. Ritard (rit.) – to perform a portion of a song at a slower rate of speed than the original tempo.
32. Rubato – a flexibility and elasticity of tempo in order to bring out the meaning of certain words.
33. Staccato – abruptly disconnecting and emphasizing individual notes.
34. Staggered Breathing – when individual choir members breathe at various times in order to give the effect of one long sustained phrase.
35. Syncopation – putting the accent on a weak part of a beat or on a weak beat of a measure rather than where the accent normally comes.
36. Tempo – the speed at which a song is performed.
37. Triplet – three notes grouped together and performed in the amount of time in which two notes would normally be sung or played.
38. Tutti – after a solo or solo group has sung or played, indicates that the entire group should join together with full power and strength.
39. Unison – when the entire choir sings together the same notes on the same pitch or at an octave apart.

40. Vibrato – the natural, pulsating effect in a voice that gives it life and interest and does not result in a variation of pitch. When this pulsating effect becomes uncontrolled, however, it then becomes a tremolo.

Most of the information in the above sections on choir rehearsals/reading music and all of the definitions were taken from Kenneth W. Osbeck's "Pocket Guide for the Church Choir Member" (Copyright 1956; Kregel Publications)