



# Church Music Help Sheets

## “CD” Series – for Choir Directors Attendance and Punctuality **CD2**

*This sheet is intended to help directors of volunteer (unpaid), adult church choirs to cope with imperfect attendance and punctuality.*

You can get to the paid choir member through the hip pocket nerve and you can try to control the junior chorister through the parents, but adult volunteers set their own priorities.

**Attendance.** All of us accept sickness as a reason for absence from choir practice or Sunday worship. In fact, choir members who are just “coming down with something” should be encouraged not to share it. There are, however, two other priorities for adults which you cannot fight: work commitments and family commitments.

Work commitments are more significant than they used to be because of the increasing participation of women in the workforce in responsible positions. These days sopranos and altos also have meetings to attend, reports to write and deadlines to meet in their own time. Family holidays have to be planned in the light of the availability of leave for both parents.

Family commitments may include the health and other preoccupations of a spouse, children or parents. Even the older members of your choir like to fit in visits to their sons and daughters at times when they can see their grandchildren, ie during school holidays.

Accept the situation and learn to cope with it.

The problem is that you need to know in advance what your resources will be on any Sunday and at the preceding practices in order to plan music that the members present can perform well. Sickness you cannot plan for except by assuming that there will be more of it in winter. Many of the other absences are predictable, however, and you must encourage your choir members to inform you of them almost as soon as they know themselves.

If you are likely to forget such information if it is given to you orally, try developing an “Absence Forecast” in an exercise book or as a sheet on a clipboard - something which is available to the choir members at every practice. It should show the names of the choir members (first names are enough) and the dates of practices and Sundays for a few months ahead. The members should put crosses against their names for the dates they expect to be missing (question marks if the absences are possible but not certain). This information is then your guide when you are planning the music programme. It needs to be checked from time to time, however, to make sure the music is still feasible in the light of more recent additions to the chart.

If this way of doing things does not suit you, devise some other early warning system for getting the information to enable you to plan realistically.

In time you may learn what times of year are the danger zones, eg long weekends, school holidays and winter generally. You may even know which members are most likely to have problems.

No matter how good your early warning systems or your appreciation of danger zones, there are still last minute emergencies when a member takes ill or, at short notice, has to give priority to a work or family commitment. Then it is up to you to decide -

- whether the absence of that member endangers the quality of the performance of the music planned, and, if so,
- whether you should sing something else, eg something which was presented recently or the music for next week if it is already in good condition.

If there is no reasonable prospect of a good performance, do not sing at all. The choir will respect you for the decision.

**Punctuality.** The most important requirement is that you should be punctual yourself, not simply by getting there on time, but by being ready to start on time. This means getting there early, opening windows or turning on heaters, making sure everything, including music, is in the right place for the practice to start without any further messing about. Then, start on time, finish on time and keep up a lively pace in between, having planned beforehand what you are going to do.

Your choir members have given up their valuable time. Respect that. Work them hard and send them home exhausted but with a feeling of achievement. (See CD3 and CD4.)

At the same time, you must realise that there are some people in this world whose very nature is to be late and some of them may be good singers. You may have to accept this, but do not wait for them to arrive or your practices will start later and later. Remember that a church choir is a strong Christian fellowship, well trained in loving forgiveness. The members may be more tolerant than you might expect when one of their number is consistently late.

Copies of any of these Help Sheets may be obtained from the Secretary of RSCM Australia, ACT Branch:  
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