



Church Music Help Sheets

“CD” Series – for Choir Directors
The Role of the Choir in Worship **CD5**

This sheet is intended to help choir directors, inexperienced or experienced, to assess or reassess the role their choirs should have in Christian worship.

If you have been associated with church choirs for some years as a singer or director, you may already have an implicit idea of your choir’s role and function which has been leading you to decisions which have seemed appropriate enough. It is important, however, that you should clarify your ideas to the stage where you can talk to your Minister or Priest about them. Leave room in your thinking to accommodate his or her views because it is essential for the two of you to see this role in the same way. Any change of incumbent warrants a fresh discussion, still with part of your mind open to different views. It is the Minister or Priest who has overall responsibility for the conduct of worship in the church; your input is that of a specialist adviser.

As with many other Christian activities, the work of a church choir has two significant dimensions: vertical and horizontal. There is a relationship with God and a relationship with people, in this case a worshipping congregation.

The vertical dimension. There is generally little variation in the way people see the vertical dimension. The function of the choir is to praise God, to glorify God, to worship him, to show our love for him using the talents he has given us.

Two points arise from this: The first is that what you and the choir do is for the glory of God and not to flatter your own ego or build your reputation as a choral conductor. You and the choir are part of the same team, pursuing the same objective.

The second point is that, although the members of the choir are corporately a musical instrument, they are individually and personally worshipping Christians. While there are some people who join a church choir for the music rather than the worship, they are not likely to be numerous. Even in a small choir, this is an advantage. When you want your choir to bring out the meaning of the words they sing, you should be able to build on the Christian commitment and experience of most of them.

The horizontal dimension. Regarding the relationship with people, the choir’s role is certainly not to entertain the congregation. Yet the choir is so often in the position of performing to that audience that the idea of entertaining creeps up on us very easily. We have to use the language of performance and the techniques of performance, but what we are doing is more than a musical performance; it is an act of worship in itself and part of the larger act of corporate worship. Many people prefer to worship in a church where the music is good, but we should never flatter ourselves that they come to the house of God just to hear the music.

The way we view the horizontal dimension is largely tied to the tradition of the church we serve and is subject to some variation. The approach to worship differs from one congregation to another within the same denomination. We need to be sensitive to the traditions of the congregation to fit the role of the choir comfortably within the framework of worship.

Here are four of the many possible ways of describing the horizontal dimension:

- to lead the worship of the congregation,
- to support the worship of the congregation,
- to enhance or enrich the worship of the congregation,
- to bring the congregation closer to God in worship.

The differences are subtle and you may be able to think of other expressions more appropriate to your congregation.

Copies of any of these Help Sheets may be obtained from the Secretary of RSCM Australia, ACT Branch:
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The ACT Branch has no objection to further copies of this Help Sheet being made for distribution to people who might be helped by them, provided they are made without amendment.