



Church Music Help Sheets

**“CD” Series – for Choir Directors
Working with the Clergy**

CD7

This sheet is intended to help church choir directors to develop a good working relationship with their Minister, Priest or Pastor.

Explanations

(a) In the notes that follow, the masculine singular pronoun (he, him, his) is used to refer to a Minister, Priest or Pastor for the sake of simplicity and clarity. Many of the clergy will of course be women and it is also recognised that in larger churches more than one ordained person may be involved.

(b) It must be emphasised that the suggestions given do not provide a fail-safe recipe for building good rapport with a new incumbent or mending a relationship that is under stress, but some of them may help to build a situation in which the Ministry of the Word and the Ministry of Music support each other.

Suggestions

The seven suggestions listed in Help Sheet O3 for Organists apply also to choir directors with minor adaptations. They are:

1. Pray for him and the things that matter to him, his family, his current projects and his Ministry generally.
2. Compliment him when he does something well, but only when you can be sincere in your praise.
3. Take an interest in his projects, but again, be genuine in your interest.
4. Identify with the congregation by getting involved with some other church activity, not necessarily involving music. Joining a church organisation that meets regularly or volunteering for a rostered duty may be difficult if you have family or work commitments. Think about one-off events, such as a clean-up working bee, a social occasion, the church fete etc. The congregation is important to him and you need to be seen as one of them.
5. Consult him. A free exchange of views and information is fundamental to a good working relationship. If you are the acknowledged leader of a music team, sound him out about new hymns, new kinds of music, ways in which the choir can be of service, any changes in the use of music in worship. A proposed choral service, in particular, should have his approval before your rehearsals get serious and before his own plans have started to firm up for worship on the date in question.

He is responsible for the worship and you do need his advice.

If you are a member of the music team, but not its leader, you should still consult him, directly or through the leader, on such matters as a hymn or tune which is not known to the congregation, accepting that his choice may have been deliberate. Make sure also that you understand any unusual requirements for choral music.

6. Earn his respect by preparing the choir thoroughly and being present in good time before the service is due to begin.

7. In a “new” situation, don’t wait too long. In many churches, clergy are appointed for a specified period of years and then move on. Some have considerable musical skills; others have very little.

Choir directors also move, mainly by their own choice or because the choir has ceased to be viable. Choir directors too come with different personalities, levels of musicianship and experience. Every time that the partnership changes is a time for role adjustment.

Start building your working relationship very soon after the new Minister or Priest arrives or after you take up duty in a different church. Other people are depending on you to do this. And remember that he may be having difficulty in coming to terms with you; have patience with him.

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.