



# ST. JOHN'S CHOIR HANDBOOK AND CUSTOMARY



## ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH BANGOR, MAINE

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### The Chorister's Prayer

*Bless, O Lord, us thy servants who minister in thy temple; grant that what we sing with our lips, we may believe in our hearts; and that what we believe in our hearts, we may show forth in our lives, Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

### The Motto of the Royal School of Church Music

*Psallam spiritu et mente. I will sing praises with inspiration and intelligence.*

*(1 Corinthians 14:15)*

**WELCOME** to the Choir of St. John's Episcopal Church, Bangor, Maine. Your decision to sing in this choir is greatly appreciated by all who will benefit from your efforts – the congregation, visitors, the rest of the choir, and above all, God. Our choir has a distinguished history of excellence, and we are privileged to be able to offer the finest of choral repertoire in worship at St. John's. This booklet explains a bit of our traditions and ways of doing things in the choir and also attempts to codify some details that will help us lead worship effectively. It is not intended as a set of rules, but rather as an aid to make you feel more comfortable in your participation. In putting it together, we have borrowed from similar booklets prepared by several choirmaster friends and colleagues – Robert McCormick (formerly St. Paul's, K Street, Washington, D.C.; now St. Mark's, Locust Street, Philadelphia), Frank Boles (St. Paul's, Indianapolis), John Repulski (Christ Church, Cranbrook, MI) and Bruce Barber (formerly St. James Cathedral, Chicago; now Christ Church Christiana Hundred, DE).

### **ROLE OF THE CHOIR**

All of the music we offer in services – organ, choral, and congregational – represents the corporate prayer and praise of all present. As stated in the St. Paul's K Street handbook – “Our highest calling as a choir is to make ‘time stand still,’ and to ‘open the gates of heaven.’ We are expected to offer musical services throughout the church year, some of great length, at numerous – sometimes frankly inconvenient – occasions.”

The ministry of the music program at St. John's includes the active participation of children and young people as well as adults. As a part of those nurturing the Christian formation of these younger singers, it is essential that adult singers provide a worthy example. One famous choir trainer of children once said – “My young choristers don't do what I tell them to do; they do what I do.” Young singers are able to readily acquire the skills needed to sing highly complex and challenging religious music, but fully understanding the sacramental role of a church choir is made so much easier when they see their adult counterparts modeling consistent liturgical leadership.

Unlike so many churches noted for their music, St. John's can be proud that its choir is active and involved in all aspects of parish life – recent years have seen our singers involved with altar guild, lay readers, rummage sale, vestry, senior warden, junior warden, sexton duties, youth groups, confirmation classes, Second Saturday meal preparation, house tours, Eucharistic visitors, Education for Ministry, women's book groups, acolytes, coffee hours. While it is not required that choir members be active in the life of the parish, it is the norm of the St. John's Choir.

In spite of this, the nature of our musical ministry means that some people view the choir as “elitist” or that our singers think their musical offerings to God are performances. Anything we can do to help the congregation understand our real mission is helpful. One of our colleagues pointed out – “The definition of

performance is to bring a work to life. In that respect, every note we sing is a performance. The question is then, ‘for whom are we performing?’ Sometimes we tend to think that we are the performers, the congregation is the audience, and God is the prompter. Rather, consider that the congregation is the performer, we as ministers are the prompters, and God is the audience.”

The choir is also a loving family and we support each other in times of joy and difficulty – birth, baptism, confirmation, graduation, marriage, retirements, and deaths are all occasions celebrated and remembered within our choir family. Each rehearsal concludes with intercessory prayer for our community and the world.

### **MEMBERSHIP IN THE CHOIR**

The St. John’s Choir is an ensemble comprised of skilled volunteers. All choir members serve at the discretion of the Choirmaster. Membership in the St. John’s Choir is by audition with the Choirmaster. While trained singers are welcome, the most essential skills are a good ear to match pitch and a commitment to blended choral singing.

- Members need to have basic music reading skills
- Members need to have an enthusiasm for choral singing
- Members need to have singing voices that can blend well with others and stay in tune
- Members do not need to be a member of the parish or the Episcopal Church
- Members need to have an awareness of and respect for our rich religious tradition that involves music (often sung in foreign languages), liturgy, and scripture
- Members need to be willing to make a commitment to weekly attendance at rehearsals and services.
- For those unable to attend weekly Sunday morning services, additional singers are welcome for other sung services, such as Choral Evensongs and Holy Days.

For those enthusiastic about singing, but without prior experience, or where the Choirmaster has concerns or reservations about a person’s singing, counsel will be given about how to solve the issues of concern. Coaching sessions may be scheduled to assist the singer in resolving such issues as sight-reading, intonation, and blend.

During the summer months, a volunteer pickup choir sings for Sunday services, leading the hymns and preparing a simple anthem. Anyone is welcome, without audition, to be a part of that group.

## **MUSIC PROGRAM OF ST. JOHN'S CHURCH**

We are eager to have a music program that engages and inspires singers of all ages.

***Sunday School Choir*** – Children enrolled in Sunday School work with the music staff to prepare special musical offerings for five Youth Sundays each year.

***St. Nicholas Choir*** – open to children in grades 2-6. The St. Nicholas choristers rehearse on Wednesdays from 4:45-6:00 pm. On Sunday mornings they rehearse with the other choristers before the morning service. They may either sing for the entire service or participate in Sunday School and join the other choristers in the chancel for the Offertory.

***Cantemus Choir*** – Cantemus is Latin for “Let’s Sing.” These young people in grades 7-12 rehearse with the adults on Wednesdays from 5:30-7:30 pm and sing for most services.

***St. John’s Choir*** – rehearses from 5:30-7:30 pm on Wednesdays and sings approximately 150 different anthems and canticles each year.

***Robert Ludwig*** - Organist/Choirmaster

***Nancy Ludwig*** – Associate Organist/Choirmaster

***Claudia Blanchette*** – Head Chorister – a faithful singer in the choir appointed by the Choirmasters to assist in overseeing a variety of logistical details of choir life, including taking attendance, organizing processions, and facilitating the Easter breakfast and May choir-hosted coffee hours.

***Alex Creaser*** – Head Choir Girl – a faithful young chorister appointed by the Choirmasters to assist, especially with details involving choir boys and choir girls.

### ***Annual Musical Services***

In addition to the regular Sunday morning 10 am Sung Eucharist, the annual cycle includes the following special services.

- Choral Evensong (four to six times each year)
- All Souls’ Day Choral Requiem (November 2)
- Thanksgiving Eve
- Advent Lessons and Carols
- Christmas Eve (4:00 and 11:00 pm services)
- Martin Luther King Service of Light

- Ash Wednesday
- Maundy Thursday
- Good Friday
- The Great Vigil of Easter
- Easter Day (8:00 and 10:00 am)

## **WEEKLY CHOIR SCHEDULE**

The complete choir schedule for the year is available online as a public Google calendar.

St. John's Choir Calendar – iCal format -

<https://calendar.google.com/calendar/ical/stjohnschoirbangor%40gmail.com/public/basic.ics>

St. John's Choir Calendar – HTML -

[https://calendar.google.com/calendar/embed?src=stjohnschoirbangor%40gmail.com&ctz=America/New\\_York](https://calendar.google.com/calendar/embed?src=stjohnschoirbangor%40gmail.com&ctz=America/New_York)

St. Nicholas Choir Calendar – iCal format

<https://calendar.google.com/calendar/ical/39m3mbnlqobj77k56ldkfgaoq4%40group.calendar.google.com/public/basic.ics>

St. Nicholas Choir Calendar – HTML

[https://calendar.google.com/calendar/embed?src=39m3mbnlqobj77k56ldkfgaoq4%40group.calendar.google.com&ctz=America/New\\_York](https://calendar.google.com/calendar/embed?src=39m3mbnlqobj77k56ldkfgaoq4%40group.calendar.google.com&ctz=America/New_York)

The normal weekly schedule for the St. John's Choir from early September to early June is –

Wednesday 5:30-7:30 pm – Rehearsal in the Nave  
 Sunday 9:15 am – Rehearsal in cassocks in choir stalls  
 10:00 am – Sung Eucharist

Additional special services are most commonly at 4:00 pm or 7:00 pm, with rehearsal beginning one hour before service time.

We send out a weekly choir e-news giving the schedule for the week along with repertoire lists.

We rarely cancel rehearsals and never cancel services. If weather conditions cause us to cancel a rehearsal, we will send out an email and text by 2:00 pm. If you are concerned about going out in current weather conditions, use your own judgment; safety comes first!

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

We want to know when you will be unable to attend – partly so that we can plan music effectively and partly because we're concerned when you're not there and

we don't know if you're ill or out of town. You may also want to contact us to add someone to the parish prayer list. Here are the most effective ways to contact us –

1. Email – [Choirmaster@StJohnsBangor.org](mailto:Choirmaster@StJohnsBangor.org). You may sometimes see emails from me using the address [RobertLudwig@aya.yale.edu](mailto:RobertLudwig@aya.yale.edu). They both go into my mail program, so they work equally well.
2. Text Robert at 207-974-7715
3. Phone message for Robert or Nancy at 207-974-7715
4. Phone message to parish office at 207-947-0156

## ATTENDANCE GUIDELINES

Everyone has busy lives and we know that conflicts will arise. It is important, though, that you hold the choir as a priority commitment and give us as much advance notice as possible when you will have to miss a rehearsal or service. If we know, for instance, that a second soprano will have to miss a service, we might want to move an alto up to S2 when we work on that piece at Wednesday's rehearsal. If we only discover the absence midway through our Sunday warmup, it may be too late for someone else to earn a different part. There is a choir calendar on the door of the music library where you may sign out in advance. When you receive the weekly choir e-news you can simply hit reply and let me know that way of an upcoming absence. We do ask that you take note in September in your personal calendar of the special services for the year such as Evensongs, Lessons and Carols, and Holy Days.

If you must miss:

- Please attend the Wednesday rehearsal even if you must miss the following Sunday. We usually spend only 25% or so of the rehearsal covering music for that week; the rest of the time is devoted to music further ahead.
- If you miss two consecutive weeks of rehearsals, please feel free to come on Sunday morning to vest and sing the hymns and service music. ***Do not assume you should sing on the anthems until you have spoken directly with the Choirmaster.***
- If you miss the pre-service rehearsal – you are welcome to vest and sing the hymns and service music. ***Again, do not assume you should sing on the anthems until you have spoken directly with the Choirmaster.***

## DRESS AND VESTMENTS

The point of wearing choir vestments for services is so that no one individual stands out visually within the group, just as we never wish to have one individual singing voice stand out. In order to achieve this aim of blending together

- Jewelry and hair bows or bands should be kept simple.

- Shoes should be dark navy, black or brown. Athletic shoes, sandals, and platform shoes may not be worn. You are welcome to leave dress shoes in your music cubby.
- Please make certain that your cassock and cotta fit properly and that the cassock can be fully buttoned to the top. If yours is not comfortable, there is a large rack of extras at the base of the undercroft stairs near the elevator.
- Your vestments are your responsibility. Please hang them up neatly in the vesting rooms and take home and launder when necessary – especially before Holy Week.
- During pre-service rehearsals in the choir stalls you should always wear your cassock, but not the cotta.

### **COPIES OF MUSIC**

We sing a great deal of music each year and the efficient use and organization of the scores is a constant aspect of choir life. Our scores are found in several formats –

- Published choir octavos
- Choral collections
- Photocopies of Psalms and public domain music

The St. John’s Choir has more than the usual number of choral collections that we regularly use, so an established pattern has been for every singer to have a large canvas tote bag to carry around this heavy load of books and music. Each singer also has a three-ring binder used for holding octavos and photocopies.

- A list of materials for your canvas bag will be kept on the white board next to the choir library. Consult this list when you arrive, and you’ll know what materials you need for that week’s rehearsal. In addition to the “bag list”, each Sunday the white board will list the music needed for that service.
- Keep your copies of the other collections in your choir cubby.
- Use the white binder for the Psalter and for photocopies of octavos to be sung that week. It will be the only binder used in services.
- Use the black binder for other photocopies and octavos of music to be used in subsequent weeks. For Wednesday rehearsals you will need both white and black binders.

### **Guidelines for music care**

- Only use pencil on music.
- Feel free to write your name on scores.
- If you attend Wednesday rehearsal but will be missing Sunday’s service, please turn in your music for that week after we rehearse it, so that it can be either used or filed as needed on Sunday.
- Judicious use of musical markings can be helpful.

- Following the service, please leave music scores (but not psalms) on the counter next to the music library.

## **LITURGICAL INVOLVEMENT AND GENERAL GUIDELINES**

As leaders of worship and also as a musical ensemble, there are many details that work best if we have common goals and routines. If you're new to our choir, don't be frightened by all of these bullets; much of it will come naturally just by watching the experienced singers around you.

### **General guidelines**

- Gum chewing, unnecessary talking, and cell phone usage (including texting and social media, but excepting professionals on call) are not a part of rehearsals or services.
- Do not use perfume, cologne or aftershave. Some choir members have scent allergies and the close quarters and deep breathing necessary for choral singing can aggravate their sensitivity.
- Encourage and support our younger singers by providing a model for them – in punctuality and actions in rehearsals and services.
- Encourage other singers, young and old, parishioners and non-parishioners, to consider singing with us.
- If you are ill and have a fever, please do stay home and take care of yourself.

### **Singing Guidelines**

- All voices in a section should strive to blend together. Soloistic singing is not appropriate for choral singing.
- Always be aware of the meaning of the text we are singing. If it is in a foreign language and you do not understand the meaning, please ask the choirmaster.
- Strive for unified vowels that will tune well and crisp consonants placed as directed by the choirmaster. Crisp consonants placed *ad libitum* simply result in a sloppy performance.
- Sing expressively and follow the dynamic markings in the music.

### **Rehearsal guidelines**

- Rehearsals always begin and end on time.
- Arriving on time for rehearsals is essential for the efficiency and morale of the choir.
- When you arrive for rehearsal on Wednesdays, look at the white board next to the choir library – it will tell you what items you need in your tote bag. Please leave other books in your music cubby.
- If you are not in good voice (cold, hoarseness, etc.) but do not have a fever and are otherwise fine, please come to rehearsal anyway. You can think through your music and learn many details without actually singing it.

Please do **not** sing an octave lower than the music is notated – with the exception of times the choirmaster asks, for instance, the sopranos to rehearse an especially high section down an octave to learn intervals.

- If you make a mistake in rehearsal, raise your hand. This lets the choirmaster know that **you know** that you made the mistake and will likely be able to correct it the next time.
- Always have a pencil at rehearsals. It has been said that the difference between a professional and an amateur singer is simply a pencil!
- Bring water to rehearsals and stay hydrated. Closed water bottles are the only beverages allowed in the nave and chancel. Water bottles being used in services should be discrete.

### **Pre-Service Rehearsal Guidelines**

- When you arrive for a pre-service rehearsal, look at the white board next to the choir library – it will tell you what items you need to bring into the choir stalls. Please do not bring your entire tote bag into the chancel.
- During services, women may leave handbags in a locked bin in the women's vesting area.
- Pre-service rehearsals are normally held in the choir stalls in cassocks.
- At the conclusion of the pre-service rehearsal we recite the Chorister's Prayer (see page 2) and process out of the chancel, carrying only the music to be used in the Entrance Procession.

### **Service Guidelines**

- At five minutes before service time, the choir gathers **in silence** in the vestibule. The Head Chorister will blink the lights to let everyone know it is time. It is essential that we maintain **absolute silence** during this time. Talking and laughter from the choir *can* be heard by the congregation in the nave. The door to the ambulatory remains shut until service time, except for parishioners entering church. One of our principal callings as a choir is to model verbal responses, liturgical posture, and the tone of worship for the congregation. By the time the choir assembles in the vestibule, an organ prelude has normally begun, helping to set an appropriate mood for the service. If you must have a conversation, please take it to the vesting room, outside, the chapel, or the undercroft.
- For Sunday morning services, the choir moves to the south ambulatory. Again, **we maintain absolute silence**. The last person in line makes certain to shut the vesting room door to the vestibule, so that the room remains secure during the service.
- Our normal Sunday morning services include the congregational reciting of the Collect for Purity before the Entrance Hymn. Recite it with confidence, but keep an ear out for the pace set by the Celebrant, and fall in line with that speed. The Celebrant is the liturgical leader for all aspects of the service and the choir should always follow the pace set by the Celebrant.

- Hymns are normally sung in unison for first and last stanzas and harmony for inner stanzas. Please do not improvise harmony. Do not sing hymn descants unless instructed to do so. Do not hum along during the organ introduction to hymns. Sing lightly on the first hymn until you have moved through the “Crimson Curtain” – then sing vigorously, but keeping an ear out to stay right in time with the organ.
- We normally move into single file down the south aisle (one pew apart) and then into double file (two pews apart) down the center aisle. Stay to the sides of the center aisle in order to help keep straight lines.
- We keep a dignified pace while walking, avoiding swaying.
- When you reach the altar rail, pause, bow your head, and move to the left or right into the choir stalls.
- During the service, be aware that some in the congregation can easily see movements that you might think are hidden by the choir stalls. We are an integral part of the worship visually throughout the entire service. There are times when we have to shuffle books, etc., but aim to be “sneaky” in your approach to the work at hand so we don’t distract. Perhaps think of being part of the service staff at a very high-end restaurant.
- Clergy, choir members and parishioners in an Episcopal church have a wide variety of physical movements, including crossing oneself, dipping fingers in a bowl of holy water before crossing oneself in order to remember baptism, bowing a reverence when the name of Jesus is mentioned, making marks of the cross on forehead, lips, and heart when the Gospel is announced, and bowing a longer reverence for mention of the Incarnation in the Nicene Creed. The use of them is a personal choice, but the choir has a role in leading the congregation in some of them, according to the liturgical traditions of a parish and its Rector. This customary explains the few moments when we do strive to have the choir lead in a unified movement –
  - Reverencing the altar before entering the pew
  - Facing the Gospel Book for its reading
  - Facing the altar for the Creed
  - During the Doxology following the anthem
- When the Gospel Book is taken to the nave for the Gospel reading, please reverence the cross and turn with the book to face the nave. Turn back to the center as it passes you in the choir stalls, again reverencing the cross.
- When kneeling, because of the closeness of our choir pews, you may need to use what is sometimes known as the “Anglican Squat” – resting your knees on the kneeler and your behind on the front edge of the seat. Please do not sit flat with your back resting against the pew back.
- Do not stare at the congregation from the choir stalls or make eye contact with them while processing.
- There is never any reason to have conversations in the choir stalls during a service – including during sermons, at the Peace, and while the congregation is coming forward to receive Communion. Again, if

something related to our participation in the service needs communicating, be as sneaky as possible.

- We face the Altar for the Nicene Creed.
- After the Offertory anthem – turn to the altar when the ushers reach the top step. Turn back to the center after the conclusion of the Doxology.
- All baptized Christians are welcome to receive communion. If you do not wish to receive, please kneel at the altar rail and cross your arms to receive a blessing.
- Anniversary blessings are offered towards the end of the service. If you are having a birthday or anniversary of any kind, you are encouraged to go to the Crossing.
- Front rows of the choir leave first during the closing hymn, leaving via the altar end to follow the crucifer and torches.
- Stand at the back of the church behind the last pew to finish the hymn.
- Please do not stand talking in the ambulatory while the organist is playing the postlude.

### ***After the Liturgy***

- Place used sheet music on the counter next to the music library.
- A Coffee Hour is held in the Undercroft following Sunday services. Choir members are encouraged to “work the room,” getting to know members of the congregation and possibly encouraging some to consider joining us. During May the choir hosts these coffee hours for several weeks.
- All personal items in the vesting rooms should be stowed in cubbies.

### **RSCM TRAINING SCHEME**

The St. John’s Choir has, for many years, been affiliated with the Royal School of Church Music, an international organization that promotes excellence in church music, especially at the parish level. One of the key aspects of the RSCM is its training scheme, now known as ***Voice for Life***, which recognizes the achievement of certain standards by choristers with the granting of medals on colored ribbons.

The levels are white, light blue, dark blue, red, and yellow. Progressing from one level to another involves achieving target goals (assessed by the choirmasters) in areas of

- Using the voice well
- Musical skills and understanding
- Repertoire
- Belonging to the Choir
- Choir in context

There are also several awards available through formal examinations – the Bronze Award follows the dark blue level, Silver follows the red level, and Gold

follows the yellow level. A singer would need to travel to Boston or some other city to be assessed for any of these awards.

Much of the work to move through the various levels can be done by adults on their own using workbooks and worksheets provided by the choirmasters, but the assessments are done by the choirmasters

### **HISTORY OF THE ST. JOHN'S CHOIR**

St. John's Episcopal Church was founded in 1835. In 1841 an organ built by Hook was installed in the church, and the first organist was W.S.K. Howard. His successor, J.W. Tufts, was a well-known musician and pedagogue. In the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, St. John's was recognized as having an excellent choir program. More research needs to be done to recognize the choir of the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but we do know that St. John's had a thriving program for many years under longtime Organist/Choirmaster Edward Prescott. The current choir program had its origin in 1980, when Dr. Fred Jones became Organist/Choirmaster. Under Dr. Jones' skilled directorship the choir grew steadily and especially embraced the RSCM training program for children. It had as many as sixty or more boys, girls, and adults singing for services at St. John's, and the choir's repertoire expanded to include many great masterworks from the Anglican cathedral tradition. The choirs took pilgrimages to the Great Britain in 1986, 1991, 1996 and 2001 – singing Choral Evensong and Eucharists in a number of historic churches and cathedrals, including St. Paul's (London), Canterbury, and Bangor (Wales). Recent years have seen more brief tenures from Travis LaCombe and Douglas Beck, as well as interim leadership by David Friedell, Gerald Wheeler, Elisabeth Patches and John Barry. Robert and Nancy Ludwig became Organists and Choirmasters at St. John's in 2012. After receiving degrees in music from the Curtis Institute, Davidson College and Yale, they served as musicians at Christ Church (now the Cathedral) in Lexington, KY before going to Cathedral of the Incarnation in Garden City, Long Island, NY – the cathedral church for Brooklyn, Queens, Nassau and Suffolk counties. In 2000, they left full-time church work and Robert was Director of Vocal Music and Music Theory at Garden City High School until he took early retirement from that position so that they could move to Bangor. Robert and Nancy have two sons - James and his wife Jessica live on Long Island where they are both music teachers and Samuel and his wife Maureen live in Burlington where they work for the Peace Corps and an international aid organization. In addition to his work at St. John's, Robert is Artistic Director of the Bangor Area Children's Choir and has a private piano and voice studio.