

“Let Your Light Shine”: Chorister Program

by Karl Robson, Director of Music Ministries

When I walk through our West Avenue entrance, I am always struck by the visual display of our parish’s “Core 4” attributes on the opposite wall. “Worship” occupies the center of this display, with the largest lettering; “Build Community,” “Grow,” and “Make a Difference” are placed in orbit around it. To me, this is an apt visual representation of what it means to *be Church*; indeed, our Sunday liturgies knit us together as a community of faith, spark our desire for further spiritual growth, and empower us to engage with the world outside our walls.

And music is an integral part of what we do in worship. Our hymns, anthems, service music, and voluntaries knit together the readings, preaching, and pageantry of our Sunday liturgies. The power of music to move human emotion has thrilled and mystified (and, sometimes, terrified) theologians for centuries. Our own parish’s musicians remain a major public-facing expression of St. John’s identity, especially to people joining us for the first time. I am reminded of sage advice from my first organ teacher: well-executed music can rescue *anything* else that goes badly in a liturgy, but poorly-executed music ruins *everything* that went well.

The budget for our music program here at St. John’s enables us to offer music of the highest quality. We are able to utilize the gifts of our volunteers and professionals alike, keep our many and marvelous musical instruments in good tune and repair, and regularly expand our music library to include repertoire of all times and places, from an increasingly diverse group of composers.

This year, the Vestry chose to fund my request for a new Royal School of Church Music (RSCM)-based Chorister program for young singers. Our fledgling program (begun in September with eight eager young participants, myself, and a newly-hired professional vocal coach) focuses on cultivating a healthy vocal technique, a deep understanding of music theory, and a lifelong love of high-quality sacred music. The RSCM curriculum covers increasingly sophisticated musical concepts, focusing on sight-singing and music theory. Choristers are treated as professional team members, and they are given musical selections similar to (or the same as) those of adult choirs. They are paid a small stipend for their attendance at rehearsals and services. As they progress through the curriculum, they are tested for progressively complex musical skills, earning a series of colored ribbons (much like in martial arts programs). As choristers grow older, they become role models for newer, younger choristers. After they graduate from high school, they can instantly find new friends

wherever life takes them – by joining the choir at the nearest Episcopal Church! Choristers make lifelong friends in a supportive intellectual environment, learn to love the music of the church, and grow into leaders of parish families like ours. Programs like ours lay the groundwork for a lifetime of discipleship, and invest in the future of music in our Anglican choral tradition.

2023 will mark the first full year of costs associated with our Chorister program. Your generosity in pledging will enable this newest arm of our music outreach (as well as our pre-existing offerings) to grow and thrive, letting the light of music here at St. John's shine brighter and brighter.