

THE SONG OF THE RIGHTEOUS

The Ward Choir Survival Guide

Quick Reference for New Directors

YOU'VE BEEN CALLED. NOW WHAT?

A calm, practical companion for your first Sunday, first rehearsal,
first song, first performance, first problem, and first Christmas program.

A printable companion inspired by The Song of the Righteous: A Choir Director's Handbook

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FIRST SUNDAY

Start with stewardship, not spectacle

Your first job is to learn the terrain, meet the people, and make a simple plan.



DON'T PANIC

You do not need to redesign the ward choir on day one. The handbook recommends beginning by learning what has already been done, coordinating with the music advisor, and finding out what resources you have.

YOUR FIRST-SUNDAY CHECKLIST

- ☐ Meet or schedule a meeting with the bishopric member serving as music advisor.
- ☐ Contact the previous choir director. Ask about rehearsal time, attendance patterns, strengths, weaknesses, repertoire, and where ward-owned music is stored.
- ☐ Confirm who the accompanist is - or whether one still needs to be found.
- ☐ Locate the choir music library and get a personal hymnbook you can mark for conducting.
- ☐ Find out when the choir is expected to sing next and what kind of music leadership prefers.
- ☐ Announce the next rehearsal clearly: when, where, and what singers should bring.
- ☐ Pray specifically for the choir and for people who may need an invitation to participate.

ASK THE PREVIOUS DIRECTOR

What worked? What did not? Who tends to come? Which sections are strong or thin? What music is already owned? What traditions are worth keeping?

ASK THE MUSIC ADVISOR

How often should the choir sing? Are there upcoming meeting themes or special programs? What approval process should I follow for repertoire?



FIRST REHEARSAL

Aim for worshipful, warm, and efficient

A short rehearsal can still feel purposeful when everyone knows what happens next.



DON'T PANIC

The first rehearsal does not need to sound finished. Success is leaving singers clearer, more confident, and more willing to return next week.

A SIMPLE 45-MINUTE REHEARSAL



BEFORE SINGERS ARRIVE

- Put chairs/music in place.
- Confirm accompanist pages and tempo.
- Choose 1-2 warm-ups tied to the music.
- Mark your rehearsal starts and stopping points.
- Decide the one musical goal that matters most today.

DURING REHEARSAL

- Start and end on time.
- Give brief, specific directions.
- Rehearse difficult spots before full run-throughs.
- Keep talking to a minimum.
- Mix encouragement with correction.
- Include at least one spiritual thought or reminder of the text.

A GOOD FIRST-REHEARSAL GOAL

Choose something achievable: a clean opening, one tricky entrance, unified vowels on a refrain, or a confident ending. The handbook stresses that short rehearsals work best when they stay focused and move on once a section is learned.

WRITE YOUR ONE GOAL FOR THIS REHEARSAL



FIRST SONG

Choose music your choir can own

The right piece serves the meeting, suits the singers, and can be prepared in the time available.



DON'T PANIC

Beautiful and simple is better than impressive and underprepared. The book repeatedly warns against choosing music that is too difficult, too showy, or mismatched to the meeting.

THE FIVE-FILTER SONG TEST

1

MESSAGE

Does the text fit the spirit and purpose of the meeting?

2

PEOPLE

Can the singers you actually have sing it comfortably?

3

TIME

Can it be learned with the rehearsals you actually have?

4

LEADERSHIP

Is the selection appropriate and approved through the proper ward process?

5

LEGALITY

Do you have enough legal copies or permission to use the music?

QUICK SCORECARD

Question	Yes	Maybe	No
Message fits the meeting	■	■	■
Ranges fit our singers	■	■	■
Accompanist can prepare it	■	■	■
Enough rehearsal time remains	■	■	■

RULE OF THUMB

If two or more answers are "No," save the piece for another season. A choir that feels prepared is more likely to sing with confidence and return.



FIRST PERFORMANCE

Remove distractions so the message can speak

The congregation should notice the song and its spirit - not avoidable confusion on the stand.



DON'T PANIC

A first performance does not need to be flawless. Prepare the beginning, the ending, and the obvious transitions well enough that the choir can look up and trust you.

24 HOURS BEFORE

- ☐ Confirm final singer and accompanist needs; bring the correct music and legal copies.
- ☐ Review opening pitch/tempo, introductions, repeats, cutoffs, and any standing/sitting signals.
- ☐ Decide exactly where each section will stand; avoid solving the entire seating plan at the last second.
- ☐ If singers are nervous, schedule a brief confidence-building run-through rather than adding new complexity.

ON THE STAND

EYES UP

Hold music high enough to see the director.

ONE LOOK

Stand and hold folders consistently.

STILL HANDS

Avoid distracting movements.

CLEAR SIGNAL

Stand and sit together.

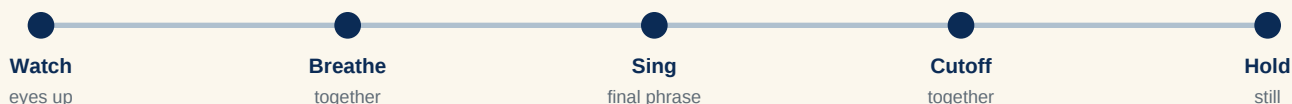
BELIEVE IT

Let faces reflect the message.

SIMPLE STYLE

Director gestures should be clear, not showy.

PRACTICE THE LAST 20 SECONDS





FIRST PROBLEM

Diagnose before you dramatize

Most choir problems are smaller when you identify the category and choose one next step.



DON'T PANIC

Do not try to fix ten things at once. The handbook's pitfalls point to a few recurring causes: posture, breathing, repertoire, rehearsal efficiency, expression, rhythm, attendance, and misplaced focus.

QUICK TROUBLESHOOTER

CHOIR SOUNDS TIRED

Reset posture and breath; choose one energizing warm-up.

PITCH IS SAGGING

Slow down, isolate the section, check breath and vowels, and adjust seating if helpful.

RHYTHM IS MESSY

Speak or tap the passage in rhythm before singing it again.

NO ONE IS WATCHING

Shorten instructions, rehearse with music held higher, and memorize the opening/ending if practical.

ATTENDANCE IS THIN

Make personal invitations, keep rehearsals pleasant, and select music that succeeds with the people who actually come.

THE PIECE IS TOO HARD

Simplify, reduce, substitute, or choose a new piece. Do not sacrifice worship for virtuosity.

WHEN THE PROBLEM IS A PERSON

Correct the music in rehearsal without embarrassing individuals. If one member repeatedly disrupts rehearsal, consider a private conversation afterward rather than turning rehearsal into a confrontation.



FIRST CHRISTMAS PROGRAM

Plan backward from the day you sing

Christmas is predictable. Use that gift: choose early, simplify wisely, and build confidence before December becomes crowded.



DON'T PANIC

A Christmas program can be spiritually powerful without being musically enormous. The manuscript's stories emphasize that simple, well-prepared music can be deeply effective.

8-WEEK CHRISTMAS COUNTDOWN

8 WEEKS

Confirm program expectations and leadership approval. Choose repertoire.

7 WEEKS

Secure legal music and accompanist copies. Begin the easiest piece.

6 WEEKS

Recruit personally, especially needed voice parts. Start main piece.

5 WEEKS

Address notes/rhythm. Record or share practice helps if appropriate.

4 WEEKS

Begin musical polish: vowels, blend, dynamics, expression.

3 WEEKS

Practice transitions, order, standing plan, and any narration/instrumental coordination.

2 WEEKS

Run larger sections without stopping. Fix only the biggest remaining problems.

1 WEEK

Confidence rehearsal. No unnecessary new ideas. Confirm arrival time and final logistics.

CHRISTMAS SANITY SAVER

Pick one "stretch" item at most. Let the rest of the program support it. The book encourages yearly planning, reminds directors that Christmas is only one of many choir seasons, and includes examples of extra pre-program run-throughs when singers need confidence.



SIMPLE DIAGRAMS

Conduct clearly. Place singers intentionally.

The best diagram is the one your choir can understand at a glance.

BASIC BEAT-PATTERN REMINDERS

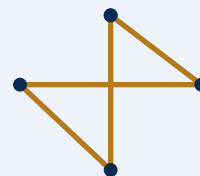
2/4 PATTERN



3/4 PATTERN



4/4 PATTERN



CHOIR CONFIGURATION STARTERS

PARTS TOGETHER



Helpful for less-experienced singers or difficult music.

MEN/WOMEN ROWS



Easy to understand; adjust based on balance and space.

MIXED QUARTETS



Can encourage independent singing and improve blend in stronger choirs.



EMERGENCY PAGE

When rehearsal goes sideways

Choose the smallest solution that still protects the message and the people.



DON'T PANIC

Flexibility is not failure. One director in the book found success by letting go of harder repertoire and using beautiful music simple enough to prepare in a single focused rehearsal.

THE ACCOMPANIST IS ABSENT

Use a simpler hymn, an approved accompaniment option already available to you, a capable substitute, or rehearse parts without attempting a risky performance plan.

HALF THE CHOIR IS ABSENT

Rebalance parts, simplify voicing, rehearse rather than panic, and decide whether the selection still serves the meeting.

THE TENORS VANISHED

Do not force an exposed part that no one can carry. Consider a reduced voicing or different piece.

YOU HAVE ONE REHEARSAL

Choose music that can be learned and polished in that time. One hour of focused success can be better than weeks of frustration.

THE BISHOPRIC REQUESTS A CHANGE

Treat it as coordination, not catastrophe. Clarify the meeting need, then choose the most achievable approved alternative.

SINGERS ARE NERVOUS

Run the beginning and ending, remind them of the message, and give them one or two clear musical priorities - not a new list of ten corrections.



YOUR FIRST MONTH

Build trust before you build complexity

A healthy choir is not merely a collection of correct notes. It is people learning to serve together.

FOUR-WEEK STARTER PLAN

1

WEEK 1

Learn names and sections. Establish rehearsal time, accompanist communication, and one achievable song.

2

WEEK 2

Repeat a consistent rehearsal pattern. Invite new singers personally. Begin shaping vowels, rhythm, and entrances.

3

WEEK 3

Evaluate balance and seating. Add expression and dynamics. Practice the opening and cutoff until singers trust your signals.

4

WEEK 4

Sing or run the piece as a whole. Ask: Did the choir feel prepared? Did rehearsal feel worshipful? What one thing should change next month?

One heart. One mind. One voice.

The handbook repeatedly returns to the idea that sacred choir work is service and prayer. Technical improvement matters, but it serves a larger purpose: helping singers and listeners worship, learn, feel the Spirit, and be strengthened together.