

2025 - 2026

All Saints Church

# CHORISTERS CHOIR

# Handbook



# Welcome!

Dear Parents, Singers, and Prospective Choristers,

Welcome! This booklet provides a comprehensive overview of All Saints Church's music ministry, its rich traditions, and its influence within the church and the greater Richmond region. Our choir program draws singers from across the area—some traveling from as far as Chester, while others live just up the street.

Rooted in the English cathedral tradition, our choirs uphold a standard of musical excellence. Choristers sing the treble (soprano) parts, while an auditioned Schola of adult singers (stipendiary and volunteer) supports the alto, tenor, and bass parts. Our repertoire spans centuries, from Renaissance motets and grand Victorian anthems to spirituals and newly composed works by contemporary composers.

At All Saints, every Sunday is a "Youth Sunday." Choristers strive for musical excellence through regular rehearsals, services, concerts, and tours. They quickly learn to read music and develop a deep understanding of what they sing. They receive professional training in sight-reading, ear training, and music theory, with opportunities for private lessons sponsored by the program. Choir tours and trips are an exciting and integral part of choir life, with past destinations including Austria, the UK, and upcoming plans for Scotland in 2025.

Beyond musical skills, choristers gain lifelong leadership abilities that serve them in many aspects of life. They form strong friendships, experience the joy of collaboration, and engage with other church ministries in service and educational opportunities.

This handbook outlines choir structure and procedures, offering prospective choristers insight into our program and long-time members a reminder of the treasure we have in our choir. We hope it inspires you to help our tradition flourish for years to come.

## **Benefits of Joining:**

- Professional music training
- Development of leadership skills
- Opportunities for travel and performance
- Strong community and friendships
- Enhanced academic skills through music education

We look forward to welcoming you into our choir family and embarking on this musical journey together!

All good wishes,

Scott G. Hayes  
Director of Music  
All Saints Episcopal Church

# The Choirs

With our choral roots stretching back to 1899 with the founding of the All Saints Choir of Men and Boys, the choir tradition remains strong. The congregation and leadership take their responsibility for providing a safe and educational environment for boys & girls throughout the greater Richmond area. We welcome all, regardless of religious background, church membership, or musical experience.

**All Saints Choristers & Schola** welcomes boys and girls in grades 2–12. Supported by an auditioned schola of skilled adult singers, this structure allows us to provide a rich musical experience, mentorship opportunities for older choristers, and high-quality liturgical music. The choir sings approximately twice a month in worship and rehearses primarily on Thursday evenings, with additional rehearsals available on Sunday afternoons. The choir continues its tradition of touring, with past destinations including Austria (2013), Cambridge & Bath, UK (2019), and Scotland (planned for Summer 2025).

**The Training Choir** is designed for children in grades 1–3 who are developing foundational musical skills before joining the full Schola & Choristers Choir. Rehearsals are engaging and interactive, incorporating music theory, vocal production, and curriculum from the Royal School of Church Music. The Training Choir sings periodically with the Schola & Choristers Choir, about once per quarter.

**All Saints Choir** is a mixed choir of primarily volunteer singers. Repertoire is drawn from all periods of sacred music. Singers in this choir come from all types of musical backgrounds – some are highly trained, others don't read music, and supported by stipendiary section leaders. Musical experience is not necessary for this group (though the ability to read music is helpful but not required), but the desire to experience and sing great music is a must. All Saints Choirs rehearses on Thursday (September - early June) and sings most Sunday mornings throughout the year (when the Choristers & Schola are not singing.)

# The Choir's Mission

The primary role of the choir is to lead congregational singing—this is our most important work. While anthems enrich the worship experience, they are not the measure by which the choir's contribution is defined.

A choir that sings with energy and conviction elevates worship. A well-rehearsed choir shapes the flow of the service, embodying the truth that “music is the heartbeat of worship” (Eric Routley). The choir serves as a model for the congregation—both visually and aurally—providing a strong, confident foundation upon which all may rely. As a body of ministers, the choir is called to uphold a positive and appropriate image in behavior, appearance, and leadership.

Musically, we aspire to the highest quality achievable for the Glory of God.

For Choristers, beyond music, our mission is to develop leaders—not only in choir but in life. A chorister must be engaged, responsible, accountable, organized, and attentive to detail—skills that serve them well in all aspects of life.

## **A Note on “Performance” vs. “Worship”**

To perform means to bring something to life. In this sense, every note we sing is a performance. But for whom do we perform? It is easy to think of ourselves as performers, the congregation as the audience, and God as the prompter. Instead, consider this:

- The congregation is the performer.
- The choir is the prompter.
- God is the audience.

With this perspective, our role becomes clear: to guide and inspire the congregation's song, ensuring that our music is an offering to God.

# Rehearsal Information

## Choristers Choir Rehearsal Times

For Fall 2024, the Boys & Girls Choirs primary rehearsal will be Thursday, 5:30 – 7:30 PM (with dinner). On singing Sundays, an additional rehearsal will take place after church (with lunch) that we hope everyone will attend. On non-singing Sundays, an alternate rehearsal will happen on Sundays, 1:30 - 3:00 PM for those who cannot make Thursday rehearsals regularly, or need a make up rehearsal.

## Training Choir Rehearsal Times

Currently, the Training Choir rehearses from 6:00 -6:45 PM on Thursday nights, concurrently with the Choristers Choir. This allows the Training Choir to jump in with the “big” choir for 15 minutes of rehearsal, before returning to their own class. At the end of class, participants are welcome to join the Choristers Choir for dinner.

## Rehearsal Etiquette

Each chorister and their parents will review and sign a **Chorister Covenant** upon joining. By signing, choristers agree to:

- Show respect to fellow choristers and adults.
- Use the restroom before rehearsal—breaks are given to the whole choir.
- Be seated and ready before rehearsal begins and return on time after breaks.
- No gum, candy, or phones during rehearsal (phones go in assigned boxes).
- Take care of music and attend rehearsals regularly.
- Be engaged, prepared, and flexible with schedule changes.

Our rehearsals are fun but focused. Disruptions will be addressed first with the chorister; if needed, parents will be consulted.



# Attendance

Singing in a choir is like being on a team—when someone is absent, the group dynamic shifts, requiring adjustments in leadership and teaching. Regular attendance ensures the choir functions at its best.

## Why is regular attendance important?

While perfect attendance isn't always possible, being present for Sundays and performances is essential. Did you know:

- Hours of rehearsal build group cohesion—learning how voices blend and interact.
- Larger projects (Evensongs, concerts) require a month or more of preparation.
- Even for a single Sunday, 2–4 hours of work go into a 5-minute anthem.

## If you must miss a rehearsal or service:

- Notify the Director of Music at least 48 hours in advance (more is better!).
- In emergencies, inform us as soon as possible.
- Contact Scott at 804.288.7811, [shayes@allsaintsrichmond.org](mailto:shayes@allsaintsrichmond.org).

## What if I don't communicate an absence?

If a chorister is frequently absent without notice, the Director of Music will reach out to discuss the situation.

## Balancing Choir & Other Activities

We encourage well-rounded participation in sports, musicals, and other activities. If scheduling conflicts arise, reach out to the Director of Music—we'll find a way to make it work. Choir doesn't have to be "either/or"!

## What are "Red Letter" Dates?

Certain key events—marked in red on the schedule—are anchor points in our program. These are high-priority services or concerts where we aim for our best. They'll be clearly communicated as essential.

## Punctuality & Choir

Being on time is essential for an efficient and productive rehearsal. Delays disrupt the schedule, require repetition of missed information, and affect the entire group.

To Begin Rehearsal:

- Arrive early, check the board for the rehearsal order, and organize your music.
- Be seated with a pencil in hand, ready to sing.
- Warm-ups matter—treat them with the same focus as the music itself.

# Parent Expectations

As parents, your attention is nearly as important as the boys' & girls' themselves. There are a few main expectations:

1. Communicate with the director any absences (expected or unexpected) as early as possible.
2. Carefully read weekly email updates carefully
3. Be active: there are a variety of ways to help out!
  - Providing lunch/food for rehearsals that require them (most Thursdays & occasional Sundays)
  - Acting as a chaperone during rehearsals
  - Helping coordinate an event
  - Help coordinate transportation for choristers who need help getting to rehearsals
  - Other volunteer opportunities as they arise

## Transportation Assistance

Assistance with transportation to rehearsals or services is available, either regularly, or as needed. If you need help bringing your child to rehearsal, please let the Director of Music know at least 48 hours in advance.

## Misconduct Prevention Training

The Episcopal Diocese of Virginia requires all staff and regular volunteers in the church to complete Misconduct Prevention Training periodically. If you find yourself chaperoning the choirs from time to time, we strongly encourage you to complete this training.

You can do the training online. The link below contains directions to both. To find the most up-to-date information about the training, please visit:

[https://episcopalvirginia.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/QuickStart\\_Guide\\_Updated\\_May\\_2023.pdf](https://episcopalvirginia.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/QuickStart_Guide_Updated_May_2023.pdf)

Please note: If you choose to do the online training, and you are in doubt as to what "units" you should take (there are many and you don't want to take more than you need), please contact the Director of Music.

# General Observations

1. Choirs are community entities. “The good of the many outweighs the needs of the few, or one.” (Spock, The Wrath of Khan) All voices in a section should sound as one voice.
2. Be mindful of the text being sung and express that text to the listener. Sing with intentionality, energy, and vigor.
3. View yourself as professional in standards, as an amateur in the love of what you do.
4. Be open to change, variety and creative experimentation.
5. Talk to people, not about people. If you are dissatisfied with some element of the choir experience, bring it to the director’s attention. Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
6. Always be friendly to all and make a point of welcoming newcomers to the choir and help them feel included. Treat one another with loving kindness and great care.



# Vestments

In many faith traditions, vestments are a visual reminder to us and to those who see us that we are set apart for a specific reason in worship of God. At All Saints (and many in the Anglican tradition), there are two main parts to our vestments:

- A Cassock – sometimes called “liturgical underwear” – as it is the foundation for most any liturgical garb. All Saints our cassocks are three colors: black, red, or blue. There isn’t anything particularly “holy” about this – as it is the just the beginning of the “outfit”.
- A Cotta (or “surplice”) – this is the “sacred” part, that designates the outfit as “choir dress” – for those who are leaders and assistants in the service. Cottas are always white – an outward sign of how we prepare ourselves for worship through rehearsals and other preparation.

Cottas come in various lengths – at All Saints, shorter cottas are traditionally reserved for altar servers, acolytes, and children in the choir. Longer cottas are used by adults in the choir. The longest called “surplices”, are nearly floor length. Our clergy wear these, as will our music director from time to time. There no significance in the length.

You’ll notice that the newest members of the choir (training choir & older beginners) do not wear cottas. These are earned after about a year (beginning choristers are called “probationers” in many English choirs!), and signify when the chorister is really ready to participate as a “full member” of the choir.

How we use vestments:

- During pre-service rehearsals in the church, black, red, or blue cassocks are always worn. White surplices are to be saved until it is time for worship.
- Handle your vestments carefully and hang it up neatly in the designated area.
- At services, wear black dress shoes and try not to let your clothing show over the top of the collar of your choir robe.
- Never allow yourself or other choir members to be seen half-vested. Cassocks should always be fully buttoned once you are outside of the robing area.

# From the Director of Music

Here are a few expectations of the director that you can count on:

- I will always begin and end rehearsals on time.
- I will do all that I can to make the best use of your time.
- I never will intentionally embarrass anyone or minimize anyone's efforts.
- I strive to make the best music possible, and to consistently challenge you as a choir to become better singers, better musicians, and a better ensemble.
- I will listen to all suggestions and concerns and do my best to address them.
- I will make decisions to the best of my ability and in consultation with the pastoral leadership of the church according to what we feel most benefits the choir and the parish at large.

# Contact Information

## PASTORAL STAFF

The Rev. Ben Robertson, Rector – [brobertson@allsaintsrichmond.org](mailto:brobertson@allsaintsrichmond.org)

The Rev. David Curtis, Deacon – [deaconjdc@gmail.com](mailto:deaconjdc@gmail.com)

## MUSIC STAFF

Scott G. Hayes, Director of Music - [shayes@allsaintsrichmond.org](mailto:shayes@allsaintsrichmond.org)

Daniel Stipe, Organist – [dstipe@allsaintsrichmond.org](mailto:dstipe@allsaintsrichmond.org)

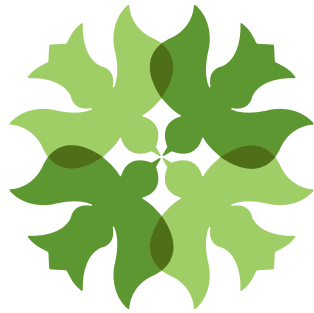
Angel Thompson, Training Choir Instructor - [angelicajaymes16@gmail.com](mailto:angelicajaymes16@gmail.com)

## CONTACT INFORMATION

Church Office Telephone Number: 804-288-7811

All Saints Church Website: [www.allsaintsrichmond.org](http://www.allsaintsrichmond.org)

All Saints Choir Website: [www.allsaintsrvamusic.com](http://www.allsaintsrvamusic.com)



# ALL SAINTS

AN EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
COMMUNITY IN RICHMOND VA

*Equipping the saints*