

Memphis Girls Choir Chorister Handbook

Congratulations on being accepted into the Memphis Girls Choir!

We hope that you will enjoy singing in this remarkable choir and that you will develop a love of choral music that will last forever.

This handbook outlines the Choir policies and procedures for you and your parents. These policies enable the organization to run smoothly and effectively, thus helping the Choir to reach and maintain the absolute highest standard of excellence possible.

It is *very important* that you and your parents read this handbook and agree to follow the policies and procedures. At the end of this handbook is an enrollment agreement for you and a parent to sign and return to Mr. Ouzts to be placed into your file.

The Memphis Girls Choir is a very active organization, and the staff will do everything possible to keep you and your family informed and updated about activities, schedules, etc. It is essential that you and your parents *keep your calendars updated as needed* and take note of any special instructions.

All of us, staff and choristers alike, lead very busy lives, and the staff will do everything possible to honor the time allotted for the Memphis Girls Choir. We ask that you, as choristers, do the same. Together we will build the absolute finest girls choir in Memphis and one of the finest choirs in this country.

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A. About the Memphis Girls Choir

The 2004-2005 season is the 3rd season for the Memphis Girls Choir. By audition, 7th – 12th girls from various private and public schools throughout the Memphis area are invited to join, all from diverse social and religious backgrounds. Their participation in the Memphis Girls Choir will train them to be excellent musicians, singers, and performers.

Church of the Holy Communion is founding and hosting the Memphis Girls Choir as a part of its music ministry to greater Memphis. The Memphis Boychoir was founded at St. John's Episcopal Church in the middle 1980s, and we feel that the same opportunity should be provided for young women in our region as well.

The Memphis Girls Choir will pursue the study of great sacred and secular choral literature and develop musical skills, discipline, and teamwork. With a rigorous rehearsal and performance schedule, these young women will represent their city, Holy Communion Parish, their families and themselves, sharing beautiful music, enthusiasm, and fellowship with all who hear.

B. Memphis Girls Choir Staff

David Perry Ouzts, Music Director, is Director of Music and Organist of Church of the Holy Communion, where he directs a music program of four singing choirs. Mr. Ouzts was Canon Musician and Liturgist of Grace Episcopal Cathedral, Topeka, Kansas, and moved to Memphis in January 2001. He holds degrees from Furman University and Yale University, along with diplomas from the Yale Institute of Sacred Music and the Berkeley Divinity School at Yale. He is presently a doctoral candidate in organ and church music at Indiana University. A native of South Carolina, Mr. Ouzts has conducted church and school choirs for many years and is active in numerous national music organizations.

Assistant Director and Accompanist TBA

Beth Fischer, Choir Manager, is the “catalyst” that holds together the Memphis Girls Choir. Her organizational and resource skills are the vital links that keep the Choir running smoothly throughout the weekly rehearsals and into our performances and tours. Mrs. Fischer handles the choir business, event and tour planning, ordering of uniforms and supplies, choir budget and fund raising, and is the Choir “photographer.” Also a native of Birmingham, Alabama, Mrs. Fischer has sung in parish choirs her entire life, as her mother was the organist of her home parish. She presently sings in the Holy Communion Parish Choir and is the mother of three daughters, two of whom sing in the Memphis Girls Choir. The Memphis Girls Choir is extremely fortunate to have the support and skills of Mrs. Fischer as Choir Manager.

C. Attendance Policies

- Attendance at all rehearsals and performances is vitally important to achieve the high level of musicianship expected of members of the Memphis Girls Choir. The Choir cannot perform consistently well unless every member is present and knows her music.
- Choristers and their families maintain busy schedules, and conflicts are inevitable. However, the only acceptable reasons for missing rehearsals and concerts are *illness, required school functions, and family emergencies*. We ask that the parent provide in advance, and as soon as possible, a written note explaining an anticipated absence. In case of illness or other emergency, call Church of the Holy Communion (901-767-6987) and leave a message for Mr. Ouzts (ext. 13). If you call and the receptionist is away from the telephone, simply enter the extension number to be transferred to voice mail.
- If you are absent for reasons other than the above, or if you are absent without explanation more than *two times* during a semester (August – December, January – May), you may be asked to re-audition to maintain your place in the Choir. Reacceptance into the Choir is at Mr. Ouzts' discretion and will be partially based upon how well you know your music and your demonstrated level of commitment. A girl, who has missed *four rehearsals* in a term for any reasons, excused or otherwise, may be asked to show evidence of acceptable progress in learning the Choir repertoire.
- Final rehearsals before a scheduled performance, or the start of the Spring Tour, are particularly important. Mr. Ouzts will grant excused absences for one of these rehearsals in only the most extreme circumstances. Permission to miss concerts and services is rarely given. These dates are available now; please put them on your calendars immediately so conflicts cannot occur.
- Choir Day Camp in August is also vitally important. During this week of intensive rehearsals, much of the fall repertoire is learned. In addition, we make fast progress in vocal technique and sight-singing skills. This is also the time when the girls have the most time to learn about each other and develop long lasting friendships. For each of these reasons, *we need each chorister to attend choir camp. Not in 2004*
- Choir Day Camp will be one of the two weeks before Memphis City Schools begin in August, but these dates cannot be announced until the school calendar is published in the spring. We know that this may be difficult for families trying to plan vacations; therefore, we ask you to try to avoid the first two weeks in August when making your summer plans each year. Because choir camp is so vitally important to your daughter's success in the Memphis Girls Choir, be certain to avoid planning other trips for her during this time or planning that "one last beach trip before school" during camp week. **Not in 2004**

D. Rehearsal Schedule

- Rehearsals are *Tuesdays and Thursdays, 4:00 – 5:30 p.m.* in the Choir Room of Church of the Holy Communion.
- The Choir regularly sings each *third Sunday of the month* for the 11:15 a.m. worship service at Church of the Holy Communion. Choristers need to arrive at the Choir Room at 10:30 a.m. to put on their vestments, organize their music, and warm-up for the service.
- Occasionally, an extra rehearsal may be scheduled prior to a concert or spring tour. These extra rehearsals, however, will be kept at a minimum and only when absolutely necessary.
- A calendar of all rehearsals, services, and performances for the year will be distributed at the first rehearsal.

E. Rehearsal Guidelines

The Memphis Girls Choir will learn an enormous amount of music each year. Every minute of rehearsal time must be used wisely. Doing so enhances everyone's feeling of accomplishment!

The girls are expected to observe these rehearsal guidelines:

- Arrive in plenty of time to use the restroom, get music and a pencil, and take your seats.
- Rehearsal will begin precisely at the appointed hour and not a minute later.
- Girls who arrive after the rehearsal warm-ups have begun will be considered tardy.
- Therefore, be in your seat, ready rehearse *five minutes before the rehearsal begins*.
- Girls will be excused from rehearsal to use the restroom only at the scheduled rehearsal break or in case of emergency.
- Put your music in the order listed on the marker board.
- Bring drinking water in a non-spill sports container with a top. It is very important for singers to drink lots of water.
- **Food, soft drinks or other beverages will not be brought into the Choir Room.**
- Girls will also not be excused from rehearsal, service, or performance to go to the water fountain.
- Chewing gum and candy are never allowed, period. This includes at any time in the Choir Room and during rehearsals, performances, or on tour.

F. Care of Folders and Music

- The Choir rehearses many pieces of music in the course of a year, and printed music is very expensive or often difficult to replace.
- You will be assigned copies of the music you will need and a notebook to keep it in.
- Music notebooks will be stored together in their designated place in the Choir Room.
- Be careful with your assigned music so that it does not get damaged or lost.
- You may be billed for mutilated or lost music.
- Mark your music ***only in pencil***. Make your markings legible and neat so that the chorister who uses the music after you can read or easily change the markings.
- If you wish to take your music home to do extra work and review, please see Mr. Ouzts.
- If you are missing music or have any problems concerning your music, ask Mr. Ouzts or Mrs. Fischer for assistance.

G. Uniforms and Dress Code

Uniforms are worn by The Memphis Girls Choir to insure the best presentation possible. The Choir provides parts of the uniforms, and each chorister must provide some.

The Memphis Girls Choir has four (4) uniforms:

Sacred Uniform (Vestment)

Church of the Holy Communion will provide each chorister a red *cassock* (long, tapered gown with fitted sleeves, buttons top to bottom), a white *surplice* (mid-length over-garment, open round neck, bell sleeves), and a white *ruff collar* to wear for worship services and the sacred parts of concerts and performances. The cassock and surplice is the traditional choir attire in the historic Christian Church and is worn by the Holy Communion parish choirs.

Concert Dress Uniform

The Choir will provide you with a black dress skirt and black shell top for your dress uniform. The shell and skirt will be identical in style for each girl and will be ordered from Lands' End. *Faux* pearls and black dress shoes are worn to complete this ensemble.

Casual Uniform

The Choir will provide you with a polo shirt bearing the Memphis Girls Choir logo, and each girl will furnish a knee-length khaki skirt. These skirts will be identical in style for each girl and will be ordered from Lands' End. Black dress shoes and a black belt are worn with this uniform.

Summer Tour Uniform

The Choir will provide you with multiple colored T-shirts that will be worn with long jeans while traveling on tour. White sneakers and white socks are worn with this uniform. The choir T-shirts will be tucked into the jeans at all times.

Needed accessories and styling guidelines are as follows:

Stockings

Colorless stockings will be worn with all uniforms, sacred, concert, and casual.

Shoes

You may choose your own shoes, but they must be conservative, low heel, black dress shoes. The Lands' End catalog has some acceptable styles of black dress shoes, if you wish to order them.

Wear these same dress shoes with all your Memphis Girls Choir uniforms. **Platform shoes or medium to high heels will NOT be worn.** Heels are not comfortable for standing during performances, walking on stage, standing on risers, walking long distances on tour, or processing in church services. Mr. Ouzts will interpret the appropriate height of heels when necessary.

Hair Style

We prefer for all the girls to wear their hair back, away from the face. Whether in a church service or a concert, people always want to see the bright, shining, smiling faces of the choristers in the Memphis Girls Choir.

Girls with shoulder length hair or longer must wear their hair pulled back and secured away from the face. Bangs should be kept cut a length that keeps them out of their eyes. Mr. Ouzts will interpret "shoulder length hair" and bangs when necessary. No large hair clips should be worn.

Hair styling is considered a "personal hygiene practice" and may be done only in the restroom. Mr. Ouzts will confiscate any hair styling items if he sees them out in the Choir Room, during any rehearsals, or at any time on tour.

Makeup

We encourage the girls to wear appropriate, not excessive, makeup for church services and concert performances. Appropriate makeup helps the girls look their best from a distance, such as in church or in a concert setting. Excessive makeup does not honor the girl's appearance or the Memphis Girls Choir. When necessary, Mr. Ouzts will interpret the term "excessive makeup."

Any item of makeup is considered a "personal hygiene item" and may be used only in the restroom. Mr. Ouzts will confiscate any makeup items if he sees them out in the Choir Room, during any rehearsals, or at any time on tour.

Jewelry

Other than watches or rings and the standard-issue *faux* pearls, no jewelry of any kind will be worn with the sacred, concert dress, or casual uniforms. *Some* jewelry, not excessive jewelry, may be worn with the summer tour uniform. No large or dangling earrings may be worn at any time. Mr. Ouzts will interpret the term "excessive jewelry" when necessary.

H. Care of Uniforms

Vestments and concert vests are assigned in the fall and returned at the end of the spring tour. All girls are advised to try on the uniform at least two to three weeks before a concert in case adjustments need to be made. There may be occasions prior to a concert, service, or tour that you will be asked to bring in or wear your uniform so that all uniforms can be properly fitted at the same time.

If you outgrow your dress or vestment during the season, Mrs. Fischer will issue you a new one. Parents may be asked to make minor adjustments, such as sewing on buttons and shortening or lengthening a cassock. *Please do not use fabric cement or hot glue to secure hems!*

Each girl will need to provide a waterproof garment bag to store her dress uniform throughout the year. These garment bags need to be simple, lightweight, and vinyl, much like the bags department stores provide when a new ladies dress or men's suit is purchased. These bags can also be purchased at Target or Wal-Mart. Mrs. Fischer can make suggestions and show examples of appropriate bags. These bags will also be used on tour.

I. Memphis Girls Choir T-shirts

When the Memphis Girls Choir travels or goes sightseeing on spring tour, all the girls wear matching T-shirts with the choir logo. The choir makes a good impression when dressed uniformly, and this practice also enhances their safety when traveling. Mrs. Fischer will order these shirts in the needed colors.

Girls receive their first colored T-shirt at their first choir rehearsal. While the girls may wear these T-shirts at any time, please be sure to keep them neat and well cared for so they will make a good impression when they wear them.

If your daughter should need a new T-shirt for any reason, be sure to let Mrs. Fischer know in a timely manner so that one can be ordered. On tour, the girls will be instructed as to which color T-shirt to wear each day.

J. Performance Guidelines

- Performances require the very best in conduct, appearance, behavior, and musicianship.
- Common courtesy and impeccable manners to each other and all adults are expected at all times.
- Eat a light meal before a concert. Avoid sugar, dairy products, chocolate, spicy foods, and carbonated drinks.
- Always eat something for breakfast before a Sunday morning worship service.
- Try to rest for at least an hour on the day of a concert
- Arrive five minutes before any designated time.
- Arrive dressed in the proper uniform.
- Do not talk when changing into or out of vestments or uniforms.
- Be responsible for keeping track of all the parts of your uniforms.
- Pay attention to instructions given by Mr. Ouzts and the choir staff.
- Conduct yourself in a calm, polite, and highly professional manner at all times.
- Remember that you are representing the Memphis Girls Choir, Church of the Holy Communion, your family, and yourself.

K. Achievement Awards

The Memphis Girls Choir is affiliated with *The Royal School of Church Music* (RSCM) and with *Chorus America*. Both of these organizations encourage attaining the highest level of excellence possible.

The Choir happily acknowledges the accomplishments of its members. Each girl is evaluated on her progress in musical skills, attendance, personal decorum, positive contribution to all Choir activities, and knowledge of the music of the Choir's repertoire.

Founded in England in 1927, *The Royal School of Church Music* provides a training system for musicianship for church, school, and civic choirs all over the world. Assessment cards for each of the three levels are kept for each of the girls and provide a means of keeping track of each girl's progress.

The three levels are: (1) Light Blue Level, (2) Dark Blue Level, (3) Red Level, and (4) Yellow Level. There are corresponding workbooks for each level.

At the completion of each level, a RSCM medal is awarded, which is worn with the appropriate colored ribbon. The medals and ribbons are worn with the choir vestments. Medals are awarded whenever the girl completes the requirements or at the spring concert.

Each summer the RSCM also sponsors weeklong training courses in 8-10 various locations throughout the country. These training courses are excellent, intensive opportunities for building singing and musicianship skills. Select girls-only courses are held annually in St. Louis and Winston-Salem (NC).

The Memphis Girls Choir is also an affiliate of Chorus America, a national organization headquartered in Washington, DC, for all types of choirs ranging from large professionally paid choruses to small volunteer choirs, symphony choruses, children's choirs, and men's and women's choirs. The organization exists to assist choirs of all sizes and budgets with management techniques, marketing, budgeting, touring, repertoire, planning, board development, and much more. Each year the annual convention is held in a different city, hosted by local choruses, where directors and administrators convene to discuss topics of interest and learn of new artistic and business developments. In addition, the hosting choruses present major concerts representing their local choirs. The recent swell of children's choirs and boys and girls choirs has been added as a major thrust of Chorus America. The Memphis Girls Choir staff travels to the annual convention each year to attend classes and network with the conference attendees, to keep the Memphis Girls Choir a highly visible member of Chorus America.

L. Tuition and Fees

Chorister Tuition

\$1200 is the estimated *educational cost per chorister* for the 2004—2005 season. These costs include providing printed music, folders, supplies, vestments, polo shirts, T-shirts, advertising, printing, mailing, and the salary for the Choir Manager.

\$500 is the *tuition per chorister* for the 2004—2005 season, which breaks down to approximately \$5.95 per hour for singing and music instruction during the year. The \$500 tuition may be paid in full at one time or in two payments, half by the first rehearsal of the season and the other half by the first rehearsal of the second semester (January).

After studying numerous organizations similar to ours, we are confident that The Memphis Girls Choir offers a superior musical, social, and cultural experience to its girls at a significantly lower cost than most other organizations. When compared to weekly programs such as gymnastics, karate, piano lessons, etc., our program is quite inexpensive. Professional musicians in the city offer programs from \$36/hour and up.

Uniform Fee

The Uniform Fee is \$50 annually, payable by the first rehearsal of the season. This fee helps cover the cost and maintenance of dresses, polo shirts, T-shirts, and other garments that may be needed for concerts or tours. We will replace all of these as your daughter grows, but we may ask that you pay an additional fee if uniforms need to be replaced *due to abuse*.

Families are encouraged to donate back to us outgrown shirts in good condition, so that future choristers may use them again, thereby saving our choir program funding. However, these shirts are yours to keep when your daughter leaves the choir.

Tour Fee

The Tour Fee is \$200, payable by May 15 each year. This fee partially covers tour expenses and may be paid in smaller increments throughout the second semester, if desired.

A tuition and fee worksheet is provided at the back of this handbook.

M. Other Sources of Funding

Choir tuition and fees provide only a portion of the funding needed for the Memphis Girls Choir. Another very important source of funding is the sale of tickets to the Spring Concert and the sale of program advertisers. All girls and parents are expected to contribute to the sales efforts of the Choir.

We also receive funding from performance fees and honoraria, patron contributions, and Church of the Holy Communion.

N. Volunteer Opportunities

Annual Viewbook

The “Viewbook” is the primary public relations tool of the Memphis Girls Choir. This book contains a detailed description of the Choir program, its history, its membership, letters of support from community leaders, advertisements, and *lots of photographs*. This committee primarily orchestrates advertisement sales by encouraging other parents to sell advertisements, determining and then approaching businesses about purchasing ads, contacting previous year advertisers about renewing their ads, and selling advertisements themselves. A professional graphic artist/designer is needed each year to produce the viewbook. The viewbook committee will consist of Choir parents and members of the Advisory Board.

History and Memorabilia

This person is responsible for the task of collecting photographs (there can *never* be enough photographs!), newspaper and magazine articles, concert and service programs, and other bits of memorabilia. After all the memorabilia is collected, throughout the year, this person then assembles it in a creative manner into a scrapbook for the Choir archives.

Uniform Exchange

This person assists the Choir Manager with the exchange of Choir uniforms and helps keep the clothing organized by sizes in the Ladies Vesting Room of the Choir Room. This person assists with assigning correct sizes of uniforms and vestments, changing them when necessary, having repairs and alterations done when needed, washing and dry cleaning vestments and uniforms as needed, and ordering T-shirts and polo shirts.

Photographers

Established choir organizations tell us “there can never be enough photographs.” Photographs help us tell our story, recruit future girl choristers, and document the incredible and rich experiences in the Memphis Girls Choir. We need pictures from all choir events: rehearsals, services, concerts, camps, and recreational and social events. The Choir will pay for film and developing or provide disks for digital photos.

Phone Tree

The parent coordinator of the phone tree organizes the phone tree each year, with the help of the Choir Manager, and is the contact person that initiates messages sent over the phone tree during the Choir season. The phone tree is organized to alert all choristers and parents of a sudden cancellation due to weather, unforeseen circumstances, other emergencies, or reminders.

Hospitality Committee

This group of parents is responsible for helping organize receptions after concerts. They recruit other parents and Choir supporters to bring refreshments, snacks and beverages, and for setup and cleanup. This group is also responsible for organizing food for special social events and rehearsals for the choristers. Organizing quarterly fun events for the girls, keeping up with birthdays, and celebrating other significant achievements for the girls is another way this committee can support the Choir program.

Donation Request Coordinator

Each year in the fall, each chorister sends at least ten (10) letters describing her involvement in the Choir and requesting financial support from friends, family, neighbors, teachers, doctors, dentists, etc. This fund raising activity has the potential of raising significant funding for the Choir year. This parent coordinator will help distribute letters to the girls, help collect and mail the letters, and contact or remind parents when necessary.

Music Teacher Coordinator

Each year we send out a packet of information to music teachers in public and private schools throughout Greater Memphis, describing the Choir program and asking teachers to recommend girls to audition for the Choir. School music teachers are our best sources for new choristers for the Choir. This parent coordinator thinks creatively about the contents of the information packet, is responsible for gathering the materials for the packets, organizing and stuffing the packets, updating the mailing list, and then mailing the packet. The Choir will, of course, pay the mailing costs.

This person is also responsible for organizing a group of parents to personally telephone music teachers, telling of their daughter’s experiences in the Memphis Girls Choir and then

encouraging the music teacher to send in recommendations. The telephoning parents will be provided with a fact sheet to use when telephoning the music teachers.

O. Parents' Meetings

Parents Meetings are held 2 – 3 times per year, generally during or immediately following a Monday evening rehearsal. At these meetings, the Parent Representative to the Choir's Advisory Board reports on activities of the Board and answers questions from the parents. Any concerns, questions, or comments from parents should be given to the Parent Representative.

Also during these meetings, Mr. Ouzts or Mrs. Fischer will inform parents of upcoming events, schedule changes, etc. Parents meetings are announced as far in advance as possible; please mark these dates on your calendars and plan to attend. If you are interested in serving as Parent Representative to the Advisory Board, please inform Mr. Ouzts or Mrs. Fischer in writing immediately.

P. Church of the Holy Communion

Celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2000, Church of the Holy Communion is one of the largest and strongest parishes of The Episcopal Diocese of West Tennessee. St. Mary's Episcopal School, a college preparatory school for girls that is nationally renowned for its scholastic excellence, shares our property at the corner of Walnut Grove Road and Perkins in east Memphis. The membership at Holy Communion is approximately 2000 baptized members and 1600 active communicants.

Church of the Holy Communion strives to be “disciples who love God with heart, soul, mind and strength, and who love our neighbors as ourselves.” This stated mission belongs to everyone who participates in the life of the church, and we understand that the clergy alone cannot accomplish the vital work of our mission. We encourage all members to make and keep meaningful commitments to our mission. We believe that there is a leadership role for every church member.

Children and youth are an integral part of our church community. We support their spiritual journeys and continued involvement in the life of the church. Discipleship, stewardship, and outreach opportunities go hand in hand. We help our members discover and use the many gifts with which God has blessed us.

Parishioners support the efforts of our clergy to provide pastoral care to our members. And the worship life of the parish provides opportunities for thanksgiving, spiritual renewal, inspiration, hospitality and celebration, through carefully planned worship and beautiful music. In short, Church of the Holy Communion is a community showing forth “the Sacred Presence of God” in the center of Memphis and beyond.

Q. Advisory Board

Mrs. Michele Morisy
Parent Representative
Memphis Girls Choir

TBA
Assistant Director/Accompanist
Memphis Girls Choir

Mrs. Beth Fischer
Choir Manager
Memphis Girls Choir

Dr. Patricia Gray
Technology Programs Consultant
Associated Colleges of the South

Mr. Ben Adams
Senior Warden
Church of the Holy Communion

The Rev. Thomas A. Momberg
Associate Rector
Church of the Holy Communion

Mr. David Perry Ouzts
Music Director
Memphis Girls Choir

Ms. Lain Whitaker
Middle School Faculty
St. Mary's Episcopal School