

Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church

Choir School Handbook



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Welcome – and welcome back – to the BMPC Choir School!

We, your directors, are looking forward to a new year of music, ministry, and fellowship. It is a privilege for us to work with the children and youth of this parish.

Please consider this Handbook to be your syllabus for participation in the Choir School. Though it may look familiar, some important changes have been made. Please take a few moments to review it with your chorister or choir parent before our season begins. Then, save it for your records! It contains information on our goals, curriculum, and standards – but, more importantly, it details the experiences and opportunities you will come to enjoy.

We expect that this will be a rigorous and joyful year for all as we grow together in our church. Thank you for your dedication, support – and, most of all, your gifts of the Spirit.

If any of your questions are not sufficiently addressed by this Handbook, you are welcome to speak to us directly. Please refer to the contact information found on page 12.

~ Your BMPC Music Team,

Jeffrey Brillhart,
Director of Music and Fine Arts

Nancy Miller Junkert,
Handbell Director

Ketti Jane Muschler,
Choir School Director

Sandi Stouffer,
Beginners Choir Director

I. Introduction	4
Three Mottos & Mission Statements	4
What is the Choir School?	4
Congregational & Community Involvement	5
Admittance to the Programs	5
II. The Choirs	5
Carol Choir	5
Beginner Choir	6
St. Andrew Boys Choir	6
St. Cecilia Girls Choir	6
Youth Chorale	6
III. The Handbell Choirs	7
Jubilate Ringers	7
Tintinnabulators	7
IV. Schedules & Events	8
Sunday and Wednesday Schedules	8
Wednesday Community Dinners	8
2011 – 2012 Season: Special Events	8
V. The Choir Community	8
The Choir As Family	8
Recruitment	9
VI. A Voice For Life	9
Training	9
Achievement	10
The Standards System	10
Head Choristers	11
VII. Expectations for Participating Families	11
Attendance	11
Punctuality	12
Communication	12
Health	12
Vestments, Music & Dress Code	13
Choir Etiquette	13
Safety Guidelines & Parking	14
VIII. Chorister & Parent Opportunities	14
Parent Opportunities	14
Private Piano & Voice Lessons	14
Summer RSCM Programs	14

I. Introduction

1. Fine Arts Program of BMPC Mission Statement

“God is at the center of all that we do. The act of worshiping God is the most important response we make. We express our faith by:
promoting spiritual growth,
encouraging broad participation,
fostering churchmanship.
Our ministry leads us to share God's gifts as an expression of God's love for each of us.”



2. The Motto of the Royal School of Church Music

I will sing with the spirit
and with the understanding also.

Psallam Spiritu et mente



3. BMPC Children and Youth Singing and Ringing Choirs Statement of Purpose

The Children and Youth Choirs of BMPC exist to lead people in the worship of God, to provide for musical training of children and teenagers, and to enhance the cultural life of the community. The choirs are supported by the congregation of BMPC and the Fine Arts Council.



What is the Choir School?

The Choir School of Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church is modeled after highly respected choral programs originating in the English choral tradition. It thrives as an intergenerational program, providing children and youth with a proven and carefully graded music education. This method provides a clear framework that emphasizes basic musical skills, develops the singing voice, explores a broad musical repertoire, builds social skills, and develops leadership qualities in a structured and spiritual environment.

Our choirs sing great choral music that spans five centuries of composition and culture. To enrich their experience and understanding, our singers participate a training scheme called *A Voice For Life*, designed by the Royal School of Church Music in America. This organization (the RSCM) is dedicated to the promotion of high standards in church music. Group and some individual instruction is provided for each chorister enrolled in

the Choir School. For a full description of our affiliation with the RSCM and *A Voice for Life*, please see pages 9 – 11.

Congregation and Community Involvement

The unique educational opportunities of the Choir School and other music programs of Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church are extended to the surrounding community. Individuals and families do not have to be Presbyterian or members of BMPC to participate in the Choir School. Although Christian education is an integral part of the music program and we believe that children need to understand the words they sing, the religious beliefs of participating families will always be respected. Beyond the commitment to the choir rehearsal and performance schedule, we welcome the participation of your family and children in all the activities of church life to whatever extent you feel comfortable.

Admittance to the Programs

The choirs consist of volunteer musicians and are open to any member or friend of the congregation of BMPC. Admittance is flexible, and is generally based on the child's age group. Some choirs occasionally take into account musical ability or previous experience, as outlined below.

Choristers have the opportunity to participate in BMPC music programs from Kindergarten through high school. The typical track is as follows:

The Carol Choir consists of children in Kindergarten and first grade; pre-kindergarten children are admitted by consultation with the director. After these first two or three years of training, singers advance to the Beginners Choir in second grade. They may become full members of either the St. Cecilia Girl Choir or the St. Andrew Boy Choir at the discretion of both directors and parents – depending on experience, maturity, and musicality – but typically in the fourth grade. Our oldest choristers may participate in the Youth Chorale. This is typically a teen / high school ensemble, but encompasses all boys with changed voices. Bell choirs proceed in a similar fashion, but levels are determined by both the child's age and experience, in consultation with the director. For more information about each choir, please see the individual descriptions on pages 5 to 7.

Regardless of this typical track, children and youth are welcome to join our ensembles at any age. If you are interested in enrolling your child, please speak to the directors to find the choir or choirs that are most suitable for your family. Contact information may be found on page 12.



II. About the Choirs

Carol Choir – Ketti Jane Muschler, Director

This entry-level choir lays the foundations for the singing children will experience throughout their time in the Choir School. Children explore music through a variety of age-appropriate songs, both sacred and secular, and take their first steps toward reading music in a warm and supportive environment. Choristers also participate in creative movement and instrument playing, which reinforce fundamental musical skills such as rhythmic and tonal competency. Performance opportunities occur occasionally throughout the year, typically during major services for Christmas and Holy Week.

Beginners Choir – Sandi Stouffer, Director

Children who are rising 2-3 graders enter the Choir School as Beginners. Building upon the foundations acquired in Carol Choir, the Beginners program focuses on using the singing voice well, understanding musical skills and symbols such as singing on pitch, pulse and rhythm, following a musical score, following a conductor, and other musical aspects that result in beautiful singing. The focus is not on performance; however, there are opportunities throughout the church year for the Beginners to sing. After their training has been completed, the child is promoted, with boys entering the St. Andrews Choir and girls entering the St. Cecilia Choir.

St. Andrew Boys Choir & St. Cecilia Girls Choir – Jeffrey Brillhart and Ketti Jane Muschler, Directors

Choristers are fully commissioned members of the St. Andrew and St. Cecilia Choirs in grades 4-8. They may be identified by their choir dress – red robe, white stole, and Royal School of Church Music medal (as appropriate). As they prepare their music, they also participate in the RSCM training curriculum, *Voice for Life*. This program allows them to expand their knowledge of music and liturgy, as well as develop individual leadership skills. Choristers in these choirs are expected to take responsibility for the “Basic Habits, Basic Skills, Christian Discipleship, and Personal Qualities” that the RSCM upholds as standards for professional achievement.

For more information about *Voice for Life*, please see pages 9 – 11. For more information about professional, musical, and social opportunities for both choristers and parents, please see pages 14 – 15.

Youth Chorale – Ketti Jane Muschler, Director

Youth Chorale is a choir for high school singers, as well as all boys whose voices have changed. These singers wear the RSCM medal and a white ribbon, along with other ribbons earned in the girl and boy choirs, as well as light blue robes. Youth Chorale singers continue to develop both their voices and skills using materials supplied by the RSCM *Voice for Life* program. The Youth Chorale typically sings on the third Sunday of each month and in concerts and special events, serving as important peer leaders for the youth of BMPC, as well as musical leaders for the entire community.



III. About the Handbell Choirs

Nancy Miller Junkert, Director

Jubilate Ringers

The Jubilate Ringers is a beginning and intermediate-level handbell team for grades 4 through 8, meeting Wednesdays from 4:00 to 5:00 p.m. This introductory group introduces new ringers to the basic skills and musicianship required of handbell ringers, while continuing to build skills of current team members. A variety of music is explored, and there are diverse opportunities for performance in worship and community events.

Tintinnabulators

Tintinnabulators is an advanced handbell team for youth in grades 9 through 12, meeting on Wednesdays from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. (Experienced ringers from grades 6 - 8 may also participate by invitation.) Members of this handbell team show skill in ringing, as well as the necessary dedication to learning challenging repertoire. Performing opportunities in worship and community increase, as well as responsibility - each member of the Tintinnabulators is expected to mentor younger ringers. Additional opportunities for solo and small ensemble ringing are available.



IV. Schedules & Events

Weekly Rehearsal Schedule

Wednesdays

4:00-4:45: Carol Choir
4:00-5:00: Jubilate Ringers
5:00-6:00: Beginners Choir
5:00-6:00: St. Cecilia Girl Choir & St. Andrew Boy Choir
5:00-6:30: Community Dinner
6:00-7:00: Tintinnabulators
7:00-8:00: Youth Chorale

Sundays

9:00-9:45: Additional Choir
School rehearsals

Typical Performance Schedule

Boy and Girl choristers typically sing in services on the first Sunday of every month; the Youth Chorale sings on the third Sunday. The Beginners and Carol Choir sing intermittently for special occasions. For more information about the Choir School Performance Schedule, please see the Music Department Calendar at www.bmpcfinearts.org

Wednesday Dinners

Each Wednesday, dinner is served in Congregational Hall. This congregation-wide dinner is catered by *Pig Daddy's* and features a full meal for a reasonable price. This year, the time has been extended to compensate for the changed choir schedule and the convenience of community families; dinners now run from 5:00 – 6:30. Please note that leftover tickets from last year will be honored this fall.

Prices:

\$6.00 per single ticket \$20.00 maximum per family \$50.00 booklet of tickets

The 2011 – 2012 Season

Singers and Ringers in the BMPC Choir School have two special events to look forward to this season:

Sunday, March 4, 2012, our handbell choirs will present a Vespers Concert at 4 p.m. Under the direction of Nancy Miller Junkert, this special Lenten event will give our ringing musicians the opportunity to express their faith with the beautiful sounds of ringing bells.

In 2010, the Senior Choir presented Paul Winter's stirring *Missa Gaia*. Written as a celebration of the whole Earth as a sacred place, *Missa Gaia* includes the sounds of humpback whales, loons, and singing birds. Couple the sounds of nature with music that ranges from folksong to Brazilian samba to jazz and gospel and you have a work that is both exhilarating to sing and hear. Because of the universal acclaim for that performance we will reprise *Missa Gaia* on April 22, 2012, uniting the voices of the Senior Choir with those of the singers of the BMPC Choir School and members of the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia.



V. The Choir Community

The Choir As Family

The choir program first and foremost focuses on work that is done to realize our mission statement. The fun and satisfaction that are derived from participating in the choir program are a result of work well done. Participants know that a structured and disciplined approach increases motivation and incentive so that skills may be learned and personal qualities developed with enjoyment. Furthermore, we can collectively make music for the glory of God with increased confidence and expertise. The work of the Choir is an ongoing process.

The choir program builds community. All participants are contributing to an end and are experiencing connection in the process. That connection is twofold: with one another as

individuals and families, and also with an historical and artistic legacy that spans many centuries and cultures.

Recruitment

Recruitment is a year-round process that involves *everyone* in the Choir and Choir School; i.e. choir members (singers and ringers of all ages), choir members' families, and Choir School supporters. Each person needs to take responsibility in asking friends, associates, and acquaintances if they enjoy singing and if they would be interested in learning more about the choir program at Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church.

This year, all Choir School ensembles will host "Bring a Friend to Choir Day" several times throughout the year. Please contact the directors for information, invitations, and the finalized dates. Our special Vespers events also serve as a means of recruitment in addition to offering our community a unique and meaningful outreach. Consequently, every singer needs to make his or her participation in the special events a priority.

When inviting prospective members as guests to the Choir, please give the Choirmaster advance notice when possible. (In the rehearsal context, guests can be invited to participate in Choir. In a performance context, however, a guest should only observe the Choir.)



VI. A Voice for Life

Training

Voice for Life is the choir training schematic developed by the RSCM: Royal School of Church Music in America. Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church formally affiliated with this internationally renowned training program in 2010. This curriculum contributes greatly to the musical success of both individuals and groups as young singers become active and literate musicians. It is expected that BMPC choristers in St. Andrew, St. Cecilia, and Youth Chorale will participate in this schematic to the full extent of their own abilities.

Choristers develop skills, attitudes and good habits through this training, in addition to gaining self-esteem and confidence. The curriculum includes many areas of musical and liturgical development:

1. Understanding the role of the choirs in worship,
2. Singing in a healthy way (including breathing and vocal production),
3. Performing diverse array of repertoire from many musical styles and periods,
4. Reading music notation,
5. Singing in English and other languages,
6. Studying music theory (including ear training and sight singing),
7. Practicing rehearsal and performance etiquette

8. Expressing our musicality, and
9. Learning the traditions of the church.

Levels of Achievement

The RSCM designates five levels of Achievement – White, Light Blue, Dark Blue, Red, and Yellow, increasingly. The choir trainer evaluates each individual singer’s progress over time as they progress through the material and complete a card of requirements.

At each level, a singer’s progress and attainment is assessed in relation to the following:

Six Habits:

Responding	Attention and Care
Listening and Looking	Breathing
Watching the Choir Director & Following Signs	Movement

Six Skills:

Using the Voice Well	Repertoire
Musical Skills and Understanding	Choir in Context

Musical development is an ongoing and intricate process. Often there will not be a specific date when a skill is learned; rather, a unit is considered complete only when the habits and skills are both regular and consistent. The assessments are cumulative: habits and skills formed for the White level are maintained and developed at Light Blue, Dark Blue, Red, and Yellow levels.

Students are also promoted to higher levels of achievement as a result of their individual accomplishments. Consequently, some singers may be promoted more quickly than others. This aspect of the program, however, gives choir promotions real meaning and significance, as well as giving the students great satisfaction.

The training is provided in a positive, supportive, and consistent environment that fosters motivation and a healthy attitude. In addition to developing excellent musicians, the system builds good character in its participants.

The Standards System

Another facet of the *Voice for Life* schematic is the Standards System. Check marks for attendance and achievements (known as ‘standards’) are recorded on a chart in the choir rehearsal room so that singers can easily see their own progress. Choristers may earn standards at every appearance – rehearsal or performance – as follows:

One Standard represents attendance at the event, rehearsal, or performance.
Two Standards represent attendance and punctual arrival. Two checks can also be earned for attendance and excellent work, *if* the late arrival or early departure is excused.

An excused late arrival or early departure should be communicated, in writing or email, a week in advance.

Three Standards are reserved as a distinction for attendance, punctual arrival and excellent work. Basic musicianship and deportment skills must be habitual and energized.

Choristers must earn a minimum of 200 standards to be promoted to the next level of achievement (i.e., promotion from white to light blue). Special recognition is given to singers who achieve the highest number of standards during the choir season. For more information about attendance, punctuality, and their affect on the standards system, please see pages 11 – 12.

Head Choristers

The *Head Choristers* are appointed to serve as leaders for the girl and boy choirs. New Head Choristers are nominated each year by the choir trainers. The ideal candidates for this position show outstanding maturity, musical leadership, and social poise. Head Choristers set a professional example for other singers and go about their work in a supportive and positive manner. They exhibit exemplary commitment to the life and work of the Choir and church.

Head Choristers are honored with and identified by the Head Chorister medal. They are given additional responsibilities for the choir – including the maintenance of a positive social and working atmosphere between all singers.



VII. Expectations for Participating Families

Attendance Policy

Commitment to faithful attendance, punctuality, and diligence on the part of all participants and their families ensures the success of the choral and handbell programs year after year. A detailed schedule of rehearsals and presentations is available before the choir season begins so that these dates can be incorporated into everyone's family calendar. The most current schedule may always be found at bmpcfinearts.org. In addition to the regular weekly schedule, our commitment to special services, concerts and choir outings is *essential* as we provide leadership and outreach in our community.

Everyone is expected to be present for all rehearsals. Obviously, this is not always possible. Please consult the choir director regarding your participation when a previous rehearsal has been missed, or when two out of three previous rehearsals have been missed. This ensures that everyone knows the anthem, is prepared to sing, and respects the other members of the choir. Dress Rehearsals are clearly marked on the Rehearsal Schedule. Attendance at Dress Rehearsals is required unless you are experiencing a family emergency. In regard to last-minute emergencies, please call the church office (610-525-2821).

Punctuality

Regular attendance and punctuality are two cornerstones of a successful choir program. Furthermore, punctuality is a mark of self-discipline and respect for a common endeavor. Every singer is expected to arrive at least five minutes before a rehearsal is scheduled to begin so that everyone can be in their assigned position, with their music folder and pencil, ready to sing the first vocalization. When unavoidable circumstances necessitate a late arrival, please inform the choir director of the situation in advance whenever possible.

When last minute emergencies prevent punctual arrival, please know that you are welcome to join the rehearsal that is already in progress. However, as a *courtesy to the Choir*, latecomers who have not made a previous communication should approach the choir director after the rehearsal to explain the situation. Likewise, if a participant needs to leave a rehearsal early, the director should be notified before the rehearsal.

This policy should not be interpreted as a punitive or demeaning response. Instead, the policy reinforces a healthy sensitivity to a common endeavor.

Communication

Each Monday an e-newsletter called *Soundings* is sent to every participant. *Soundings* contains the weekly schedule, upcoming music selections, news of note, and announcements about concerts or choir activities. You may submit articles for consideration in *Soundings* to our Fine Arts Office Assistant, Stephanie Speakman at: Stephaniespeakman@bmpc.org.

Please feel free to contact the choir directors with your thoughts on any aspect of the music program. You may reach us by:

- Visiting the Fine Arts Office (located in the Converse House wing of BMPC),
- Calling the church directly at (610) 525-2821 and asking to speak with a member of our staff, or
- Contacting us individually at the following email addresses:

Jeffrey Brillhart: Jeffrey398@aol.com

Nancy Miller Junkert: nancymillerjunkert@bmpc.org

Ketti Jane Muschler: kettimuschler@bmpc.org

Sandi Stouffer: ssteach3@verizon.net

Health and Choir School Participation

Choir School rehearsals, services and concerts require the highest level of concentration and deportment that would be comparable to the most demanding and rewarding scenarios a child would experience in public or private school. Consequently, parents

need to take responsibility in monitoring each child's diet, medication (if necessary), and sleep to help the child perform his or her best in Choir School activities.

- Diet: Food, candy, and drinks that have high quantities of sugar are to be avoided preceding all Choir School activities.
- Sleep: A good night's sleep preceding rehearsals and especially Choir School services and concerts is a prerequisite.
- Communication: Parents and the Choirmaster should communicate as often as necessary to evaluate Choir School performance and the welfare of the child.

Vestments and Music

Vestments serve as a visual symbol that the Choir, which includes children, teenagers, and adults, functions as one voice, leading the congregation in worship and offering praise to God. In addition, the combination of vestments and ribbons, which are earned by choristers as they progress through the Chorister Training Program, serve as incentives and remind us that each choir member is commissioned with responsibilities of musical leadership.

Stewardship of our fine vestments is everyone's responsibility, as they are worth several hundred dollars. While wearing vestments, everyone in the choir needs to refrain from eating any food and drinking any beverage except water. Please contact the choir director if a vestment appears to be in need of repair or cleaning before an upcoming service or concert. Each member of the Choir is assigned a number that identifies his or her music, hymnal, folder, cubby, and vestment. Great care must be given to all of these items, since each singer usually has between \$30.00 to \$60.00 worth of music in his or her folder. Please contact the choir director after a rehearsal if anything is amiss.

Dress Code & Choir Etiquette

On Sunday mornings and at all special events, boys may wear light colored shirts with ties, dress trousers or khakis, and dark shoes. Hair should be nicely kept. Girls may wear skirts, dresses, or slacks with dark, "closed-toe" shoes. Please do not wear jeans, sneakers, or sandals, and avoid turtlenecks as they protrude above the robe. Jewelry, if worn, should not focus undue attention upon the individual and necklaces should not be worn over the robe and stole. Hair bows, if worn, should be white and not elaborate.

Chewing gum and candy are strictly prohibited at any rehearsal or service. They present both a distraction to the choir and a severe choking hazard to singers.

Cell phones must be turned off during rehearsals AND Worship services.

Safety Guidelines & Parking

When arriving for rehearsal, parents or caregivers must walk their children to the door and lead them into the rehearsal room. At the end of the rehearsal, parents are urged once again to meet their children inside the building and walk them back to the car. Please do

not drop your children off on the sidewalk and then drive away before they have entered the church building. For pick up, parents are invited to wait inside the choir room – but please do so quietly so as not to disturb the rehearsal.

On Sundays, please use the Harcum College parking lot, which is located opposite BMPC. Enter that lot from the Montgomery Avenue crosswalk, just west of the BMPC campus.



VIII. Chorister & Parent Opportunities

Parent Opportunities

As parents, your support and encouragement are crucial to the choral program. Please notify the choir director of absences with as much notice as possible (a week in advance via email is preferred). In addition to directly supporting one's own child, parents can become involved in other aspects of the program including car-pooling, chaperoning social events and trips, hosting receptions, mailings, committee work, publicity, and assistance with staged productions. Parents, visitors and prospective choir families are always welcome to observe any rehearsal; however, we ask that visitors refrain from talking unless invited to participate.

Voice and Piano Lessons

We are pleased to recommend several professional teachers who have been authorized to use the Fine Arts Center for private instruction. Arrangements for fees and scheduling of such lessons should be done directly with the instructors.

The Royal School of Church Music Summer Music Courses

As we are affiliated with the Royal School of Church Music, everyone is encouraged to participate in one of the Royal School of Church Music summer courses that are held in numerous locations throughout the United States. Each course is conducted by internationally renowned musicians and offers choristers an opportunity to sing the finest of sacred repertoire in a large group with the highest standards of musical performance. Choristers enjoy meeting their peers from around the country and return to their own churches energized and even more devoted to singing. Furthermore, these courses assist in developing each chorister's potential, which in turn strengthens the home choir. Dedicated and experienced support staff supervise a full complement of structured recreational and social activities. Information concerning the RSCM summer camps is available at www.rscmamerica.org.

