



SAINT MARK'S
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL

CHOIR SCHOOL HANDBOOK



2025-2026

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CHOIRS OF THE CHOIR SCHOOL

Junior Choristers

The **Jr. Choristers** (roughly K - 3rd grade) sing once a month (with Sr. Choristers) at the 9AM service and rehearse each Wednesday from 3:30 - 4:15.

Sr. Choristers

The **Sr. Choristers** (roughly 4th - 8th grade) sing three times a month at the 9AM service and rehearse from 4:30 - 6PM on Wednesdays.

Schola

The teen **Schola** (roughly 9th - 12th grade with some recent graduates and newly changed-voice tenors/basses) sings twice a month and rehearses from 7:30 – 8:45PM on Wednesdays.

Evensong Choir

This by-invitation choir includes Sr. Choristers and Schola members demonstrating vocal, musical, and behavioral leadership. These choristers join auditioned adults to sing advanced repertoire at Evensong services on the 1st Sunday of the month October – May.

Joyful Noise Early Childhood Classes

Joyful Noise is a play-based musical offering at Saint Mark's Cathedral for **babies, toddlers, and preschoolers** (and their chosen adults!) to explore sound, become rooted in the foundations of music theory, and develop key physical and social-emotional skills while in beloved community. Classes are led by our seasoned early childhood music educator, Elizabeth Antley.

REGULAR REHEARSALS AND SERVICES

* Please note that services may occasionally run longer than scheduled.

Wednesday Schedule

3:30 - 4:15PM	Jr. Chorister Rehearsal (St. Nicholas)
3:30 - 4:20PM	Optional Musicianship Tutoring for Sr. Choristers (St. Nick piano lab)
4:30 - 5:30PM	Optional Class Piano for Jr. Choristers (St. Nick piano lab)
4:30 - 6:00PM	Sr. Chorister Rehearsal (St. Nicholas)
6:00 - 6:30PM	Dinner for choristers and families in Bloedel Hall
6:30 - 7:25PM	Evensong Choir rehearsal (Cathedral Choir Room)
7:30 - 8:45PM	Schola Rehearsal (St. Nicholas)

Sunday Morning Schedule

8:05 - 8:15AM	Vesting (St. Nicholas)
8:15 - 8:50AM	Warmup (St. Nick and Nave)
9:00 - 10:05	Liturgy (We will generally be seated in chairs on the north aisle of the cathedral nave and sing from the NE corner (the "Compline Corner").
10:05AM	Liturgy ends and choristers return to St. Nicholas to divest. Please come up to the St. Nick space to sign out your child.
10:10-10:50AM	<i>Optional</i> offering for children PreK-5 th grade: Godly Play classes happen right up where our choir room is from 10:05-10:45. These classes are faith formation and are without charge.

Sunday Evensong Choir Schedule

3:15 - 4:10PM	Rehearsal in the nave (arrive early to grab binders)
4:10 - 4:20PM	Vest at St. Nick
4:20 - 4:30PM	Gather in Bloedel Hall
4:30 - 5:15PM	Evensong service

CHOIR SCHOOL CALENDAR and COMMUNICATION

Choir Schedules for the Year

Here are the ways to access our Choir School schedules at any time.

1. PDFs of our schedules are attached to welcome emails.
2. PDFs of our schedules are available on the cathedral website www.saintmarks.org/choirschool
3. Google calendars have been created for each of our choirs and are available on the Choir School website www.saintmarks.org/choirschool

Inclement Weather and Schedule Changes

Rehearsal Cancellation for Inclement Weather –

As a general rule, the Choir School follows Seattle Public Schools weather cancellations. When schools are on a weather delay, the Choir School and Cathedral staff make the decision as early as possible if conditions in the afternoon will require cancellation. Please be watchful of email and texts for updates.

Schedule Changes

When changes to printed and Google Calendar schedules are required, you will receive email notice as soon as possible.

ATTENDANCE

Your child's voice is truly, 100%, irreplaceable. The children that sit next to your child learn to breathe and sing as a unified unit with your child. Absences are a strain on other choristers and a disappointment to your child who has worked hard to become proficient on our repertoire. Choir is not a club. Your child has a role and teammates as they lead adults in worship.

Rehearsals and liturgies are required, not optional, events

Unavoidable absences require advanced notice which show respect to the other choristers and to their conductor.

Please limit absences to *no more than 4 absences during Sept - December and 5 absences between January and June*. No-shows are not acceptable.

Schola attendance – As high school students encounter the demands of Junior and Senior year testing, college visits, academic stresses and other demands, Ms. Gilmore is understanding and compassionate toward such pressures and schedule changes. Early communication is key to the choir being able to accommodate and cover for these absences. If singers are frequently missing rehearsals or services without early notice nor clear commitment to their fellow singers, they will observe Ms. Gilmore becoming less and less accommodating...

What is too sick to come to choir?

Please keep children home who are symptomatic with fever, chills, sore throat, lethargy, and/or a heavy, productive cough. We are understanding of allergy symptoms and the final stages of recovery from a cold that include runny nose/cough. We leave it to parent discretion whether their child can or should sing. **Masked singing** isn't anyone's favorite but is a good option if you are concerned your child might still be contagious.

Leave of Absence

If your child wishes to participate in a short-term conflicting activity (sports, theater, seasonal work), we are glad for their diverse interests. They will be placed on a temporary leave of absence. Please address this with Ms. Gilmore.

How to communicate an absence

Absences should be communicated via email. Ms. Gilmore tracks emails better than texts. If a singer wakes up ill the morning of a liturgy, feel free to text Ms. Gilmore. (509)668-2468.

TUITION and SCHOLARSHIPS

The choir school charges a **semester tuition of \$200/singer**. The ministry of the Choir School is underwritten by parishioner pledges to the annual budget of the cathedral. Chorister tuition pays for a fraction of the cost of the Choir School program.

Fall tuition is due by October 1st. Spring tuition is due by February 1st.

Tuition scholarships

We never want tuition to be a barrier to participation and have donors ready to support if the tuition is challenging at this time. No full scholarships are given but if a partial scholarship is needed, please email Choir School Director, Rebekah Gilmore with requests. Scholarship awards are determined by committee.

The Choir School Volunteer Treasurer, Amanda Davis, will track tuition payments for choir and extra classes. If you need a reminder to pay tuition, you will receive an email from the Treasurer.

CHOIR SCHOOL DRESS

Vestments

All Choir School choristers vest in traditional cassocks (full length poly-blend robe) for liturgies and formal appearances. Jr. Choristers wear an additional ruff collar. Sr. Choristers and Schola wear a traditional white cotta (half length poly-blend) over their cassock. Just like a soccer team wears uniforms, choristers vest for group unity and to signal to the congregation that they are leaders of worship.

Shoes

Choristers wear **black dress shoes** with their vestments. Black soles. Comfortable but dressy. Black socks/stockings are preferable. No sneakers please.

Black Shoe Exchange – Located in the Vesting Room, utilize the shoe exchange shelving to donate or pick up good condition, clean black dress shoes. We know they grow out of them SO fast.

Other notes

Please **avoid thick sweaters** or sweatshirts under vestments

Please **avoid high collars** under vestments

Hairstyling needs to be neat and **away from face**

Please avoid **hats, hair coverings, brightly colored hair bows, large earrings and eye-catching jewelry** all of which detract from our unified appearance.

DROP OFF/PICK UP INFO

Rehearsal location

The Choir School rehearsal space on floor 2.5, the Mezzanine, of the St. Nicholas building. The access code to the southeast stairwell is distributed yearly by email. Internet is not available in the Mezzanine at this time. Parents are welcomed to remain in the lobby area or kitchen during rehearsals. The Choir School vestments, Piano Lab, Rehearsal space, Godly Play classrooms, and restroom are all located on this level. A microwave, refrigerator, and water kettle are available in the kitchen.

Drop off, check-in, and release

Jr. Choristers - Please park your vehicle and walk your child up to the rehearsal space to check them in. Jr. Choristers will be released and signed out from the rehearsal space at St. Nicholas.

Sr. Choristers may be dropped off at the St. Nick entrance but will be released from **Bloedel Hall** where we end up for the community meal. If your child is not staying for the meal, please plan to check them out from Bloedel Hall at 6pm nonetheless.

Community Wednesday Dinner

All are encouraged to participate in the Wednesday evening community dinner, a delicious and well rounded meal. Kid palettes are considered and a vegetarian or vegan option is included.

Suggested donation: \$6-kids, \$8-adults, \$25-family cap

Venmo, cash, credit are all accepted.

Don't be surprised if Evensong choristers are encouraged to go to the front of the line. They have another rehearsal at 6:30!

SAFE CHURCH INFO

All adults volunteering with the Choir School must have a background check run by the cathedral and have completed the Universal Safe Church certification. Parents are not allowed to go on trips with the choir if they are not Safe Church certified. This training helps you know what to look for and how to tell someone if someone's behavior toward another doesn't seem safe.

Background checks –

Adults must submit the cathedral authorization form. Background checks are good for 5years.

Universal Safe Church Training

This training is accessed through the Diocese of Olympia website at

<https://ecww.org/safechurch-online/>

The training is online and takes about 2.5hrs to complete. You are able to start and stop this training. The training certification is good for 3years.

SUNDAY SPECIFICS

Saturday Sleepovers and Late-night fun

Please think carefully about sleepovers or late-night activities on Saturday nights before choristers must sing for Sunday. Being sleepy in church is brutal and to be avoided but being tired because of Saturday night choices is not a reason to miss a choir performance. The skill of smiling through being tired, meeting one's commitments, and considering future life choices is a good skill to acquire in childhood/teen years. ☺ Ms. Gilmore took a while to learn this lesson and can spot the sleepy chorister.

Breakfast

Your child needs solid, non-sugary food on Sunday mornings so they can perform their responsibilities in our liturgies. Singing on a growling stomach is the worst and will lead to behavioral issues. **Protein, protein, protein.**

Communion

All people of all ages are invited to receive the bread and the wine at communion. Please talk to your child about receiving communion. If your family's approach is for your child to not receive either/both the bread and wine, please coach them to walk with their choirmates in line up to the priest and cross their arms over their chests to receive a blessing. I will also coach them on this but please talk with them about this if they are unaccustomed to communing on their own.

Children's Chapel

Jr. Choristers will leave the 9AM liturgy to join the Children's Chapel time in Thomsen Chapel during the homily, creed, and prayers. Children's Chapel time involves songs, prayers, and stories that are age appropriate. The choristers return in time to sing the offertory anthem.

MUSICIANSHIP AT THE CHOIR SCHOOL

ROYAL SCHOOL OF CHURCH MUSIC

RIBBON LEVELS

The Saint Mark's Cathedral Choir School is a member of the Royal School of Church Music, an international organization that links choristers around the world with a shared curriculum and musicianship ribbon award system. Sr. Choristers and Schola members are eligible to test for and receive their RSCM ribbons and medallions. The curriculum, based on RSCM's Voice for Life program, emphasizes well-rounded musicianship as well as lifelong growth in music and faith; vocal and ear training as well as knowledge of music theory; and ministry through liturgical leadership and community service.

Musicianship Class Tutoring Time

Musicianship tutoring is offered for Sr. Choristers on Wednesday afternoons before choir rehearsal. This is a hosted drop-in time that is open to all Sr. Choristers.

- A team of volunteer **adult musicianship tutors** (cathedral parishioners - music performers & educators) are each partnered with kids to assist in working through the workbook curriculum for the 50min class.
- The **curriculum, "A Young Singers Journey"**, is a workbook curriculum with audio tracks that assist singers in basic keyboard, theory, and sight singing work. They are repetitive by design in the way that piano or instrumental practice is repetitive. If a chorister is taking private music lessons, the tutors assess which skills need reinforcement and will move them to a more advanced book. The books are provided as part of the Choir School fee.
- Books can be taken home and worked on outside of choir. Only one book per student so don't lose it! Completed pages should be checked by a tutor or by Ms. Gilmore to make sure the student is on the right track.
- Tutors will frequently do a short group lesson on particular skills included in the Royal School of Church Music benchmarks that need to be met by singers to receive their ribbons.
- Mr. Kleinschmidt and other tutors test choristers on their musicianship skills during the musicianship tutoring time to mark off those particular skills on a chorister's way to getting their ribbons.
- If your child arrives after 4:05PM, it is difficult for them to participate in musicianship class.

Ribbon Levels- The Royal School of Church Music has five ribbon levels that signify levels of musicianship shared across the globe by choristers participating in RSCM member ensembles from England to South Africa to Australia and the US. If you see a picture of choristers at Ely

Cathedral in the UK and they are wearing a dark blue ribbon, our dark blue choristers know they share the same knowledge and skills. Pretty cool.

The ribbons levels are white (our white cottas function for this level), light blue, dark blue, red, and yellow.

All choristers and ribbon skills are represented on our Ribbon Level Google Doc distributed by email, so that parents and singers can track their progress. This doc is updated as kids test on the skills. Some skills can be observed by me in rehearsal and I mark them off as I see them. Most need to be individually tested by me, Mr. Kleinschmidt, or other tutors.

Individual testing – For singers who are unable to attend musicianship tutoring time, staff are available to test with them on other days. When arranging an individual time with Ms. Gilmore, please consult with her early over email or in person about the goals for the scheduled session. During the summer months, slots are available with Ms. Gilmore and others for individual musicianship coaching toward ribbon levels.

Class Piano

This class is intended to supplement the music education of Jr. Choristers and requires additional tuition. This introduction to the piano reinforces skills being learned in choir rehearsal by fostering keyboard familiarity and music reading principles. This class can prepare choristers for future private piano study or tailor their growing piano skills to support their choral journey. Classes are taught by Hannah Hochkeppel.

What does a typical session look like?

1. Snack and a music themed story
2. Rhythm Games
3. Review of previous learning using games or piano sight-reading challenges
4. Introduction of new or building concepts
5. Piano lab time! (Continued or new music, 1:1 instruction and support, mini-class recitals and duets with other students or instructor)
6. Take-home challenge and sticker awards

LARGE EVENTS

Pageant of the Nativity

Why we do a big Christmas pageant: The Pageant is a lot of work at a busy time of year and we thank you for your family's dedication. Dean Thomason and Ms. Gilmore have identified this as a key ministry of the Choir School for the cathedral and larger community. Acting and singing the story of Jesus' birth helps children (and everyone else) embody the truth of God's presence with us here on earth now and always. Offering a pageant of this scale reaches out to the greater Seattle area welcoming new families into our space and showing the prominence of children in the life of the cathedral.

If you are new to us (or even if you aren't): Please view the Pageant trailers and footage from past years on the cathedral website to get a sense of the event.

Register your child(ren)

We ask for registration of your child for participation in the Pageant. It is a required event of the Choir School but given the breadth of preparations for this event, we need additional information you're your family. Every child has a costume, a headpiece, and numerous other preparations made for them. This is also how you alert us if your child has an interest in a named role or a reading part.

Spoken Role and Reader auditions

We will hold auditions for spoken roles and readers on Wednesday, Nov. 19th around Choir School rehearsals. Please indicate on the form if your child/teen would like to audition. There are not enough speaking roles for everyone.

**Because auditioning can be a tender thing for our kids, please know that we take many factors into account when awarding the few speaking roles of the Pageant. Kids that take the risk of auditioning are given special consideration for non-speaking parts as well. Confidence, clarity, expressiveness, past role assignments and seniority are all considered when production staff award dramatic roles for the pageant.

Parent crews: At least one parent per family is placed on a crew when registering their child. Some call this being "volun-told" but you are given the opportunity to choose which crew best suits your abilities and interests. Many hands make light work. Light work is all we want to ask at this time of year!

Music preparation: The majority of music preparation will be achieved in rehearsals. For functional learning and enjoyment purposes, a Spotify playlist of the majority of the repertoire is sent out with a YouTube equivalent. This listening will be fun for your whole family.

Jr. Chorister parent note: As you look at the Pageant schedule, please know that we will be adjusting the call times for Juniors as we get closer to the rehearsals. We understand that their attention span can't be sustained for the total times listed and we will either notify you of late arrival or early release OR provide snacks and additional activities to keep them engaged during longer stretches. For the moment, please hold the total time as listed.

Pilgrimages

The Senior Choristers and Schola take annual pilgrimages to sing for parishes or events in our Diocese or larger region. These trips vary in distance and expense. Scholarship help is available to contribute to covering this cost if needed. Be attentive to the choir schedules for pilgrimage dates and please promptly register your child for these trips when asked to do so.

GENERAL NOTES

Cell phone policy

Choristers are strictly forbidden from using cell phones during rehearsals or liturgy.

Vestment and music care

Choristers are expected to treat sheet music, binders, and vestments as the shared property of the Choir School and Cathedral. Families will be responsible for repairing any damage to folders, sheet music, vestments, or other St. Mark's property beyond normal wear and tear.

CHOIR SCHOOL EXPECTATIONS

1. Be prepared for rehearsal with music, pencil, water bottle, and an empty bladder...
2. Punctuality – Plan to be in your seat ahead of the stated rehearsal start time. If a rehearsal starts at 6:30, that means that singers should be seated with all supplies and ready for a downbeat at 6:30.
3. Keep a focused mind and act in ways that are up-building to the rehearsal. Asking to use the restroom during a rehearsal is a disruption that should only happen if someone takes ill during the rehearsal.
4. You are encouraged to ask questions of the conductor for clarification but first, listen to the conductor's full instructions before raising your hand with questions. When asking or answering a question, do so as succinctly as possible.
5. Keep track of the section of a piece being rehearsed even if you aren't singing so you are ready to join. Repeating instructions to a few unfocused singers takes precious time and if you aren't paying attention, you are wasting other people's time.
6. Prepare your heart to receive the gentle critique from your conductors. If there is a way you can improve your singing, it is the conductor's job to ask for that. You aren't a lesser person just because there is a way that your singing might be improved. When given a suggestion, just say, "Ok. Got it!"
7. Always remember the feeling of your heart pounding when you sing by yourself in rehearsal or performance and be unfailingly kind and supportive to everyone else brave enough to take that risk in front of you.

Evensong Choir Specific Expectations

Musicianship

1. Evensong choristers, young and old, must always be able to track where we are in a choral score.
2. Evensong choristers are expected to read music with confidence and commit to fixing errors rather than relying on the singers around them to get it right.
3. Evensong choristers must be able to match pitch with their section 100% of the time.
4. Evensong choristers must be able to blend their voice with their section.
5. Evensong choristers must demonstrate confidence and bravery by raising hands to answer questions, willingness to sing a passage by themselves in front of the choir, and making eye contact with the conductor during rehearsals.

Responsibility

- Attendance and punctuality
- Schedule – planning ahead and reserving time for Evensong commitments and communicating conflicts early to Mr. Kleinschmidt and Ms. Gilmore.
- Focused listening to instructions
- Engage in the work we are doing together and work to care for each other with kindness and compassion.

STAFF

Rebekah Gilmore, Director of the Choir School,
Associate Musician and Director of Youth Ministry

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Elizabeth Antley, Early Childhood Music Instructor (Joyful Noise)

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Cara Peterson, Choir School Accompanist

Nicholas Chrisman, Schola Bass Vocal Mentor

John Garlid, Schola Tenor Vocal Mentor