

Children's Choir Survey

Responses from members of The Fellowship of United Methodists in Music and Worship Arts, January-February 2009 to the questions

In regard to your children's choir(s):

How do you schedule it (them)?

How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)?

1

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)? We have a children's choir grades 4-8. They meet on Wednesday evenings from 6-8, which includes 30 minutes of "blessings and bummers" where kids get to talk about their day and pray it up!

This is sometimes a highlight for them. There are competing activities, which take kids out, but we always welcome them back when they are able. It is a tightwire act. The director has a year-end party for them at her house, which is a draw, along with singing out at other locations once or twice a year (also a draw). When they complete a year, they receive a charm (these are all girls), which is also motivating for them. They sing in worship once a month and we try to incorporate them into cantatas done by the chancel choir. Additionally, we have a handbell ensemble for jr. high which meets on Sunday evenings before youth group. They are also not without conflicts sometimes, but we deal with it and keep working on ways to have them play out and play in worship. We are also doing a church talent show - which incorporates the kids and they are really getting into this. One kid is in 5 different musical offerings. This event is combined with the adults and we do it as close to Valentine's Day as possible, this year right on Feb 14. We use it for a Music Ministries fundraiser. In the summer we do a children's musical for two weeks, 9-noon. That also gathers up boys and girls grades K-9. We get a lot of kids and friends of kids from the church and community. I guess, the busier you get - the better the kids seem to like it.

Jane W.

2

We care about our kids and our adults and our kids and our adults care for each other. We make time in rehearsals for caring and sharing. If I needed help, people would be knocking down the doors to help me.

We make choir important - to both the chorister and the parents (and those that bring them!)

We schedule ahead. We have a monthly choir newsletter. The September and January issues include not only the singing schedule with anthems listed for the semester (our children's choirs each sing about once a month) but also important dates. For example, January choir notes includes mandatory rehearsals for our May children's play; mandatory parent meetings for junior high/high school choir tour; and the dates of our adult choir cantata rehearsal with orchestra.

Our rehearsals are structured so that we are always looking ahead at the next five or six anthems so that an absence doesn't cause the chorister to lose ALL rehearsal time on an anthem.

We have one adult chorister who cannot be at rehearsal because of work conflict, so he comes in on a weekday to review music with our choir director.

If a chorister knows he has to miss several rehearsals, he's welcome to take music home to keep up and knows that our choir director will assist on an ad hoc basis.

We do not belittle extracurricular activities. They are important. We may express our displeasure at activities being scheduled on Sunday morning. But the displeasure is directed at the system, not the star soccer player who also sings in choir.

If we have a particularly talented musician who is preparing for a contest, we try to include the contest song somewhere in a worship service so the student has an additional opportunity to perform before an audience before the contest.

The students in the larger school district our church serves have difficulty scheduling both academic and music classes. In our advertising we emphasize that we take time to teach the young ones how to read music. We also teach theory on an as-needed basis to our older choirs.

We moved our adult handbell rehearsal to an hour before adult vocal rehearsal. Interestingly membership has moved both ways.

Laura D.

3

I'll relate my experience with a small church (75-80 worship attendance) a few years ago. I led a group singing time (10 minutes) at the beginning of the Sunday school time period, but there was no formal children's choir, and at first I had no luck starting one. But then I discovered that short-term children's musicals worked well. We started with an easy Christmas musical, with rehearsals on three Saturday mornings in December (I marketed it to parents as a great kid-free time to do shopping or gift-wrapping). The kids loved it and discovered that singing together was fun.

Then I started doing a larger children's musical in the spring. I started with a kick-off party on a weekday afternoon after school to generate excitement. There was no obligation to do the musical if you attended the party, but those who chose to do so were required to sign a covenant pledging not to miss more than two rehearsals (out of a total of about 12). We had weekly after-school rehearsals on Thursday afternoons. With parental permission, I walked to the elementary school nearest the church, collected about 6 or 8 children, and walked them back to the church as a group. I used adult volunteers (these changed week-to-week, and I signed them up ahead of time) and donated snacks from UMW so that kids could "hang out" and snack until all the schools (three elementary and the middle school) had released their kids and everyone was there.

Once everyone was there, we started rehearsal, which was divided into several segments to keep their interest over the 90 minutes. We ranged from 2nd to 8th grade, but it worked because I used adult volunteers to help the younger ones find their place, make transitions, and stay focused. The last year I did it I had about 2 dozen kids, about half of whom were not directly connected with the church.

I also charged each participant -- it was either \$10 or \$15, with a discount for multiple-child families. Although the money did help cover the expense of purchasing the books for the musical, the real benefit was that families tend to be more committed to (and place more value on) an experience that costs money up front. We also let it be known that scholarships were available, but I only recall one family asking for financial assistance (and we just waived the fee for that family).

I believe that if I'd called it "children's choir," it would never have worked. The key was short-term commitment (about 3 months), the excitement of the theatre aspect (costumes, props, a fun story, etc.), and providing lots of variety at each rehearsal. They ended up learning a LOT about singing together, but they didn't realize they were actually having a choral experience!

Laura B.

4

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)?

We have determined that we have a small window of time in which our children's choir will meet each Sunday -- fifteen minutes prior to Sunday school, immediately after our first service. This has been a difficult decision for us but because so many of the kids are involved in other activities throughout the week we felt that we had to "capture the moment" when the kids were present. We acknowledge that we feel a bit rushed but the kids are actually waiting for the first service to end so that they can go into the sanctuary to practice. As pastor I first began the choir and with a smooth transition and cooperative effort have handed over the responsibility to our adult choir director. We teach the kids from a variety of resources and augment what they learn with kazoos, puppets, "bones" rhythm instruments [we used Dollar Store "bones" as blocks in singing "Dry Bones"] and more! The kids are excited to come because they know that it won't be boring.

Karin T.

5

Our Children's Choir is not an actual choir but all the children of our Sunday school who wish to sing in a worship setting. The rehearsals are held at the end of Sunday school before our 10:30 worship service. They sing on the second Sunday of the month. We also have a Christmas musical program in December and a Children's Day musical in June. These require extra rehearsals on Saturdays.

This has worked well plus it encourages the children to stay connected as they move up in grades to the Youth Choir.

Jean A.

6

By children's choirs, I'm assuming you are referring to early elementary. We have a God's Kids night on Mondays. The children have dinner (prepared by a committee) at 6:00, have lesson, crafts, games, and music when something is being planned special. I just don't have the time to do it on a regular basis, so at times like Christmas, etc., I'll practice with them for 3 or 4 weeks prior to the event. This happens about 3 times a year. The children range in age from 3 to 10 and are divided into 2 age groups. Each practices 20 minutes.

As the children get older, they want to ring handbells. About every 3-4 years, I begin a new group of older elementary kids, and we practice after school for 45 minutes. The Jr/Sr High bell choir has practiced at 8:30 on Sunday morning for years. When they get that old, early Sunday morning is the only time we can find. We practice for an hour, and the kids are very reliable about making it. I think it's because these youth really want to be in the bell choir. Those who choose to be on traveling sports teams simply can't be in bells. Around concert time of special times, we'll schedule extra practices before school (usually 6:30 in the morning) or later at night (usually 9:00).

I think the key to "competing" with school events for practice times is a consistent music program - one that exists over a lot of years and with a straightforward understanding. For instance, our ringers understand that if there are 2 absent, we don't practice. That puts quite a bit of pressure on the individuals to consider carefully how important a conflict has to be before they miss practice.

Also, we have the good fortune of living in a small enough town that I know the teachers and coaches. Most of them will excuse kids from sports practices early to accommodate our practices. It's a compromise. If a ballgame falls on a practice night (this Wednesday our girls' BB team has a tournament), I just cancel practice.

Having said all of the above, it really is getting more and more challenging to find time for music. Our children are too busy. I think they find choirs a stress reliever.

Churches have allowed schools and other activities to dominate. It's about teaching priorities, how to handle peer pressure, serving God, etc.

Isn't life a challenge!!?!?!?

Marilyn H.

7

Both of our children's choirs meet at the same time to save the parents at trip. We do it in that no man's land timeframe of 6-7 p.m., which is right after school sports and activities. I admit the kids come in with serious fast-food-drive-through-eat-in-the-car breath. I don't try to compete. Those who can participate do. Sometimes a kid drops out for 2-3 months during a sports season and then comes back in after the season. They know they can't just show up to sing on Sunday; they are on "leave of absence" for the season. We say goodbye for the season on their last rehearsal with us and welcome them back gladly when the season is over. I also finish the choir year at the end of April. With schools out here by May 21-22, the sports teams all collide by the end of April: soccer, softball and swimming.

Debra T.

8

On Wednesdays our church has a meal at 5:30 and activities for children and adults at 6:30, so I have children's choir from 4:45-5:30 before the meal.

Tricia C.

9

Our children's and youth choirs are all part of our Wednesday evening LOGOS program which includes Bible study, worship skills, recreation, and a fellowship dinner. Pre-school through 5th grade are here from 4:30 PM to 7:35 PM, and Middle School-High School program runs from 5:15-8:20 PM. This year the LOGOS "semesters" are Sept. 24 through December 10 every Wednesday except Nov. 26, and January 7 through April 1 every Wednesday, except Feb. 18 (winter vacation). There is a fee of \$110 per child per year or \$55 per semester (covers the meals, materials, music, LOGOS trainings for paid and volunteer staff, etc.) We generally find that if people pay \$110 they will make sure their children are there every week! The church started the program 5 years ago with about 35 kids; this year we have more than 120 enrolled. This is in addition to Sunday School and UMYF on Sunday mornings (120 in

preschool and elementary Sunday school and 66 in middle and high school, until we get our new addition finished, then the fire department will permit us to have 300-400 in these programs so we will have room for growth for the first time since 1995).

Because of sports and marching band programs you will notice that we do not start until the last week in September and end before Easter this year. When Easter is in March we have 2 weeks after Spring vacation. But no part of the program ever goes into May. Also some of the middle and high school youth only participate in the winter semester.

The LOGOS program includes Preschool-1st Grade, 2-3 grade, and 4-5 grade singing choirs, 4-5 grade handchime choir (same time as singing, so they must choose), middle school handbell, and high school handbell choirs.

I should also point out that our growth has slowed in the last year - we only have 4-6 adults in our quarterly new member classes (down from 10-20 in previous years). And there are only 2 other churches in the village: a small non-denominational Baptist church and a congregation of The Community of Christ (formerly known as the Reorganized LDS church). There are only 2 "mainline Protestant" congregations within 5 miles of us: a small UCC Congregational Church, and an ELCA congregation 2 miles south of the village (we have children and leaders from that church in our LOGOS program). We also have several Roman Catholic families in the LOGOS program. The Episcopal church in town closed 8 or 9 years ago (their nearest church is 5 or 6 miles SW and we work together in several ways). I cannot tell you where the nearest United Presbyterian church is located. An independent offshoot of the Evangelical Presbyterian denomination nearby is building a mega "second site" about 6 miles to the south of us.

There are many independent "Bible" churches, Wisconsin and Missouri Synod Lutheran, GARBC Baptist, Church of Christ (non-instrumental), Church of God, Free Methodist, and Assembly of God congregations in the 3- to 7-mile range.

So we are in a vacuum of mainline Protestant theology congregations and get Presbyterian, UCC, Disciples of Christ, ELCA, and even some UMC new residents in our adult membership classes.

John P.

10

When to schedule Children's Choirs!!

We moved our children's choir to Wednesday night this fall, mainly to try the new time and it was also a time that was good for the volunteer directors. We added a snack supper between the children's handbell rehearsal and the children's singing choir. The singers are in grades 1-5 and we attracted some children with the new time. We also lost a few that liked the Sunday time slot better. Overall, this was a good move for us. Our pre-school choir meets after children's time on Sunday mornings at our 11:00 service. These are children that are usually taken to the nursery. This was a gold mine for us and a great thing for the volunteers. They meet for about 30 minutes and have the bonus of nursery workers to help with crowd control. We use the Musikgarten sacred curriculum for this choir and love it. Our numbers aren't huge but we have a good percentage of the children available in our congregation.

Rev. Debbie C.

11

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)?

We don't have a "children's choir" per se. But I work with the children each week for 15 minutes. There is a half-hour between S.S. and the start of worship, and we use 15 minutes of that to sing songs with any children who choose to come. It's worked very well - the kids eat their donuts, then come in to sing. Nearly all the parents come with them, so I have lots of support, and the parents are learning the songs along with the children.

Bonnie F.

12

In regard to your children's choir(s):

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)?

We have a K-2nd grade choir, a 3rd-5th grade choir, a 6th-8th grade choir, and a high school choir. The two younger choirs rehearse during our 11:15 worship service. Our main Sunday school hour is during the 9:30 service, and those children who choose to be a part of the choirs rehearse during the next service. Our Middle School and High School choirs rehearse on Wednesday evenings, Middle School from 5:00-6:00 and high school from 6:30-8:30.

The three younger choirs sing in church once a month, and the two youngest ones do a Christmas concert and a Spring concert. The high school choir sings in one of our morning services every week and goes on a summer tour every summer.

Working around busy schedules is challenging. We find that trying to "work around" them is counter-productive. We try to schedule our events when the fewest things are happening, but we can never please everyone and we try to make our program as attractive and as appealing as possible.

Dirk D.

13

We currently have two children's choirs, one for ages 3-kindergarten, and one 1st-5th grade. This of course presents a challenge, primarily concerning grouping a wide range of maturity levels together. However, given our limited rehearsal space and lack of time, it makes scheduling and maintaining committed leadership much easier. We have rehearsal for both groups on Sunday night, beginning at 6. Several of the oldest children have already been there for a handchime (3rd-5th grade) rehearsal at 5, and we have found that coinciding with Sunday night UMYF meetings helps the many parents we have of multiple-age children to have their children participate. We also have two incredible volunteer directors for these groups, whose children also participate.

We have done fun activities to gain the children's interest, including skate parties, dance parties, and the Christmas musical, which always fosters their excitement. However, the critical aspect is our entire church's emphasis on participation in volunteer ministry. While this concept is not easily imparted to young children, it has become our mission to engage all the church membership, from the youngest (largely through their parents, naturally) to the oldest. One important part of that is trying to schedule activities for all age ranges to take place at the same time, to lessen a little of the "everyone has to be somewhere at a different time" dilemma, and to give the parents a chance to engage in some spiritual growth activity as well.

Rob M.

14

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)? Our Cherub Choir (age 3-kindergarten) and Carol Choir (1st-5th grades) meet Wednesday evening from 6:30-7:00, immediately after the church's fellowship dinner and immediately before the children's mission clubs meet. Parents can drop off their children at choir and then attend choir rehearsal or Bible study between 6:30 and 8:00. We are very fluid regarding attendance; children will drop in and out of choir during the year as sports seasons change and practice schedule change. We also have a liturgical dance troupe that includes elementary, middle, and high school girls. They rehearse on Sunday mornings from 8:30-9:30, and that gives the dancers another opportunity to be involved in worship arts, if they have class on Wednesday evening.

The children's choirs sing in church at least monthly from October - May.

Terri C.

15

Having recently left the parish after 35 years, my most recent pattern for children and youth choirs in a downtown innercity area was to rehearse at 9:00 a.m. Sunday mornings before Sunday school.

James J.

16

Our children's choir is directed by a volunteer; they have excellent attendance because they meet between our first and second service before Sunday school starts. Parents will usually get them there then since it's right before Sunday school. The director also integrates a lot of handbell playing, which the kids seem to love.

David H.

17

Children's Choirs

I have space in my program for three "kids" choirs (Angel, Chapel, Youth). Not every year fills those spaces, but I have only played around with the junior/middle school-high school group with scheduling. Originally they met on Thurs. at 6:15. Then came ski club,

etc. They were moved to Sunday right after the second service (around noon). That worked for quite a long time until I essentially ran out of kids. Last year I had 2 younger (read: middle school) kids for that choir. They were moving up from the elementary group, which has ALWAYS (50 years) met on Thurs at 4 pm. We decided to stay at that hour and change the name and robes! This year basketball interfered, so we got creative before Christmas and have met at the Sunday noon time for a few weeks. They are anxious to go back to Thurs. as soon as BB is over.

The Angel Choir (age 4-3rd grade) has been on Friday at 4 pm for about 50 years. (I have been here 35.) Although sometimes the kids are tired, they still manage to learn their stuff in the hour that I have them. I expect each of these choirs to sing in church once a month, but we sometimes have to "fudge" it if there will be too many absent. They sometimes do more at holiday time. I send notes home pretty regularly and talk to the parents if needed. They only sing for the second service. The dance problem, believe it or not, usually comes once or twice a year - when they have pictures ON SUNDAY with an ironclad schedule!!! Also, sometimes the recitals interfere with an extra rehearsal when I am doing a play.

Not a kid comes into the church but what I try to find out where they go to school, grade, etc. I usually ask the current choir members to talk it up to the new ones, even at school. I arrange transportation (usually me) if necessary. I speak with parents, and talk about the many things that the previous kids have accomplished partly as a result of regular choir attendance: being comfortable in front of an audience, performance and audience manners, using the "other" part of the brain, being able to listen well, singing in tune!, having the most welcoming audience for any performance - alone or with a group, understanding of the texts with Bible connections, understanding the real reason for the holidays, sharing, being in a play - responsible for a part, appropriate behavior in church, following the service, and praying even for snacks. There are a number of kids who have gone on in music, thanks partly to the opportunities they had from church ... one to New England Conservatory, then Julliard; one in Shenandoah; one in Baldwin-Wallace, two to SUNY Potsdam to become music teachers -- all of whom did their share of solos and the choir stuff for all their school years. There are some kids who can't handle the commitment of the every week schedule, but I suspect that it isn't totally the kids' problem.

I was amused at Christmas Eve service when a couple of college-age kids came to me and mentioned that the little kids didn't seem to know the verses very well and that -- just like when they were in it -- I had to sing the verses and the kids chimed in on the refrain. We had had two weeks of snow days right after Thanksgiving and even though I had sent the music home, it just wasn't the same. We do what we have to do!! I started out as a music teacher with those years of teaching in all three levels. That helps keep a program working. If directors need help with that sort of thing, there are plenty of helps available, and most teachers are helpful in finding materials and giving suggestions. I make sure that the schedule is in the bulletin every week. I write an article for the newsletter almost every month (even though it often seems like the same article) with upcoming events and encouragement of new members (not just kids). I have the kids sing with the adults sometimes. They all love that. Keeping it out front helps, and being there to help Sunday school teachers also helps. Even though the program isn't that large in numbers, it is fairly strong in consistency and substance.

Carolyn B.

18

We have a program on Wednesday nights called "WWJD" - Wednesdays With Jesus Dudes! It runs from 5:00 pm - 7:30 pm. We start off with the older kids (4-7 grades) and do puppets and the younger group (K-3) go to the church library and either watch a video, play games or do some kind of structured busy work. At 5:30 both groups come together for a light meal. At 6:00 both groups then go to choir (combined) for 45 minutes. At 6:45 the kids then go to either a craft/hands-on experience, or a storytelling time (biblically related), or some church-related activity such as making valentines for shut-ins, etc. At 7:30 the children are picked up by their parents. We do not run this program continuously from September thru May; we usually start in the second week of September and go 10 weeks or so up to Thanksgiving and end the main part of the program. The kids' choir then comes back for about three more weeks until we put on their Christmas musical usually the 2nd or 3rd Sunday in December. We break for Christmas and then start up about the 2nd week of January and go 8 weeks, then off 2 weeks, then go another 8 weeks and end right before the spring musical the 2nd Sunday in May. After this program the kids are done till next September. This seems to help the attendance as the kids are not coming continuously for nine months straight.

We vary the 5:00 older kids' activity throughout the year to include choirchimes, and keyboard. The combined kids choir puts on two musicals every year -- one at Christmas and another in early May for what we call "Children's Sunday." In this service the kids pretty much do everything: usher, take up the offering, read scripture, read prayer concern cards, etc. The musical on this day is in lieu of the sermon. (The minster loves having a Sunday off when he can sit with the congregation.)

Mark T.

19

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)?

We have to work very hard to sell commitment to our choirs. We are in the process of re-evaluating our effectiveness in children's choirs. Many of the kids "hate" it and I, as the director of music, am trying to nail down exactly why. I am to meet with the parents and conductor very soon. Next week we are going to try giving prizes to those kids who exhibit mastery of the songs, who watch the conductor and then, just a general door prize.

We have found Wed. evening right after the church supper to be the best time for the children's choir. At the same time the adults usually have a presentation of some sort that they attend. Because I observed our conductor having to wear three hats at once (teaching the music, keeping order and trying to play the accompaniment) I have implemented a rotation of the parents to come and act as monitors. I have given them a list of what their duties are.

Rhonda S.

20

I retired from my responsibilities as organist/pianist/worship planner in 1991. I can tell you, however, that all of our choirs, vocal and bell, are smaller now than when I retired, even though church membership has shown some growth. All directors are well qualified, pleasant. Families simply cannot cope with mid-week rehearsals.

Although this does not relate directly to music, I will mention one very successful addition to both of our contemporary and traditional services. One energetic woman took it upon herself to engage children (ages 5 or 6 to 10) in Sunday morning services by inviting them (after getting parental consent to be supportive) to be greeters, ushers and acolytes. She is very strict in their training -- kids must sign up, go through a period of observing older peers, wait their turn serving alongside a child "more experienced," before being considered fully prepared to serve in these capacities. Yes, they hand out bulletins and collect the offering and take their responsibility very seriously. Setting up this program initially took numerous short sessions, scheduled on Sunday mornings. Now the kids pretty much "grow into" the routine. The success of this program centers solely on the loving, patient but very firm woman who is a taskmaster for details and lets each child know she expects nothing but their best. They respond accordingly. Not having any weekday rehearsal time keeps it an attractive option for families.

Nancy T.

21

Our church is 18 years old and we have been running a children's music ministry for 17½ years. We have always had to deal with the "soccer craze" and all the other activities but have seen an increase in the "time crunch" the past 5 years or so. In the beginning we held rehearsals once a week at 4:00 p.m. The biggest challenge was finding volunteers and getting children to the rehearsal site who were in afterschool programs. Our 3rd or 4th year we decided to move the rehearsal to 6:30 p.m. and our attendance doubled and so did our volunteer help (most parents have full time jobs outside the home). We have also made the change to end the season with the performance of our spring musical the last weekend of April. When we continued into May we lost half the group.

The children's music ministry has become a significant port of entry for un-churched families.

Marilyn B.

22

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)?

We rehearse every Wednesday night after school. I rehearse the younger group, "Rainbow Singers," from 4:00 - 4:45 while a group of choir moms supervises the older group and sees that they get a snack. We have a nice big play area on the third floor with a craft area at one end where the children can be creative. The children sometimes create cards for our shut-ins. If children need to do homework, one of the moms will take those children to our children's library. We then switch groups and I get to rehearse the "Sunbeam Choir" (grades 2 - 5) from 4:45 - 5:30. This schedule has been in place for close to 30 years so parents pretty much plan around it when scheduling activities. However, I just lost a little girl to an afterschool program. Our church van helps by picking up thirteen children from one of our schools. We have forty children in the combined choirs. Our church also does a Wednesday night dinner following choir. I believe this has been a boost to our program and our young families have fellowship together. Other folks join for the dinner also.

We sing once a month and present a special Sunday night worship/program in December and we lead the entire worship service the first Sunday of May. Sometimes the May service is a musical, sometimes it is a compilation of music, scripture, poetry, etc. Last year, since we had a large group of 5th grade boys, we presented Mark Patterson's "Elijah." This year in May we will be presenting the story of Ruth. The coordinator of our Sunday morning Christian Education program is very cooperative and includes a study for a

month of what we are presenting. The children just completed a study of Ruth.

In our community, very few churches offer a real children's choir program. Most sing some songs, but do not commit to an every week, quality music, vocal training, type of agenda. It is also important the children not be relegated to services that no one else wants to do. Our children lead worship at the 10:45 time. They lead worship; they do not entertain. Children know when they have done well and offered their best to God. If that is done consistently, faithfulness and good attendance follows.

I have spent a good chunk of my lifetime teaching and leading children in worship and I have very strong ideas about the responsibility of the leader to make sure that the adults in charge do their work to guarantee that children are ministered to and provided an opportunity to minister to their congregations.

Mary K.

23

Both of our children's choirs meet after worship on Sunday. Parent volunteers feed them a light lunch, and then we have rehearsal. There aren't too many activities in their lives that conflict with Sunday afternoon rehearsals. It is a great system because no one has to make an extra trip.

Rodney

24

Cherub Choir (ages 4-7) meets from 3:30 - 4:00 after school on Thursdays. The school is close to the church so the older children walk the younger ones over. Some of the kids go to different schools and their parents bring them.

The Gitchie Gumees Singers (ages 8-12) meet from 4:00 to 4:45 on Thursdays. We have our library room set up for their homework between 3:30 and 4:00.

They both sing the 3rd Sunday of each month at both the 9:30 and 11:00 services - at 'children's time' in the first service followed by communion with their families and as the introit in the second service so they can leave. This took some educating of parents that the kids couldn't leave until after they sing at the second service. We give the parents coffee, etc., and they chat until the kids are through.

When these kids have school sports I make arrangements with their coaches to have the kids miss every other practice. That way we each get them half of the time.

We have healthy snacks. (The cookies, etc., make them way too wild and they can't sit still.) Snacks seem to be very important because they are all 'starved'. Sometimes it is hard for them to sit when they have been sitting all day. We play some physical song games and rhythm games to get the wiggles out.

I try to have them sing songs they like. I take popular songs that they may have heard (It's a Wonderful World and It's a Small World, etc). We do quite a bit of talking about what the songs mean and how they relate to us as people today. Usually these are songs that their parents might know. That makes a difference also because they practice at home with their parents.

We raised money for robes. They are 'just like' the adult choir's. (Oriental Traders has some for \$10 each - the quality may be lacking but the price is right.) It was/is important that the kids have input as to what the robes look like because if they don't like them they won't come. They think they are hot stuff when they wear them. It makes the kids into a unit. They feel more connected with each other and act more mature while they wear them. The older kids chose their name. Gitchie Gumees means big lake. We also have many native Americans in our area so it fit.

All the kids know that they are being groomed for the adult choir. We talk about singing techniques etc. We have rules and the kids follow them. I don't have to say anything because their peers remind them. I also try to send birthday cards, valentines, etc.

JoEllen E.

25

At our church we have 3 morning services -- 7:45 (traditional), 9 am (contemporary) and 11 am (traditional). Our children's choir, grades 1-6, meets every Sunday after the 11am service. At 12:15 the children have a snack (we used to do lunch but now we offer

cheese, fruit, crackers, etc.) prepared by parents who stay to organize that. The rehearsal is 12:30-1:30. After that they have a cookie or a small sweet snack before they leave. It seems to be working well.

A couple of times during the year we plan a joint choir anthem with the adult worship choir and the children's choir. It is always wonderful. We did "Night of Silence" this past December. The children sang Silent Night while we adults did the 4-part harmony version.

Bev M.

26

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)? It seems there are sports and dance lessons every night of the week in our area, just north of Pittsburgh. We designed a program for children called Bridge Builders on Wednesday evenings. Children do three half-hour rotations - a learning activity, a craft or hands-on activity, and choir. Older children do 2 45-min. rotations. All children are together the last 15 minutes for closing, etc. Three age levels are 4 yr. olds-K, grades 1-2, and grades 3-5. The older group also includes drama and handbells in their rotation. During January we reconfigured the program to involve parents - they have a 45 min. class with parenting topics such as "obstacles your children face in school" while the children do their lesson; then the second half we have parents and children work together on an activity related to the night's theme - i.e., an obstacle course for the above topic. This has been highly successful in involving parents and children together. Choirs and regular rotations will begin again in February and run through April.

We welcome new children throughout the year, so new kiddos continue to join.

Our hope is that the January respite from choir will help all to look forward to February! One of the factors for this decision is that the weather in Pittsburgh is very snowy and cold in January with evening activities often being canceled.

Tom T.

27

I have carpools set up to go to schools and day care centers to pick up children for choir. We have two choirs, Cherub - ages 4 through 1st grade - and Wesley - ages 2nd through 8th grade - that meet on Monday afternoon from 4:15 to 5:15, so most working parents can get to the church to pick up a chorister after choir if we get them to the church after school.

Texas Conference has a weeklong choir clinic (camp) at Lakeview Methodist Conference Center near Palestine, Texas. The children love to attend, and they can receive a full scholarship from the church to do so, if they are members of the choir. A musical is presented each year to help raise money for scholarships, and the children love to participate in a musical.

We also offer a class for children 0 to 3 years called Song Play. It uses the methods of the Richards Institute and Education Through Music, which is taught in the Houston area by Randy McChesney. We have something in that Monday time slot for all children through the eighth grade.

Joyce E.

28

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)? Our children's choirs are scheduled on Wednesday evenings in conjunction with our church-wide Fellowship Meals. We arrange our time so that families may come to the church and eat dinner together and then move to rehearsals/small groups. Our children's choirs rehearse during the same hour with the opportunity to also have activity time in the gym. While the children are in rehearsal, many adults remain in a time of fellowship or move to small groups. While most groups remain the same for the semester, we do offer an array of small groups in four-week sessions so that the topics/classes may change, i.e., watercolor, woodcarving, knitting. By offering something for the entire family we make it into some families schedules. There are others who have conflicts, but we make sure that the offering is there and trust that individuals will see the importance of making time for church-centered activities.

Occasionally, we do have special parties on the evening of our rehearsals to thank the children for being a part of the program. This year we are adding a musical hoping to inspire more children to be involved.

Jeremy B.

29

We schedule our children to practice on Sunday morning at 9:00 (second service begins at 9:45 with Sunday school beginning during the second service around 10:00, after the children's message). We have two choirs, Cherub Choir (K-2nd grade) and Blue Angels (3-6 grades). It is easier to get the children to come a little earlier on Sunday mornings than it is to try and get them there on a weeknight. They practice every week and each group sings once a month.

Kristin W.

30

Our church is fairly small with about 300 members but many children. We have a children's choir with K-5th, younger handbell choir (K-2) and a chime choir (3rd and up). We have a half hour for children's choir and then split into chimes and bells for another half hour. It has been virtually impossible to schedule around sports, scouts, etc. I just try to make due with the children who arrive each week. For the last two years we have put on a Christmas musical with the children and both years were well attended with about 200 people. I also seem to lose children once they get to 4th grade or so. That was the reason for the Tone Chimes and that has helped some but we still lose several.

I require the starting age to be kindergarten but this year I took "rising" kindergartners after Christmas. Right now we have about 20 children. I also purchased boomwhackers as a way to entice the children and reward them from time to time by letting them play with the boomwhackers.

If there is a way to compete with the many activities children have today and a way to keep them involved after 4th grade, I would really like to know more about it.

Ginny S.

31

We do not have a regular children's choir. However, we do have the children sing for some special worship services. In those cases, we schedule the rehearsals in consultation with the Sunday school teachers and take a few minutes from the Sunday school time for several weeks before the special services to hold rehearsals for the children. The teachers have been asked in advance, and they include the short rehearsals in their plans.

Judith M.

32

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)? Our Junior Choir is for grades 3-8. It has met on Wednesday afternoons since forever!, so folks know going in that Jr. Choir meets on Wed. from 4:15-5:15. The choir meets from Sept. through April ... too many conflicts with end of year school stuff in May. They sing about every 6 weeks; when they do they sing both an anthem and an offertory. They also sing on Christmas Eve and for the Easter Vigil service. The singing schedule is decided in September and sent home, so folks know from the beginning of the year which Sundays the choir will sing.

They do a musical the last Sunday in April. Major conflict is with the Intermediate School musical which is in March, but the music teacher is a friend of mine, so she sends me her rehearsal schedule far in advance and I work around it.

Last year we did start a primary choir which rehearses on Sunday mornings before church school. They sing about every 6 - 8 weeks ... always an Introit ... so they can sing, then sit with their parents. It gets them into seeing themselves as choir members, so it's even easier for them to start in the Jr. Choir in 3rd grade.

Sally C.

33

We schedule our children's choir (Son-Shine Choir) on Wed evenings. Our church plans what we call "Wonderful Wednesdays" where the children's choir meets from 5:30 - 6:00 pm and then everyone eats together in our Fellowship Hall. At 6:25 pm our children

go to "The Promised Land" workshops to hear Bible stories in the tent, get snacks in "Mary and Margaret's kitchen," and finish around 7:15 pm. The adults have a 30 -45 min. program at the same time the children do, and then we have adult choir practice, praise band, etc., around 7:00 pm.

This works very well for us and we usually have a very good turnout. We have tried doing things on other days of the week, but found we can't compete with all the activities families have now. We have determined that when whole family is involved, we have great success.

Lisa T.

34

Oh, for ideas! Recruitment doesn't work and we can't compete with soccer here. They schedule the games on Sundays, evenings. No day or time is sacred. In Indiana (where I was previously), we had a "community night" when the school had a ban on any activities on Wednesday nights. That gave churches and other organizations a chance to have something without competition from school events.

The only thing we have been able to do is one of our parents at Christmas takes the initiative for a children's program. She asks all the parents or grandparents to pick a Bible reading, poem or song. We usually get one instrumental and one piano solo, one Bible reading, a few recitations. Then she has them all sing something together. It makes it a lot easier, the kids come prepared, and she only has 3-4 rehearsals. This year they all wore Santa hats and made it into the local paper.

I think the key is getting the parents/grandparents involved and having the kids coming prepared.

Janet H.

35

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to these questions. I have had a particular passion for churches to recognize children as essential participants in worship and the life of the church. I began in the fall of 2006 with a determination to create a musical and multi-generational worship and musical community. Below are some of the steps the staff and I took to encourage this transition.

I became the Music Director in the fall of 2006. My role was shaped due to my skills and there was not a continued children's choir program due to no volunteers. Also, the church is around 200 worshipping members.

There has been a concerted effort to be more inviting to children by the staff. One of my priorities was to reach the children as soon as possible. The Sunday school time was out of the question because it happened at the same time as church, which didn't allow me to lead it. I began with a Children's Choir on Wednesday evenings 1/2 hour before the adult choir. Immediately, I incorporated the choir into participating during worship. This was very new to the community as well as to the children.

The next year, Wednesday evenings were firmly established as "church night" with meals and several other opportunities. I continued with the Children's Choir and attempted to teach the preschoolers after church and Sunday school for 10 minutes. This was sort of hit or miss. This past year, the Cherub Choir is also meeting for 1/2 hour, before the meal is served. This has allowed more music learning and building interest for the Children's Choir when they are of age. It took my participation in the summer VBS following my first year to get me introduced to the children of the congregation in any sort of way.

The main thing is that the Wednesday night program has been endorsed by the whole staff and the community of the congregation. I personally do not have attendance expectations. I do have high musical expectations. I have flexed their worship leadership by when children are around and when they are ready to perform their music. The music I choose varies from longer anthems with instruments to short sung sentences for portions of the liturgy.

New also this year is the Instrumental Choir. During the Children's Choir time on the second Wednesday of the month, I provide an all-instrumental rehearsal for those who would never sing. We work with percussion, Orff and chimes. This has increased the musical leadership by children in worship by two fold over last year.

Cynthia P.

36

I have found that incorporating the rehearsal time for children around our Wednesday night family program, knowing dinner would

be available following, gave parents a boost in having the kids there for choir. It is an early enough time-slot that ending time still gave time for homework and almost the usual bedtime.

Lorraine M.

37

Please go to countrysideumc.org for our home page, then to Our Ministries, and finally click onto Children's Ministries. There you will find information concerning Wednesday Nights for Kids! From 6-8:00 p.m. every Wednesday our Children's Ministry Team supports a collage of Children's ministry opportunities. As you will see on our Website, which is one avenue to recruiting beyond our Church, we offer Children's Choir, Bell Choir, and Beginning Musicianship opportunities. Liturgical Dance and Recreation is also a part of the options our families have to choose from. By offering excellent opportunities in a safe environment, led by creative leaders who have a heart for our children and their specialized area, parents and children alike are drawn to participate. Our families also know that an expectation is that the choirs, whether vocal or bells, will have an opportunity to participate in worship on a regular basis. Our liturgical dance troupes also have opportunities to share in worship and have been an integral part of expressing praise and glory to God.

Caren L.

38

Our children's singing choirs meet during worship. Children remain in the sanctuary through the Doxology -- they miss the scripture, message and final hymn. Generally they have only 30 minutes for rehearsal. On communion Sundays (first Sunday of the month) they sing for worship and remain in the sanctuary for the entire service. In theory, I am opposed to children (K-Gr. 5) not being present for all of worship. However, we have members who live 30 minutes from the church, and they will not return for a 45-60 minute rehearsal during the week. We have a midweek program for adults and children 4-6 weeks in the fall and spring, and some will come to the church for short-term courses, but not on a weekly basis.

Our children's handbell choir meets on Tuesdays after school. Of the 7 children, only 3 are affiliated with the church; the remainder come from a neighborhood after-school tutoring program.

Ellen J.

39

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)? Children's choirs in our church have met on Tuesdays and Wednesdays right after school. We pick up choir children at school in the immediate area and at two private schools. We have considered other times, but to be honest, we would end up losing some of the singers we have now. We do have singers who "drop in" to choir once football and cheering season end. Sadly, I have already lost a couple of singers to basketball and next month when softball and T-ball begin, I will lose more. The dancers seem to dance "in and out" but fortunately they are good musicians and quick studies. I don't know what the answer is to this dilemma. It is apparent that children are much busier than they once were, and clearly it is difficult for parents to get children to rehearsals—thus our school pick-up.

As a result of school changes for some of the upper elementary age children who meet on Wednesdays, the time for their choir was moved to a later time to give children out of the immediate Monroeville Public School area time to get to the church from school. We have a Girl Scout troop that meets following our rehearsal and we provide a homework time for those who are not involved. A junior high choir began two years ago as a result of 6th graders who wanted to keep singing. The only time they could meet because of other activities was from 3:00-3:25 on Wednesdays. We were able to continue picking these singers up at the junior high school. Those who had to leave did so, and the others continued singing with the older elementary choir.

Because of very small demographics in our K-5 through 2nd grade, this is a very small choir this year.

Nancy C.

40

We make our children's choir a part of our after-school Children's Ministry program, which meets on Wednesdays. We don't have much competition for that, but Sunday morning sometimes is a challenge when we want to have them sing in worship. Then we run

up against custody issues for some of the kids, and families being gone because of a sporting event by an older sibling and parents' work schedules. Also, because we are part of a two-point charge, our worship hour changes and when we are early (8:30 a.m.) it seems to be harder for parents to get their kids there. But we go with who we have. No auditions required. We average about 10-12 in our choir.

Michael

41

I schedule the children's choirs two times a year -- in August for September-December (Epiphany, actually) and in January for Jan. through June. This means I'm checking the school calendar before I begin and trying to figure out my own vacation schedule (I'm retired). I find that the earlier parents know about rehearsals and church performances + extra activities, the better able they are to incorporate this into the family schedule. Fortunately, I have a core of dedicated families who work with me, and I try to keep to my planned schedule as best as I can.

Karen H.

42

I have a children's group that varies widely in size.

I wound up simply picking a time (4:30 Wed.) that fit my schedule well. Any other time caused conflicts anyway. So I picked what worked best with my schedule (Wed. being my regular choir/music night).

Reliably, I can get 5 to perform one Sunday a month. I have had up to around 17 at rehearsals. Average at rehearsals this year has been around 8-10. The recent run of cold weather seems to have caused my numbers to dip, but I'm hoping it will bounce back up around spring.

Michael C.

43

I have scheduled our choirs at 5:30 p.m. on Wed. followed by a pizza dinner, which is \$2/wk, followed by Pioneer Clubs for 4 yr-5th grade and Bible study for teens. Everything ends promptly at 8:00 p.m. Some of the children miss rehearsals during sports season, but have the music to learn at home and join us when we sing. We have approximately 30 children 4 yr-3rd grade and 20 in the 4th - 12th grade choir.

Linda R.

44

We schedule the children's choirs in late afternoon on Wednesday (mid-week). We still have huge conflicts with other activities but we allow the children to come in and out as they are able.

Mark Z.

45

How do you schedule it (them)? Our practices are usually Sunday afternoon before the children and youth activities. How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)? By putting our rehearsal on Sunday afternoons, it avoids the "during the week" activities.

Renee M.

46

I schedule my children's choir around the Christmas and Easter seasons. We meet for a period of about 5 to 6 weeks. During that time we learn an anthem to be sung during worship as well as sing fun songs, play musical games, and learn something about worship and the seasons of Advent and Lent. Dinner is included in the activity so parents don't have to rush around after work. We call this activity "Sing With Your Supper." This seems to work well with our families because it doesn't require a long-term commitment.

Linda H.

47

Our children's choir is worked into a family Wednesday night programming. Dinner, adult Bible study, confirmation, choir and nursery. Something for every age although only 1 option for K-5th - choir. 6:30 - 7:30. I put out a schedule in the summer when parents start setting up fall schedules and ask them to keep Wednesday night free.

Donna

48

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)? The current schedule was in place when I arrived July 1, 2008. Families are used to this schedule and know from previous years that this is when the children's choirs will meet. We have coordinated family and supper activities.

Gwyn B.

49

Scheduling: We have to have choir on Sundays just to try to avoid sports conflicts, and even so, we often have problems anyway. Two years ago, the Christian Ed director and I decided to combine forces with children's choir and children's youth fellowship. Our "team" name is BLAST, and we're working on getting shirts. We try to refer to our groups as teams, and we use sports metaphors as much as possible. If you can't beat 'em, copy 'em.

Involving the parents is extremely important, so I try to utilize them as much as possible. I don't use a contract, but I do try to communicate how important it is for choir members to come each week. We do a spring musical, and some of the parts are distributed based on the year's attendance. Sometimes that's what it takes to keep the children coming.

Jeanette S.

50

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)? We have a Wed. evening program, sponsored and coordinated by the Worship Arts Ministry, called WOW (Worship arts On Wednesday), which meets from 6-7 pm, following our Wed. Night Out supper. This programming includes various learning experiences in performing and visual arts, and is designed to appeal to children/families for whom "singing" isn't their only interest. We also have "Advanced Electives" from 7-7:30 for Gr. 2-5 in Drama and Handbells, to give those more experienced students a chance to excel.

We had quite a 2-yr. long tussle over providing opposing activities on top of what we were offering ... with the Children's Ministry folks telling us that we HAD to have basketball in the gym, arts/crafts in the youth center, etc., in order to take everyone's desires for involvement into consideration. I did an email survey of over 50 churches to gather info - so that I had data to show what others were doing. In every case, we were told that sports/other programming immediately followed the music/arts schedule, but it did NOT overlap or replace it.

So, through the intervening 2-yr period, we have evolved through a jointly-sponsored Wed. night schedule that had what they considered a "something for everyone" approach. As the weeks wore on, and there was such scant participation in any other group, the children's education leadership interest decreased. So we picked the programming up again, increased our "electives" that children Gr. K-5 can choose from, and we now have the largest Wed. pm groups we've had in almost 10 years.

We rotate electives with the children Gr. 2-5, so that they have 5-6 weeks to experience skills like handbells, creative writing, making sets/props, skits, drama, recorder, dance, and percussion. So, if there is a genuine desire to be involved in what is going on for families on Wed. evenings, we believe we have covered the bases in providing opportunities for children with diverse interests to become

involved.

Eileen S.

51

I no longer serve as the children's choir director at my church, but the scheduling continues from then to now.

There are two levels of children's choirs - 3,4,5 year olds and 1st grade through 5th grade. The younger choir meets on Wednesday evening from 6-6:30; the elementary choir meets from 6:45 - 7:30. These rehearsal times coincide with other classes offered for every age at our church. Competing with other activities in our community is very difficult, even within our own church. As far as church activities go, a church-wide calendar is maintained by one certain person who helps us to coordinate activities that might conflict. All of those involved in children's ministries have learned to cooperate with each other to avoid as many conflicts as possible.

The children's choirs registration is held in conjunction with all Wednesday evening children's activities, which are very popular in our church. In fact, children's ministries, not part of the music ministries, does all the registration in the late summer for the fall/spring activities. As far as the choirs go, we have the best participation when we're presenting a musical. In the past, there was always a Christmas musical, which brought in a large number of children for the fall session. Unfortunately, spring participation was usually about half that of fall, unless another musical was being presented late in the spring. Musicals appear to be very popular with children and adults, who also love helping with the musicals.

Nancy H.

52

We schedule "Mustard Seed" sessions right after school @ 3:30-5 p.m. on Wednesdays for elementary children. Vans pick up the children at their schools and deliver them to church. We have snacks, Bible Study, recreation, crafts, music activities like Vacation Church school is formatted. 42 children come for this.

Then we have a church supper for around 150 people 5-6.

The children who want to sing and ring handbells for worship stay for rehearsal 5:30-6:30. We have 12 children choosing to do that. Some just come for this hour.

It is a long evening for them, but we have the best results getting them there this way.

Gloria W.

53

I direct a Genesis Choir (ages 4-2nd grade) and Joysingers (ages 3rd -6th grade). We meet on Wednesday evenings after Family Table, which is a dinner that we serve with all our families involved in Wed. night activities. The Genesis Choir meets from 6:15 -7:00 at which time they go to the nursery/playroom for the older kids if parents are still involved in church activities. The Joysingers are involved in Bible study called Rock Solid during the 6:15-7:00 time. It is organized by grade level, so each grade level meets separately. Then the Joysingers rehearse from 7:00-8:00. We have snacks at the end of both choirs. Each children's choir sings in church once a month and more during Christmas and Easter time.

Julie A.

54

Our church has a children's "choir" which is made up of all Sunday school kids up to third grade. They learn simple songs ("The B-I-B-L-E", "Jesus Loves Me", etc.) as part of their weekly opening exercises with all classes together, then on the Sunday they are singing in church they rehearse in the sanctuary for about ten minutes. They sing in church about once every six weeks. Not all children sing for the worship service, but they all learn the songs.

Our Youth Choir is made up of ages third grade through high school, for girls' and unchanged boys' voices. They meet weekly at 8:30

a.m. on Sunday before Sunday school starts. They learn unison and some two-part anthems written for children's/youth choirs, and sing in church about six times each year. They learn proper vocal technique and emphasis is also placed on the contribution they are making to the worship life of the whole church and how they are honoring God by singing in choir.

By having rehearsals on Sunday morning, we avoid conflict with sports and other activities. The downside is not being able to do some more difficult music that might otherwise be within reach of the groups. (Our adult choir also rehearses on Sunday morning, during the Sunday school hour).

Linda B.

55

We are just starting a children's choir for the first time. The number of children in our congregation has really grown, so it seemed like a good time.

The kids have been practicing right after our Sunday worship service while our fellowship hour is still going on. I think they have 8 or 9 so far. That's all I know at this point.

Ann R.

56

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)?

We found that we were losing members because of what day we held rehearsal, which had been "our day" for years.

It was due to conflicts with dance, etc. We did a parent check-in and found that another day worked for more folks. It doubled our attendance! It was so simple yet we had to break out of our own inflexibility to make it happen. We are trying to coordinate annually with their schedules. The seasonal activities with sports we are not able to accommodate but we do our best. We watch the school calendar for vacations & days off and schedule likewise. The challenge is we deal with three school districts.

Reggie A.

57

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)? We have scheduled our children's choirs' practices for Sunday mornings at the conclusion of the early worship service. The practice is about 20 minutes long. The two age-level choirs alternate Sundays, with the younger children ("Cherub Choir") meeting 2nd and 4th Sundays and the older group ("Children's Choir") meeting the 1st and 3rd.

Gene F.

58

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)?

We schedule our children's choirs' rehearsals on Sunday afternoon. That is the only day we have found that some of the parents will bring them back to the church. Weekdays are completely consumed by other activities for children in today's world. We are finding that even Sunday is beginning to be consumed by secular activities but so far have managed to hold on to that one day for some of our church kids.

However, we have many children on our rolls who are not in choir or handbells. We think the main reason is because parents today are not willing to bring their kids back to church on Sunday afternoon ... since it is the only family day some of them have.

*We Methodists have always been in awe of the Baptists who have huge attendance at Sunday and Wednesday night programs. How in the world do they do this???

Deborah G.

59

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)? I schedule my rehearsal time just prior to our weekly Wednesday night dinner. This makes it easiest for the parents to bring their children and then stay for dinner. Conflicts are conflicts; I can do nothing about them. As far as scheduling the children to sing in church worship, I check with the parents and schedule when most of the children will be available.

Our program is not big by any means, as we are a downtown church with primarily an older congregation.

Robert J.

60

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)? At our church, we schedule choirs for children, ages 3–5th grade on Wednesday evenings. We have three choirs, ages 3-4, K5, and 1st-5th grade. The children and choir workers come early to eat dinner, 5:15-5:45, and have rehearsal from 5:45-6:30. The other adults eat dinner while the children are rehearsing. We do have children who do not participate because of sports activities, but we cannot find a way to work around this. We try to emphasize how important our programs are, but parents are ultimately the ones to make the decisions about what their children do. I believe if enough parents would let coaches know that Wednesday night is church night for them, that might have an impact, but that hasn't happened so far. There is no way to schedule a rehearsal time that doesn't interfere with other activities, but we have found most people are in the habit of Wednesday nights being a church night. We also have mission activities for all of the children following choir, as well as studies for adults during that time, so their parents are involved in activities, as well.

Janice H.

61

We have Wednesday evening suppers during the school year. Then, we offer classes for adults at 7. Our children's choirs are held at the same time as the adult classes. We also have child-care programs then.

Tina E.

62

We do our children's choir as part of our Wednesday night activities. We serve a dinner at 6:00, and have children's, youth and adult activities after the meal. The children's choir begins at 6:30, and is followed immediately by what we call KICK Club which is a high energy, experiential, Christian teaching time. The children's choir works as one, while we break the kids into age groups for KICK Club. With the whole family here for an evening's at the church, we don't have to worry about scheduling around competing activities.

There is a strong emphasis on fun and serious spirituality. The two elements are not mutually exclusive.

Bob I.

63

I currently have a Middle School Youth Choir. (In the past, we'd had some interest about a children's choir but no one got their kids there consistently so we dropped it.) Later I found out that several of our youth have sung in all-district choirs through their schools so I decided to try and see if there was any interest. I tested it out in the summer to see if any kids would come. They did! I announced it in the bulletin and sent e-mails to every parent of a middle school or high school youth as well as direct e-mails to every youth whose e-mail I could get hold of. I first tried to do rehearsals before youth group on Sunday evenings. However, I found out that many of these young people didn't attend youth group. So, at the parents' request, we switched it to right after the second service on Sunday mornings (11:30). This has worked well and I have pretty consistent attendance. Some kids who initially showed interest ended up being too overcommitted to other activities to even make it on Sunday mornings. But we have settled into a nice group of 8 youth: four sopranos and four altos (one male alto). Now that we've been singing successfully for several months (and to critical acclaim!), some of the other kids (even some younger) have expressed interest in wanting to be a part of it. I have the youth singing once a month and I featured them with the adult choir for our Christmas concert with orchestra. I gave them one piece to solo on with the orchestra and got a great response to that. I've had them sing with the adult choir twice and that also gets a good response. So the youth are very excited about all the attention they've gotten and because I use several of them to do solos, they show up because

they're afraid to miss out on auditioning for a solo. They love singing everything I give them and will try anything. I love these youth dearly and it has been a great deal of fun working with them.

Mary Anne B.

64

Our children's choirs are a part of our Wednesday night schedule. At least in our area, keeping it on Wednesday helps children and their parents focus on that evening as time spent with the church. Children's handbells meet from 4:30-5:30; dinner is from 5:30-6:30; children's vocal choirs meet from 6:30-7:30. In the fall, we have a rotation where each choir does something different every month (Orff, choir, and praise team are the rotations). In the spring, Our Pre-K to 1st grade choir involves singing, snacks, and crafts. Our older choirs (2-3 Grade, 4-6 Grade) work together toward the spring musical in May. In addition, our 4-6 Grade choir always prepares for Choristers Guild festival every year. With the orientation of our schedule and the fall rotation, festival preparation happens periodically on Saturdays for a couple of hours.

In addition to the choirs, Grades 2 and up are invited to be a part of a dance group that meets from 6:00-6:30 (beginning halfway through the dinner hour).

Our directors are very skilled at picking music that holds their interest. The rotation in the fall allows us to expose them to different kinds of music, too, and helps them develop an appreciation for various forms of musical presentation.

Parents need to see that their children are spiritually valued, and we seek to give them a voice. Children play an important role in the life of the church, and allowing them to lead lets their voice be heard in the present moment. It is not simply something to be reflected upon when they are adults. Our catch phrase for Children's Music Ministry is, "Make it fun for the children, and they will WANT to be there." Our main goal is teaching them about the love of God; music is a tool we use toward that end.

Rev. Jackson H.

65

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)? The parents asked that all children's choirs be moved to Sunday afternoon (5:00 - 6:00). In the fall of 2008, we decided to try it. The parents love it and are much more committed to the program.

David R.

66

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)? All groups meet on Wednesdays during our music, education, family meal times. By making it all-inclusive, it becomes important to the families. We follow music time with a good, cheap meal and then education time until 7:30.

We changed our music schedule to allow the parents to get off work in two-income families. We changed the start time from 4:30 to 5:15 for preschoolers. They enjoy games and music and Bible and birthdays. Moms help on a rotating basis and also volunteer to help as "assistant" directors. We average about 25 in this age group.

Grades 1-6 meet as a chime choir at 5:00. They also are later now ten years past and grew from an average of six during the earlier time when kids had to walk from school to get here, to an average of fourteen now. Their level has grown from barely recognizable tunes (so poorly played) to level two on a regular basis. The director is positive, demanding, and rewarding. Each spring they end with something special and last year went on a mini-tour to an area church ... what pride they had in a job well done.

Grades 1-6 then meet as a vocal choir at 5:30. Again, they average fourteen to sixteen per rehearsal. They sing well, are articulate, rhythmic, and support the service with their songs. We would like to see it grow so we can again split the group in two with 1-3 and 4-6 choirs meeting in separate rooms and performing at different times.

It helps to have the participants and their parents having a positive feel about the groups. The fun or joy in these groups come from feeling good about a job well done and that speaks volumes!

Bloyce J.

67

Our children's choir program is on Thursday afternoons after school... this does leave out some families who work and cannot provide transportation at that time, but within the life of our church this is the best time for us. We run our program in 2 semesters... kids may join for the fall or the spring (or both) ... this allows some families to participate in only fall or only spring when they are not playing sports, etc. If they had to commit to the entire year we would probably lose them.

Jennifer H.

68

Three choirs in age groups: 3-PreK, K-2nd, and 3rd-5th grade are scheduled at the same time on Wednesdays after church dinner from 6:30-7:15. Two directors are in each age group. That is the best time for the kids at this church. Many groups don't practice on Wednesday in the area, leaving the night for church stuff. If the kids are involved in something that practices on Wednesday, they have to choose.

The year is planned out ahead of time. Kids sing once a month, participate in a children's choir festival, and do a musical in the spring.

Carrie W.

69

How do you schedule it (them)? We continue to have all our children's choirs on Wednesday evening at 5:00 P.M.

Music Makers (Pre-K and K) 5:00-5:30 P.M.

Carillon Singers (1,2,3 Grade) 5:00-5:45 P.M.

New Creations Choir (4,5,6) 5:00-5:45 P.M.

Youth Choir (7-12) 5:00-6:00 P.M.

How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)? We have stayed on Wednesday because of all nights that seems to be the evening that fewer after school and extra curricular activities are scheduled. Notice I didn't say "no other," since we do have after some extra curricular and school activities for children and youth in our community even on Wednesday.

Mark L.

70

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)?

We have 3 children's choirs (K-1, 2-3 & 4-5 with between 35-50 in each group) that meet simultaneously on Wed. afternoons from 4:30-5:45. After experimenting a bit, we found that this timeframe worked best for most people. It allows working parents to set up carpools with parents who work at home; they can participate by picking the kids up. It also piggy-backs onto our church's Wed. pm. meal & ministry programming, so parents can pick their kids up from choir then go have dinner together right here at church. It also gave our older choirs the time we wanted with them, and our younger K-1 choir divides the time between singing and other activities. This time also works for the majority of our area school dismissal times, which vary from 2:30-4:20.

It seems to avoid many after-school & extracurricular activities, but of course, we still run into some conflicts. I'm convinced there is no such thing as a day or time that would completely avoid that -- I once had a 5th grader who had ice hockey practice at **11 pm** on a weeknight!!! We sometimes have a few kids who start choir after soccer season ends in late October ... we just stay open to having them join us whenever they can!

Mostly, though, we recognize that everyone has a lot to choose from these days of where to be and what to do - and if we want to compete at all, I think it's really less about WHEN we meet and more about HOW we meet. We do our best to make choir one of their favorite places to be! They need to feel compelled to be there, and feel that if they miss a rehearsal, they're going to miss out on something fun or big or meaningful!

My biggest compliment each year (and what I call my "real paycheck") comes when I hear from a shocked parent telling me that their child (OK, especially a boy) begged them to let them go to choir instead of (basketball / football / soccer, etc.) - or laughing at how they (the parent!) are being hurried out the door so they won't be late to choir ... how can you not love that? (And just to be clear, I

have nothing at all against sports or other activities; I actually support their involvement in both, think they are both valuable to their lives, and try my best to honor & work around their other commitments when scheduling extra rehearsals - but I just love the confirmation that we're doing something right when they don't want to miss choir!)

Lori B.

71

We have had to schedule our children and cherub choir rehearsals during our worship service. The children are in the worship service for the opening hymn, call to worship, anthem and then come forward for the children's sermon. After that, they leave for one of the two choirs or children's church.

We can't seem to get children or adults to church other than on Sunday morning . . .

Karen M.

72

Currently I have a children's choir of 35 voices. I meet them on Wednesday afternoons from 3:30-5:30pm. I place them in a 3-tiered rotation that is divided along age/grade, i.e., K-1, 2nd-3rd grade, 4th-6th grade.

The rotations begin at 4:00 and are scheduled every 30 minutes. The children are divided each year based on numbers within each group. I have volunteers help with the various rotations.

Within each rotation we cover different techniques and skills including, vocal/choral singing, instruments such as recorder, Orff, chimes, and percussion as well as a rotation devoted to rhythmic games and using sign language on the texts that we sing and texts from hymns. I also spend time learning Solfege and other sight-singing techniques.

I base the activities for the rotations on the skill sets of my volunteers which have been consistent over the past couple of years but can change at any time.

I meet the children at 3:30 each Wed. for snacks and allow them time to get energy out and get comfortable with the other children around them. I find that this helps any new children who join to get involved quickly and have something to do.

The Children's choirs sing once every six weeks in worship as well as performing some kind of special presentation at Christmas and at the end of the school year, i.e., a musical or special worship service led solely by children.

Quint H.

73

We hold our children's choir rehearsals on Wednesday evenings 6:00 - 6:45 pm, three choirs meeting simultaneously for age 3 - grade 7. We've found this time allows kids to attend activities after school and is not too late on a school night. Kids who are in dance seem to have practice every night, so it wouldn't matter which night we had choir for them.

Dr. Marcia Van O.

74

I only have one choir and my children come from around the area of our church and I inherited a Sunday rehearsal right after the worship service. This isn't the best idea and I am going to try and change it to an afternoon after school. I have K-5 graders and so far haven't had too many problems with sports. On the other hand, I have 5 children who come from divorced families and so they are only able to come every other Sunday. I don't know how to work around this problem.

Kathy G.

75

Currently between church family dinner and adult choir, along with other youth and adult studies. BUT only 30 min. for pre-school (2 groups) and only 40 min. for a 1st -4th group. About 60 altogether, and about 10 adults involved.

Choirs are integrated in program of missions & Bible study, which GREATLY enhances attendance / consistency. Use musicals (which kids and parents are crazy about)... start advertising the musical just before the "semester," and we're overrun.

Glenn H.

76

In our small rural neighborhood I have found the best time for most families is on Sunday either prior to or after worship. The parents do not have to make a special trip into town or make sitter arrangements. Our Sunday school even allows us to use their time when needed.

Sandy M.

77

We have three children's choirs: The Church Mice, for ages 3 through grade 1; The Joyful Noise, for grades 2 through 6; and The Be Attitudes, for grade 7 through 12. The rehearsal times are: Mice-9:45 am Sunday mornings (before the 10:30 service starts), Noise - 9:30 am Sunday mornings, Be Ats - 6:30-8 pm Thursdays. The Sunday morning rehearsals work well because the parents don't have to make extra time to come to the church; they just start out a bit earlier and have a coffee while their kids are rehearsing before the service starts. The Be Attitudes have had this established rehearsal time for many years, so people adjust their schedules to participate. Of course, we run into school events on Thursday evenings. Some kids have chosen to drop out for the length of basketball season and then return; some go with parents on trips on school breaks, etc. We just adapt the singing schedule and all music is rehearsed well ahead of time so that if there are misses, we can still have confident and capable singers ready to present at a service.

The singing schedule is also planned in Sept., as much as we can, so that parents know when their kids will be needed to sing in church. I also get a copy of the schedules for the two local school divisions in late August, so I know when spring break is and when professional days occur. What I don't get to know are the band concert dates and the sports event dates. I try to be as anticipatory as possible, but nothing ever works that well! (We also have an adult choir and an adult choral ensemble as well as two instrumental groups, so if I can't get the children's choirs for a particular Sunday or special occasion, I schedule one or more of the other groups.) Depending upon the outside interests of the singers, I sometimes ask the singers to use their outside talents at the church. Dance, music lessons are easy to incorporate into our programs and the kids are usually very willing. As for the sports, not so much.

Sometimes when we are doing a musical, I'll hold a Saturday morning rehearsal, which gets around some of the sporting events, but not all. Sometimes a Friday evening works for us for an extra rehearsal for a special event.

Where our singers and instrumentalists have competing activities, we need to celebrate those activities. These are healthy signs, and kids need to experiment and become proficient with other interests. I ask them to call or email me when they are sick or can't attend. They do, which is really helpful to me, and then I tell them to enjoy whatever they are doing, or get better and we'll miss them. When they return for the next rehearsal, we welcome them back and ask how they are, so there is personal and corporate attention given to them. I've learned that it's not all about holding steadfast to the rehearsal plan or reaching the goal. It's about the individuals participating and the development of community. I bring choirs back to rehearsal at the third week in August, even if some singers are still away, so we can talk about what exciting things happened over the summer and get started on music for fall, Christmas and beyond.

Judy G.

78

Our children's choirs are all scheduled on Wednesday afternoon to early evening. Two years ago we built a series of activities for children who don't sing around that schedule. So, while children are in vocal choirs, bell choirs, chimes or boomwhackers, other children can be in groups like puppets, media training, etc. Then there is a meal available for those who want to stay for the evening program, which includes classes for adults, Missions Club and chess club for the older elementary children, and childcare and activities for the younger children. Rehearsals begin at 4:15, the meal is 5:30-6 and evening classes run 6-7:30, except for Disciple Bible study, which runs till 8:00.

Youth vocal and bell choirs rehearse on Sunday afternoon, followed by a meal and the youth program.

Susan L.

79

Children's Choirs are part of our "Wednesday Night Live" program, with dinner, children's choir for 30 minutes, and children's program for 30 minutes (programs during the year include Bible Zone, chimes, children's Christmas musical rehearsal, Scouting programs - God and Family, God and Me, puppets, recreation time).

Work around the other competing activities: we get lots of children for the month and a half prior to our Christmas musical - they all want to be part of the musical! But the rest of the year, our numbers are very low, due to all the other conflicts.

Patty H.

80

We have gone to a term system this year. We have 4 terms of our midweek children's program, which includes choir. The Fall term was 5 weeks, the December term was 3 weeks, the Winter & Spring terms will be 4 weeks. We won't always have the same children due to all of their other activities, but we are able to reach more of them for at least a little bit. They are more willing to sign up for a term than they were for a whole or even half year. This system was proposed by the parents and we got a much higher registration for our first 2 terms than we would have otherwise. The children lead in worship the Sunday after the completion of each term. It creates programming challenges, but so far we have met them and we are getting more participation.

Robert F.

81

We start our children's choir in the fall - close to around when school starts. From Aug - Dec we work on Christmas music and songs/lines for our Christmas Musical. We sing once a month in our worship services (not always Christmas music - but that is our main focus) ... then after our play we go Christmas caroling to our church "shut-ins" and nursing home patients. We will take the month of January off and begin again in February. We try to sing once a month in worship services until the end of the school year. We usually make a big day out of Palm Sunday including a breakfast ... once summer hits we take off again because of too many schedule conflicts with vacations and activities, but once again we encourage Vacation Bible School and other "kid friendly" events as they arise - game night, barbeques, ice cream socials, etc.

We usually practice on Sunday afternoons. That schedule has worked out best for the majority of the children's schedules, including all of their sports, dancing, Girl/Boy Scouts, etc. We sing a variety of music: we have sung with the adult choir, with a piano accompaniment, with guitar accompaniment, but mostly with CD's. I would like to incorporate sign language soon, too. I think it would be fun to make a music video, too - we'll see.

Kimi W.

82

The sheer number of activities available to kids today makes recruiting and maintaining a children's choir a real challenge. I have two boys of my own, ages 6 and 10, so I am right there with the other parents in trying to make this work with all the other activities they want to do.

Here are the best answers I can give:

We schedule our rehearsals on Sunday evenings. The weeknights and afternoons are just so busy for kids. I think it is very hard to make rehearsals work during those times. On Sunday evenings, we do have conflicts with basketball/soccer games, but since those are usually at different times each week, even if they have some conflicts they can still participate.

I think as a director, you also have to be realistic about what you can expect time-wise from your kids and parents. The amount of time we spend rehearsing and much of the music we perform are nowhere near my personal "music utopia." I have chosen to accept that and I am willing to alter the program from my ideal to a program that can fit into kid's lives and therefore impact more children with the music of the church.

I also am very accepting of the idea that kids are going to miss some rehearsals. I ask each family to donate \$14 at the beginning of my choir year. They then get a CD of the musical we are performing and I make a CD of me singing all the other songs for worship etc., that they need to know during the year. Then, even when they have to miss, they have something at home to reinforce the music we are learning.

My key piece of advice in all of these is to remember that with children's choir, you are selling your program mainly to the parents, not the kids. The parents are the ones who are going to have to drive them to rehearsal each week. I always emphasize the biblical lessons that we will be learning through music and drive home that kids will remember things they learned in song much longer than they recall a Sunday school lesson or memory passage.

Jenny N.

83

We have two children's choirs - Cherub and Carol plus the Chime Choir. We attempt to schedule these at least once a month in addition to special occasions such as Christmas, Easter, etc. We work with the directors of each group to keep "on-top" of the various schedule competitions that go on with our children.

Pat K.

84

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)? We rehearse on Tues. after school - when it isn't snowing!!! For special events we may add Sat. rehearsals - working on our musical, First Communion rehearsal, etc. - but I don't have all the children.

Donna K.

85

We average between 90 and 110 children, grades K-5, in our children's choir program each year. We meet on Wednesday afternoons, from 3:00 - 5:00 pm. Everyone has snacks and social time from 3:00 - 3:20. There is a 5-10 minute traveling period" which involves trips to the restroom. Grades 1, 4, and 5 then go to choir practice, while grades K, 2 and 3 have "Discovery Time" -- a period of Christian education led by our children's directors. At 4:10, K and 1 switch places and 2 and 3 switch places with 4 and 5.

We have children come in and out, due to sports, dance, etc. I have found three things to be essential in dealing with this:

1. Communicate with the families as much as possible and in as many ways as possible. I give them our schedule at the beginning of each semester and ask that they give me their child's schedule. They are often willing to negotiate with coaches and dance instructors.
2. Support the other activities that the children take part in, as much as you are able. I encourage them to come to church in their soccer uniform if they have a game after church. They are more likely to sing on game days -- then leave and go quickly to the game - if they feel that I am supportive of them.
3. If (when) someone drops out for a semester or a six-week period, be sure that he/she knows that the door is always open and is always welcome back. Keep sending your newsletters to the parents. Don't let them forget you!!!

Venita M.

86

Our children's choirs are held on Wednesday evenings along with four other rehearsals and our mid-week dinner. Both groups, Cherubs (age 4 by Oct. 1 through first grade) and Carol Choir (Grades 2-5) meet from 6:30 to 7:15. This is also the time period when we offer Bible studies and other short or long-term programming.

The Wednesday evening schedule is

5:30 - 6 Carol Bells (grades 2-5)

5:45 - 7 Midweek Dinner

6:15 - 7 Carillon Ringers (grades 6-12)

6:30 - 7:15 Carol Choir (grades 2-5)

6:30 - 7:15 Cherub Choir (Age 6 by Oct. 1 - First Grade) 7:30 - 9 Chancel Choir (adults) 6:30 - 7:15 Assorted Bible Studies and/or

interest groups

7 - 8 MnMs (Middle School Youth)

7 - 8 High School Youth Bible Study

7 - 9 Arise! Praise Band rehearsal

Wednesday evening youth activities are in addition to Youth Choir and regular youth activities on Sunday afternoons. Sunday afternoons are all youth - choir, fellowship, band, worship, 2 to 5:30 p.m.

The Carol Choir sings regularly in worship (3 or 4 times a semester) and performs two full-scale musicals each year - Christmas and spring. They have overnight lock-ins twice a year with trips to Laser Quest, bowling or the like and overnight sleep and movies in the Sanctuary!! They also try to perform off-campus at least once each semester. The Cherub Choir, because of age, is not involved in the outside activities but they generally sing in worship whenever the Carol Choir sings. The Carol Choir sings at both the traditional and the contemporary services. We try to make all of our ensembles attractive and desirable while keeping them spiritually enriching and useful in the overall mission of the church.

All in all, our program is successful because everything is coordinated with everything else and the Wednesday night schedule is sort of a one-stop shopping trip. The Ministry of Music and Worship Arts works closely with the other program areas (particularly Children and Youth) to keep from stepping on one another's toes.

Elvin N.

87

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)? Crosswalk Children's Choirs (Grades 1-3 at 4:15-5:00; Grades 4-6 at 5:00 - 5:45) meet during an after-school program called Crosswalk.

Children walk across the street (with children's ministry director) from the elementary school to our church on Wednesday afternoons. They attend 3 sessions that include an Academy session (choosing to just do homework, learn a new skill or be in an interest group), to Bible study and then to choir. Some children come only to choir -- a few even come from other churches that do not have children's choirs.

Dr. Susie D.

88

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)? Because of the many "other" activities that children are involved in, our Sunday school program meets on Sunday evening at 6:15 p.m. On the 2nd and 4th Sundays our children's choir (Voices From Heaven) rehearses and part of the SS lesson is done following that time. We have been doing this since late October and so far it is working.

The children usually sing on the 2nd Sunday; however, that is worked out between myself and their director. They also sing at other special services such as our annual lessons and carols service and they will sing on Palm Sunday.

We have at least 20 more adults attending worship on the Sundays the children participate in our worship celebration.

Barry C.

89

I have a choir for elementary age (grades 1 - 6) children (the SonShiners) and a choir for teenagers (T AFC-Teens All For Christ). I also have a handchime choir for beginners (usually elementary age) and a handbell choir for more experienced ringers (usually teens). All of the groups rehearse on Sunday afternoons. The rehearsal times are placed in coordination with the times for our two youth groups (FISH - Faithful In Serving Him - for the teens and CHIPS - Christ's Helpers In Prayerful Service - for grades 4 - 6).

The schedule looks like this:

2:15-3 Bells

3-3:45 Chimes 3-4:30 FISH

3:45-4:30 SonShiners

4:30-5:45 T AFC 4:30-5:30 CHIPS

This schedule allows the parents to make fewer trips back and forth, except for the families who have children in both age groups.

All of the groups lead worship twice monthly, doing the same anthem at the 8:15 AM service one week and the 10:45 AM service the next. I encourage the groups to perform for community events, so that others from outside the church can appreciate their talents.

I subscribe to a music service that allows me to make rehearsal CDs for my singers, which I do periodically throughout the singing year (September to May). The children can take their music home and listen to the CDs to rehearse throughout the week. This is especially helpful for the parents of the younger children who frequently end up knowing the songs as well as the children!

My rehearsals are on Sundays because that is the day with the fewest other demands on the time and energy of the children and their parents. I am fortunate that the parents and children see that their participation in the music groups of the church is a priority and they try to adjust their school, sports and dance activities accordingly, if at all possible. Conflicts DO occur, but I try to remain as flexible as I ask the families to be. (It can sometimes be very frustrating!)

Finally, we make time for fun. We have an end of the year party or outing (teens and children separately) once school is out for summer. Over the years, we have had swim parties at homes or at public parks, miniature golf parties, trips to the zoo, the Science Center and Children's Museum, and have spent time at an amusement park and at a water park. The hardest thing is deciding where each group wants to go.

At Christmastime, the entire fine arts department (I also direct the adult Chancel Choir, an adult handbell choir, a drama team, a dance team and a band) gathers for a combined Christmas party, complete with food, games and (of course) presents!

These choirs have taken many years to build. I first started the elementary choir, building from music experiences I had with the children in Sunday School and Vacation Bible School. Once these children got older, they wanted to keep singing, so the teen group was started. I was able to target some of the more out-going, musically gifted children; these children and youth were able to draw others to the choir. That, I think, is the key. You have to make the youth of all ages feel that they are LUCKY to be able to be in the choir - that is where the leaders are.

Dianne R.

90

Currently we have a volunteer director instead of me (the adult choir director) and they meet twice a month for about half an hour during the 8:45 am Sunday worship service. These are children younger than 4th grade.

We currently do not have a choir for 4th thru 8th graders. For special services like the Christmas program, we use Sunday school time for rehearsal for everyone through 6th grade. By doing this we do not have truly adequate rehearsal time, but we also do not run into too many conflicts with outside activities as you indicated.

We used to rehearse during the first 10-15 minutes of Sunday school but that was not good because of numerous conflicts that wound up cancelling the rehearsal.

I would love to have a fully functioning children's choir, esp. for the 4-6th graders and another for 7-8th graders, but lack of numbers and conflicts outside of Sunday morning service or Sunday school time prohibits a successful endeavor at this time.

Dennis D.

91

I have been working with the children's choir at our church for a number of years. We have tried a variety of groupings (age) and formats over the year to try to suit the needs of the church and the families. We have actually made changes since the year began to try to accommodate our families.

#1. The choir or choirs are most successful in our community if the ages match the ages of the schools. For example, as we moved from junior highs to middle schools and when the 5th grade was housed for a period of time at the middle school, it always works best if the choir is the same grouping as our school. (We find that even if we do not put a "cap" on the upper level, we attract few to none who have moved up to the next level in school.)

#2. We try to start our choir program on the second week of school. This allows parents to figure out the bus arrangements, as most of our population rides buses to school, and yet they have not gotten involved in another group at school.

#3. You have to be flexible ... if there is soccer for six weeks in the fall, welcome them back eagerly when they return. We also have children leaving early or arriving in dance leotards!

#4. We use a variety of materials, including chimes, handbells and Boomwackers to provide an opportunity to make music and introduce musical skills in other formats.

#6. Our schedule has traditionally been right after school on Wednesday and our church has a dinner that evening at present. This year we have moved to 6:30 PM, immediately following the meal and for all but one family this seems to work better. We lost only one child and we do not have as many transportation issues. Sunday morning is not a good option as we have kids in two different services with church school between and our children's choir leaders are involved in the adult choir.

#5. In order to compete, I feel there has to be some element of "fun" in the children's choir program. The past several years we have had an extended time with snacks, games, instruments and singing and this worked well and I think it was appealing to some boys who aren't interested in just singing. However, we have shortened it to focus on singing with our change of time and I miss the longer sessions and so do the kids! On a personal note, we spend time in a circle each week just sharing for a few minutes and I feel this bond is important in a church setting.

Ellen P.

92

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)? The elementary choir is scheduled Sunday morning, between Sunday school and church -- however this only leaves 20 to 25 minutes for rehearsal, which is tight. The middle school choir is scheduled from 4:30 to 5:30 on Sunday afternoon, before youth group. I don't think we could get any children to attend if we tried a different day of the week.

I'm new to directing these choirs, and have a strong core of children although each choir is fairly small. Without going outside the church, I'm not sure how to get many more children -- every child who wants to sing is part of the choir already.

Sara C.

93

My kids' bells only meet for about 30 minutes weekly with no time for anything extra. They are scheduled right after the adult bells and just before the adult singing choir on Wednesday and during the dinner "hour" (which is from 5:15 to 6:30 at church) they play and then eat.

Shirley R.

94

Here's what works for our children's choir ministry:

1. Our Children's Program Director and I work together to organize a "Wednesday After School Program." The children come immediately after school. We ask the parents to provide a snack for them before they arrive. The children attend programming for an hour and a half, and divided into 3 groups, ages 4 years through 5th grade, participate in three 30-minute rotations, or centers. The rotations always include 30-minute choir rehearsals and 30 minutes of Bible-related studies and activities for each age group (4-5 year olds, K-2nd grade, and 3rd-5th grade). Depending upon our semester curriculum and goals, the third rotation is either choir chimes, theme-related games, or arts and crafts. If we are working on a musical production, we have used this time to work on learning lines or choreography. One teacher remains in a stationary location to teach; additional volunteers are assigned to remain with each group throughout the 3 centers. Combining our children's music ministry and children's programming activities strengthens both our ministry for children and our music ministry for children.

For example:

3:45-4:15 Covenant, Choir
Cherub, Activity
Celebration, Bible Study

4:15-4:45 Covenant, Activity
Cherub, Bible Study
Celebration, Choir

4:45-5:15 Covenant, Bible Study

2. We are fortunate that our school systems attempt to avoid scheduling sports and school-related activities on Wednesdays.

Jane K.

95

We schedule choir immediately following school on Wednesday afternoon for grades K-6. Carpools are coordinated from the 10 schools. Choir for 4 year olds is scheduled during the day immediately after our church pre-school.

Beverly C.

96

CHILDREN CHOIR DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT

First of all, it is important to realize that **there are NO SHORT CUTS nor EASY FORMULI** for developing and maintaining children's choirs. It is a grand mix of many elements that makes for a successful choir. It goes back to having a carefully designed plan of where you are planning to take each choir, a lot of hard work and as much creativity as you can give. In this article, I will mostly deal with choirs that include children from 3rd Grade to 6th Grade. I do not worry about size, if you are organized, have a couple of good choir mothers, you can easily manage up to 60 to 70 children. You will need to make some adjustments, according to your local situation but basically I have found that certain rules apply to most situations. Let me point out in the beginning that if the church has a full time director of music, this person should direct all performing choirs from 3rd grade through Adults. If directors carefully design their total programs, it will pay big dividends in the end. It is important to design a program that prepares each choir member to advance to the next level choir. I feel from 3rd grade up, that you must establish a regular and consistent singing schedule. This is an absolute must, if you are going to keep the interest of the children. If you do not have a place, a purpose nor a need, you must create a need and purpose or forget having this choir! As much as possible, have the children to sit in the choir loft, teach them about leading worship and for heaven sake, let them sing with the organ. While serving in a recent interim position, the choir loft was very restricted and they did not have room for two choirs, so the minister and I created a monthly evensong for the children to sing, on the first Wednesday of each month. The children took that responsibility very seriously and loved singing this service. Below are some of my rules for a successful children's choir in a multiple choir program:

1. **TRAINING CHOIR:** There needs to be a Training Choir for Pre School through 2nd Grade that is basically a music experience group to prepare the children for the upper Elementary Choir that begins at 3rd grade. The younger choir will sing occasionally, as they have a piece prepared. I will discuss this further down in this article.
2. **SUMMER PLANNING:** For the 3rd through 6th grade choir, spend time the first part of the summer planning the next season's work. Here are important items to include in your plans:
 - A. **Establish the choir calendar** with all singing times (including special musical events), all rehearsals, parties and/or outings.
 - B. **Select all of the Repertoire for the year.** Offer to work with your minister to acquire his sermon themes and Scriptures for the next year. If he is not that organized, use the Liturgical Calendar and Lectionary as next most reliable guides. Order any new music far enough in advance that you have it in by the time you go to choir camp.
 - C. **Carefully organize a Choir Camp** with a workable schedule of rehearsals, classes and plenty of time for recreation, recruit staff and train your leadership to make your Choir Camp a big success. This is a crucial time for beginning a successful choir year.
3. **CHOIR CAMP:** Plan a four-day camp, away from the church where the children live and work together before starting the new choir year. You can look for church camps available or small college campuses that are not terribly expensive. If possible, charter buses to transport the children so the parents are never there. Do extensive planning to achieve the biggest bang for the week. You should schedule three one-hour rehearsals each day. In addition, have section rehearsals for new music in more than one part, conduct classes in music theory (ear training and sight singing), schedule ample play time with numerous planned activities and some free time, ask someone in Christian Education to conduct a related study (for instance, you could have a Study on the "Psalms", if you have anthems based on Psalm text) and possibly offer some crafts classes from time to time. Print up the schedule to give to the children before they leave for choir camp and take additional copies with you that are included in their repertoire packet.

GOALS FOR CHOIR CAMP

- A. To start new repertoire for the season
 - B. Develop solid tools for fast learning with lessons in music theory – especially in reading music, ear training and sight singing.
 - C. Always emphasize the fact that they are leaders of worship and the importance of this roll. They must always strive to be prepared to do their best.
 - D. They will make closer friends with other people in the group, learning to appreciate each other and how to live and work together. Since the children often come from several different schools, this is especially helpful to bond friendships among all of the children, across school lines.
4. **PROMOTION:** Use the 30 days prior to the Choir Camp for an **all out** promotion. Actually, start placing the dates and location of the camp in the church bulletin each week, three months ahead. Six weeks ahead, write an article for the church bulletin regarding choir camp, making each week's article different. Let them know that more information about the camp is available from the music office. Thirty days ahead, write to every child in the Sunday school from rising 3rd grade up inviting them to attend Choir Camp, making the camp and singing in the choir as attractive as possible. Ask them to respond with their camp registration to the music office in 10 days. After the 10-day deadline, follow up by calling every child who has not registered. This call should be made by THE DIRECTOR OF MUSIC. Do not leave messages but keep trying until you reach every child and have a personal conversation with him/her. Nothing takes the place of this personal contact! If you should find that finances are a problem, see if you can locate a sponsor for that child.

NOTE: If you are successful in this promotion at the beginning of the year, you should not have any further recruiting during the year. Work to maintain loyalty from those who attended choir camp. The children who might come in later will have missed a big part of the preparation experience for the year. If they come in feeling behind, they will probably get discouraged and quit and you will have lost that child for good. Suggest that prospective members should plan to attend choir camp next year. However, always audition new prospective members and it is OK to make exceptions to the rule if an outstanding talent shows up but be careful about those exceptions.

5. **REGISTERING CHILDREN FOR CHOIR:** Have a standard registration sheet that requests all important information about the child, such as: musical background, instruments played, if they have sung in choirs in other places, phone number, street address, e-mail address, and what school they attend. If you have several children coming from same school, provide parents, from that school, with a list of other members from their same school and telephone numbers, so they can discuss forming car pools.
6. **SETTING REHEARSAL DAYS AND TIME:** This is never an easy task! A lot depends on your local situation. Always be familiar with the church and school schedules, know what time the schools let out for the day and the travel time to the church for the children. Look for church-scheduled family activities that you may connect. But once you find a day and time that works, establish it and keep it from year to year. The longer you have this day and time known, the more respect you will have for reserving it for choir in future years. It is best to avoid Sunday rehearsals for elementary children. It is too far from the next Sunday. Look at Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons as possibilities.

NOTE: I was interim music director in a Presbyterian Church recently where they had a big Wednesday Family Night that was well established and had been successful for years. I was able to tie the children's rehearsal into that event, rehearsing the choir before the family night dinner. It is best to schedule the rehearsal for the Pre School through 2nd grade and the older elementary children's rehearsal at the same time. This is helpful to families with children in both age groups. The smaller children generally meet for 45 minutes and the older children for an hour.

7. **REHEARSAL CONTENT AND LESSON PLAN:**
NEVER GO TO A REHEARSAL WITHOUT A WELL THOUGHT-OUT LESSON PLAN. Always know what you have to prepare in each rehearsal and how you are going to move toward accomplishing your goals in this rehearsal.
 - A. **THE YOUNGER TRAINING CHOIR:** I do not relate to the very young children nor do I have the proper training to work with this age group. I was most fortunate during my years at Church Street United Methodist Church in Knoxville, TN, to have a fabulously talented lady in the congregation who was active in the music program, named Shirley Smith. Shirley had taught Music Education at the university level and she had also taught public school music. She agreed to teach the Preschool through 2nd grade children for me. This was truly a training choir. She did most of her teaching in the form of games with the children – they were playing and learning at the same time. Several times a year, she would have music prepared for them to sing in church. They would sing from the chancel steps and then return to the front pews, where a number of parents were sitting with them. When the children moved to the next choir, as 3rd graders, they were perfectly matching

pitches and responding to rhythm. They were also advanced enough in school to read an anthem text. In other words, they were ready to work!

B. **3rd THROUGH 6TH GRADE REHEARSAL:** Use the first 20 minutes for warm-up exercises and also include music theory. You can easily merge these two elements to accomplish both goals. You probably can find many examples of what you wish to teach in their repertoire packet for your warm-up and theory instructions.

1. During your music theory session, put a strong emphasis on ear training and sight singing. Possibly, do some clapping of rhythmic patterns.
2. Vocalize the children in mostly descending exercises to establish a good head tone. Teach them to avoid the ugly, chest tone. Work on sustained and repeated notes with related chords being played below.
3. When you move to rehearsing repertoire, give priority to the repertoire that is coming up immediately; work to polish this music. Spend time working on repertoire that will be coming up in the future, including special music programs.
4. Always keep things moving at a very fast pace, as fast as the children can keep up. If they are getting restless or feeling overwhelmed with a difficult piece, do not just keep pushing them but always have music in the folder to move to quickly that they know or can learn quickly and sound good. Sometimes a rest from something difficult and then returning will permit you to make much more progress than to just keep driving when a piece is not going well.

NOTE: TEACHING NEW NOTES: teach new notes by using nonsense syllables until they have the music firmly locked in. Then move to the text by first having them to read the text in rhythm. After this is done, you can put the music and text together.

NOTE: CHOOSING REPERTOIRE: Choosing the right repertoire is very crucial. Choose music with solid substance. Put a lot of emphasis on the text and favor text based on Scripture, great literature and/or text based on great hymns. Carefully choose text with theological teaching value. Always try to select most of the children's repertoire based on music the children can sing with the organ rather than the piano. Avoid the pop-style music; it generally has very little substance and will not be a lasting addition to your choral library. Try to build a substantial library of repertoire that will be old friends to the older choir members when it shows up in future years. A good friend of mine, who is an outstanding church musician, refers to the pop style (so called) youth music as the disposable arts. Add lasting treasures to your music library. In the end, the pop-style anthems are much more expensive and wasteful, since they do not have lasting value for your music library. Music that is based on scripture will enlarge their knowledge of beautiful verses from the Bible. Always be conscious of your role for teaching the children good and sound theology rather than spending time on shallow text and music that have little to no lasting value.

9. **SINGING FOR WORSHIP SERVICES:** This is the main purpose for the choir's existence.

- A. Always make an effort to have choirs from 3rd grade up to sit in the choir loft.
- B. The choir should be fully vested. Strive to have all of the choir vestments to be alike— they look much better when two or more choirs are singing in the same service.
- C. In Knoxville, the 3rd through 6th Grade children sang in two services a month, on the 2nd and 4th Sundays. They sang for the early service with the Youth Choir and sat in the choir loft. There were two anthems in every morning service; the children would sing one and the youth choir the other. These children are perfectly capable of preparing and singing two anthems a month, plus special services.
- D. As I mentioned earlier, in the interim position I served in a Presbyterian church, the choir loft was very small and restricted, so the minister and I developed a choral evensong, held on the first Wednesday of each month for the children. The children processed, led the evening hymns, sang the psalms, intoned some of the prayers, sang an anthem, and they recessed out. They led this service with a lot of pride and dignity. They took their responsibilities very seriously. This is a case where we created a need and purpose for these children! This service attracted a good attendance.

NOTE: TEACH THE CHOIR THE PARTS OF THE SERVICE: stress the fact that they are leading the worship. Make up a notebook for each member and place everything in order. You may want to put in some written instructions along the way such as: "Remain Standing" "Be Seated." Keep written instructions short, simple and to the point. If there are read prayers, read through them with the children. Always stress their leadership role. When they get this message, there will be very few, if any, discipline problems. They realize that all of the eyes are on them. I have learned to use my eyes to cut like a razor blade, if there is a discipline problem and it generally stops them in their tracks. The other children, especially the older choir members, are good about quietly correcting their neighbors. However, if I have done my work in preparation, discipline problems are very minimal.

IN CONCLUSION: Expect a lot from the children and they will surprise you with what they are capable of accomplishing. You can be serious and conduct a fun rehearsal at the same time. ALWAYS have the children address you with respect, never by your first name. Be quick to recognize success (for individual and/or the group). Strive for perfection (which you probably will not achieve) but do not beat up on the children when you do not get it; try to point out what went well. You have the power to convince them that they are capable of doing what ever you ask of them. Always show your interest in every child for their achievements in choir as well

as outside of choir. Treat all children the same and do not show favoritism. The last one is very hard to follow but is absolutely crucial. **GOOD LUCK!**

William G.

97

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)?

- We have 5 children's choirs: Cherub Choir (must be 4 yrs old by Sept. 1), Kindergarten Choir, 1st grade Choir, 2nd & 3rd grade choir, and 4th and 5th grade choir.
- ALL of our choirs rehearse on Wednesday evenings from 5:15-6:00 PM.
- We have about 120 children participating in our choir program.
- We follow the school calendar, starting rehearsals the first of September and going through May. The only exception is our 4-year-old choir. They meet for 6 weeks in the fall and sing at Christmas, and then do not meet again until April. They meet for another 6 weeks and sing on Mother's Day. Cherubs also only rehearse for 30 minutes, from 5:15 - 5:45.
- Each choir is staffed with a choir director, one accompanist (if possible) and 2-3 parent assistants. Two of our choir directors are paid staff and the others are all volunteers.
- Families are understandably stretched, schedule-wise. We do have children who may leave for soccer season or basketball season, but we always let them know that they are welcome back to choir at any time during the year!
- I mail out a schedule at the beginning of each semester, which has the dates each choir is scheduled to sing in worship for the entire semester, as well as dates that we will not be having choir rehearsal (Ash Wednesday, spring break, etc.) This is printed on one-half of an 8 1/2 x 11 sheet of card stock. I attach a magnet to the back so families can post it on the fridge and can refer to it as they are planning their schedules. I am often told how appreciative they are to have the choir schedule so far in advance.
- We have a MusiCamp every summer which is open to ALL children ages kindergarten - 5th grade. This gives them an opportunity to try out choir for a week and get to know the different adults who help with children's choirs. At the final concert we give out information about our choir program.
- We do not limit our choir membership to church members only. We have had several non-church families send their children to choir, especially those in the home schooling community. Many like having the opportunity for their children to participate in a traditional choir/music education program.
- We are not a performance-oriented program, but rather a process oriented program. This allows us to spend a lot of our rehearsal time playing instruments, rhythm and singing games, etc. We do so much more than just learn anthems to sing on Sunday! The kids really love to come to choir and many tell us that it is their favorite day of the week!

Teresa G.

98

To be honest, my music ministry in the States was 90% adult choir, or maybe 95%. At Oak Park UMC, we had a scant few youth, and I was able to persuade them (four on a good day) to stay for an hour after regular Sunday services, usually "bribing" them with pizza, burgers or something. We had a few youth trios and some youth-adult ensembles. I would not call it "successful," but it worked, in its' way. Then at Wesley UMC we just never had a chance in the last four months to get a youth choir off the ground, although there were far more active young people at that church. Then the first of this year, my full time employment brought me to Ireland, so I'm - regrettably, sort of - no longer involved in a music ministry; and Protestant churches with music programs in southwestern Ireland are pretty scarce.

Brad P.

99

1. How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)?

Our rehearsals are scheduled on Wednesday afternoons from 3:30-4:30. We often pick the children up at the school and walk or drive them to the church for a snack, then rehearsals. We are in tandem with our children's handbell choirs, and one rehearses chorally while the other rehearses handbells. We have more issue with Sunday morning worship than we do our rehearsals in regards to conflicts.

Mark B.

100

Over twenty years ago, rehearsals occurred after school on Thursdays. These rehearsals were run by our director of music and were

part of his full-time job as music minister. When these roles transitioned to volunteers who worked at other jobs during the day, we had to re-think Thursdays; "after school" was not after work. Another incentive for this was the fact that although we are an urban church, we have a large draw from multiple suburban schools in addition to neighborhood public and private schools. Also, children interested in church choir tend to also be in extra-curricular school activities and lessons (piano, gymnastics, karate) that occur after school during the week. We run simultaneous rehearsals of both Carolers (kindergarten-2nd grade) and Choristers (3rd-6th grade) after our second worship service ends from noon-1:00. It makes for a loooong morning, especially if they attend Sunday school beginning at 9:45 or when they occasionally sing for the 8:30 service, also. To help with those occasions, the Carolers do not rehearse on the days that they sing for worship. This schedule also requires that the rehearsal begin with a quick snack (provided by parents on a rotation sign-up). Our middle-school handbell choir rehearses during this hour, also, and many are 'graduates' of the children's choirs. Some have siblings in the younger choirs. This schedule enables parents to make fewer trips to the church and avoids *some* of the extra-curricular school activities and lessons, etc., but not those pesky traveling soccer and hockey conflicts! (However, we encourage participation as long as we see that the parents are working with us to ensure balancing missed rehearsals with missed athletic practices or games.)

Denise C. and Rosie J.

101

Yes, scheduling the rehearsal is the nightmare! Each year I poll those most interested. This year rehearsing during the week but overlapping with after school care hours at the church (4-5 pm). I have felt that a Sunday morning rehearsal during our second service (Sunday school is concurrent with the first service) might get the largest number of participants, but there is no one available to lead the group at that time - I lead music at the second service and choir members interested in leading the children are at church at that time. The "one-stop shopping" for parents providing transportation seems to be a key to good attendance at church events.

Bringing a friend from school or another church increases the size of the group most easily. However, with children from other churches, a monthly Sunday service commitment is sometimes not possible for families.

Return interest is generated for some eager to participate in the local fall AGO annual choral festival service (joint children's choir participation singing two anthems) just for the opportunity to sing at the Naval Academy chapel (very impressive venue "right in our back yard.") Again, this takes one child attending to spread enthusiasm with the others.

Very small group this year - 5. But one child has just brought 2 friends since the new semester at school.

Last year area ecumenical directors expressed concern about opportunities for children to sing in large groups and with adults, so this year's ecumenical choral fest will highlight children's anthems (4?) and children singing with adults (2 anthems?) and then a couple of anthems by joint adult choirs alone. We hope this experience will encourage children to stick with choral singing.

Sometimes I get a child attending because his/her school schedule does not permit taking chorus at school and the parent asks about our program (this holds for the teen group as well).

We do an intergenerational church-wide music drama each winter and the children's choir participates in one scene; this has sometimes brought children to the drama the next year for speaking and singing roles as well as the children's choir participation.

Recruitment then centers on "bring a friend," the opportunity to sing in a group, the opportunity to sing in special venues, an enhancement to current after-school program. Although I would love to have a dozen kids every year, the kids who start do not drop out midyear - some measure of meeting a need. To stop the program for a year, I think, would be disastrous - I doubt we would get it going again - so we started this year with 4 and are now at 7.

Other churches in this area struggle with this question as well. I look forward to reading the article for ideas and encouragement.

Susan P.

102

In regard to our children's choirs, we find it impossible to schedule around competing activities. The choir program is a modified Logos program and is scheduled on Wednesday night when there is supper and many other family activities going on. We are thankful for the families who consider "choir" a priority.

Louise A.

103

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)? We also struggle with competing activities and have experimented over the years with scheduling the children's choirs on a Sunday afternoon as opposed to a weekday. We came back to the weekday and scheduled them on Wednesday afternoons.

After several years of doing that we decided to have a supplementary program on Sundays (called Sunday Singers) in which the children at our 8:15 services and our 11:05 services would leave the worship services following the children's sermon and would have Sunday Singers rehearsals (combined all ages) working on the same songs that the children did on Wed. evenings. We currently still do that.

This past year we revamped our Wednesday program which we call "Whimsical Wednesdays". The children who ring choir chimes come from 5 to 5:30 for "Cherub Chimes." The other sessions run from 5:30 to 6:30 and consist of three 20-minute sessions including such things as singing (this happens every week), dance, theatre/drama, musical games, art, music theory and instruments such as recorders or Boomwhackers or other rhythm instruments. The children have loved the variety and we come up with a "master schedule" that's color coded for the various choirs which we post each week. So far it's been working well.

We have three age group choirs:

"Wee"Joice choir - 4 yrs - Kindergarten

Music Makers - Grades 1, 2

FINALE! Grades 3-5

Cherub Chimes (grades 3-5) 5-5:30 pm

In addition to singing periodically in our worship services, the children present two musicals a year, one at Christmas time and the other one in the Spring. The schedule may be slightly altered as we get closer to the presentation of the musical with a more extended singing time and just one other activity that week.

Lahonda S.

104

How do you schedule it (them)? How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)?

I am in a 70-in-worship, older, rural-with-subdivision-development-all-around, church. I do not have a consistent children's choir, but add children's music ministries at different times of the year.

VBS in summer and a follow up "choir" to sing in worship a succeeding Sunday later in the summer.

Children's parts/verses added to the adult choir cantata at Christmas.

Short-term children's choir for Christmas drama and hymn sing.

Winter time: An afterschool fellowship and exercise group using VBS style music and motions to provide a space for children to sing and play in the winter. This is not a choral performance aim, rather a missional one to the children in the neighborhood.

Most rehearsals for these types of events are either on Sundays after worship for a half hour or on Wednesday nights prior to the adult choir rehearsal when I am already at the church.

I took an informal survey of what nights are good for the most "loyal" families and then I considered my schedule as I am in seminary full time as well. I found, for these short-term projects, if the children wanted to be there they were able to make it work. Advanced planning and save the date announcements some times work.

Abby C.

105

We have recently had 3 formally-trained and active music teachers join our church. We took the position of music director, which was held by a person without formal training, and divided it into three components: 1. Music Director, 2. Choir (adult) Director and 3.

Organist. Since she was really neither interested in nor engaged in the Music Director component, we eliminated this aspect of the job. She now holds the other two parts of the job, and was given a modest raise. But the Staff-Parish Relations Committee now has 1/3 of

the music staff budget to work with, along with an increase approved by Church Council, to begin paying accompanists for the early “contemporary” service and to begin paying either a children’s choir director or a youth choir director, whichever emerges first. Hopefully one of these two ensembles will emerge this year or next.

Mark T.

106

We don't have a bona fide children's choir program at this time, but that may change as our young church continues to grow. I do direct a children's group that presents an annual holiday show/musical and sings occasionally in worship. This group is comprised of kids in grades 2-6. (I tried involving younger children, but for a variety of reasons, this didn't work for our situation.)

Preparation for the holiday show begins in mid-October and runs for 8 weeks, plus a dress rehearsal and the performance. Our rehearsals run concurrently with other Sunday evening activities, so this works well for parents who may already be at the church for a study. Each weekly session starts at 5:30 and ends at 7:30 p.m.; and the dress rehearsal, which runs from 9:00 a.m. to 12 noon, is held on the Saturday before the Sunday evening performance. The 5:30 p.m. performance (usually on the 3rd week of Advent) is followed by the church's largest potluck dinner of the year. It is an extremely well-attended event and is a church tradition.

I schedule the children to sing in worship when it makes sense thematically, repertoire-wise, etc. Some examples are: singing an anthem from the holiday show the week before the performance; sharing one or more of our Christmas pieces in the Christmas Eve early service; singing for the Children's Sunday, which is held in June right after Vacation Bible School; and singing on Palm Sunday (if this doesn't coincide with spring break).

1b. How do you work around the many competing activities of children (sports, dance, etc.)?

Because we focus on short-term goals, competition with other activities hasn't really been a big factor. Kids who want to participate make the singing their priority. They understand that regular attendance is absolutely necessary due to the shortness of the learning period. Parents and participants are well aware of the attendance requirements, and they only sign up if they can commit to the rehearsal and performance schedule.

Nylea B.