



# Children's Choir Seasons

By Adam Lefever Hughes

**W**e live in a time when prioritizing our activities proves to be difficult at best. With the ubiquity of smartphones and instant availability, many parents are never truly off the clock from their jobs. National testing requirements, increasing amounts of homework, and the pressures of doing well in school for future placement and success put similar demands on our children and youth. Combine these challenges with sports practices, music lessons, and other extracurricular activities and it's easy to see how church participation and worship leadership may shift to a lower place on the priority list. As a response to these challenges, I would like to

share my experience restructuring children's choir into a series of seasons that allow families to prioritize church.

## Season Setup

To set up my seasons, I split the church year into four seasons, each one about seven weeks long. In the 2019–2020 year, the seasons fell as follows:

- Season 1** (Reformation):  
September 12 to October 27
- Season 2** (Christmas):  
November 7 to December 24
- Season 3** (Hymn Festival/  
Transfiguration): January 9  
to February 22
- Season 4** (Easter): March 5 to  
April 12

This setup allowed the children's choir to participate in worship leadership at least twice each season, culminating in a festival. Setting up the seasons this way also allowed the group and the director to have at least one week without rehearsals between seasons. I found this week off to be an important time for the singers and a particularly important time for myself to gather resources, make rehearsal plans, and rejuvenate for the next season.

With the seasons being on the somewhat shorter side, this encouraged me as the director to come to each rehearsal well prepared with teaching methods, concrete goals, and questions of faith to help foster

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conversations about the music we were singing. Indeed, I found splitting the seasons to be a great way to engage with the choir about matters of faith and worship, since the seasons were so contained. We got to engage with the words we were singing and ponder how what we were singing might fit in with how we worshipped during that particular season. In the struggle to facilitate the education of life-long Christians, such conversations emerged as a clear benefit to this sort of structure. Although these discussions were always possible, the seasons helped to frame them for me and the children.

We did not start until after Labor Day due to school schedules, although it would be easy to adjust that for your

### **The Children's Choir plays Orff and other percussion instruments at worship.**

context. You may also have noticed that the final season ended on Easter Sunday. In my particular context, I have found choir attendance drops off in May due to travelling, schoolwork ramping up, and end-of-the-year activities. In the 2018–2019 year we experimented with ending children's choir after Easter. Families really seemed to appreciate it, and I was neither tearing out my hair about attendance nor having to change plans due to absences. If your context would allow for it, I might recommend a fifth season, Pentecost. With myriad beautiful songs to sing throughout the Easter season (Good Shepherd Sunday comes to mind) and some really wonderful options for the Day of Pentecost, post-Easter to Day of Pentecost would be another logical grouping to make a choir season.

## **Commitments and Communication**

Having set up my seasons, I made a few promises to myself. I viewed each season as a separate entity and promised myself that the children and I would only work on music that related to that season. I didn't want any children who had not participated in earlier seasons to feel as if they didn't belong, due to other children having a head start on music.

I also promised that I would come to each rehearsal with clear goals and rehearsal plans. As the solo, full-time director of music in charge of six choirs, it is easy for these goals and plans to fall by the wayside as I contend with some of the more immediate tasks on my to-do list. I committed to a positive, joyful spirit and remembered that these families were taking





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a presence on our website for the most accurate, up-to-date information.

the opportunity to spend extra time with their community of faith; the very least I could do was not waste their time coming up with plans on the fly.

The third promise I made was that I would incorporate music fundamentals and repetitive elements in every rehearsal for the entire year. This meant including rhythm games, solfège work, movement, and silly songs. Similarly, I instituted a flow for rehearsal that started with some fundamental work; time spent on music for worship; games, conversation and questions; and a sending song. Besides simply being good practice for keeping children's interest, these commitments helped keep some sense of structure throughout all the different seasons so that children who may come and go knew what to expect when they walked in the door.

Last, I made a strong commitment to keep the lines of communication fully open between me and families. Early in the fall, before school started, I began to communicate the change in the schedule to families and encouraged them to sign up for the seasons that would work. I was able to put a form on our website that emailed me when someone new signed up. I also included

announcements in our newsletter, the bulletin, and in emails as each season came or went. Such announcements were directed toward families who were already involved, as well as to families who had not been involved. I also worked with our director of children's ministries to make sure the information was getting in the right hands.

In return, I asked that families commit to missing no more than two rehearsals per season. Consistent attendance meant not having to review what we had already covered. I also asked that families commit to being present when the choir provided worship leadership during a given season. These expectations were communicated up front along with a request that children commit to having a positive attitude and trying their best.

When any choir member signed up, I made sure to thank them for their commitment (yes, commitment), record their responses, and add them to any communication lists so they would be included in any further communication. As the seasons came and went, I would thank the children for their service, modify email lists as necessary, recirculate articles in the newsletter, and maintain

## Benefits

The benefits of this system were manifold. As the director, I had a clearer idea of how many children I would have at choir on any given Sunday. This helped with music selection, anthem placement, and setting expectations. This seasonal approach also allowed families to come and go as their schedules allowed and gave them the opportunity to choose church as an activity. Practically speaking, I also believe the act of signing up for choir encouraged better attendance and participation during the seasons. Whereas I would normally be teaching a different choir every week due to fluctuating attendance, this year we were able to build on what we had learned from the previous weeks because there was a deeper investment in showing up for rehearsal. I encourage you to consider this seasonal approach as you plan for the upcoming year and as you seek to deepen the faith of your congregation through song.



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Photos courtesy the author.