



SAINT PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL DUBLIN

SAINT PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL CHOIR

Choristerships: *A guide for parents*

INTRODUCTION

This booklet is designed to serve as a reference for choristers and their parents. We hope you find it helpful.

THE CHOIR PAST & PRESENT

Music has played an integral part in the daily life of Saint Patrick's Cathedral since its foundation in the thirteenth century. Henri de Londres (consecrated Archbishop of Dublin in 1213) created a college of sixteen vicars choral in 1220. Archbishop Richard Talbot (Archbishop of Dublin from 1418-49) endowed a college of six minor canons and six boy choristers in 1431. His purpose was to ensure the provision of polyphonic choral music in the Cathedral. The choir was reorganized at the Guinness restoration in 1865, and it remains one of the few choirs of men and boys in Ireland.

THE RELATION OF THE CHOIR SCHOOL TO THE CATHEDRAL

We are very proud of Saint Patrick's Cathedral Choir School. Founded in 1432, it is the oldest school in Ireland and also the only choir school. It is a co-educational national school subject to the standards and curriculum as prescribed by the Department of Education and Skills. The Archbishop of Dublin is Patron while the Dean chairs the Board of Management. The Choir School caters for pupils from 3rd through to 6th class. A separate ethos statement is sent to all new parents along with the enrolment form.

THE 'CONTRACT'

Training a chorister is a long and laborious business. After anything from 6 months to a year's probation (normally in third or fourth class) there lies ahead up to four years of chorister life. Two of these, the first two, will be spent learning the trade; by the beginning of the third year the chorister will have attained sufficient experience and vocal maturity to contribute at the highest level. On acceptance for the probationary year a letter from the Cathedral states clearly the position, namely that places for boys in the school are only available for probationers and choristers, and thus that if a boy is withdrawn from the choir (without the permission of the master of choristers) or for any reason

is asked to leave the choir, then he also loses his place in the school, and all the benefits associated with being a chorister. These benefits include free instrumental and vocal tuition. Once a boy's voice breaks his life as a chorister sadly comes to an end after hopefully many enjoyable years in the stalls of Saint Patrick's, however the benefits he's enjoyed during this time (with the exception of the vocal tuition) continue for as long as he remains a student at one of the Cathedral Schools.

Perhaps the best way of looking at these benefits is to see them as compensation for the time and commitment of chorister and parents alike. Such investment signals the expectation that both will give freely of their time and effort – including their Sundays, and occasional periods of school vacation.

INSTRUMENTAL and VOCAL TUITION

Choristers are encouraged to learn an instrument during their time in the Cathedral Choir – to help with this free in-house tuition is available in voice, piano, guitar, flute & saxophone (30 half hour lessons PA). If parents would prefer for their child to remain with an existing instrumental/vocal tutor then bursaries of up to €630p/a are available from the Cathedral. This provision is subject to review - the Cathedral must be satisfied that satisfactory progress is being made i.e. sufficient effort is being made to practise at home.

In addition to this, Choir School Choristers also receive fortnightly group vocal tuition with a visiting singing tutor and theory tuition.

CONCERTS AND TOURS

The Choir receives a number of invitations a year to give concerts, both in Ireland and abroad. They provide the stimulus of performing in a different environment from the Cathedral, performing to an audience rather than to a congregation, and widening the range of repertory experienced by the Choir.

RECORDINGS

From time to time, the Choir makes commercial CD recordings. This usually involves around three sessions of three hours, spread over a number of evenings. Making a recording is a time consuming business, and requires great reserves of patience, but the end result is always worth all the hard work.

The choir also frequently makes radio broadcasts. These are often live broadcasts, but when they are recorded they may involve extra time for re-recording. The boys have also been involved in television recordings occasionally – once again, considerable reserves of patience for this time-consuming work are needed. For projects such as these and other similar events and outings, it is always a good idea for boys to bring something with which to occupy themselves during the inevitable periods of waiting.

FEES

The boys are paid modest pocket money whilst they are in the choir. This is on a scale which begins at just a few Euro a month and can rise to up to €25 a month for those boys who continue into the Grammar School. This payment is not intended as 'pay' in the strict sense of the word; rather, it reflects the boys' commitment to and hard work for the Cathedral. It also presents an opportunity for monies to be withheld if a boy fails to uphold a satisfactory standard of behaviour. There are also on occasions other performances for which the boys receive payment including weddings and recitals to visiting groups.

CHORISTER RANKING

When a boy first arrives at the school, he is a probationer (see below for an outline of the routine). He only attends practices and does not sing at any of the Cathedral services. His entry into the choir is carefully graduated:

- The first 'level' is that of Junior Cassock Boy (JCB). These are probationers who have been promoted (the first level of promotion) stay on a Tuesday evening to sing evensong – plus very occasional Sunday duties. *Please see overleaf for full timetable.*
- After a period at this level, and when the Organist assesses that a boy is ready, the next promotion is to Senior Cassock Boy (SCB). This means that in addition to Matins, the boy now sings at Evensong once or twice a week – all Tuesdays and alternate Thursdays again plus occasional Sunday duties. *Please see overleaf for full timetable.*
- The last and most significant stage of promotion is when a probationer is ready to become a Chorister (C). He will now take on the full chorister timetable (see below), which includes staying till 6.10pm each Friday for service and practice, and two services on Sunday. There is a special ceremony for the admission of choristers to which parents and families/friends are warmly encouraged to attend, and indeed, to support all choir events. They wear full chorister robes, including white surplices. *Please see overleaf for full timetable.*

WEEKLY TIMETABLE

MONDAY		
8.30-9.00	Chorister Rehearsal <i>Hewson Room</i> The Choir School opens at 8.25am for the Choir School Choristers to drop off their belongings/homework before heading into the rehearsal at 8.30am.	All
9.00-9.20	Matins <i>Cathedral</i> Following the short rehearsal the choristers walk over to the Cathedral to sing the morning office <i>Matins</i> – the service lasts approximately 15/20 minutes after-which the boys return to begin the school day proper.	C
9.30-2.30	School	All
TUESDAY		
8.30-9.00	Chorister Rehearsal <i>Hewson Room</i>	All
9.00-9.20	Matins <i>Cathedral</i>	JCB, SCB & C
9.30-12.30	School	All
12.30-1.00	Hot Lunch <i>Hewson Room</i> Boys singing for evensong on Tuesdays and Fridays are provided with a hot lunch. NB those that aren't singing will need packed lunch.	JCB, SCB & C
1.00-2.30	School	
2.30-3.30	Rehearsal <i>Hewson Room (seniors) Practice Room 1 (juniors)</i> From the close of School and until the boys are picked up by their parents they are looked after by the Master of Choristers who is in turn assisted by Cathedral appointed supervisors in line with Diocesan Child Protection Guidelines. Those boys not singing for evensong are picked up (promptly) outside the School's main entrance at 3.30pm.	All
3.30-4.10	Homework <i>Hewson Room</i> On Tuesdays and alternate Thursdays the boys have a period of supervised prep.	
4.10-4.20	Tea <i>Hewson Room</i> The boys are provided with a snack and a drink.	
4.20-5.00	Rehearsal & Robing <i>Hewson Room</i>	JCB, SCB & C
5.00-6.10	Full Rehearsal & Evensong <i>Cathedral</i> Boys finish their day at the end of evensong at which point they need to be collected from outside the Cathedral promptly.	
WEDNESDAY		
8.30-9.00	Chorister Rehearsal <i>Hewson Room</i>	All
9.00-9.20	Matins <i>Cathedral</i>	JCB, SCB & C
9.20-1.00	School	All

WEEKLY TIMETABLE

THURSDAY		
8.30-9.00	Chorister Rehearsal <i>Hewson Room</i>	All
9.00-9.20	Matins <i>Cathedral</i>	
9.30-12.30	School	
12.30-1.00	Packed Lunch	
1.00-2.30	School	
2.30-3.30	Rehearsal <i>Hewson Room (seniors) Practice Room 1 (juniors)</i>	
3.30-4.10	Prep <i>Hewson Room</i>	SCB & C
4.10-4.20	Tea <i>Hewson Room</i>	
4.20-5.00	Rehearsal & Robing <i>Hewson Room</i>	
5.00-6.10	Full Rehearsal & Evensong <i>Cathedral</i>	
FRIDAY		
8.30-9.00	Chorister Rehearsal <i>Hewson Room</i>	All
9.00-9.20	Matins <i>Cathedral</i>	C
9.30-12.30	School	All
12.30-1.00	Hot Lunch	C
1.00-2.30	School	All
2.30-3.00	Rehearsal	C
3.00-4.00	Theory/Activities	
4.10-4.20	Tea	
4.20-5.00	Rehearsal & Robing	
5.00-6.10	Full Rehearsal & Evensong	
SUNDAY		
Boys must be dropped off at the Cathedral with enough time for them to robe and be in the choir stalls to start singing at the time advertised. As normal the boys are looked after by the Master of Choristers and staff supervisors.		
10.15-12.15	Rehearsal & Eucharist/Matins	C/All
2.30-4.15	Rehearsal & Evensong	

HOLIDAYS

Details of the date of the beginning and end of term, of mid-term breaks and any occasional days when the school is closed (for example for teacher in service training) are normally issued by the school at the appropriate times.

For guidance, the terms usually run from the start of September through to very close to Christmas, from early January to just before Easter, and from the week after Easter to the end of June. There is a mid-term break of a week in the Christmas term, and a short break of a few days during the Lent (spring) term.

The choristers are required for the Christmas and Easter services. At Christmas, this means the annual Carol Service on Christmas Eve and the morning service on Christmas Day. The choristers also sing on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday during Holy Week and on Easter Sunday. The boys are then off the week following Christmas & Easter, plus the bank holiday weekends in May & June in addition to this the whole of July and August are holidays from both school and choir, with the exception of occasional short choir tours.

DISCIPLINE

In practice, we are very fortunate at Saint Patrick's in that the vast majority of children have a full appreciation of the necessity to abide by School and Choir rules and regulations. Individual lapses in good behaviour during Choir and Cathedral time are dealt with by the Master of Choristers, Chorister Supervisors or Dean's Vicar. In cases of continuous breaches of discipline a girl would be asked to leave the Choir, and would thus immediately lose all benefits of membership.

PARENTS' CIRCULARS AND LINES OF COMMUNICATION

Chorister Diaries are normally sent to all parents in good time. Whilst attempting to give as much information as possible, there are occasional additions and changes, and the Master of Choristers will always try to give as much notice of these as possible. The vast majority of the Cathedral's communication is done via email so please make sure we have a contact email address that is checked regularly.

CHORISTER ABSENCES

Choristers are absent for only one of two reasons: because they are unwell, or because *with prior consultation* they have been given permission to be absent. For sick Choristers the routine is as follows: parents should notify the Master of Choristers and the School early on the morning when their child is unwell. Leave with the agreement of the Master of the Choristers occurs under the following limited circumstances: important family events such as weddings and funerals and visits to the dentist or doctor that cannot be fitted in at more convenient times. Please note that informing the Master of Choristers of absences is not just a courtesy, but is vital in making sure that all children are accounted for.

PRIZES

Each year prizes are awarded to deserving choristers who have made particular progress in the choir over the year or who have made a notable contribution to the choir during the year. Normally, boys would have been choristers for over a year before they would be eligible for a prize.

- The Miller Prize (a cup, with no financial prize attached) is awarded to a boy who has made a good contribution to the choir.
- The Scott Medal (and cash prize) is given to the boy who has made the most progress since entering the choir.
- The Saint Peter's Medal is presented for all-round musicianship, combining good singing and instrumental playing. (This prize, and all subsequent prizes listed here have cash prizes attached).
- The Roger Medal is presented for punctuality, good attendance and reliability, along with the Dean's Prize.
- The Marchant Medal is presented for good enunciation, along with the Verso Prize.
- The senior prize is the Winstanley Medal. This is awarded to the Senior Solo Chorister, both for outstanding leadership and musicianship and for solo singing, and is combined with the Lyster Prize, the Murphy Prize and the Dr George Hewson Memorial Prize.

DRESS

On weekdays the boys are in school uniform. On those days when the school normally has sport as part of the day, boys need to remember to bring black shoes & socks to wear at the Cathedral services. On Sundays, and for any occasional weekend commitments (concerts, services) boys should be in school uniform, complete with black shoes.

THE CATHEDRAL STAFF and CLERGY

The Organist and Master of the Choristers, Stuart Nicholson, is responsible for the training of the Cathedral Choir, its musical repertoire and all its associated activities. He is the person with whom the Choristers most frequently interact.

The Precentor is the dignitary appointed by the Cathedral to oversee all aspects of the Cathedral's music and all Choir related matters. As such, he chairs meetings of the Music Committee, which is a subcommittee of the Cathedral Board.

The Dean's Vicar, Canon Charles Mullen, has considerable responsibility for the smooth running of daily liturgical matters in the Cathedral. He also serves as Chaplain to the Choir School.

Each of these personnel is available for pastoral care and is contactable through the Cathedral Office.

The Cathedral Administrator, Gavan Woods, supervises the financial and administrative operation of the Cathedral, and is based in the Cathedral Office.

CONTACTS FOR PARENTS

Stuart Nicholson <i>Organist & Master of Choristers</i>	Tel. 01 453 9472 Mob. 087 414 3811
	Email: organist@stpatrickscathedral.ie
Canon Peter Campion <i>Precentor</i>	Tel. 01 453 9472
	Email: campionpr@yahoo.co.uk
Canon Charles Mullen <i>Dean's Vicar</i>	Tel. 01 453 9472
	Email: deans.vicar@stpatrickscathedral.ie
Gavan Woods <i>Administrator</i>	Tel. 01 453 9472
	Email: administrator@stpatrickscathedral.ie
The Choir School <i>Saint Patrick's Close</i>	Tel. 01 454 0588
	Email: choirsch.ias@eircom.net
The Cathedral Office <i>The Deanery Basement</i>	Tel. 01 453 9472
	Email: info@stpatrickscathedral.ie

THE PARENTS' ASSOCIATION

This voluntary group of parents is playing a substantial role in the success of the Choir. It is a great support to the Choir, School, staff and clergy. Keen to participate, they organise fun events and as well as fund raise on behalf of the Choir School. Parents are encouraged to contribute to its membership. It also allows for fellowship amongst the parents.