

Choir Customary – Church of St. John the Evangelist September 2008

Nothing is too good for God!

Our Liturgy is not a casual activity, but our public service to God, and our personal and collective order help us to achieve beauty in holiness and holiness in beauty. Sloppiness of any kind has no place in church, whether in singing, appearance, or attitude. Leaders of worship must not draw attention to themselves, but to God who is the focus of the liturgy.

Attire

Choral attire exists in order to maintain a degree of anonymity in order to focus the attention of all worshippers to God and the liturgical action. When donning choral vestments, we symbolically die to our selves and outwardly show our unity as servants of the Great King.

The cassock should be long enough to touch your ankle or should be adjusted to make this happen. Surplices should reach to the hip area. Each choir member is responsible for keeping their vestments clean and tidy.

All choristers must wear real shoes (preferably black) (no tennis shoes, trainers, or the like).

Dangling earrings or excessive jewelry should be removed as well as any other attention-drawing personal effects, such as corsages.

Decorum and Posture

Since the choir is a unified organization, it is important that all act appropriately and do the same things at the same time and look uniform in their vestments. Choral instructions are not meant to be a burden, but to strengthen the idea of “beauty in holiness” and the fact that outward order reflects interior order and perfection for the sake of Christ.

Silence should be maintained in the hallways before the service begins, unless conversation directly pertains to the liturgy at hand. Other conversation can be reserved for the choir room, the Thayer Common Room, or coffee hour.

The choral procession should not rush, and singers should move two-by-two in exact precision, leaving the space of two pews between each pair. Hymnals or folders need to be held in front of the chorister with both hands, unless choristers are carrying candles, palms, etc., in which case music will be carried in the left hand. Nothing is to be tucked under the arms.

When walking, hold yourself straight with your shoulders back and your head erect. Face directly to the point which you are headed. It is extremely important that at all times, all – singly or in pairs, maintains a consistent rhythm, even when ascending or descending steps. (Note: When entering from the side door, the inner partner takes no steps, but stops and pivots, allowing the outer partner to maintain his or her rhythm - without rushing or taking giant steps - to execute the turn. Picture an opening door: the inner partner acts as the stationary but pivoting pin in the hinge, while the outer partner functions as the moving door.)

When entering or leaving the chancel, choir members must bow to the cross or altar (a symbol of Christ) from the shoulders, not merely a nod of the head. When processing into the service, we bow from the top step before moving into the pew. When we are censed, we bow just after the thurifer bows to us and while we are being censed, unless this would be a detriment to the choral sound. At the recessional, exit the pews by the altar, bow and turn to the organ to recess out of church.

The choir, as one, follows the Gospel procession by turning as it leaves the chancel and turns back as it returns to the chancel, faces the altar during the Creed (facing East toward Jerusalem), and kneels following the Sanctus for the Eucharist Prayer.

While singing, unless from a book, all music must be held in choir folders or binders. (Note: Binders should not be opened during the service. When they are closed, they make a distracting snapping noise.) Holding single sheets of music appears sloppy. Music should be held in place until the end of the piece including when the organ continues after the choir is finished.

There is to be no food or drink in the choir stalls during the service. No one in the congregation should *ever* witness choir members consuming any food or drink in the choir stalls. This appears very uncouth and disrespectful. Do not stare out at the people in the congregation, but remain focused on the liturgical action. Do not sprawl or lean on anything, and remain in your formation whether in the choir stalls or in procession. Remember never to do anything in choir that you would not want photographed, caught on video, or anything you would not want your mother to see.

The Sign of the Cross and other ceremonials are outward signs of reverence and expressions of deeply personal belief and practice. They are not requirements of our liturgy or "tests" for membership. If you feel comfortable with them, use them by all means. You may make the sign of the cross at the appropriate portions of any service, and as this is an act of personal reverence and act of faith in the Trinity and expression of receiving God's graces, it is not mandatory.