

The FORTIS BOYCHOIR, Inc.

"Making a difference...one boy at a time"

BRAVE COURAGEOUS



Handbook

For Parents and Choir Boys

FORTIS BOYCHOIR

**The FORTIS BOYCHOIR, Inc.
A Non-profit Organization Incorporated in the State of Nebraska**

The Purpose of the FORTIS BOYCHOIR

The experience of many years has shown that the FORTIS BOYCHOIR appeals to, and most benefits, a certain type of boy. He may also be interested in sports, the sciences or the arts. But he IS interested in music, whether it be listening to the radio or singing in a choir at his church or school.

Music is not the ultimate goal of FORTIS BOYCHOIR philosophy, for many of the boys will not sing professionally after voice change. Yet, musical excellence is the FORTIS BOYCHOIRS' hallmark. The choir staff uses music as a means to the end of helping to educate the future man whom you have entrusted to us for this very brief period of time. Through the art and science of music and related fields, we endeavor to teach and develop in him self-discipline, self-motivation, consistency of accomplishment, etiquette and other qualities which will aid him immediately in his long-range and continuing quest for success, whatever his chosen field. Because the Choir's goal is excellence, choirboys are traditionally above average in intelligence and ability as boys, and this continues on into their adulthood.

Musical excellence and the philosophy of the FORTIS BOYCHOIR go hand-in-hand, for the stretching toward a goal of perfection are the most rewarding and enriching of all human experiences and is the greatest character builder of all.

A Note to Choirboys and Parents

The purpose of this handbook is to make clear the rules, policies and procedures of our organization. We have very specific guidelines that are a result of many years spent training boys in a professional endeavor, as well as a result of personal contributions from many people who are skilled and experienced in the education of children.

The very best of handbooks is of no value however, unless it is carefully read and thoroughly learned. The very best rules become nothing but words unless they are followed and enforced.

Upon receipt of this handbook, we consider our policies to be communicated. They exist for the mutual benefit of your son and the Choir and will be actively enforced. Our endeavor to be one of the best boy's choirs in the nation is a glorious and honorable one, yet one that demands excellence, discipline and commitment, a commitment that requires placing one's own ego second to that of the group and the cause. The beauty is that, in the process of molding that choir, personal lives are also molded and boys become men. And in the placing of one's personal ego second to that of a worthy cause, character is developed and ego deepened.

Larry E. Cooper
Founder/Artistic Director

About Our Rules

The FORTIS BOYCHOIR has very clear rules regarding almost every aspect of a boys' choir career. They are actively enforced, since we sincerely believe that they exist for the mutual benefit of both the choir and the boys. Our responsibility is too great and our job too big to waste time in the disorganization that arises from a permissive atmosphere. Our experience has been that everyone profits from the orderly and efficient atmosphere that is a result of clear policy and thorough training.

Choirboys can add still another dimension to that atmosphere by choosing to operate under the spirit of the rules and not the letter only. A cheerful acceptance of the very positive reasons for which the rules exist makes one a participant in our community. The standards are there to help us in our work. One who feels that the rules exist against him and wastes time testing or resisting them is not likely to have a successful choir career. More importantly, he is not likely to have a very productive or happy life.

Parents can help by supporting our position and influencing their son to keep a positive and constructive attitude. He has much reason to be proud. We will inform parents of serious character disorders or highly significant offenses, we do not ask parents to do our disciplining. In the same spirit, we urge parents not to offer their sons excuses. We have no choice but to make him personally accountable if we are to train him in the excellent tradition that is the hallmark of our Choir.

Parent's Responsibilities

Attitude: It is easiest to adopt the attitude of your youngster as he begins his choir career, that is, to dream of the glories of tour and the performing stage without much thought of how such glorious feats are achieved. In a society that addresses itself primarily to youth, ease and comfort in most commercial endeavors, the choir continues to work with and educate each individual boy following patterns of success tried and proven through our years of experience. With music as the tool, bringing with it a set of disciplines and demands uniquely its own, we can call forth from your son those qualities so highly prized, yet so generally obscure in this society, honesty, purpose, creativity, maturity and a zest for living that will cause his spirit to soar!

Health: You can supply us with a healthy choirboy who can be present and able to work at every rehearsal. This involves preventative as well as remedial measures in regard to your choirboy's general health patterns. It also includes such detailing as watching our unpredictable Nebraska weather, so that your son will be protected at all times from sudden temperature changes. A good health record on tour is primarily due to the practice of just such preventative measures that keeps the group well. If adults train themselves to listen to nightly weather reports in detail, then in turn communicate to their singer the needs of the day regarding dress, coats, etc., soon basic habits will be formed that will be automatic as he grows in his choir routine.

We want to hear from you when your son is to be absent for any reason. This includes any rehearsal, workshop or concert. A note to the boys' choir director will help us keep track of missed activities. By keeping your son healthy, you can help maintain the quality that makes us successful.

Behavior: Another real contribution parents can make is to drive car-pools, insisting on standards of behavior consistent with that held by the boys in rehearsal. That is, ground rules are explained, and there should be as few as possible, then failure to comply will bring a suitable adult response that should bring order out of chaos! If problems persist, then the offender's parent should be contacted. Simple standards of safety preclude play of several passengers in a moving car so it should not be permitted in choir car-pools. If every parent checks with his choirboy to make certain he expresses appreciation to the various drivers of the car-pool by saying "thank you" as he leaves the car, we will have the beginnings of thoughtfulness that will pay big dividends when your child begins group living on tour.

Music: Although we are not associated with any school district, each boy should be encouraged to participate in the vocal music program of his school and church. The music we perform is selected and approved by the Artistic Director and his staff. Each boy will be given a folder of his own music and will be required to memorize it. He should bring his folder to every rehearsal or workshop. It will be his responsibility to keep his music in good order and he will be charged for any damaged or lost music. During the year, seasonal music, including that of a religious nature, is performed.

Care of Voice: Choirboys coming out of rehearsal should not be running and yelling. Vocal chords and bodies are warm from use in rehearsal and need rest on the way home. Not unlike athletes, your son has been involved in physical activity in a very highly developed way and just like any athlete; he must learn to pace himself. You can help us in this area.

Clothing - Uniform and General: When entering our program we will provide you with a list of clothing items for the publicly worn portion of his choir uniform. This process is accomplished through a series of notes designed to help you through the fitting and purchase of regulation items with a minimum of difficulty. Your boy can do his artistic work better if he does not have to be reminded too often of notes left at home that should have been turned in earlier.

Notes and Verbal Communication: PLEASE ensure that every communication, whether by paper memo or verbal announcement, reaches you consistently every week. This means that memos should be placed in a specific spot for later reading if the family schedule calls for dinner or some other activity shortly after the choirboy's arrival home. Memos are distributed during rehearsal, so please ask your son for them as soon as you pick him up. If you are in doubt about any choir communications, please check with your director or with another choir parent for clarification. We have a choir wide weekly memo that is filled with information pertinent to ALL choirs. Each Thursday afternoon, we upload the newest issue onto our website at www.fortisbc.org. You can find the link for it on the main page below the menu on the left.

Finances: The FORTIS BOYCHOIR of Nebraska, Inc. is a public, non-profit organization supported by various funding means. **Every boy has a tuition fee of \$50.00 per semester while he is involved with our choir.** Semesters run from August-December and January-May. We sponsor several significant fund raising projects throughout the year, which include a Christmas Concert and our annual Spring Concert. However, even with our efforts to fund the organization we fall short of our annual budget because of a variety of expenditures. We expect you and your son to be involved in these and other fund raising projects throughout the year. Our summer and winter camps, for the Tour Choir involves a camp fee, which is dependent on the length of stay.

The concert uniform is generally clothing that you may already have at home. We will provide a list of clothing items that will be easy to find and inexpensive to buy. If your finances don't allow you to purchase these items let us know and we will work with you to purchase these items.

General Responsibilities: On an adult level, choir living (or living through choir) takes creative planning for both parent and staff alike. How you arrange to meet the sometimes complicated scheduling, the care and consistency with which you approach problems which are bound to arise, serve as a testimony to your son about your concern and interest in his work. The old maxim, "what you are speaks so loud I can't hear what you say", is particularly applicable to all adults in their dealings with children. If you talk about the importance of choir, but cannot arrange to fulfill the obligation to attend Parents' meetings, then you are saying to your child, "listen to what I say" and conveniently leaving off "follow what I do." There is never time to cover every situation or problem. The main point: just as it is with every group of choirboys and every group of parents coming in contact with the organization called The FORTIS BOYCHOIR, standards call for individual attention and devotion. Together, we (boys, parents and staff) must apply ourselves to the everyday detailing that will make us successful. As parents, you should strive constantly for constructive understanding of the work being done by the artistic staff and your sons in rehearsal. All of us can assume our role as functioning, caring adults, always ready to encourage and bolster when spirits sag, aiming for the objective approach rather than the subjective one often taken by the boy in his immaturity. If a problem is a serious or persistent one, either individual or collective, then help should be sought from the choir director. We are constantly at your service even though our caring processes may not take the prescribed patterns of this permissive society in which we find ourselves. Perspective will show, however, that we do care a great deal for you and your son.

Rules and Regulations

Rehearsal Grounds

Any form of fighting, rough-housing, pushing, shoving, etc., is prohibited. When two or more parties are guilty, both will be punished regardless of who began the dispute. A boy who has repeated trouble controlling himself regarding this likely will be dismissed. This rule will be strongly enforced and "we were just playing" and other such excuses will not be accepted.

Your voice is your instrument. The annual budget comes to between \$1000 and \$1500 per year per boy. Your voice is valuable and you cannot abuse it, for example:

- a. No yelling or screaming -- ever.
- b. In cold weather, wear appropriate outdoor clothing, including throat protection.
- c. Do not become overheated inside. Remove sweaters and jackets.
- d. Do not exert yourself out-of-doors in cold weather, as it will cause you to breathe through your throat. Always breathe through your nose in cold weather.
- e. Warm-up before rehearsals is your best friend in vocal development. Take it seriously and let it work for you.

When boys arrive before rehearsal time, they may enter the rehearsal room and assist in setting up chairs, etc. If they need to use the restroom before rehearsal, that should be done first.

You will have assigned rehearsal seating called "concert position". You should always be in your assigned seat unless moved by your director. Boys should be IN PLACE at rehearsal starting time.

Do not bring any play items to rehearsal, balls, skateboards, etc. The choir will distribute such when time and opportunity permits.

Attendance

Attendance at all rehearsals and performances is mandatory. If a boy is ill, his director should be notified prior to rehearsal or concert time.

Promptness is essential. Rehearsals begin on time and require intense concentration. Unless a boy participates from the very beginning, he misses important vocal warm-up. Late arrivals cause damaging distraction.

If a boy is late to a rehearsal, he should enter the area quickly and quietly. Mandatory attendance is necessary for us to train at the level expected of a professional group; therefore, excessive absence or tardiness can make it necessary to replace a boy even when acceptable reasons exist.

When your son is absent for any reason, a note signed by his parent **MUST** be presented to his director at the next rehearsal. Remember, our choirs meet only during the academic school year. Exceptions would be tours or other selected performances which may be when school is not in session, and which may be determined to be of unique value or present an exceptional opportunity.

General Discipline and Character Development

A choirboy is expected to be truthful and honest at all times, even when it means admitting to a punishable offense or reporting the actions of another.

An unfortunate misunderstanding in the minds of some boys is that lying or cheating is a sign of being tough. Nothing could be further from wrong. Cowards lie. The brave man has courage of his convictions to speak the truth.

Choirboys who lie will be reprimanded. Those who do so repeatedly will be dismissed from the choir.

Choir boys can disagree and still be brothers. They can compete in business, sports, politics, even in wars, and still retain respect for one another; but when one lies to the other, there is no future to their relationship unless trust can be restored.

In that spirit, boys are expected to immediately admit infractions to rules. If asked "who's talking" or "who sang that wrong", brave and well trained boys will raise their hands immediately if guilty. Usually, that's the end of it. But, if a boy does not admit his guilt, it becomes a much more serious matter indeed, and will be treated as such.

At the root of courtesy are manners. Boys are expected to be mannerly in their appearance, actions, forms of address and general decorum.

When boys are out of the choir uniform, they are still expected to be clean and properly attired. Like it or not, they represent our choir wherever they go and whatever they do.

Rehearsal Procedures

Total attention is a must. This means no talking among yourselves and eyes on the director and your music. Develop absolute concentration, ignoring any distractions. This is a skill you must learn to be able to perform professionally.

Correct posture is also extremely important. Without a strong and alert body, a voice is undependable and weak.

When Standing

- a. Hands at your side
- b. Weight evenly distributed between the feet
- c. Feet apart in line with the width of the hips
- d. Throat, head and jaw free and loose
- e. Eyes ahead
- f. Never slump or allow the rib cage to fall
- g. Do not lock the knees

When Sitting

Posture is the very same but in a sitting position. Music should be held up off the lap so the head does not dip and the director can be seen just over the top. When singing, sit forward on the chair and never allow your back to touch the back of the chair.

Rehearsal time is valuable... we cannot waste time.

One of the traditions of the Choir is the observance of an immediate "silence" when announced. This is accomplished when a staff member says, "Code One". During a silence, boys are not to speak or make noise of any kind.

The uses and advantages of the silence are many. It is a practical skill that is essential in studio work, backstage and for instructional purposes. All sound, and especially music, is painted against a background of total stillness, another skill we help our boys develop.

We work with these concepts as truths. There is no such thing as "almost silent" or "almost still". It is either silent or it is not. In teaching the concept and enforcing a silence, all gray areas are eliminated. Boys do not have to wonder just how much noise can be tolerated. There will be none. This is the only fair position for us to take, and the simplest to understand.

One concept we hope for boys to embrace is that a silence is not called for punishment. It is a skill, a working procedure, a tradition, designed to make our product more effective and professional. Not only does it aid us in preparing and executing our productions, it teaches our boys another lesson in self-discipline.

Though we try at all times to emphasize the positive reasons for the use of the tradition of silence, it is necessary to make the breaking of a silence a punishable offense in order to effectively teach the concept. A broken silence is no silence at all.

More positively, as boys become more experienced, they voluntarily and very responsibly observe silences. They have seen the great value of the tradition and the results that can come from an orderly and efficient atmosphere.

Total silence is referred to as "Code 1". "Code 2" is whispering only. "Code 3" is quiet talking only. "Code 4" is normal conversation.

Disciplinary Policies and Procedures

The FORTIS BOYCHOIR does not allow a permissive atmosphere. The amount of time and energy exerted by both boys and parents makes it imperative that we not waste time by allowing this behavior. The magnitude of the job we have before us is one that requires total commitment. Even so, we do feel that our ideas are child-centered and in the best interest of the boys, both individually and corporately.

While the Choir will always inform parents if we observe problems in boys that indicates serious character disorders, we do not ask parents to do our disciplining and infractions remain a matter between the boy and the Choir, unless a serious disorder is suspected. Not only is this important in the building of individual responsibility, but also it is essential for us to develop a relationship of confidence.

At the same time, there are no secrets and the director or any of the staff stands willing to discuss individual progress or problems at any time. Parents should feel free to call to discuss such matters. When offenses do occur, the normal penalties are, in order of severity:

- 1. The assignment of a theme. Themes normally are 50 words in length and due in one week. When not submitted on time, the length is doubled or other steps are taken.**
- 2. Warning slip. After one theme has been assigned, a warning slip is issued. This slip is an indication of a boy's failure to comply with the rules and spirit of the choir and must be signed by his parent, then returned to the director at the next rehearsal. There is only one warning slip given out per semester.**
- 3. Suspension from choir activities may result when serious or repeated offenses have been committed, yet the Choir feels that the boy has potential and a possibility of redeeming himself.**
- 4. Expulsion from the Choir is the last resort but necessary in some cases. While the Choir makes every effort to help boys solve their problems, participation is an optional activity and a privilege. We cannot jeopardize the program for other boys by allowing repeated offenses by one who refuses to embrace the policies and spirit of the Choir.**

Since the Choir does not send home a regular progress report on each boy, parents should feel free to request such a report on their son at any time. The most effective means is to request the report in writing to the boy's director, giving them time to accumulate the necessary information to better respond to your request.

Any boy engaging in an activity that is unbecoming to himself or the choir will be dismissed immediately. This includes, but is not limited to vulgar and immoral language and behavior, possession or consumption of any alcoholic beverage or any illegal narcotic drug.

Communications with Home

For the purpose of expedience and economy, most communication between the organization and the home is via the choirboys. We work very hard to make the boys responsible in this matter.

Some notes will have the boy's name on them. He knows that he is not to leave that note at choir, but to take it home and see that the appropriate person reads it.

When the note requires a response, it is the choirboy's responsibility to see that the response is brought to choir by the designated deadline. On important communications we occasionally require the return of a parent's signature indicating that the communication has been read.

In all cases, it is the boy whom we hold responsible. This is how we can best help him develop a strong sense of responsibility. Parents can assist us in these matters by giving close attention to the messages brought home and make appropriate responses when requested.

Though parents can be helpful in reminding their sons of responsibilities, the failure of the parents to do their part does not constitute an excuse for the boy. In this matter we are teaching personal responsibility. It is the choirboy's task to see that the job gets done.

Academic Standards

In order to be a successful member of the FORTIS BOYCHOIR, a boy must have above average ability and achievement in school. Although we will admit boys with average grades when all other qualifications are met and academic potentials seem to be adequate, we do require that their grades be improved before they are considered for the touring choir.

Our experience has been that a choirboy's grades are usually very good. Though this seems somewhat strange since the Choir demands a great deal of time, it simply confirms our attitude that poor grades are seldom the result of adequate time; rather, they more often are the result of a lack of incentive and poor organization of time available. At the choir we provide added incentive and help a boy organize himself so that he can accomplish more than he could before, even with additional free time.

We encourage parents and teachers to have high expectations of members of the FORTIS BOYCHOIR both in their academic work and their citizenship. We appreciate knowing when boys are academically deficient or less-than-good citizens. Grades will be furnished to the boys' choir director each grading period.

We do not allow boys to tour who are experiencing serious academic difficulty. When such a situation does exist or seems likely, it is far more constructive for us to know rather than after the boy is in serious difficulty. Normally, when choir, parents and school work together, a downward trend can be reversed before the difficulty becomes an almost insurmountable problem.

A Final Thought

The FORTIS BOYCHOIR will leave an impression on almost as many thousands of people throughout the nation who see them in public as they do those who see them in performance.

This handbook covers a broad assortment of items designed to help you make all your experiences with the FORTIS BOYCHOIR positive ones. Having read and digested all this information, you now have a clearer understanding of what you can expect from us, and what we will expect from you. If, at any time, a clarification of a rule or policy is needed, we urge you to contact your son's choir Director or the Artistic Director.

You are now a member of a very elite group of boys. Welcome!

FORTIS BOYCHOIR MISSION STATEMENT

The FORTIS BOYCHOIR Organization provides boy choristers a unique opportunity to instill positive and beneficial qualities in themselves; it is the mission of the FORTIS BOYCHOIR to provide the skills and training essential for lifelong learning through the finest music education in the boy choir tradition. We will create a supportive and positive environment that develops discipline, self-esteem and maturity, which aid in the transformation of young boys into young men. In order that this mission is realized, the FORTIS BOYCHOIR music program will include parent and community involvement, high expectations, a strong commitment to excellence and quality instruction for all choristers.