

pening and continued to listen intently to the ladies around them. Even though they weren't singing, the men realized they were a part of the music.

Individual accountability has skyrocketed. This has been incredibly important.

### The Bottom Line

A mixed arrangement with singers, a modified scramble, has helped my students individually and as a choir immensely. It has also sharpened my hearing and my ability to diagnose problems. I told a colleague what we were doing and suggested he try it. His voice mail the next day reflected an excitement each of us can experience. His choir had as much success with this new approach as we did. He went one step further and tried it with his women's choir and had superb results.

My mixed choirs now utilize three standing formations:

1. traditional sections—all the sopranos together, all altos together, etc.
2. soprano/tenor mixed, bass/alto mixed or a slight variation: soprano/bass mixed, alto/tenor mixed
3. completely scrambled, e.g., SATBSATBSATB throughout the choir

Our goal now is to rehearse completely scrambled as much as possible. My students were initially concerned about learning new music in this formation, so we agreed to start in sections but progress to mixed formation as soon as we could.

I was reluctant to try this new idea with our Junior Varsity Mixed Choir, but the ensemble had surprising success with arrangement 2 above. I didn't spend long hours trying to decide who stood where. Once the voices were spread out, it became quite clear if an individual

needed to be moved to another spot. Some young and/or insecure singers will need to have a person from their section standing with them for some time. To date, those cases have been small in number in my school.

If you aren't already "mixed up," I encourage you to experiment with it. Let your singers grow in a new way, and see what happens. You—and your singers—are in for a pleasant surprise!

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We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit (Aristotle)

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### *"Choir Lite" – Less Time, Just as Fulfilling!*

by

Lee G. Barrow

(Reprinted from the ACDA Southern Division Newsletter,  
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During my 25 years as a church choir director, I have often sought to recruit new members for my choirs. One of the most common excuses I heard from potential members for not joining was the ongoing time commitment required. Many aspects of their lives—dealing with children, frequent out-of-town trips, job responsibilities, and at one church, part-year residency—made these singers reluctant to commit to the nonstop regimen of regular weekly rehearsals and Sunday services. I sometimes tried a "join and come when you can" approach, but few responded, and with those who did, the resulting uncertainty of exactly when they would attend was less than

satisfactory for all involved.

Several years ago, a part-year resident couple who traveled often heard that we were performing one of their favorite large works. They approached me and asked if there was any way they could join us to perform just that particular work. Since the husband was a tenor, how could I refuse? Thus a tradition was born.

After that experience, I developed several yearly invitations to join the choir with a short-term commitment which I designated "Short-Term Choir" or "Choir Lite." At least twice each year, I advertised the idea, which included a six-week period leading up to a major performance occurring most often at Christmas and Easter.

Singers were encouraged to join just for those six weeks. The requirements were simple: come to at least four of the six rehearsals, and then sing with us at the designated service or performance. Singing at the intervening Sunday services was optional but encouraged, as long as the singers had attended the previous two rehearsals and had learned the anthem well.

Rehearsals were planned in such a way that the "short-term singers" who were not singing on Sundays could leave early. After first rehearsing the coming Sunday's anthem (I always started and ended the rehearsal with the upcoming anthem), we then worked on the cantata or other music for the special service. Those who were not singing on Sundays could leave, and I concluded our rehearsal with the music for future services.

A number of people responded to these invitations, excited to have the opportunity to serve without a long-term commitment. Most also joined us for the intervening Sundays. For those who didn't, starting the rehearsal with the next Sunday's anthem often got them interested enough to change their minds.

Another benefit of this approach was the identification of potential "pinch hitters" for those Sundays when the absence of regular members created a weakness in one of my sections. Many of the short-term singers were happy to join us for a couple of weeks to fill out a section when needed.

Most importantly, about a quarter of the short-term

singers eventually joined the choir on a long-term basis. The short-term commitment got them in the door, but the camaraderie and sense of fulfillment kept them coming back. This method of recruitment was far more successful than all of my previous efforts combined. Not only did the Short-Term Choir Program increase the number of singers for our special presentations, it also increased the number of regular members in my choir.

How about trying this "choir lite" approach to recruitment? It is, indeed, fulfilling!



## *The Best Things in Life are Free— Especially Choral Music*

by

James A. John

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Summer 2007, revised January 2009)

The Choral Public Domain Library, or CPDL ([www.cpd.org](http://www.cpd.org)), has been in existence for ten years. Currently one of the largest free sheet music websites in the world, CPDL makes access to choral scores easier and more economical than ever before. If you are familiar with CPDL you have probably found it helpful.

You may also have discovered — as I have — that the quality of what's available varies widely. The sheer volume of material can be overwhelming, requiring time and effort to sort out editions and make intelligent choices. Learning to get the most out of this formidable resource is a challenge, so I decided to explore CPDL in greater depth.

Rafael Ornes, Minister of Music at Valley Presbyterian Church in Portola Valley, California, founded CPDL in