

Overview for Instructors

Leadership Program for Musicians, Inc.

Principles of Choral Leadership

Part 2: Voice training for choirs

This sheet is intended to be copied by a local LPM coordinator and given to the instructor with the course material.

Helpful things to understand This section of the course deals with vocal pedagogy. Its intent is to teach choir directors to help volunteer singers develop their vocal skills and improve their singing ability. Such singers, who volunteer copious amounts of their time to church choirs, often maintain for their entire singing careers the same level of ability with which they began. This course is based upon the belief that all singers can improve by understanding their instruments and the techniques for properly using them. As with any skill, the greater the ability the more enjoyment derived. In addition, enhanced skills will improve the offerings of singers to the worship. Surely the praise of God merits such an effort!

Materials Song literature for this course may be taken completely from the hymnal. The instructor may wish to augment this with additional material. Song literature, however, must be simple so that the focus is on vocal development rather than on mastery of complex music. The vocal exercises and illustrations from the sessions may be copied from the curriculum and distributed to participants. Instructors are requested to credit the authorship of the material they copy.

Assignments Each participant will practice the vocal exercises contained in the curriculum and will also practice teaching another person. Practicing the exercises will help to gain a firsthand understanding of them. Working with another singer will develop the ability to communicate and to listen attentively.

Hints for teaching The assumption is that the LPM instructor who teaches this material will be a seasoned voice instructor. While the instructor may be accustomed to working with participants in an academic setting and using the technical language appropriate to such a setting, it is imperative that simple, direct explanations be used in teaching this course. This is because the explanations that the LPM instructor gives will be passed on through the local choir directors to their volunteer singers.

On the other hand, gaining knowledge of a subject implies learning new information and new terminology. The local choir director may well discover that people are eager to have some new technical understanding of singing. For this reason, it is important to include basic terminology and concepts of vocal production.

Because this is a course in pedagogy, it is critical that the instructor guide the class members in teaching. Observing the interaction of emerging instructors with singers is important. While LPM participants may benefit from developing their own singing ability through the course, the ultimate goal is becoming more adept at helping volunteer church choir singers. The most critical skill of a voice instructor is the ability to listen. The instructor will want to strive to develop in participants the ability to hear both errors and improvements in singing. People are often self-conscious about their singing. The voice is more personal than an instrument because the voice is part of the body. It is linked to the personality and the image one has of oneself. For this reason, it is important for the instructor to be encouraging and supportive and to emphasize this to the LPM participants who will work with choir members. Harsh criticism is inappropriate. It is the responsibility of the voice instructor to find something in every singer to praise.

At the same time, course requirements should be adhered to, and participants should be expected to come to class having prepared the exercises. The competent instructor will strive for a balanced atmosphere of rigorous work and positive encouragement.