



## **The Choir of St Francis Church, Welwyn Garden City**

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### **St Francis Choir – Factsheet, Background Information and FAQs!**



St Francis Choir was founded in 1964 and has played a vital role in the life of the church ever since then. It is regarded as one of the best church choirs in Hertfordshire and is one of only very few in 2025 where children continue to sing the treble line of the music.

Girls and boys join the choir between the ages of 8-11 and stay in the choir until they 'retire', which is for boys when their voice changes, and for girls at the end of Year 10. Currently the youngest chorister is 8 and the oldest 14. Each year auditions are held at several of the local primary schools where the places available are always hotly contested! There are around 20 choristers in the choir, and a similar number of teenagers and adults who sing the lower parts.

The aims and principles of the choir are:

- To lead and enhance the worship at the Sunday services
- To lead and enhance the worship at Evensong and other important services in the year
- To provide a free musical education to choristers in the choir

Choristers not only learn musical skills during their time in the choir, but also skills which will equip them well for adult life - hard work, concentration, loyalty, how to form relationships with others, and the importance of self-discipline. Most importantly, they have a huge amount fun and form friendships that last long beyond their time in the choir!

In order for the choir to succeed, we recognise that a tremendous amount of hard work and commitment is required from both the choristers and their families. We ask that you put choir commitments first when organising other activities. The choristers work as a team in rehearsals and services, and with limited rehearsal time, attendance at each rehearsal and service is crucial for the choir to continue its high standards of performance within worship. As a token of the church's appreciation for this hard work, the choristers are paid a small amount each time they attend. This is then paid out termly as pocket money for each of them.

The Sunday morning Parish Communion is the *raison d'être* of the choir, and it is here, and at our monthly Choral Evensong, that the choir primarily concentrates its efforts. The choristers sing each Sunday morning, with usually one Sunday per month off, as well as occasional weekday Festival services. In terms of hours each week, the commitment is not huge, but for reasons outlined above, it is vital that a very high attendance rate is attained by all choristers. Other events such as the annual residential choir week are organised for the benefit of the choristers, and these should be an equally enjoyable aspect of their work. Parents are integral members of our team, and we look forward to seeing them both at services, and - to recognise the large commitment which they make to the smooth-running of the choir - on more informal social occasions.

As well as singing at St Francis Church, the choir is often invited to sing at the cathedrals of the UK. In the last 5 years, the choir has sung at Westminster Abbey, St Paul's Cathedral, Salisbury Cathedral, St Albans Cathedral, Portsmouth Cathedral, and this year there are trips planned to St Edmundsbury Cathedral in March, Ripon Cathedral in August, and Rochester Cathedral in October.

We hope that each chorister's time in the choir will be enriching and rewarding and that at the end of their time in the choir, they will feel proud of the important role they have played in the distinguished musical and spiritual life of St Francis Church.

The weekly commitment is as follows, but when new choristers join the choir, they build up to this gradually:

**Friday: 7-9pm Choir Practice (Initially just 7-8pm for new choristers)**

**Sunday: 8.35 – 10.30am Rehearsal and Parish Communion Service**

**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the month: 5-6.45 pm Rehearsal and Choral Evensong**

There are also occasionally other services on or around important festivals in the church calendar, such as Christmas and Easter.

There is normally one Sunday each month without a service, or where attendance is optional. The choir terms follow the school terms, so there is no choir during half term, the summer holidays, and the weeks immediately before or after Christmas and Easter.

## **Frequently asked questions:**

### **What sort of music do you sing?**

We sing Anglican choral music ranging from the early 1600s to the present day! If you want to have a listen to the choir, there are some recordings on our website under 'Media'. We either sing unaccompanied or with the organ. <https://stfranciswgc.org.uk/the-choir/>

### **Does it cost money to be in the choir?**

No, being a chorister is free. The only time that parents are asked to contribute is when the choir is singing away from St Francis, such as the annual residential week, for which we try to keep the costs as low as possible.

### **Do I need to be an amazing singer to join the choir?**

No, for new choristers all we look for is a good ear, ability to sing simple tunes and a willingness to learn.

### **Do I need to be able to read music?**

No, this is something that you will learn how to do in the choir.

### **Is it OK to miss a service or rehearsal?**

While we expect choristers to attend all rehearsals and services, absences for illness and unavoidable clashes with other events are understood. The choir operates a signing out sheet to give notice of known absences.

### **Do I get to sing at Christmas and Easter?**

Yes! The Christmas carol services, and the services on and around Easter are highlights of the choir's year!

### **Do I need to be a Christian?**

Whether individual choristers believe in God or not is their own personal choice. However, as the main duty of the choir is to lead Christian worship services, if they don't, they must remain mindful of this and behave in a way that respects the worship. Most of the choristers attend the Youth and Children's Church groups on a Sunday morning during the service. The choir acts as one aspect of the church's mission, and many choristers choose to discover more about Christianity through it, but equally some do not and that is understood.

### **How much will I get paid?**

This depends on your rank in the choir – we keep the rates under review periodically, but most choristers get between £10-20 per term, plus a contribution from the church to their 'bank' which they receive when they leave the choir.

### **Are the music staff suitably trained in safeguarding?**

Yes. All adults who have responsibility for the choristers are DBS checked and have completed the relevant Church of England safeguarding courses. Our organist is the Headteacher at a local primary school and is the safeguarding lead for the choir.

### **Will I make friends in the choir?**

Of course! When you join you will be assigned one of the senior choristers as your 'Auntie' or 'Uncle'. It's their job to be a friendly face, look after you during rehearsals, show you where things go, and what to do.