



NATIONAL FORUM  
OF GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH MUSICIANS

*The musical arm of the Archdiocese that strengthens and perpetuates  
Greek Orthodox liturgical music in America*



**Position Statement Regarding**

**ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CHOIR DIRECTOR**

*Guidelines for Selection and Development*

The following *Guidelines* identify skills, knowledge, and personal attributes that the National Forum of Greek Orthodox Church Musicians believe to be integral to the role of a choir director in the Greek Orthodox Church. Identifying an individual who can fulfill this role in the Orthodox Church is challenging, but not impossible. While a professionally-trained candidate may not always be available, finding an enthusiastic musician and leader who is willing to be trained might be a more realistic option.

Recognizing it is a rare person who possesses all these qualities, the *Guidelines* should be viewed from a two-fold perspective: first, as a tool for clergy and parish council members when selecting a choir director; and second, as goals for all choir directors to pursue in the fulfillment of their responsibilities.

**A. The Director's Musical Role**

Choir directors must be well-trained in the fundamentals of music, conducting, and vocal and choral techniques. Ideally, the director should have a degree in music with a special emphasis in voice or choral conducting. Parishes are encouraged to provide continuing training through local community colleges, private lessons, and Orthodox Church Music Institutes and workshops provided by metropolis church music federations and/or National Forum of Greek Orthodox Church Musicians. A choir director should strive to possess the following attributes:

1. Has a working knowledge of the fundamentals of music
2. Can play a keyboard instrument.
3. Has a good ear for pitch and rhythm
4. Understands how to create balance for a choral ensemble
5. Has a working knowledge of basic vocal fundamentals and choral techniques, and able instruct singers in them
6. Has a working knowledge of the rudiments of conducting, including:
  - a. beat patterns
  - b. attacks and releases; cueing
  - c. expression
7. Has a working knowledge of the organ and the ability to help the organist effectively accompany and support the choir during rehearsals and/or services
8. Has a working knowledge of English diction as it applies to choral singing

**B. The Director's Pedagogical Role**

Choir directors must be effective teachers, using rehearsal time wisely to educate members musically as well as spiritually --- with the end result being an improved

music program for the parish and greater liturgical understanding for all. While many people possess great knowledge of music, some have difficulty imparting that knowledge to others. The following pedagogical skills are considered essential when selecting a choir director and when working as a choir director:

1. Assesses the capabilities and qualities of individual choir members and place them in the proper section
2. Plans rehearsals to accomplish short and long-term goals
3. Conducts effective, productive rehearsals
4. Detects and corrects errors
5. Selects music suitable for the level of the choir, introducing new music as is appropriate and practical for the demands and needs of the individual parish
6. Trains choir members both as individual vocalists and as ensemble musicians to create the most appropriate choral sound
7. Provides instruction about the liturgical and feast day hymns and services
8. Develops and trains assistant directors and/or organists as necessary

### **C. The Director's Liturgical Role**

The music of the Orthodox Church is an integral part of worship services. Choral music must add to the liturgy, not distract from the prayerful environment of worship. Choir directors must understand the rubrics, structure, and meaning of the various services. Thus, it is important that the choir director possess the following knowledge regarding Orthodox worship:

1. Has considerable knowledge of the Divine Liturgy and other services of the liturgical year
2. Has a thorough knowledge of Greek Orthodox religious practices
3. Has a working knowledge of the Greek language and its phonetics
4. Communicates regularly with the parish priest regarding all details of the services in which the choir will be participating
5. Works with the priest to develop a plan for expanding the choir's role in other services (special feast days, holidays, etc.)
6. Sets and cultivates a spiritual tone for the choir
7. Works closely with the parish priest to determine the proportion of English and Greek liturgical music as appropriate for the parish

### **D. The Director's Administrative Role**

While a strong musical background is important, so is the choir director's ability to be an organized administrator. Strong organization and preparation behind the scenes creates a more polished and professional parish music program. Participating in various parish events, fundraisers, and special musical programs is customary for choirs. Without strong administrative skills, and a cooperative team of choir members, the director will have difficulty achieving the goals of the choir. Suggested responsibilities in this area include:

1. Maintains a special and close relationship with the priest, who, according to the Archdiocesan Uniform Parish Regulations, has "charge of all matters of divine worship and the personnel connected therewith"
2. Communicates effectively with the priest, choir, organist, psaltai, parish council, and Church School
3. Provides leadership in planning and carrying out the goals and objectives of the choir, in conjunction with the parish priest

4. Coordinates the activities of the choir with the parish and ensures the cooperation and support of the choir
5. Represents the parish and the choir at the Metropolis church music federation; and nationally, supports the National Forum of Greek Orthodox Church Musicians
6. Exercises authority in all musical matters
7. Is responsible for implementing the following:
  - a. recruitment of new choir members
  - b. attendance and punctuality rules
  - c. development and maintenance of a music library
  - d. care and maintenance of robes
  - e. development and use of a choir budget
8. Participates in the selection and hiring of the organist
9. Researches and introduces new Greek and English liturgical music, relative to the needs of the parish, and the ability of the group

#### **E. Other Important Attributes**

The choir director has a very visible position within the church. As part of the liturgical ministry team for the church, the choir director must possess certain spiritual and personal attributes, exemplifying a lifestyle that adheres to the teachings of the Orthodox faith.

1. Serves as an example of appropriate behavior and spirituality
2. Conducts services in a manner conducive to worship
3. Relates to the choir, clergy, and parishioners in a sensitive, understanding, and patient manner
4. Strives to learn and improve

#### **F. Remuneration**

The position of choir director carries tremendous responsibilities. Besides handling regular services, the choir director must commit time each week to preparation, rehearsals, and communication with the priest and choir members. Parishes might recall the old but important saying: "you get what you pay for." Parishes that do not compensate musicians adequately (or not at all) for their services will have a more difficult time establishing consistency and setting a standard for higher musical and spiritual goals. Also, holding a person accountable, either on Sundays or during the week for preparation and rehearsals, may become more problematic. Thus, it is strongly recommended that choir directors be remunerated to provide the best and most suitable music programs for their parishes, formulated in full cooperation with their parish priests. Directors' salaries should also be reviewed once a year for merit and/or cost of living increases, if appropriate. The following four factors should be considered in determining equitable remuneration:

1. Musical training (college degree, private instruction, and/or informal training)
2. Experience with both vocal and choral music
3. Scope, duties, and time requirements of the position (choir directing only, or responsibilities for additional church music programs such as a youth choir, music education in the Church School, men's choir, and/or chanting)
4. Budget of the community (the budget of the parish should include a line item for an appropriate monthly stipend for the director and a separate item to support purchase of music and to cover continuing education of its church musicians.)

*(Adopted July 1984)*