How to Successfully Recruit and Maintain a Church Ensemble/Choir-Jackie Schnittgrund

I. Recruit
   A. Give a free steak dinner to everyone who brings a new member who stays until May... if it’s a tenor that reads, they get 2 free dinners.
   B. Bulletin announcements.
   C. Pass out business cards to members in May to distribute to those they hear during the summer who sound like they could be potential members.
   D. If given a name, call them a minimum of three times per year to recruit. Write a letter of invitation as well.
   E. When a new member arrives, make them feel very welcome. Hospitality, hospitality, hospitality.

II. Attendance
   A. Have a list of dates for rehearsal and Mass for the year. Members indicate when they will be missing.
   B. If a member is absent for 4 weeks, call/email and tell them that they are missed. Ask if there is a problem and be very open to the possibility that it is you. Inquire what can be done to correct the issue.
   C. If a member says that they will be quitting, tell them that you are saddened but that they will always have a place in the choir should they change their mind.
   D. Write a letter at the end of the summer updating members to the activities of other members over the summer. Give info on upcoming first rehearsal.

III. Social/Spiritual
   A. Delegate social activities to a member or group within the choir.
   B. Establish an email list for all members including phone numbers.
   C. Have refreshments after your first rehearsal of the year plus a party at Christmastime and at the end of the year.
   D. Ask for contributions to be collected from the group.
      1. Gifts for director, organist, cantors at Christmas
      2. Flowers/candy for members if they are ill.
      3. Cards for members to be signed by the choir for illness, deaths, etc.
      4. Masses for members’ loved ones who are recently deceased.
   E. If a member has an illness, organize meals and visits.
   F. If a member’s immediate family dies, take meals and offer to provide music for the funeral.

IV. Rehearsal
   A. Start and end on time and include prayer. Special intentions help everyone know what is concerning other members.
   B. Prepare and plan rehearsals
      1. Immediate-the next liturgy.
      2. Review upcoming songs.
      3. New music. Establish # of rehearsals to learn it and plan ahead.
      4. Have one “challenge” piece for fall-Christmas and Jan.-Easter that you work on at most rehearsals.
5. Look through new music and establish trouble spots prior to learning and establish strategies to address them.
6. Have sectionals when needed for learning a part, addressing a problem (i.e. too much vibrato, flat intonation, etc.).
C. Develop an approach that is professional and demanding yet humorous and lighthearted and fun. **EVERYONE SHOULD LAUGH AT LEAST ONCE AT EVERY REHEARSAL.**
D. Warm-up prior to Mass in a location outside of the church.
   1. Go over all choir anthems to be sung.
   2. Clarify anything about the liturgy when needed.
E. Develop small ensembles within the choir who may rehearse before or after the big group’s rehearsal
   1. Female, Male, Mixed Groups.
   2. Use these ensembles when choir takes a weekend off, during the summer months, or in addition to choir anthems.

**V. Planning**

A. In the summer, plan your year from Sept.-May
B. Catholic liturgies are on a three year cycle. Refer to what you did three years ago and look for possible repetition.
C. Make a data base of songs used for congregation
   1. Document the frequency of songs used. They should be sung at least once a year at a minimum.
   2. Divide these songs into seasons and use (i.e. Gathering, Communion, Sending Forth)
   3. Make a plan to introduce any new songs for the year and also include long term planning for the next 3 years.
D. Make a database of the solo anthem songs that the choir sings which include season, theme, date last used.
   1. Indicate on the database those songs that you plan to use for the year. I use a highlighter.
   2. Use the database for the previous year to plan the next year. If you didn’t use it last year, think about it for this year.
E. Review the readings for the Sunday and use this along with the season that you are in as a primary determining factor for your selection.
F. Make adjustments when needed especially when key musicians will be absent for that planned liturgy.
G. Use the summer to review promotional CDs from publishers.
   1. Compile the songs you like in iTunes for future consideration.
H. Subscribe to music mailing from the major publishers to review for future use (GIA, OCP, Paluch, etc.)
I. Consult NPM website (**www.npm.org**)) and look at their planning guide for all Sunday Masses.
J. I favor an eclectic approach to music so I incorporate music that is traditional, chant, contemporary, praise which uses both organ and piano accompaniment.
L. Utilize GOOD instrumentalists when possible.
   1. OCP publishes music for solo instrumentalists for some of their hymns.
2. Select choir anthems that utilize instrumental accompaniment.
3. Consult with your band/orchestra director for high school students who are especially gifted and use them. Even if they are not Catholic, often they will come and help out.
4. Inquire about adults who are instrumentalists who can be used.
5. For especially important feast days use instrumentalists (Christmas, Easter, Confirmation, Feast of Christ the King).
6. Have instrumentalists as soloists especially during the summer months. There is an abundance of music available for this purpose (JW Pepper is a good resource).

M. Develop an organized/documentated library w/librarian

VI. Education
A. Go to NPM meetings both locally and nationally
   1. Good networking.
   2. Excellent resource for new music.
   3. Learn about your ministry.
   4. New techniques for your craft.
B. Attend publisher’s reading session in your area. Check their website for dates.
C. Take periodic choral conducting classes or workshops.
D. Read periodicals especially the NPM magazine.
E. Reread Sing to the Lord yearly.
F. Review the New Roman Missal yearly for liturgical/musical references.

VII. Personal issues
A. BE ORGANIZED TO A FAULT
B. Stretch. Be more than you think you can be.
C. Remember it’s not about “me” but “we.”
D. Replace the word “can’t” with “how.”
E. Be positive.
F. Love what you’re doing.
G. Love the people that you are working with.
H. Love the people that you are serving.
I. Let your love of the Lord show through in everything you do.
J. Pray.