

Helping the Adult Un-tuned Singer

Most choirs have un-tuned adult singers in their ranks. How can we assist these would-be singers? This session will present strategies based on in-the-field experiences to help them find their voices.

We often spend lots of time helping children find their voices but fail to give attention to adults who are in need. To fail to offer help to someone struggling as a singer, who self identifies and asks for help, is un-Christian. Just as medical professionals have codes of ethics regarding their commitment to help people who are ill, music ministers must assist people in need. To refuse or ignore a person whose spiritual life could be enhanced by his/her fuller participation in worship violates our calling to ministry. When we refuse to help or to ignore, we are sending the message that his/her problem is unsolvable.

How does this issue affect music ministry?

- The untuned singer who joins your choir.
- The untuned singer who self identifies and asks you for help.
- A person who loves to worship who doesn't sing in tune, and you are compelled to help.

Stories

- Annette – African American woman who joined the choir but couldn't find her voice.
- Herschel – Older man with learning challenges.
- Mark – Teenager who is bright and wants to be with his friends.
- Margaret – Middle-aged woman looking for a group and place to help.
- Aaron – Teenager who is the son of the church custodian.
- Robert – Seriously inhibited teenager.
- Brian – Teenager with limited experience.

What can the stories tell us?

- Voice classification is key.
- You must assist.
- They usually succeed.
- People who don't want help will decide singing is too much work.
- Hearing issues must be addressed.
- Movement is closely related – steady beat.
- Not every situation works out ideally.
- One-on-one help is a must.
- Create a supportive environment.
- You must not pretend. The person knows he/she has challenges.

What are the steps we should take in an actual one-on-one encounter?

- Ask them to sing something that they know and like.
- Observe what you hear.
 - Key and range?
 - Correct or incorrect intervals?
 - Rhythm correct or not?
 - Did they sing correctly within some of the range?
- Start from where they are.
- Go slowly – the appointment may only last a few minutes.
- Often the challenge is one of the following:
 - Limited range – must be expanded
 - Failure to distinguish singing voice from speaking voice – elongated speech
 - Lack of support system for the voice – learn to connect breathing
 - Poor tonal models
 - Health concerns – environment (smoking), hearing

- Steady beat and rhythm concerns – go back to preschool – lack of pre-singing experiences
- Wrong vocal classification – is acceptable for an adult to sing a non-traditional voice part – salvage the person always
- Emotional challenges
- Failure to connect learning styles to singing
- Give homework – vocalizes, part tape from choir music.
- Set-up a regular appointment.
- Monitor progress.

Moving forward

- Placement within the choir – emotionally and musically.
- Dealing with the hard cases – not succeeding after appropriate amount of time.
- Checking in on them – monitoring short and longer term needs.

Helpful reading:

Forcucci, Samuel L., "Help for Inaccurate Singers," (*Music Educators Journal*, October 1975).