10 THEME IDEAS for your next CHOIR PROGRAM
Introduction

A choir program or concert is a great way to keep momentum in your choir after Easter, keeping music in the folders and energy in your rehearsals to the end of the year. Church choir programs run the gamut from purely sacred to secular, Patriotic, gospel, Broadway, and everything in between.

Your choice of music will depend on your choir’s interest, your congregation, and your goals for the church music program. Will this be a fundraiser? A community event? A celebration of the church year? A music-based worship service?

When planning a choir program (for any time of the year), I like to have a theme in mind. For me, a theme serves as creative inspiration and a way to tie everything together and it helps make repertoire selection a little easier.

Looking for some ideas? You’ve come to the right place.

Here are 10 of my favorite theme ideas for choir programs. Enjoy, and happy singing!

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1 | Spirituals

Songs of strength, hope, and endurance, African-American spirituals are an important part of American history. This collection of songs emerged during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries and represent the intersection of African heritage, Christian faith, and the unparalleled struggles of life in slavery (source).

One way to remember and honor this legacy is by presenting a program of spirituals.

Include choral arrangements, solos, and duets or small ensemble pieces and use bits of narration to share insight and offer historical perspective.

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Music ideas (remember to include a mix of choral, solo, instrumental, ensemble, etc.):

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Hymn Festival

There’s nothing like a hymn festival!

Have choir members vote for their favorites and maybe invite submissions from the congregation, too. Include choral arrangements, solo or ensemble arrangements, and a few hymns for congregational singing.

Group like hymns together (common theme, hymn writer, date of composition, season of the church year, etc.) and add narration to tie it all together.

If you have the time and resources, add a few descants (instrumental or sung), prepare creative hymn introductions and/or harmonizations, bring in brass or string players, etc.

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Music ideas (remember to include a mix of choral, solo, instrumental, ensemble, etc.):

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3 | Seasons

This theme draws inspiration from Ecclesiastes 3 ("To everything there is a season...").

You may choose to organize your program by seasons of the year, with four distinct sections. Or, you could focus on seasons of life with music that addresses times of abundance, hardship, joy, sadness, loss, and new life.

A third option might be to celebrate the seasons of the Church year, with music from each liturgical season (see no. 10).

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Music ideas (remember to include a mix of choral, solo, instrumental, ensemble, etc.):

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4  |  Hymn Lyrics

Looking for theme ideas and inspiration? Your hymnal is a great place to start.

Choose a title or line from one of your favorite hymns, find a great choral arrangement of that hymn, and build a program around it. Something like, "Come, Spirit, come" (from "Gift of Love") is a humble prayer for God to come and dwell among us. "Come and worship" (the refrain from "Angels From the Realms of Glory") is an invitation to all present to come and worship God together.

Here’s a program by Dale Witte called "Come and Worship." Dale used the verses of "Angels From the Realms of Glory" (angels, shepherds, wise men, saints, sinners, all nations, all creation) as a structure for the program. See the full program here.

Similarly, here’s a program (also by Dale Witte) called "Tidings of Comfort and Joy." Notice the mix of instrumental and choral pieces, solos, and congregational songs and hymns. See the full program here.

For something a little more general, consider a music-themed lyric such as, "When in our music God is glorified," “Tune my heart to sing thy grace" (from "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing"), or "Lift every voice and sing.”

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A few hymn arrangements that come to mind:

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5 | Scripture Verses

Similar to no. 4, the Bible is also a great source of inspiration for programming.

Choose a short, programmatic Scripture verse like, "Let there be light" (see an example of a light-themed program here), "And on earth, peace" (the title for the 2015 St. Olaf Choir Christmas program), "Sing to the Lord a New Song," or "Praise Him!"

Pair short Scriptural readings with each piece of music—sort of a lessons-and-carols format.

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A few anthems based on Scripture that come to mind:

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Sacred Mosaic

I love this theme. Reminiscent of stained glass windows, the idea of a mosaic—whether in sound or visual art—offers a wealth of ideas and inspiration for creating meaningful concert programs.

You might make a musical mosaic, of sorts, with short, contrasting works that fit together into a greater whole. Or, you could incorporate visual art by pairing images of paintings, sculptures, carvings, etc. with each piece of music on the program. (Make sure you have permission to project or display artwork that is still under copyright.)

If you have artists in your church, consider making your own mosaic using magazine clippings, tissue paper, or torn pieces of construction paper. (here's a great step-by-step tutorial).

Create the mosaic live during the program, adding pieces to the art work during the narration (and maybe even during some of the music), or prepare in advance, divide into blocks or tiles, and piece it back together during the program.

Here is some mosaic inspiration:

Easter cross
Colorful heart
Simple cross (from Mosaic Community Church)
Dove
Jesus

Remember, these are just for inspiration! Create your own art by drawing it yourself, using images in the public domain, or using royalty-free stock images or graphics.

Have some ideas? Jot them down here:

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Based on the SAB anthem by Paul A. Tate, this theme is centered on unity and 1 Corinthians 12 (the "many parts, one body" section).

Choose music and readings (Scripture, poetry, other books) that talk about unity, togetherness, and peace. At a time when there is so much violence in our world, these are reminders we all need to hold on to.

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A few anthems I know that tie in with unity and peace:

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This is a fun one!

Choose hymns, anthems, and songs to teach to the congregation from around the world, organized by country. This is a great opportunity to introduce other languages to your choir! Consider adding in prayers from around the world to help tie it all together.

Here is a list of hymns, prayers, and sacred songs (organized by language) to help you get started.

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Music from around the world (text and/or tune) that I could use:

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9 | Broadway Revue

Perfect for a fundraiser!

Choose your favorite solos, duets, and choruses from a variety of Broadway shows and musicals (think Wicked, Phantom of the Opera, A Little Night Music, Kiss Me, Kate!, Annie, Rent, Showboat, Singin’ in the Rain, etc.) and plan a fun evening out for church and community members.

Consider making it into a dinner theater or serving dessert and coffee!

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A few fun Broadway show tunes we could use:

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The Church Year in Song

Journey through the church year with a concert program featuring music from the liturgical seasons: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and Ordinary Time. Use your hymnal as a guide and choose supporting instrumental music and choral anthems (perhaps your choir’s favorites from the year!).

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A few favorite anthems from this past year that tie in with the seasons:

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