

GRACE IMMANUEL CHILDREN'S CHOIR

Welcome to the children's choir ministry at Grace Immanuel! This handbook explains our priorities for our time with your children.

WHAT WE'RE ABOUT

The children's choir ministry at Grace Immanuel exists for three purposes, in order of priority:

1. To teach children about God and the gospel through music, earnestly praying that they might come to faith in Christ and be life-long worshippers.
2. To teach the principles of beautiful singing and healthy tone production so children can learn how to properly use their voice.
3. To teach music literacy to equip them to read and use notated music.

We're a church, not a performing institution. Our primary purpose is to pray for the salvation of the children entrusted to our care, and to diligently teach them biblical truth through the powerful and memorable medium of song.

Here are some excellent thoughts from Isaac Watts, excerpted from the preface of his *Divine and Moral Songs for Children*:

My friends, it is an awful and important charge that is committed to you. The wisdom and welfare of the succeeding generation are entrusted with you before hand, and depend much on your conduct. The seeds of misery or happiness in this world, and that to come, are oftentimes sown very early; and, therefore, whatever may conduce to give the minds of children a relish for virtue and religion ought in the first place, to be proposed to you.

Verse was at first designed for the service of God, though it hath been wretchedly abused since. The ancients among the Jews and the heathens taught their children and disciples the precepts of morality and worship in verse. The children of Israel were commanded to learn the words of the song of Moses, Deut. 31:19,30; and we are directed in the New Testament, not only to sing, "with grace in the heart," but to "teach and admonish one another by hymns and songs," Ephes. 5:19. And there are these advantages in it:

1. There is a great delight in the very learning of truths and duties this way. There is something so amusing and entertaining in rhymes and metre that will incline children to make this part of their business a diversion.
2. What is learned in verse is longer retained in memory, and sooner recollected. The like sounds and the like number of syllables exceedingly assist the remembrance. And it may often happen that the end of a song, running in the mind, may be an effectual means to

keep off some temptations, or to incline to some duty when a word of scripture is not upon their thoughts.

3. This will be a constant furniture for the minds of children, that they may have something to think upon when alone, and sing over to themselves. This may sometimes give their thoughts a divine turn, and raise a young meditation. Thus they will not be forced to seek relief for an emptiness of mind out of the loose and dangerous sonnets of the age.
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Isaac Watts' pastoral burden is ours as well. To this end, we have the difficult task of choosing the best and most useful material from a wide range of Christian music, some of it excellent and some of it poor. We're intentionally "aiming high," placing substantive and profound texts into the minds of children that they may grow into over time, rather than aiming exclusively on texts that are simple and repetitive. This evaluation is subjective, of course, but the goal is to place within them lyrics that they will never need to outgrow.

We also use times of "performing" in church to teach principles of corporate worship: service, humility, proclamation, reverence, and orderliness. Even something as commonplace as good posture, for example, aids in a presentation that avoids undue visual distraction, and so we teach it regularly.

Second, we seek to teach principles of beautiful singing. If the goal is to produce life-long singers, it's essential to help children use their voices properly. They must learn, as early as possible, to sing in the upper part of their register, with a light and supported tone. This we call "head voice." For that reason, our instruction tends to avoid popular styles that push the voice too low or too loud, or encourage a breathy or forced tone that can cause children significant vocal problems as they develop. While we never want to communicate, explicitly or otherwise, that these musical styles are inferior in the corporate praises of our Lord, our focus is on *vocal pedagogy* (teaching) *that produces life-long singers*.

To this end, we'll also give individual help to children that are struggling to sing on pitch, or have difficulty in healthy vocal production. We'll never single out any child in choir for singing, or cause them embarrassment, but we will initiate private assistance through you, the parent, if we feel it would help a young singer improve.

Finally, we will use a portion of our class time to teach music reading. Just as children can learn to read with practice, so they can learn to read music, and in a relatively short period of time. While this isn't the first priority in our rehearsals, it's definitely important.

Thank you for entrusting your children to our care!