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# COVENANT OF GRACE

Rehearsal Suggestions

by Lee Dengler

Preparing your choir for a major work like *Covenant of Grace* is no small task. For most of you, this undertaking must be accomplished simultaneously with singing at least one anthem in the worship service(s), possibly providing an introit or some other service music, giving support to the congregation as they learn a new hymn – the list goes on. What a wonderful blessing you and your choir are to your congregation.

Assembled here are some rehearsal ideas and suggestions for *Covenant of Grace*. These ideas fall into four main categories:

## VOCAL EXERCISES AND WARM-UPS

It is always helpful to do warm-ups with your choir that address issues in the music you are about to rehearse.

## DICTION

Good diction not only enables the choir to be understood, it also produces a more unified choral sound. Giving attention to voiced consonants adds intensity and clarity to the words and immensely helps in singing legato.

## CHORAL BLEND

A good choral blend is accomplished when vowels are spacious and well supported. When this is uniformly done by every choir member, the tone becomes unified.

## MUSICAL POINTS OF FOCUS

Every piece of music has an occasional passage that presents some difficulty for the choir. It is always helpful to go into a rehearsal already knowing where those spots may be and being prepared to address them.

## PAEAN OF PROMISE

### VOCAL EXERCISES

Sing these exercises as warm-ups, moving up in half steps. In Ex. 1, have the singers concentrate on singing a legato line, and on the diphthong in “mighty.” In both exercises, ask them to start the “O” with an open throat so that they do not create a glottal attack on the vowel. You may suggest that they put a very subtle “H” on the “O” in order to create a more open and relaxed throat.

Ex. 1 

Ex. 2 

### DICTION

Be careful not to close the “r” in the following words:

ser <u>v</u> ant	m. 6
word(s)	ms. 8, 50, 86, 90
cour <u>a</u> ge	m. 9
ever <u>s</u> ure	ms. 10-11
ever <u>l</u> asting	m. 14
forever <u>r</u> endure <u>r</u>	ms. 17-19, 21-23
show <u>e</u> r	ms. 38, 74
your <u>r</u>	m. 53
star <u>s</u>	m. 55
never <u>r</u>	m. 59
for <u>r</u> you are cover <u>e</u> d	ms. 65-66

A diphthong is a combination of two spoken vowels, sometimes spelled out (about) and sometimes spelled with a single vowel (mighty). In these words the singers should give full length to the initial vowel, placing the secondary vowel at the very end along with a closing consonant, if there is one.

gr <u>a</u> ce	ms. 17, 21, 67
m <u>i</u> ghty	ms. 35, 71
l <u>i</u> fe	ms. 51, 87, 91
w <u>a</u> y	m. 62
h <u>i</u> gh	m. 76

Enunciate only one “k” on “take courage” ms. 6-7, 8- 9  
Sing a voiced “th” as in “wither” on “withh” ms. 38, 54, 74

### POINTS OF FOCUS

In order to achieve perfectly tuned chords in ms. 90-91, practice singing in pairs of voices that are an octave apart: Sop. I and Tenor, Sop. II and Baritone, and Alto and Bass. After singing in pairs, practice singing with all the parts combined, asking each voice part to carefully listen for the other voice that is an octave apart.

# COVENANT OF GRACE

Devotionals

by Susan Naus Dengler

Have you ever heard the phrase, “preaching to the choir?” This phrase typically implies that someone is speaking, somewhat emphatically, to the one group that probably does not need to hear the message. For instance, a pastor who is giving a lecture about regular church attendance to the small, but faithful few who are in church every Sunday, is “preaching to the choir.”

The contributions that church choirs make to their respective congregations, whether through single anthems, service music, or cantatas and other major works presented for special occasions, might well be termed, “preaching from the choir.” Certainly, every choral selection that is shared in worship carries with it its own “sermon.” Being a member of a congregation’s choir implies privilege and responsibility.

What a privilege it is to join our hearts and voices with fellow believers to sing about God’s love and grace! What a joy to be able to “live with” words and music for a number of weeks, while rehearsing a particular choral piece, until it becomes a part of one’s very being. And, what a solemn responsibility to preach these “sermons in song” to our congregations, endeavoring to convey every nuance of meaning to a group that usually only gets to hear the selection one time.

The following devotional suggestions for *Covenant of Grace* are offered with both the privilege and the responsibility of church choir membership in mind. May we prayerfully hide these precious truths in our hearts, so that we, and the congregations that we love and serve, may draw ever closer to the God of all grace!

Devotion 1  
**PAEAN OF PROMISE**

What is a covenant? In general terms, it is a solemn promise to either engage in or refrain from a specified action. Unlike a contract, it is a one-way agreement in which only the one making the covenant is bound by the action. This sounds something like grace, doesn't it? Grace is the unmerited favor and mercy of God toward each of us humans.

Surely, we are in a win/win situation with our loving God! Even though we have done nothing to deserve it, God has made a solemn promise to cover us with grace.

Here are some of God's promises that are mentioned in the text of "Paeon of Promise:"

"God is ever sure, God is always faithful."

"Know therefore that the Lord, your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love Him and keep His commandments, to a thousand generations." Deuteronomy 7:9 (NRSV)

"God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." 1 Corinthians 1:9 (NRSV)

"God's love is everlasting."

"The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving kindness.." Jeremiah 31:3 (NIV)

"I will make you a mighty nation."

"I will bless you, and make your descendants into a great nation. You will become famous and be a blessing to others." Genesis 12:2 (CEV)

"I will bless you that you might be a blessing."

"So will I save you and you shall be a blessing. Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong." Zechariah 8:13b (NRSV)

"I will bless your night with shining stars of peace and hope."

"Yet the Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me and my prayer unto the God of my life." Psalm 42:8

"Every valley that you walk, you'll never walk alone."

"I may walk through the valleys as dark as death, but I won't be afraid. You are with me, and Your shepherd's rod makes me feel safe." Psalm 23:4 (CEV)

"If you lose your way, I'll bring you home."

"If any of you has a hundred sheep, and one of them gets lost, what will you do? Won't you leave the ninety-nine in the field and go look for the lost sheep until you find it? And when you find it, you will be so glad that you will put it on your shoulder and carry it home." Luke 15:4-6 (CEV)

"You are covered by my grace."

"Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered." Romans 4:7 (NIV)

Which of these promises do you need to remember in your present circumstances? Which might you share with a troubled friend or loved one? May you carry these words, these evidences of God's grace, with you throughout the coming week!