

ENCOURAGING OUR YOUNGSTERS

At the end of the last Ely Music Rag editorial meeting, the conversation of the three members of the task group turned to the role of young people in our choirs and, in particular, to their involvement in the activities often provided for the other youngsters in our congregations.

There is a story, perhaps not wholly apocryphal, of the Vicar who stood in his pulpit one day, surveyed the congregation, and asked why there were no children in his church. Behind him was a robed choir containing 16 boys! I hope that attitude which treated the choir as something rather different from the congregation as a whole has now become extinct, but I fear that sometimes the attitude prevails, albeit subconsciously. Sir Sidney Nicholson in his book *Quires and Places where they sing* said 'The choir ... consists of certain members of the congregation who are willing to devote their talent to the special work of helping the Church's music'. This is a most important role and emphasises the choir's place in the worshipping community. We often talk of 'all-age worship', and where better can we see this in action than in a group of individuals who, in my choir at least, range from 8 to 70, all combining together in praising God and helping to lead the worship of the whole congregation? However, there is no doubt that those towards the younger end of the age range sometimes need additional help in appreciating what is going on around them and it is often not politic to enquire too deeply into what goes on under the choir desks during the longer lessons and sermons!

It is thus important that we should consider offering to our youngsters something to help them to understand just what worship is all about, and in two out of the three churches represented by the editorial team, they go out for at least part of the service (usually including the sermon) to be part of the Children's Church or Sunday School. This can be very valuable for all concerned since, besides giving the children something they can more easily relate to, it means that the preacher can concentrate on speaking to those of more mature years and does not need to worry about having to be understood by all age ranges.

The potential danger here is, in my view, that we begin to lose the sense of communal direction that a good choir should try to achieve. The essence of a choir is that its music making is co-operative, and so I believe that it is vital that all the choir see themselves working together and detachment of a part of it can mean that we end up with two groups, one of which takes part in only some of the music. In the worst case, there can be a tussle between the Children's Church and the Choir Leader, where the latter has to fight to have part of his or her choir back for the musical parts of the service, and this conflict can communicate itself to the children who might feel that they are being dragged away from 'fun' activities to go 'back into church'.

The real answer here is co-operation between the choir and the Children's Church. Each must recognise the value of the other, and a way must be found to permit the younger members of the choir to feel fully part of both

organisations. I know that in all three of our churches, that co-operation is achieved, but I wonder whether everyone reading this feels that there is the right balance in their church between maintaining the unity of the choir on the one hand and, on the other, making sure that the younger members of that organisation have activities that challenge them and avoid mischief during the sermon.

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