

# **Choral Director Development Report**

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## **Past Events**

### **Music Summit – Nov 18**

This was our first workshop – It was attended by 32 members representing 12 chapters at a cost less than \$200 to the district! (See attached for comments from attendees to this event.)

Our goal at this first meeting was to get Pioneer Directors together and begin to explore issues and needs. We covered everything from vocal production, warm-ups, rehearsal techniques, technology for the chorus and its members, how to increase membership and much more.

The outcome was a strong need to do this again and go into further detail on our most needed areas.

We determined that all directors and Music teams have valuable information to share – so at our next Music Summit we will take time to let all chapters present share their “best practices”.

I feel that getting our directors together regularly to share ideas, thoughts, concerns and needs is integral to creating a stronger Pioneer.

### **Upcoming Events:**

### **Music Summit – May 19 – Canton, MI 9-5**

At our next upcoming Music Summit we will focus on several areas. District board members are encouraged to attend with their chapters.

Each chapter will get an opportunity to share a “best practice” for a 10-15 minute block – administrative, show, rehearsal technique, membership drive idea, community relations, etc.

We will continue discussing increasing membership, effective rehearsal techniques, improving overall chorus singing and technology. Review the concept of using modernized audience friendly music selection and the benefits of the Harmony Mercenaries Program.

Discuss the new presentation category and how it effects our scores and chapter performances. Paul will talk about the four levels of coaching/performing: Do, Think, Feel, Be.

We will also have an open discussion about the “Silo” mentality of chapters and directors. How can we avoid that – help each other – learn from one another – grow together.

Jamie Carey, Paul Ellinger, Dave Spitzary and Diane Clark will lead sessions.

## **Music Summit – Saturday, Sept 29 – Okemos, MI 9-5**

I am looking to continue director and music team development.

We are looking to invite specific guests that include Theo Hicks, Don Campbell and others.

We will again ask our directors what they would like to see and include elements of such.

We will be adding Kaleb Lenneman and Patrica Osborne to this panel to discuss how they have grown and inspired their chapters to a higher level.

## **Choral Directors Workshop Intensive – Saturday, Sept 29 – Grand Rapids, MI 9-5**

After a long discussion with Donny Rose and Doug Smeltz I am going to bring back the CDWI to Pioneer. This program at the national level has been struggling – it is used less and less each year. However, I think it can be of benefit to many of our directors – but we need *top level coaches*. I have requested that we bring in only A level directors to work with our directors. People who have actually lived it and done it – not learned it at a training or read it in a book. We need trainers that will motivate our directors to attend. I have also stressed the need to work on chorus techniques like balance, blend, vowel matching, sync, etc... The overall sweeping concepts we are working to improve in our Music Summits.

I am looking at the potential of having directors ask at least a GROUP of their own chorus members attend as the “mock chorus”. I think this can help – they see what is being worked on with their director. In addition – the director is actually directing at least SOME of their own members. (Chief complaint of CDWI attendees in the past) We will try to get at least one or two songs that the director uses with his own chorus.

I told Doug Smeltz that our plan would be to send a “directors view” of the director in a contest or show and at least a 10 minute rehearsal video for the trainer to view in advance. This will help save time and key in strengths and weaknesses faster than just meeting them the day of the event.

If we get more than 5 directors/assistant directors interested – I will look at doing one in Grand Rapids on Saturday the 17<sup>th</sup> and one on Sunday the 18<sup>th</sup> in the SE section of the district.

### **Chorus Coaching:**

A Question I am exploring: Why are choruses not “coaching”? Only a few do.

Can the District offer money for this? Do they now? For Example – Could the District cover expenses (hotel, travel, meals - limit \$200) and Stipend (\$100) - Total of \$300 per year max – every chorus?

I will review, renew and publish a list of CHORUS coaches that are in the district and near-by.

## **Final Thoughts –**

My last thoughts may not be my specific area – but one that directors have talked to me about over and over. - One of the primary concerns of ALL Pioneer directors is the **AGING** membership of its chapter– which leads directly to the need for an influx of new members and membership growth. And – “what is the DISTRICT going to do to help MY CHAPTER” – “we are all alone here”.

Over the past 10 years we have completely lost chapters that were once strong – Alpena – Gaylord – and in all reality we are on the verge of losing 3-4 more chapters (Muskegon, Holland, etc...)

**WHAT DID THE DISTRICT DO TO SAVE ALPENA and GAYLORD?**

**WHAT EFFORTS WERE MADE TO KEEP THEM AFLOAT AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL?**

I believe that we need to focus our attention on not only how to save these chapters, but revitalize and strengthen ALL Pioneer choruses.

As chapters decrease in membership, they do not attend convention (loss of revenue), we lose overall district membership (loss of revenue) and they do not bring in new members (loss in revenue). If we do not spend some money now to bring them back and help water them so they grow – we won't have to worry about saving our money for future conventions as we will not have future conventions to save it for.

I believe we need NEW ideas and NEW programs – we need to think outside the box. Can we put together a task force that would include experienced district chorus members/directors that have had hands on experience in growing their own chapters along with non-members (PR, MEDIA, Business People) to develop a district plan. We need to let these chapters know soon that we care about THEM – that they are important – and we are going to put our money where our mouth is and help them.

### **ONE IDEA: Student Stipend Program.**

Many churches have student stipends to lead their sections and bolster their membership with “ringers”. The United Methodist Church choir I directed for 2 years in Mt. Pleasant did this and I know of many others that use this method very successfully. They pay \$15 - \$25 per week (rehearsal and church service) per student. Many times the students in turn bring non-paying friends along. This helps immediately bring a vocal boost to the chorus – new blood – younger members. This potentially help attract better quality singers and younger members. And gives the chorus director some much needed support on the risers!

### **The Plan:**

Advertise in the local paper – free radio announcements – music department flyers (Upper High School and local Colleges)– etc... and announce that a local men’s chorus is looking for paid vocal assistance.

Have the chapter director and music team hold interviews – meet and greet. Do they fit what we need – etc....

Benefits: Section leaders – potential ability to help plunk out parts on the piano – maybe make tracks – be seen at your singouts and performances! They might bring friends – bring family members and others to shows – etc... Get them to form a quartet. You might potentially have another Frontier on your hands....

Pay the students \$25.00 per ATTENDED rehearsal/performance. 4 section stipend section leaders. Potential outlay \$400 a month – or \$2,400.00 (Max of \$2,500) for 6 months.

Would this work? It works for churches. What is it worth to save a chapter.

Ok – so what happens at the end of 6 months? We evaluate at 5 months and determine with the chapter to renew the contract.

Second 6 months – chapter pays students dues and supplements \$10 per session or \$160 a month/ \$960 for 6 months. District pays \$1,440.00 – Max of \$1,500.00

Would the District approve to try it for 6 months with one or two troubled chapter? A “pilot” program. Potentially we could get sponsors – hold fundraisers – etc.. to support this program.