



## **Inviting the Ward to Sing in the Choir | A How I Lead Interview with ToriAnn Perkey**

October 23, 2024

Kurt Francom:

Let's be honest, few humans enjoy meetings and many feel trapped in meetings. As leaders, we don't want to burden those we lead, but meetings can seem to do that more often than not. We wanted to address the pain of meetings through the Meetings with Saints library. Here we have 15 plus presentations dedicated to improving the meetings we run. We have experts in the field addressing topics like getting people involved in meetings, staying on task, dealing with conflict in meetings, and a ton more. We'd love you to explore the full Meetings with Saints library over 14 days at no cost to you. You can do this by visiting [leadingsaints.org slash 14](https://leadingsaints.org/14). That's [leadingsaints.org slash one four](https://leadingsaints.org/onefour). We'll also give you access to all of our virtual libraries to educate about other leadership topics. It's really good stuff, so visit [leadingsaints.org slash 14](https://leadingsaints.org/14) or click the link in the show notes. So my name is Kurt Francom and I am the founder and executive director of Leading Saints and obviously the host of the Leading Saints podcast. Now I started Leading Saints back in 2010. It was just a hobby blog and it grew from there. By the time 2014 came around, we started the podcast and that's really when it got some Traction and took off 2016, we became a 501c3 nonprofit organization and we've been growing ever since. And now I get the opportunity of interviewing and talking with remarkable people all over the world. Now this is a segment we do on the Leading Saints podcast called How I Lead. And we reach out to everyday leaders, they're not experts, gurus, authors, PhDs, they're just everyday leaders who've been asked to serve in a specific leadership calling and we simply ask them, How is it that you lead? And they go through some remarkable principles that should be in a book, that should be behind a PhD. They're usually that good. And we just talk about sharing what the other guy's doing. And I remember being a leader, just simply wanting to know, okay, I

know what I'm trying to do, but what's the other guy doing? What's working for him? And so that's why every Wednesday or so, we publish these How I Lead segments to share. Welcome into the podcast today. We're talking with ToriAnn Perkey from Orem, Utah, and she talks all things choir director, right? The ward choir director at the state choir director. And this is a calling that maybe doesn't get enough content. I mean, we have a series of music-focused episodes in the next few weeks, but hopefully you can gain from ToriAnn's experience. And if you know a choir director, especially somebody who's been called to as the Ward Choir Director, but they don't have too much confidence in it, or they don't feel prepared enough to step into that role, this would be a great episode to talk about. Listen for the great tips like ToriAnn mentions, asking for feedback, reaching out to people and asking, almost surveying, like why don't you come to choir and how can we make it better, especially for those who enjoy singing but don't come to choir, right? How do you market it to the point that you don't become overwhelmed, but you at least know that people are aware of it and that you are drawing them in and making it exciting, bringing energy to the calling. ToriAnn does a great job on this. And then just that relationship between the choir director and the bishopric and making sure the resources are there and that it really is a positive experience and adds to the meeting and not just adding the meeting. I love this portion of the ToriAnn mentions of turning every choir practice into a spiritual meeting where faith is shared, where connections are made and the spirit is just so present. It's great, great idea. So here's my interview with ToriAnn Perkey, the ward choir director. All right, ToriAnn Perkey, welcome to the Leading Saints podcast.

ToriAnn Perkey:

Well, thank you for having me. I'm excited to be here.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah, this is great. We're going to talk all things ward choir, state choir, all those things, right? Because that's an important, sometimes overlooked leadership role in the church, right?

ToriAnn Perkey:

I would agree with that. Yes, I'm excited.

Kurt Francom:

So what's your history with this calling? Have you been pigeonholed as you're always the go-to person for these things?

ToriAnn Perkey:

Maybe, although I think maybe a better way to say that is the Lord sees ability and like, I don't know, or maybe leaders just see that I can do certain things. So I've probably been a member, I've been an adult member of the church for 30-ish years, and probably 20 plus of those, I've either been a ward choir or ward choir director, state choir director, and or concurrently a music coordinator, state music coordinator, something like that. So I've been doing this for a long time on and off over a variety of years.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. And what's, do you have a general music background at all?

ToriAnn Perkey:

I loved music. I'm self-taught on a couple of instruments. I did band in high school and stuff like that. Then the senior year of my high school, they decided to start a marching band. I became the drum major, but it's not like I had years of drum majoring experience. That was my only conducting experience. Then after that, it's all just loving to conduct to music in the car and things like that. No, I don't have any professional training in music beyond what I did. for fun in high school.

Kurt Francom:

And then is there anything about your, because you're in Orem, Utah, is there anything about your stake or ward that, you know, about the demographics or anything that would be important to note as far as how it relates to the choir?

ToriAnn Perkey:

Yeah. So I think that's an interesting question. So originally I was called to be the ward choir director in Columbus, Ohio. So that was where we lived when I first was called. And then I was called to be the ward choir director in the state choir conductor, director concurrently in Ohio. And that was a very different dynamic than what, and then I've served as this ward choir director in my ward for three separate times over the course of 15 years. And now I'm the state choir director again. And what's interesting is every single time, it's different. So in my first ward in Ohio, the ward was, there were some older more settled families, but I would say about half the

ward was like a young married family ward, lots of young kids. I had young kids at the time. I was having kids while I was conducting and things like that. And then we moved and then I went on to the stake and the stake level was very different because you know, out there, you're spread way apart. It takes 60 minutes to an hour and a half or two hours to get around the state. So trying to have state choir experiences was different than a ward choir experience, right? And then I moved here and coming to choir is easier because you're not having to drive as far to get to choir. But a settled choir that doesn't have lots of young, vibrant musical families is really different than And the dynamic in my ward from 15, 16 years ago is really different than my ward or stake now. So I would say that it's, I mean, I'm in a traditional Utah ward, spread of families, things like that. But every single time I've been a choir director, the rules have kind of changed.

Kurt Francom:

Well, that's that's I'm glad you brought that up that knowing that you've had this experience, you know, not just along the the Wasatch Front, right? So that's cool. Yeah. Anything else any before we jump to your principles that kind of lays the groundwork for us or any other details worth mentioning?

ToriAnn Perkey:

I think as I think about all the different things I've done, I feel like my story, let me just, can I just lay out a little bit of like how this played out? So initially I get called to be award choir director and it was the most terrifying thing I'd ever been asked. I almost said no. I sat there and I just thought about it because I didn't know how to conduct a choir. And even though your musical doesn't mean you know what you're doing, And I think that it's a really good example where sometimes leadership looks at someone and says, oh, I think you can do this because you sing or you've been in choir before or whatever. And so that was really interesting. And then to be concurrent. So then when they asked me to come into the stake level, the reason was my stake in Ohio had been doing a cantata, which is to make it very simple. It's kind of like a musical story with some narration in between the songs. And we'd been doing the same one for 20 years for Christmas. And they brought me in because they wanted to change it. And they needed someone who was going to be the changemaker. And that was really hard. And so the leadership was like, we need to bring someone in who has done the cantata once, but we're going to change that. And I think That also, you know, I think that's really interesting. It's so interesting as you look, every time I was called, one of the running themes, and I think this is important, was the choir is dead or dying. Usually it's dead. Like, you know, like sometimes choirs are really robust, but then over time they drift and dwindle. And then sometimes it's more like six people standing up there. Or in the first situation, there were three people who did a performance and then nothing happened for several months. And that's been consistently the pattern for me. And I'm not saying that's the case for every leader in state or ward choirs, but I was called to resurrect it after it kind of died in my current ward. And then the most recent time

that I was called to be state choir director, which was just this summer, they said, we need to resurrect the choir after COVID. And actually the last time I got called to be ward choir director in my ward, it was also after COVID. So that is a consistent pattern. And I think will be helpful to know as we start talking about some of my principles about how you successfully run a choir, because part of it is what do you do when no one wants to come? Because I think that's one of the biggest challenges of ward choir. Ancestor choir is like, how do you get people there when they don't have to come? Their temple recommend is not dependent on whether or not they show up at choir. And I think, so, you know, as we talk about things, I think that's important to recognize.

Kurt Francom:

Cool. Well, let's get into it then and we'll touch on those as they come up. First principle being ask questions and get feedback.

ToriAnn Perkey:

Yeah. So I kind of fell into this concept with the very first time because I didn't want to show up at choir and not have anybody there. That probably says as much about me as anybody else. I just didn't want to lead a choir of three people. That sounded miserable. And so I called, I took the ward list and anyone who was remotely active, as in I recognized the name, I called every single person. And this was before texting, before Google Forms. And I said, okay, tell me why you like, if you come, do you sing? And if they were like, oh yeah, I've sung before, I'd say, great. If you've ever gone to ward choir, why did you stop going? Or what do you like about choir? Or if you can sing and you don't come to choir, tell me why. Like, what is it about choir you don't like? And I got a whole range of answers, whole range. But there were consistent patterns. There were things like, well, it goes too long, or I don't know what to do with my kids, or I can't read music, or I don't read music well enough to be able to learn the songs quickly enough, or the music's too hard. I got all of this list of things. And then based on that, I could go through and I could say, OK, well, I can solve this problem. I can solve this problem. We'll have a couple of young women stay after and watch all the kids. I'll make, and this was way before it was easy, I'll make recording tracks so that everybody can listen to the music if they can't read. I'll make sure I don't pick music that's super complicated. The first principle I think, and this applies to anything beyond choir, anything that I call a silo calling where you kind of work on the periphery and you have to beg people to show up. I feel like relief site activities fits in this category. I feel like early morning stake mission prep could fit in. There's places where What we have to do is entice people to get there and we have to figure out why they're not coming. I think a lot of times we assume they're not coming because of reasons that aren't necessarily true and we can problem solve those reasons if we just ask. As they give us feedback and we address those issues, they feel heard and people are more willing to participate because they feel heard and they feel like their problems are being addressed, which I think is also really important.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah, and that's just great advice for any calling or role that, you know, just reaching out to people who don't come who are on the rolls or whatever and say, you know, why don't you come? I love to hear it, you know, and just take these are just data points you can start to collect and then that can influence the inspiration that you get.

ToriAnn Perkey:

Yeah. Yeah. And what's been interesting is the answers have been different over the years and how I have problem solved, those things have changed over the years. In my current ward, we don't have a nursery for the children. We just don't because it's a different need, a different fit. We didn't do that for state choir, but because the issues of why people can't come has changed.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. Yeah. It makes sense. Anything else about getting feedback and asking questions or does that kind of cover it?

ToriAnn Perkey:

I think the only thing I would add to that is when I ask for feedback, I always stress that they're not going to hurt my feelings. I've often had the benefit of being able to say, look, I've never been the conductor before, so you can't hurt my feelings. You're not going to tell me about the previous choir, right? They're not talking about my previous choir. But I think it's really important that people feel like if they give feedback, your feelings aren't going to get hurt and that you genuinely want to know so you can address it. Because otherwise, feedback just feels like you're spitting into the wind and that's no fun.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. And if they tell you that choir practice is too long and then you do it for a shorter time, it's like, wow, maybe I will come back, right?

ToriAnn Perkey:

Yeah. And I can go back to that person and say, did you know we've shortened choir? Guess what? It's only half an hour. You said that was an issue. I would love to have you There.

Kurt Francom:

Very good. All right. The next principle is market like crazy.

ToriAnn Perkey:

Okay, so going back to the idea that we have two kinds of callings in the church, at least I like to think of two types of callings. We have the ones where people are going to show up because they're going to show up. So primary teacher all the way up to bishop, like Sunday callings, people are going to show up. And actually a lot of callings that work with youth and teenagers, like younger children in primary and people are going to show up there too because the adults get the kids there. Like you're pushing your kid to go to youth activities every week or whatever. So that's one category of calling. I don't have to worry about kids showing up in my primary class. I don't have to worry about young women showing up on Sunday. But anything in the other category is stuff where it's completely optional, which means that if people don't know about it, they will forget. We are so busy as a people that if I want to be successful, it is my job to go out and get the information in front of every people as much as humanly possible and not worry that I'm oversharing. I'm going to let people know where Word Choir is in the bulletin, and I'm going to send texts, and I'm going to send emails, and I'm going to say, guess what? These are the songs we're singing, and this is how long rehearsal is. I am going to make it sound interesting, and I'm going to make it sound exciting. Going back to the first point, I'm going to talk about how we're problem-solving things. I'm not just going to send that once. I'm going to send it every single week. I think people come to choir, in part, if you send a reminder text every single week. And the more I send and let people know, the more likely they are to show up because they hear. And I think that goes along with that is the idea that every time you meet someone new, you say, do you sing? Do you want to come?" So this is in Ohio, and we would have more new people show up in Ohio, right? Because it's that. And one day, this guy gets up and bears his testimony. I've never seen him before. So I made a beeline for him right after sacrament meeting. And I said, do you sing? And he's like, well, yes. And I said, great. This is where choir is, and it's right after church. And what part do you sing? He's like, I'm a bass. And I said, great. It was his first time back to church in 15 years, or maybe a second time, but within a month. He became one of the most devoted regular followers. And after a year and a half, he said, coming to choir was an essential part of my journey back into the church because I had a place where I felt like I belonged every single week. That wouldn't have happened if I wasn't like, I am going to go find every single human that can sing in my ward, and I'm going to invite them to be a part of this. I think we have to pull people to us and get them excited.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. And so part of that is a lot of that marketing, just those one-to-one interactions as you're engaging with people.

ToriAnn Perkey:

Yeah, I mean, I think everybody knows about like putting it in the award bulletin or handing out a flyer, but it's it's the extra pieces that make it sound like you care and your energy then makes them excited.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. Do people ever just say, no, I don't sing or no, I do sing, but I have no interest in being in the choir.

ToriAnn Perkey:

Yeah. Oh, yeah. Like, I never saw it as a rejection. So let's say someone new shows up in the ward and I say, Hey, do you sing? And their answer is, uh, no, we're just visiting. I'm like, well, great. I'm the ward choir director. So I asked that to everyone, but tell me where you're from. Like it became, I would just transition or no, but I'm not interested in being choir. Actually, that's a two-part answer. If the no answer is no, I don't sing. I never sing. I'm like, oh, that is awesome. We need people in the congregation who love to listen to choir. If nobody's in the congregation, then that's not going to work either. So I'm so glad you're out there. But no, I don't come to choir is a different answer, because then it's like, oh, why don't you come? And then you can address that. Or I would get, no, it's not a good fit for me right now. I'm like, okay, great. Well, do you mind if I ask you later? Like, I feel like it's kind of like missionary work inside where you're just looking for, are they giving me reasons that are strong reasons? Or are they giving me reasons that are more like deflecting reasons, but maybe if we have a conversation, they're willing to come.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. Love it. That's really helpful. Anything else about marketing like crazy that you want to add?



ToriAnn Perkey:

And just don't be afraid that people are going to be annoyed. Like you should assume that if you put out 10 different types of things, people will see one, right? Like I just think that people are afraid they'll be annoying. And I have yet to be annoyed by hearing more announcements because inevitably we're all busy and not paying attention.

Kurt Francom:

Next one you got is make it easy and simple to participate. How do you do that?

ToriAnn Perkey:

Okay. So I don't know, I don't know, have you ever been to a ward choir? Have you ever tried?

Kurt Francom:

I enjoy singing and I enjoy ward choir.

ToriAnn Perkey:

Great. And you know, whether you're going to ward choir, state choir, whether you're going to anything, Sometimes you can go to something and it feels disorganized. It can feel like the person's not really sure what's going on. Specifically in choir, you'll see things like, oh, I was trying to get the music photocopied and so we're running late. Or, well, I'm not really sure. We're just going to look at this song, but maybe we'll do this song or whatever. Or it'll be, oh, I thought I'd scheduled the building to rehearse, but actually we're going to move because I didn't know about this. It can be all kinds of things. And the challenge is that the more sticky points where people are frustrated or they're kind of annoyed or they're not engaged, you give people reasons to not want to be there. When I say make it simple and easy, I'll give some specific examples from Word Choir, but I think it applies to anything that you're doing, that you're putting on an event for people, is it's things like, do I have music for every person who I think will participate? No one has to feel like they don't belong because they don't have a song, a sheet music to read. Do I have an assigned folder so they know how to find their music, so they can make notes in their music, so that they can then have that music every single week? Do they know exactly where we meet? Do they know if we're not meeting? Do they know what the plan is? Can they plan on it ending at a certain time? I think my job as, because I'm like a little mini event coordinator every time I do a rehearsal, right? And so my job is to sit there and think,

where are all the parts where this could get, I don't want to say boring, but it could be a sticky point. Does everybody have a pencil? If they don't have a pencil, how can I ensure that everyone has a pencil so I'm not stopping in the middle of the rehearsal to hand out pencils? How do I make sure everybody has music so I'm not stopping the rehearsal and making everyone wait because someone walked in 20 minutes late and they don't have the music? And there's all kinds of ways to problem solve that. Can I ask the sister so-and-so that is faithfully there every week and just say, would you be in charge of handing out the music if someone walks in late so I can keep the rehearsal moving? And I think simple and easy is about thinking, how do I make it so crazy simple and easy for a person to come that they don't have any excuses? And so the reasons they're not coming are not because I have made it difficult to be There.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah, that's, again, all these principles are like, so generally helpful with any any leadership role that you have, or as you're trying to organize an effort, right, or a class or so. Yeah, that's really good. Anything else that we missed as far as making it simple to participate or that?

ToriAnn Perkey:

I think it would go back. I think what I would add is just go back to the feedback piece, right? People are going to tell you why it's not fun. They're going to tell you why it's complicated. They're going to tell you where they get frustrated if they're honest with you. And then simple and easy is problem solving all of those things. So it's listening. And then it's also your own observations of where do things get stuck. It's both.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. Awesome. All right. The last principle is make it worth their time. I love it.

ToriAnn Perkey:

So I think this dovetails off simple and easy, right? So the challenge with a choir is inevitably if you're doing four parts, there's always a chance to be sitting and doing nothing. Choir directors can make things move more quickly. We can plan rehearsals so that it doesn't feel like no one's sitting for a long period of time. But more importantly, I think when we're thinking about make it worth our time, I think about the mom who's got two teenagers at home and a 10-year-old and a four-year-old. And if she chooses to come to choir, then that is an hour-ish from her Sunday.

She is not with her family, right? If a dad chooses to come in addition to whatever meetings he's going to, that's an hour he's not with his family. We need to be aware that if we're inviting people to participate something in addition to all the other things they're already choosing to do, then it has to be more than just a guilt trip like, you should be in choir because God said we have to have a choir. That's not what it's about. It's saying, how do I make Actually, it's about asking the Lord, how would you like me to make this experience so that the people who come feel edified, feel like this was worth giving me their time? I see if someone comes to an activity, the number one resource that we have to give in our lives right now for most of us is our time, right? That's the most expensive resource. And if someone chooses to give me their time, that is a sacred stewardship because that's an hour they're not giving to other things that are important. Yeah. So with that in mind. I'll give you this last, and it's changed. Like every time I would get this calling, my prayer would be, okay, what am I supposed to focus on? Why are we having choir? Why do you want this ward or this state to have a choir right now? Because every time you get this calling, it's different. The ward makeup is different. The state makeup is different. The direction from the leadership is different. And I think it's valuable to ask that and you say, Bishop, or your bishop counselor, like, why do you think our word choir matters right now? And it's not just because the handbook says you should have a choir. That is not it. So then once you know that, once you're getting that inspiration, the answer then becomes, okay, how do I build that up? So here's a great example. This last time in stake for stake choir, I asked the question after I talked to the leadership and they're like, well, we really feel like we want to resurrect the choir because of after COVID and we just really want to bring music back into the stake and we really want people to feel unified. I was like, great. As I prayed about it, in addition, I felt like for this group that's going to participate, choir needs to be a conversionary experience for the participants, and not just so we can make music for state conference. And so because of that, my goal wasn't just make it simple, make it fun, make it easy, all of these other things we've talked about. But I took some of the things that I've learned over the years from other people. I can't take credit for all the things I do at choir because that's really all about like you're collecting ideas. And I said, OK, at the end of every rehearsal, we will take five minutes. and we're going to just read the words and think about what we've sung. And then I would tell them, I'd say, I'd like one or two of you to tell me, what does this music mean to you? And so we would have a mini testimony, five minutes, at the end of the rehearsal every single week. And not only does that enhance the performance, because then people actually know and have really thought about what they're thinking, but in addition, The spirit, which goes from just supporting a practice, becomes this edifying moment where everyone is having a spiritual experience through the words and through the music. And then we would sing it again, and there's nothing like that after you've had a little testimony meeting and then you sing about it. I'm not saying that that's the right mode for every choir or every experience, but I think when we say, when I think make it worth their time, I want my choir members to walk away saying that I feel like I am a bigger, better version of myself because I showed up today. I feel edified. I feel like I can go through the rest of my week and I feel just a little bit more lift. And that's my job because I'm creating something they're going to give time to. Yeah.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah, because so many times choir practice can kind of just feel like this, this necessary step that nobody really likes, but hey, it's always fun to sing in state conference or in the ward. And so let's just get through the grind here. But instead to step back and say, how can we really make this a conversion process, a spiritual process, even during the practices? So everybody is edified.

ToriAnn Perkey:

Yeah, I think, um, That makes me think of something. It's been interesting to me over the years to notice that if we talk specifically about ward choirs and state choirs, one of the things they do, and this is ancillary to what you just said, is they bring people together who otherwise wouldn't necessarily come together. You can have a member of the Relief Society president Singing with someone who's a primary teacher who's sitting, you know, ideally you have youth coming, right? Like you have all of these different people who maybe we don't get to say two words to each other at church on Sunday. Maybe I never see you during the week. But choir allows me to create relationships that don't happen in other places. So when we talk about making it worth the time, I think it's also recognizing when we say it's a unifying experience, it's not just because we're singing together, it's because adults across the ward spectrum who have a common interest or are willing to have, they want to learn, come and associate together in a very unique setting. and often find a place to belong that maybe they don't feel like they belong in other places. And some of my dearest relationships over the course of my lifetime have been made as you're laughing and joking amidst the word choir practice, which hopefully there's laughing and joking in every word choir practice, because that's part of making it fun and making it worth it. But it's been interesting to notice how often belonging in strong choirs matters to people.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah, yeah. Any other, I'm just thinking like when it comes to, and you've touched on this a little bit, like working as the choir director, working with the bishopric or the stake presidency, like how does that relationship go? Anything come to mind as far as how to improve that? Yes. Or work as a team.

ToriAnn Perkey:

Um, I have had a variety of leadership. All my leaders have been amazingly supportive. I've never had one who was like, man, ward choir is not important and just like shoved me off in the corner. Um, I've always felt supported. Um, but different bishoprics run differently and I'll stay at the ward level because I think the stake tends to be a little bit more organized. It tends to be a little bit more structured because it's usually state conference that you're working with. So I've had bishops who will say, we would really like the music to align with every, like music that

aligns with the talks is amazing. That is a real, like, if you've just heard a talk on the atonement, and then you sing, I Stand All Amazed as a choir, talk about a reinforcement, right? But a choir cannot find out about the talks two weeks in advance. So I, as a choir director, all we, and well, and I should say music coordinators, like I often held both callings together, but if they're separated, then the music coordinator and the choir director are working together. So we do need to clarify how the conversation happens. But I would go to the bishopric and I'd say, if you can give me the talks four months in advance or six months in advance, Every single week will align with your theme. I can make every choir number align. As a music coordinator, I can also make our special music align. Even your hymns. One thing that leadership can do if they feel inspired and impressed that they want their music to further support what their messages that they're picking is to give the information just much sooner. because that's challenging. The second thing is to realize that while there is so much free music out there, it is nice to occasionally be able to buy folders and to make sure you can buy music. A budget for choir matters. Often, I've had to go and say, do I have a budget? Then inform them that \$40 won't buy me one choir's worth. That's one song, if I'm lucky. So appreciating that to have good choirs does require, especially, I believe, startup funds to buy folders and pencils and give me a place to store the music in the building. That's another one. Please, please, please. Like every time I get assigned, every time I would get it in a new area, a box of music or sometimes multiple boxes would show up at my house. And I think surely there is somewhere in the building we can hide this. And I would go to leadership and I'd say, please, is there an empty closet? Can we tuck this somewhere? No one's going to steal music. So it doesn't even have to be locked. But please, do I not have to keep this at my house, please? Yeah. Yeah, that's amazing and supportive. If you really want your word choir to be successful, this is like there's like the necessities and then the like asks. I would say if you want your WordChoir to be successful, then tell people don't plan meetings during WordChoir. Like the biggest, hardest thing is that you, let's say you meet from 10 to 12, and then your rehearsal, if you're the last person, no, let's say like 12 to two, you're the last person in your building. Now you're going to have choir at 2.15 or 2.30, and everybody has their presidency meetings. So I can't get anybody to choir because everybody's somewhere else. And yet the bishop's saying, you need to have a ward choir. And I'm thinking, I literally don't know when, unless I hold it at 4.30, but then everybody's fixing dinner. Choir often is, You're supposed to create this amazing experience that requires, I would say, a large number of ward members and their response. And often it's like, well, fit it in around the edges, but you can't. If you want to have a consistently performing ward choir, there's lots of other ways to do ward choir. So I'm not telling the leadership how to do it, but I'm saying it is difficult to run a ward choir if everyone's planning presidency meeting during ward choir. Then my last thing is this, not every choir director will know to ask, but I think it's always helpful if the director and the music coordinator, they know what the bishopric is hoping the choir will accomplish. I don't know that all bishoprics think about that. I don't know if they ever sit down and they think, why do we have a ward choir? Because if a bishopric, and I've had some who give that to me and somewhere I have to ask and then they have to think about it. But when leadership gives vision for a specific group, or they can say, well, you know what I mean? Like they can say, well, we really feel like our ward needs to work on unity right now. We really feel like we're just trying to really get the youth involved. Or they might say our ward focus right now is temple work or whatever it is. then as a ward choir director and a music coordinator, the

people who are picking the music, I can reinforce that. I can sit there and I'd say, great, then every third song will be about the temple, or I will do everything I can to get the youth there, or I can do a special youth combined number or whatever. I can build my choir to support the ward's vision if I know what they want me to focus on. So I would add, that would be my last thing, is just give me vision so I can fulfill it.

Kurt Francom:

Really helpful. That's, that's, that's awesome. So much to consider here. How about any, like, apps or technology or, I don't know, cool pencils you use, or I don't know, anything like the practical tools that come to mind?

ToriAnn Perkey:

There is a free website that was built by some, I just love people who have talents and then they aren't looking to make money. I don't have any trouble with making money with people's talents, don't get me wrong. But there's a website called [sacredsheetsmusic.com](http://sacredsheetsmusic.com). And anyone who writes a piece of music, or is an accomplished composer who wants to share their music for free, can put their music on that site. It is 6,000 sheet music pieces strong. You can filter by topic, you can filter by number. soprano alto tenor bass versus just like two part. You can look for a specific title. It filters in a variety of ways, which is why as a choir director, I need a lot less money than I used to. The nice thing is I actually don't play the piano, so I can go and listen to many pieces of those sheet music, have like MP3 recordings with them so I can hear what it sounds like. As a choir director, I would say that is my number one go-to resource in terms of finding sheet music, which is often the hardest thing. So you're either going to sing out of the hymn book or you're dealing with music that maybe is 30 years old. But that is a wonderful resource. The second thing is, I think that sometimes people, again, get called and they don't know where to get additional training. Sometimes I think people look at someone who sings and they think, oh, well, then of course you can lead a choir, or of course you can play the piano, right? We think of playing the piano as a skill that you have to have had some lessons. And I don't know that people translate that to leading choir is separate than just being able to even conduct the music and sacramenting. That's a very different thing. And so there are, and I'm not going to point any specific ones, but there's lots of conducting out there. You can go out and find, how do I conduct music? The church has some very specific things they've put out. Depending on your resources, there are some workshops you can pay for, but there's also lots of YouTube videos. And I think learning how to conduct music is also something that's helpful. And I don't know if all choir directors or leadership understand that Choir directors benefit from having training if they don't have it. I mean, I got really lucky in that I had some very specific things and I like to practice conducting classical music in the car. But even I with that, I would just pretend. But even so, I went looking for things because I was like, I don't know how to do dynamics. I don't know how to

cut people off. There's very specific things you do to bring people in that's totally not intuitive and it's a specific skill set.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah, it's so true. Yeah, that's really helpful.

ToriAnn Perkey:

Sending someone off to be the young men's camp hiking leader. I was going to say scout leader, but we don't have that anymore. And then saying, we're going to call someone who has no idea how to camp. You'd want to go learn some things. Absolutely.

Kurt Francom:

Awesome. Well, ToriAnnn, this has been so insightful, so helpful. I'm sure this will be of help to many choir directors who need the help, you know, who are looking for resources. So I'm glad this will be in our library. Any other point, principles, concept, story that we need to make sure we include before we wrap up?

ToriAnn Perkey:

I think the last thought that comes to mind is as a choir director, you can often not know the full extent of the impact you're having. I remember we were doing one of those little testimony moments in a state choir, and a guy raised his hand and he said, my wife passed away this summer, and we happen to be singing her favorite Christmas song. And every time I sing it, I feel like she's right next to me. I think stories like that, if we hadn't opened the floor, which you don't always get an opportunity to do, you don't know that. Yeah. The last time I got called as a choir director in my ward, it was for a relatively short period of time, and I'm not going to lie, I was a little burned out. I was like, why am I doing this again? Have I nothing else to give? It turns out, that there was one particular individual who I needed to make a relationship with that we have continued that relationship because that particular individual needed something that was beyond what choir was going to provide, but that's the only way I would have connected with that individual. I think trusting as a choir conductor, choir director, that your impact is bigger than just the songs you sing in sacrament. That doesn't even include all the things that happen when a song is sung. You're making more of a difference in individual lives than it sometimes feels like you are.

Kurt Francom:

That's great encouragement. Well, ToriAnn, as you reflect on your time as a, as leading music, how has leading music helped you become a better follower of Jesus Christ?

ToriAnn Perkey:

Oh, that's, you asked it a different way than you normally do.

Kurt Francom:

All right, I'll throw you off.

ToriAnn Perkey:

That's a beautiful question. The reality is, as a choir conductor, I stand up there and I cannot do my calling by myself. I'm in charge, everyone's supposed to follow me if we're all on the same page. I'm collectively molding sound to create an experience. That's my job. But without every individual voice in the choir, doesn't work, right? Like I have to have all the parts and they have to be each voice matters. And so I think if we think in terms of the Savior being the leader of the choir, and we've heard this, I mean, this is not the first time this metaphor is used, but my voice matters, my unique way of every voice has its own sound. But as I stay focused on the conductor, I create a unified sound and he leads and molds me to follow him where he's taking the entire group. And I think that becomes very apparent when you stand in that leadership role and you feel the power of creating a group coming with you and then thinking about the Savior taking that role and you sitting in the choir.

Kurt Francom:

And that concludes this, how I lead interview. I hope you enjoyed it. And, uh, I would ask you, could you take a minute and drop this link in an email, on social media, in a text, wherever it makes the most sense and share it with somebody who could relate to this, this experience. And this is how we, how we develop as leaders, just hearing what the other guy is doing, trying some things out, testing, adjusting for your area. And, uh, that's. That's where great leadership is discovered, right? So we would love to have you share this with somebody in this calling or a related calling, and that would be great. And also, if you know somebody, any type of leader, who would be a fantastic guest on the How I Lead segment, reach out to us. Go to



leadingsaints.org contact. Maybe send this individual an email letting them know that you're going to be suggesting their name for this interview. We'll reach out to them. See if we can line them up. So again, go to leadingsaints.org slash contact and there you can submit all the information and let us know. And maybe they will be on a future How I Lead segment on the Leading Saints podcast. Remember, solve the burden of meetings by visiting leadingsaints.org slash 14 and getting 14 days access to the Meetings with Saints virtual library.

Gordon B. Hinckley:

It came as a result of the position of leadership which was imposed upon us by the God of heaven who brought forth a restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And when the declaration was made concerning the only true and living church upon the face of the earth, we were immediately put in a position of loneliness. The loneliness of leadership from which we cannot shrink nor run away, and to which we must face up with boldness and courage and ability.