

WELLS CATHEDRAL VOLUNTARY CHOIR

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Voluntary Choir Survey

As surveys go, we have had an excellent response. In view of the encouraging results, it was decided to extend the survey to the Cathedral Churches in Wales and St. Mary's Edinburgh (thought to be the only Scottish Episcopal Cathedral with daily services and run on similar lines to those in England).

I have pleasure in enclosing a copy of the results as requested. I hope I have interpreted the replies accurately. In a few cases particularly where, instead of completing the questionnaire, replies were sent either in the form of a letter or a document describing the music arrangements of the cathedral generally, some of the information supplied did not quite fit the questions or was slightly ambiguous.

As you will see, seventeen choirs overall said that they were interested, or might be interested, in discussing the possibility of forming a Federation of Cathedral Voluntary Choirs. Consequently we are now inviting a delegate (with partner*) from each of those choirs to come to Wells on Saturday 6th July. We would ask you to arrive by 2 pm for a 2.15 pm meeting start. Partners not wishing to attend can join a bespoke Cathedral tour, by one of our members, or do their own thing. The meeting would close at 4.15 pm and, whilst we rehearse for evensong, delegates could re-unite with their partners over a cup of tea in the Cloisters Restaurant before attending evensong at 5.15 pm.

There would then be an opportunity for a wash and brush up at a choir member's home before convening for drinks, weather permitting, in the garden of The Rib, which lies just east of the Cathedral. Supper, with members of our choir, their partners and guests will be served in Vicars' Hall. Afterwards you are invited to leave with members of the choir who have offered bed and breakfast (*gratis*). More detailed information will be sent to those accepting the invitation. If you have any queries at this stage, please do give me a ring.

It is the weekend of the Four Choirs Festival in Bristol and details will be available for those who might be interested in attending on Sunday before returning home.

I enclose a few thoughts regarding the possible advantages and disadvantages of forming a Federation of Cathedral Voluntary Choirs to stimulate your own views. If you would like to send your feedback prior to the meeting, please do so. We would particularly like to have, in advance, the input of any interested choir unable to send a delegate to the meeting.

Yours sincerely,

Lynne Browning, Vice Chairman

* This at your discretion. We thought, as singing in a VC often takes time from family life, this could be an opportunity for you to have a weekend away together. Alternatively, a second delegate from your choir is welcome.

Wells CVC were asked to think about the objects of a FCVCs, to talk to others and feed back. For starters to toss around, could it be helpful to:

1. us as individuals and as a choir?
voice training/workshops¹/exchanges/combined events²
2. liturgical music?
wider platform for modern works (JDH in D!)/borrowing scheme/standards
3. the music in Cathedrals or around the dioceses?
less 'said' (or indifferently sung) services when CCs unavailable
4. emerging choirs? shared experience/advice/support
5. Cathedrals that do not have a voluntary choir? could it help them/support
6. know how other choirs manage financially - do they have constitutions - are they autonomous?
7. directors/organists/singers?
a ready network for those on the move or needing help from neighbours
8. be able to offer (with Cathedral agreement) any dates we are asked to do but cannot manage (e.g. 28th/29th Dec. 96) and perhaps take up offers elsewhere when we have a gap (eg Ash Wednesday - Easter hols)
9. celebrate the millenium in its full anno domini context?

Reservations:

1. Travelling and agreed times to do any of the above are probably the biggest turn-off.
2. Organising anything needs interested and efficient people who also have some time. Running the organisation will have its "distance" problems too. Is it feasible to have a chairman in one diocese, a secretary in another etc. or should one choir take the whole job on for a couple of years at a time?
3. It all costs money, although, hopefully, not a great deal.
4. There are already organisations which do not directly, but possibly could, cater for some of the above needs - the RSCM, the Friends of Cathedral Music, the Church Music Society and the NFMS. At the delegates meeting, we should discuss whether to go it alone or discuss with another organisation the possibility of being a sub-section, contributing a column to their newsletters and/or sharing their established set-up, publicity, etc.

¹ These could be on themes (psalms, weddings, funerals, plainsong, composer or period etc.), or taken by a living composer, or each Director could rehearse one new piece submitted by each participating choir.

² Combined events could be, for instance regional one year and national the next.