

Glory to God for all things! My choir has its own practice room, our own light switch beside the choir stands and a nave floor and ceiling of our acoustical dreams! I'll never forget when Father and I rushed over to this building as soon as the flooring was put in for no other reason than to hear what it sounded like when we sang! Our first hymn? The Troparion of Theophany! (*"When in Jordan Thou wast baptized O Lord..."*) Both the nave and the choir practice room are so live, much more than our beloved Azle space. We no longer have to use our microphone stands or have to compete with a loud air conditioner. As stated before, Glory to God for all things.

It was tough to decide where the kleros would be positioned in this space with the location of the hall front left and the doorway to the restrooms on the front right. Being in the back corner allows the congregation to focus forward to the altar for worship and prayer with minimal distraction. However, the choir singing from a back corner also comes with extra vigilance and diligence for congregational singing.

I appreciate Father's reminders that as you sing from the congregation, to remember that your volume should be just under the choir and that your tempo should match the choir, starting and stopping together. Even if it's a weekday liturgy and the choir is small with one or two singers, you can help them the *most* by keeping your volume just *below* them and following their lead.

Our role is to lead the congregation in song in one voice together to glorify God. Before every rehearsal begins, we pray, asking for the intercessions of Archangel Gabriel and Archbishop Dmitri of Blessed Memory and that we may be reminded that we are, indeed, joining our voices with the angels. Orthodox worship is sung worship and it's at its best when it has a strong lead and unified followers. Thank you so much for supporting us as we journey through this transition of our new, acoustic-friendly space.

I continue to learn and grow in my role as choir director. I'll tell anyone that I have a master's in teaching, not music. Music has always been a passion and a joy to be a part of for me—whether it's singing around the family piano, highschool or college choirs, weddings or funerals, and yes Orthodox choirs, as the Irish ballad so beautifully puts it: *"How can I keep from singing?"* I want to thank the Parish Council for agreeing to fund my desire to take eight private conducting lessons with Dr. Robin Freeman (with whom I took a beginning conductor's course on scholarship at the 2020 St. Vladimir's Music Symposium). I had four sessions with her in the fall and will resume the four remaining sessions this spring. She's been a wealth of knowledge for me looking at a variety of pieces, fine-tuning, troubleshooting, and coaching me in conducting patterns and practicing strong down beats. I've never had the opportunity to have private lessons in anything and am soaking up and applying everything I can from this experience. I've also attended Dn. Anthony Stokes' workshops on putting together a Vigil service which will hopefully be in our future. Vigil is so rich with our Orthodox theology and we miss much when those hymns aren't added to our worship and preparation. In the meantime, it's been a joy to add Litya at the end of Great Vespers before major feast days whenever we can.

I've saved the best for last, which is of course to thank my dear choir members: Melinda Bowman, Heather/Irene Marrick, Jamie Stepich, Lydia Marinello, Andrea Rovny and Pete Drauden. You all know I could not do this without you. Thank you for showing up behind the scenes to rehearsals, for the kindness, respect and grace you give me, for your proactive support to help troubleshoot when needed, and for singing multiple services in a week when you're tired and have other commitments. I cannot thank you enough. Thank you to Andrea for stepping up and leading when I have other commitments. I always know the choir is in good hands.

This is our worship. This is our Orthodox faith. This is how we serve God.