



fcooca

Organising a Federation Festival

A step by step guide for Associations

Introduction

This guide to organising a Festival for the Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers' Associations came into effect in 2021. For anyone who has been associated with the Federation for any time, they will see that this is a much simplified guide from previous versions.

Annual gatherings have been held by the Federation since its formation in 1910 and have changed over the years. Until the 1980s, the event was centred around the AGM but, in the 1980s, this was separated out to provide an additional opportunity to meet each year. Over time, the Festival has become a significant event spread over 3 days – Friday to Sunday – and requires much planning and resources to bring it to fruition. In recent years we have witnessed falling interest and attendance at both this event and the AGM, which has given rise to a revised approach.

Hosting a Festival is a chance to let other former choristers enjoy the delights of your city/town, your cathedral/church and its musical tradition. It is also an opportunity to celebrate, especially if your Association or cathedral is marking a special anniversary or event. It doesn't matter if your Association is large or small. It need only take a few of you to make the arrangements and run a successful event but, obviously, the more people involved, the easier it will be. It is recommended to involve your cathedral's Dean and Chapter, or senior clergy in other places, (though, not necessarily their direct involvement) and, of course, the Director of Music/Organist. Their support and input needs to be in place at the outset of any plans.

What sort of Festival?

To break with tradition, we want you to decide the format of the event you wish to hold. We suggest it should focus on one day (Saturday). Some delegates may wish to arrive on Friday and stay through until Sunday and enjoy a whole weekend in your city/town but it is necessary only to offer a programme of activities for just the one day. It may be appropriate for you to invite the Federation to share your annual gathering. Cathedrals, especially, are busy places these days and holding one former chorister event in a year rather than two may help with availability.

We have only one request; that there is a choral evensong sung by the present choir. You may also wish to offer a formal meal, lunch or dinner, at which there might be a guest speaker. Delegates at past Festivals have also enjoyed the opportunity to sing with the choir at the evensong, which would require suitable rehearsal time to be built into the schedule.

Other activities which you might consider are:

- A tour of the cathedral/church/school
- An organ recital
- Less formal activities such as hand bell ringing or a visit to the organ loft

First Steps

Our recommendation is to start the planning process as far ahead of the date as possible. The first thing to do is to check the year you are planning to offer has not already been taken by another Association by contacting the Honorary Secretary (secretary@fcoca.org.uk). As we've said, cathedrals and churches are busy places with many calls on their resources. You will want to ensure no other events are going to take place on the day of the Festival and so booking the date with the music department (Director of Music) clergy and the administration team comes high on the priority list. Although planning 2 or 3 years ahead is recommended, we have had successful events arranged in not much more than a year.

Next, establish an organising committee and nominate one person to be the conduit with the Federation. That person will be invited to attend Executive Committee meetings (usually held via video conference, i.e. Zoom) in the year prior to your Festival to keep us informed of progress.

Once the organising committee has been established, thought can be given to the programme for the Festival, catering requirements and guest speakers for the meal (in the past called the Banquet). Your committee may also wish to give thought to any entertainment that might be provided at the meal or between evensong and dinner, if it is to be an evening event.

It is not necessary for you to make any arrangements for accommodation or transport. Delegates will make their own arrangements, though, it would be helpful if you were able to provide a list of recommended hotels and, if at all possible, arrange any special rates you may be able to secure.

Promoting the event

The date needs to be in people's diaries at the earliest opportunity. As soon as you have agreed the year with the Honorary Secretary it will be included in our future events list on our website and we will include them in the next newsletter.

You will need to decide if booking is to be done using a physical booking form or on-line. If the latter you should bear in mind that some older members of associations may not be that comfortable with on-line booking, though this is proving less of a problem each year.

The first major promotion of your event should be included in the edition of *Once a Chorister* magazine in year prior to your event. *Once a Chorister* is published on-line, usually in November and the copy deadline is the end of October. Your article might include an invitation to the event from the Dean/Director of Music/Association Chairman, information about the choir/organ/music team, information of the history of the cathedral/church/town/local places of interest and anything else you think will attract visitors to your town/city.

If you are going to use a physical booking form, a circular, in .pdf format can be attached to any of the newsletters sent in January, March and May. The same form can also be published on our website at any time and your own website if you have one.

You might also consider printing copies of the invitation with booking details that can be distributed at the Festival in the year prior to your planned event.

GDPR presents a number of challenges for organisations such as ourselves. We ask associations hosting Festivals to make available the contact details (email address) of

those who have attended a Festival. This often proves difficult as many cathedrals and churches, where they are the data manager for the former chorister association, require positive approval for data to be passed on. Where possible, we ask for the booking form to have a tick-box to opt out of the delegate's email address being passed to the next Festival host and a second tick-box for those not wishing their name and association to be included in the attendees list distributed to delegates.

Delegates will need to wear a Federation Membership card. Those who have not attended before or who have lost their card will need to order another one **directly from the Federation** together with a lanyard and holder, at least two weeks before the event. Please mention this in the invitation and booking form and refer delegates to the Membership page on the Federation website at www.fcoca.org.uk .

Budget and finances

As the costs of each element of the event will need to be on the booking form, it makes sense to agree a budget at an early stage of the planning process. If the event is part of your own annual gathering, you will be doing this anyway but, if it is a stand-alone event you will need to set a price for the meal and determine the cost of any other activities.

In the cost per person for the meal, you will need to include not only the cost of the food but, where appropriate, the cost of any room hire, wine and other drinks, non-paying guests, hire of any equipment i.e. sound system, piano, lighting etc.

Our overall advice is, to attract the largest number of delegates, keep your costs as low as you can. Attendees at these type of events expect to pay roughly what they would pay for a meal in a mid-range restaurant.

Help is at hand

Please do remember that you are not on your own; there is plenty of help available to provide advice and guidance. First and foremost, the Executive Committee is very keen for your event to be a resounding success and may be contacted at any time to discuss any concern you may have. It is also worthwhile making contact with previous years' hosts. They will be able to provide guidance on attendance numbers and, hopefully, attendee lists, as well as programmes, booking forms, advice on the booking processes and other items that will affect your budget.

Festival outline plan

For those who have not previous organised events of this sort, below is an outline for a *Festival Weekend*. As we said at the beginning of this guide, the shape of the event is entirely your choice and this programme is for guidance only and is based on previous Festivals.

Friday

Evensong
Civic Reception
Dinner
Compline

Saturday

Morning - Optional tours, Organ Recital
Rehearsal with Cathedral Choir for Evensong
Festival Evensong
Pre-Dinner Drinks followed by Festival Banquet

Sunday

Morning Service
Farewell Reception (coffee after service)
Optional Sunday lunch

Things to consider when setting your Programme

Friday (where an extended event is organised)

- A good way of involving the “town” is to invite the local civic head to Evensong, followed by a drinks reception where the Dean/FCOCA Chairman/Local Association Chairman can welcome delegates.
- In recent years, it has become a Friday night treat to walk back into the Cathedral at twilight to sing Compline, the last office of the monastic day. The Federation can provide printed orders of service (contact the Honorary Secretary) and we can usually rustle up enough singers and a cantor to sing the service ourselves, but the inclusion of the Cathedral Lay Clerks is always very welcome.

Saturday

- It is customary for the Chairman of the Federation to read one of the lessons at Evensong and for the Federation prayer to be included in the intersessions (see “Who we are” page on the Federation website at www.fcoca.org.uk).
- At the dinner (or lunch if preferred) the number of speeches and who does them is entirely up to you, but bear in mind the length of the programme, especially if it is held in the evening
- There are normally three toasts, the Loyal Toast followed by the National Anthem (sung and often two verses) before the speeches begin plus ‘The Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers’ Associations’ and ‘Our Guests’.
- Musical entertainment is always well received!

Sunday

- Many delegates will attend at least one of the services in the Cathedral, most attending the main Eucharist service.
- In the last few years, an optional Sunday lunch has been arranged. This has been well received, the cost being an extra charge on the weekend.

The Federation Executive Committee does feel that three things should be included if at all possible. These are:

- Compline on Friday evening (if an extended event is being organised)
- Delegates are invited to sing with the Cathedral Choir at Festival Evensong
- The Chairman reads a lesson at Festival Evensong

On the day (or weekend)

It is helpful for members of your Association, to be “on duty” to welcome delegates and act as stewards, especially if activities are taking place in different venues. A map of the locality included in the invitation or handed out on the day, is also very useful. You may wish to provide delegates with a “Welcome Pack” containing the programme, map, local tourist information and a list of attendees.