

Josiah Telschow: Excited to Begin a New Chapter with the St. Francis High School Choir Program

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Josiah Telschow, new director of St. Francis High School Choirs, is enthusiastic to begin the journey with students, staff, and parents to continue the growth of our choral programs.

As the St. Francis High School Choir Boosters welcome our new choir director, we had an opportunity to catch Josiah Telschow for this Q&A interview. It has been a pleasure getting to know him as he sets the stage for a successful 2017-18 school year.

Q. Congratulations on your new position as Choir Director for St. Francis High School! What are the most exciting aspects of this opportunity?

I am thrilled to teach in a place where vocal music is held to the highest standard, where students are motivated towards excellent singing, and where the community is so supportive. I have watched the show choir program grow since the beginning, and am excited to join that team as well!



Q. Please tell us a little about your background.

Originally from Madison, Wisconsin, I crossed the border into Minnesota when I attended St. Olaf College, and have happily been here ever since! After completing my studies in the Bachelor of Music Program, Music Education, I student taught with Lin Warren in Hastings. I then began my own teaching career at Indian Mounds Elementary School (Bloomington) in January of 2008. When the choir director position at Kennedy High School opened up that same summer, I moved down the street and have been there ever since.

Q. What were your responsibilities at Bloomington Kennedy? What was a typical day like for you?

Life at Kennedy was busy! I will miss all of the relationships and programs I've built there, and will forever be grateful for the experience. During my tenure at Kennedy I directed 7 different choirs (including the Varsity, Junior Varsity, and Men's show choirs), plays and musicals, coached the pole-vaulters in track and field, taught theater classes and piano lab, and produced the school-wide talent show.

Q. We understand you have professional performance experience. Will you please share more?

Right out of college I was fortunate to be hired to sing with the VocalEssence Ensemble Singers as a baritone in the 32-voice professional choir. I officially "retired" from that position two years ago as our family grew, but am so grateful for all of the experiences I was a part of, and for the learning opportunities given to me to study under some truly remarkable conductors and musicians.

Some highlights from my singing career include the World Choral Symposium in South Korea and a subsequent tour of China, tours of Norway, England, and Eastern Europe, a concert with Rufus Wainwright (Halleluia), singing for President George W. Bush in the White House for the National Day of Prayer, performances at Carnegie Hall and the National ACDA convention in Los Angeles, and singing the encore song with The Rolling Stones at TCF stadium.

Q. You are married and have two young children. Please share more about your family.

I am blessed with a wonderful family! Heidi and I have been married since 2011. Our house is busy and loud most of the time.



We have a four-year-old daughter (Eve) who is as independent as they come, a one-year-old son (Freddy) who loves to sit, smile, and laugh at his big sister, and two fur babies (Ginger, a Brittany Spaniel and Bonnie, a German Short-hair Pointer) who love to hunt out of our back yard.

Q. You have been to Europe several times. Please tell us about your travels and what you enjoyed about it.

Whenever I have been fortunate to tour places around the United States and abroad, I love experiencing the culture and history of that place. It opens my mind to new and creative approaches that I can take back to my day-to-day life.

Q. You have demonstrated strong passion for Show Choir. Based on what you know so far, what vision do you have for the St. Francis Show Choirs?

I am so excited to continue the forward motion I've seen developing in the St. Francis Show Choir program over the last handful of years. It is so impressive to be such a "young" program and also be so successful. To me, performing is all about storytelling. I look forward to diving into our coming shows and competition sets to see how we can tell our stories, and seeing how much fun we can have while doing it. Show choir is a special thing... part choir, part show. I hope everyone is ready to work hard and sweat a lot!

Q. The Madrigal Singers class is relatively unique to St. Francis High School. What is your perspective on this program and the related Madrigal Dinner fund raiser?

This is uncharted territory for me, but it sounds like a blast. I have found students to be wonderful resources of creativity and fun, so a show where students take the lead seems like a challenging and exciting opportunity. I look forward to learning more about this special St. Francis tradition.

Q. You have a strong background with theater. How do you see that aligning with your work at SFHS?

My experience in theater has helped shape and build who I am today. The saying goes, "there is place for everyone in the theater," and that is SO true! I take this quote to heart and let it bleed into my classroom. Everyone is welcome in my classes and ensembles! Our greatest strengths are often our differences. When everyone brings something unique and shares themselves with the rest of the group, we are all stronger and better for it. I am eager to learn the stories of the St. Francis community, students, staff, and parents.

Q. You have known Luke Warren for several years. How did you meet and what did you work on together?

We go way back! Luke and I started and graduated together from St. Olaf in the bachelors of music education program. We sang together in the Viking Chorus (and made it out alive) and three years together in the St. Olaf Choir. I then spent a semester with his father, Lin Warren, in Hastings and have been a colleague of both of them ever since! I am grateful that the relationship between the St. Francis and Hastings choir communities will continue to have each other's backs.

Q. Please tell us what you are most proud of in your previous work.

I am proud and humbled with the evolution of the Kennedy Choir program. Not only have the students grown to be fine singers, dancers, and performers, they have shaped the program into a stellar community based on hard work, teamwork, and friendship.

Q. What are the top three lessons you would teach someone who is considering a career in music?

Take piano lessons, practice constantly, and get involved with as much as you possibly can!

Q. How can we increase enthusiasm for the fine arts in schools?

I think the enthusiasm is already there, we just have to do a better job about bringing it to the forefront of our discussions when we talk about what we value in our education system. To me (and to anyone who has experienced it), music is not just an "elective." It is a core class that intrinsically shapes who we are and how we learn. The more we talk about the importance to us and bring the rest of the St. Francis community in, the better!

Q. What are your hopes as you engage with the SFHS Choir Boosters and the parents of choir students?

It takes a village to run a choir program. I am enthusiastic about beginning this journey with the students, staff, and parents of St. Francis and will rely on your insight and support to help shape the continued growth of the programs and traditions of what makes St. Francis choirs great.

Q. What are the most important aspects a student should consider to be successful in your choirs?

That's an easy one! Show up (and be early), work hard, and have a positive attitude. That's all you need!

Q. What do you enjoy doing when you're not working?

I love being outdoors with my family. We love to camp, bike, and makes smores over the campfire. When I have some down time, I love to read fantasy novels. I'm currently on book 11 of the Robert Jordan "Wheel of Time" series. It's been a commitment to dive into this story, but I'm loving it!

Q. What is the best advice you have ever received?

"When better is possible, good is not enough."

Q. What would surprise others to know about you?

I have a tattoo! Last Thanksgiving I got a tattoo of the Celtic knot for fatherhood tinted in blue on my right forearm since both of my children were born in the month of March. Actually, my daughter was born right on my birthday four years ago. It was the best birthday present you could ask for!

Q. What does the St. Francis High School Mission mean to you?

Our mission is to equip all students with the knowledge and skills to empower them to achieve their dreams and full potential while becoming responsible citizens in a dynamic world.

The St. Francis Mission Statement speaks to what I believe in education. Singing in choir is so much more than learning how to sing or being able to read a score, it's also about learning how to function in a team and using your strengths to make the group better. I believe to my core that choir is about building people as much as it is building musicians.