



## 1. The Constant Challenge: Helping the Out-of-Tune Singer

Theoretically, they are labeled by different terms — monotones, uncertain singers, untuned singers, pitch problems, inexperienced singers, non-singers, droners and other descriptive titles. If you have a choir selected by audition, and are able to have a carefully screened group, there is no necessity for your learning to help and enable the less vocally gifted children. However, in workshops and singing courses, one of the major concerns of teachers of young children (kindergarten through fourth grade and beyond) is the child who cannot sing in unison with other voices. This unsolved problem demands a constant search for new ways to identify, classify, motivate, encourage and enable. There are many scientific studies being done, and many doctoral theses being written. There is much experimentation with computer technology, and much new information about how the control center of the brain functions in areas of pitch awareness.

Most researchers agree on several points:

- 1.) Children need to become **aware** of pitch fluctuations in their speaking and singing voices.
- 2.) They must have experience in **unison** singing with other voices, and must be aware of the unison sensation.
- 3.) Every physically and mentally able child can learn to sing.
- 4.) Early childhood is the most effective time for remedial help with singing problems.

5.) For many children, being unable to produce a singing sound is a developmental problem rather than one of deficiency.

Now, way down deep you may sometimes wish these children weren't there to have to deal with. Your choirs would sound better without them. True. Sometimes they cause behavior problems because they feel "sub-average," and are occasionally the targets of ridicule. True.

Sometimes they are the most loyal and enthusiastic of the choir children, and are present at every rehearsal, come summer heat or winter sleet. True.

As a Christian leader, you are as much concerned with the needs of the musically sub-average as you are with the talents of the more musically gifted child. True.

As a musical director, you want the total sound of your choir to reveal something of beauty and clarity for the services of worship. You cannot allow unrestrained dissonance to take precedence over the melody and text of the choir's offering. True.

What is the solution? I should like to be able to send each of you — special delivery — a neat little package containing "perfect pitch" pills, or some other magic potion! But all I can offer are suggestions of approaches which have proved successful, and to tell you that whatever effort you put forth is well worth your time and patience if you are able to open the world of song to these youngsters.