



## **NPM BASIC CANTOR CERTIFICATE: STUDY GUIDE**

**What is the Basic Cantor Certificate (BCC)?** The BCC is a certificate that recognizes the progression of acquired basic skills of Cantors serving in Roman Catholic parishes. The BCC provides assurance that the recipient can lead psalms and litanies, and has demonstrated a basic understanding about music, the liturgy, and the role of the Cantor. Regardless of your educational background, the BCC is the first and required step toward the 2 more advanced certificates, the Intermediate Cantor Certificate (ICC) and the Cantor Colleague Certificate (CCC), should you choose to pursue these.

**Why might I want to earn the BCC?** NPM is an organization of lifelong learners, constantly honing their craft. The BCC is both a spiritual journey as well as a learning experience. The candidate receives encouraging feedback and assistance as they grow in their ministry, continually improving their skills and deepening their spiritual understanding of their role in the liturgy. Cantors have also found the certificate valuable should they move around the country/change parishes, and useful when they are faced with quantifying their liturgical expertise for a parish where their skill level is unknown--for instance, if asked to cantor a wedding or funeral in another parish. The certificate helps the resident music director and/or pastor determine that the cantor has a competent level of understanding of music and liturgy compared to other cantors in the nation with the Basic Cantor Certificate.

**Who is eligible to earn the BCC?** You must be 18 years of age or older to apply for the BCC. You must also be a current member of NPM at the Basic level or higher. You should have an openness and desire to improve your skill level as a Cantor.

**How do I apply for the BCC?** Your first step in the process is to fill out and submit the BCC application to NPM (located on the NPM website under Formation) along with a \$25 non-refundable processing fee. If you are not already a member of NPM, you have an opportunity to pay for a 1-year Basic Membership when submitting your BCC application. Once the candidate's application has been processed by NPM, the BCC administrator will reach out to meet virtually with the candidate and answer any questions they may have about the BCC adjudication process.

**What is involved in the certificate testing process?** The exam has 2 components, a vocal adjudication and written testing. Each component must have a passing score of 70% or higher.

1. The vocal adjudication consists of singing 2 psalms (1 chant style, 1 melodic style) from the approved lists on the BCC application form. Additionally, a *Kyrie* and a setting of the Lamb of God (*Agnus Dei*) should both be sung as litanies from among any approved published Mass setting. The candidate is also required to do a pitch matching exercise which includes 3 sets of intervals played on piano or organ that the candidate is required to sing back accurately. All portions of the vocal testing must be recorded without any stops and then uploaded by the proctor to the BCC administrator in an easily accessible format (YouTube, Google Drive, etc.)

2. The written testing consists of 3 parts.
  - i. The first part is a multiple-choice/short answer test of basic music theory and knowledge of the Mass/liturgy. A sample basic music theory question is below. The liturgy section will be easy to pass if you attend Mass weekly.
  - ii. The second part is a multiple-choice answer test with questions based on the USCCB document “*Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*” dealing with the role of the cantor and basic liturgical knowledge (specifically paragraphs 8-40.) Your parish may have a copy of this document available for you to study. Alternatively, it is available for purchase from the USCCB or other vendors. A sample question is below.
  - iii. The third part is a short paragraph response asking the candidate to reflect upon their spiritual and musical preparation process during the week as they get ready to proclaim the psalm. The candidate should acknowledge not only musical preparation, but also identify spiritual and scriptural preparation and sources.

**Where do I go to earn my BCC?** The BCC exam process currently takes place virtually, typically in the parish in which the Cantor serves. This allows the candidate the advantage of doing their testing in a familiar setting, one in which the Cantor serves regularly. The candidate needs to secure the assistance of a proctor to administer the written tests, as well as to oversee the production of the vocal video which will be submitted for adjudication.

**Who can serve as a proctor?** The candidate needs to secure the assistance of a proctor who is a member of NPM. The proctor’s role is to administer & submit the written tests and to supervise & submit the production of the vocal exam video. The proctor could be the candidate’s music director, a music director from another parish or a fellow member of a local NPM chapter. The proctor can also serve as the accompanist for the vocal video exam, or the candidate can secure another individual to act as accompanist. The candidate may not accompany him or herself for the vocal adjudication as the focus of the adjudication is on the complete skill set of the Cantor. These include (but are not limited to) posture, eye contact, gesture, & stance. (*See BCC Adjudication Sheet on the NPM website for an overview of specific scoring for the BCC.*)

**Who are the adjudicators?** Once you’ve completed the written tests and the vocal video, your proctor will submit both portions to the BCC administrator. The administrator will score the written exams and secure a minimum of 2 adjudicators to score the vocal exam. The adjudicators are current and former members of the Steering Committee for Cantors and other nationally and regionally known cantors.

**Is there a specific amount of time to complete the BCC exam process?** You have 1 year from the date your application is processed by NPM to complete all portions of the certificate. If you do not complete the exam process in this time, you will need to reapply.

**What if I do not pass a portion of the exam?** You may retake any portion of the exam for which you did not receive a score of 70% or higher within 1 year of application. When a candidate has difficulty with a section of the exam, a local mentor may be suggested to assist the candidate before the re-examination is completed.

**Who may I talk to if I still have questions?** Contact the BCC administrator listed on the NPM website.

**SAMPLE BCC MUSIC THEORY QUESTION AND SAMPLE 'SING TO THE LORD' TEST QUESTION:**



This symbol is:  
a. a half note  
note

b. an eighth rest

c. a dotted half note

d. a whole

The normal consequences of sung participation in the liturgy are:

a. charity, justice, and evangelization  
b. sacraments and charisms

c. compassionate care for creation  
d. freedom from distress