



‘We want to promote unity in Liberal’

By RACHEL COLEMAN

- Leader & Times

Call and response goes back centuries, to the continent of Africa. In social and political gatherings, a back-and-forth exchange between the speaker and those who listened became a way to practice democracy. Everyone was invited to participate.

Nowadays, it's most common to hear call and response during church services in black congregations. As a preacher makes his points, he might pause to ask the listeners, "Can I get an amen?" When the choir performs a song, it's common to hear a soloist singing a phrase that's repeated, over and over, by the rest of the choir.

In music, call and response sets up a framework for gospel, blues, jazz and even modern genres like rap. It's also a key part of what goes on in Liberal at the Black History Adult

Community Choir.

Through high-energy songs, clapping — and plenty of call and response, “the goal is to bring praises unto God,” said director Melody Green.

Yet there’s another agenda as well.

The gospel concert that serves as a finale to Black History Month celebrations each February in Liberal is typically well-attended by a diverse audience — African-American, Caucasian, Hispanic, Asian. This year, organizers hope the choir will also reflect that multicultural mix.

“We are cordially inviting everyone who loves to play an instrument or sing to come and join us,” said Green.

Green’s invitation is as inclusive as it sounds. Each year, the choir works with what it has available in terms of singers and accompanists.

“We’ve had a keyboard and an organ. We’ve had just the keyboard. Sometimes we have a saxophone or guitars,” Green said. “We always have drums.”

That said, Green would like to see a larger group of singers join the choir this year. Rehearsals thus far have been sparsely attended and “we need singers,” she said. “Our choir consists of all cultures, denominations and age groups. If people haven’t sung this type of music before, they shouldn’t worry. Your voice and presence are always welcome.”

Though the choir does not use traditional music written out on staff paper with parts clearly indicated, members do receive printed lyrics, a CD of choirs performing the songs, and plenty of personal instruction. The group often works through the various parts bit by bit, singing and testing the harmonies.

“If someone hasn’t had a chance to sing this music before, we’ll help them learn,” Green said.

Rehearsals for the Black History Adult Community Choir are set for 6 p.m. Mondays at Bibleway Church of God in Christ, 410 E. Eighth Street. Music and more scheduling details will be available at rehearsals, but people who have questions may call 309-7644 or 626-7518 for information.

“Our goal is to promote unity in Liberal,” Green said, “and that goal can only be accomplished with the help of our community joining together as one.”

February Fish Fry

Food and fellowship go together, and that’s what the Black History Community Choir is counting on as it plans a fundraiser for early February. The choir will host a fish fry Feb. 1, with proceeds to offset the cost of gas for accompanists who travel from out of town to help the group practice. Organizer Faye Alsup, a longtime choir member herself, said she’s hoping for a good turnout.



“We’ll start at 11 a.m. and sell meals until they’re gone,” she said. “They usually go fast.”

Choir calls for community response

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The menu for the fish fry is fish, brown beans, potato salad and lemon cake. Each meal is \$10 and delivery is available. To order meals, call Bibleway Church of God in Christ, 410 E. Eighth Street, 624-4181.