

# All-State Youth Choir and Orchestra 'fosters quick friendships through a love for Jesus'

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Over 70 students, from 9th through 12th grade, gathered at William Carey University for the Mississippi Baptist All-State Youth Choir and Orchestra tour. From June 10-12, the students participated in rehearsal camp at William Carey. Every day from June 12-17, the students and leaders traveled across the state to perform at churches that invited the choir and orchestra for a concert. This year, the students sang in eight worship concerts: seven in churches and one at a senior living center in Hattiesburg.

On Monday morning, the students began an active schedule of rehearsals, with "a lot of fun built into it." Divided into family groups, each led by an adult sponsor, the students ate dinner together and played games, forming an inclusive spirit of fellowship which amazed even the adults.

Kris Smith, Worship Ministries Director of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) and leader of the tour, commented, "The students came together on Monday and sang their first concert from memory on Wednesday night, so the expectation is high. You certainly have to be committed to the process, but they rose to the challenge, and I was really proud of them. Some of the sponsors have texted me saying, 'I'm back at work today. Can we go back on tour?' I told them, 'If the bus showed up outside with all the students onboard, I'd get on the bus today.' We had a great trip."



(Photo credit: Tanner Cade)

Acting as mentors for the week, adult sponsors came with a variety of roles to fi

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“The concerts really are times of worship,” said Smith. “Even when we were in the senior living center, I encouraged the students to remember that they are sharing the Gospel as they sing. It’s not just about making pretty music but sharing the message of Jesus Christ.”

Not only did the students share the love of Jesus with their voices, but Christ was also glorified by their actions. “One student was very nervous when she first arrived,” Smith recalled. “She had never done anything like All-State before and was withdrawn at the beginning of the trip. Her family group leader recognized her isolation and started talking to her and encouraging her. The other students then surrounded her and loved on her, truly caring for her. By the next week, she didn’t want to leave. When she went home, she went home a different person.

“That’s one thing I will say about this group most of all. I have worked with All-State Youth Choirs in the past and in other states, and usually there would be social cliques. This year, there were no cliques. All of the kids really supported one another in the talent show at rehearsal camp. When our concerts featured a different student or group of students playing piano, singing, or putting a band together, the students were always supportive of whoever stepped out of their comfort zone. So it was really remarkable to see their love for each other and the transformation of that one girl from her arrival until the time she left.

“After our first concert on Wednesday night, we held a time for some of the students to share their experiences,” Smith recounted. “For a lot of the kids, they are the only ones

coming from their church home. A few churches send large groups, but the majority send just one student. Even so, many of the students stood up to say they had found some true friends in All-State.

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(Photo credit: Tanner Cade)

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Having worked at the MBCB since January, Smith related what All-State meant to him. “Leading this tour was a full-circle moment for me. As a student, I sang in the Louisiana Baptist All-State Youth Choir for four years, and I went back as an adult sponsor. The year before we moved to Mississippi, I was the Youth Music Consultant for the Louisiana Baptist

Convention and produced their All-State Youth Choir tour that year. When the Lord called us to Mississippi 17 years ago, I had to give that up. I really believed in this work, and it was through All-State that I began to discover my calling to ministry. So it was really sad for me to give that up. So to be able to be in this position and lead that group of kids again was incredibly special to me.

“I joked with the kids that I had been in just about every possible role with All-State throughout my life, except for driving the bus and playing the piano, which you don’t want me to do either one of those,” Smith laughed. “When I looked at that full choir looking back at me, I could just see the potential and the gifts that the Lord has given these students. They are fine kids and very, very talented. I know that the Lord is going to do an extraordinary work through them.”

If worship ministers have a student interested in music ministry, consider encouraging them to audition this fall for the 2025 All-State tour. Potential All-State singers must not only be musically talented, but reputable students. “It’s an experience that the students will take with them as they grow,” said Smith. “Looking at our concerts, all of the alumni who come up to sing, it’s a meaningful ministry, so much so that All-State singers want to come back and be a part of a program bigger than themselves.”

For more information on the 2025 All-State Youth Choir and Orchestra tour, [click here](#). Auditions for the 2025 choir will be held from September 7 through October 20 of this year. See the website for criteria.