

Minor in number, major in praise: Senior Adult Choir Festival lifts spirits despite dwindled choirs

By Lindsey Williams
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The Mississippi Baptist Senior Adult Choir Festival showcased the power of music and community through worship, said Kris Smith, director of Worship Ministries of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB). “It was wonderful to have four MS Baptist churches come together, each choir pouring their hearts into preparations, culminating in a beautiful celebration of worship through song.”

Held at Meadow Grove Church on May 7, each choir presented two songs of their choice, prepared months in advance. Participating choirs included First Church, Madison, First Church, Newton, First Church, Jackson, and Venture Church in Hattiesburg. The choirs received evaluations and encouragement from adjudicators Jason Easley, worship pastor of Highland Colony Church, Ridgeland, and Barry Worrell, worship and senior adult pastor of Emmanuel Church, Grenada. First Church, Clinton, attended in support of the festival and the fellowship.

Smith led congregational worship between each presentation. Although attendance was lower than in previous years, the room resounded with praise. “As I had the privilege of leading these gathered choirs in congregational singing,” Smith said, “their enthusiasm filled the sanctuary, lifting spirits and touching hearts. It was a moment of pure worship, where age melted away in the presence of God’s grace.”

Wyndy South, MBCB's consultant for keyboard and preschool and children's music, accompanied the congregation on piano. "She just plays like she loves the Lord," said one choir member.

Since becoming director in January, Smith has adapted to the rhythm of the Worship Ministries department. "The person who doesn't get enough credit is Cathy Taylor, the ministry assistant for our department," he said. "She makes this happen. This is my first rodeo, but it's not hers, so we're grateful for her. She has been very patient with me."

As the festival concluded, the sanctuary buzzed with excitement. Rick Van Egmond, member of the First Church, Jackson, Reflections Choir, shared on social media, "Irene and I have been talking constantly for the last five hours about this morning. We had the wonderful opportunity to sing in the greatest Senior Adult Choir anywhere! Our Reflections Choir at First Baptist Church Jackson is remarkable! The music that we produced was beautiful and worshipful! The love and fellowship in this group is unsurpassed!... God has blessed us with a gifted, godly leader. Ryan Ethridge (director of the Reflections Choir and music associate of First Church, Jackson) is truly anointed! His submission to God's Holy Spirit is so evident... I thank God for placing this group together!"

Ethridge, 25, directed the Reflections Choir for the first time at the festival without a sheet of music. The choir sang "Refuge," written and produced by Harland and O'Brien, and "Hallelujah! Thine the Glory," arranged by Mary McDonald.

Jim Hayes, director of Venture Church's Visionaires choir, is 96 years old. The Visionaires sang "Keep Your Lamp," arranged by Victor Johnson, and "Psalm 23: Surely Goodness, Surely Mercy," by Semsen, arranged by Barnard.

The Singing Saints from First Church, Newton, sang "He Looked Beyond My Fault," by Rambo, arranged by Allen, and "In Christ

Alone Medley," arranged by Allen as well. The Singing Saints were directed by Gil Powell, pastor of worship and senior adults at First Newton. Chris Spence, pastor at First Church, Newton, attended to cheer on the choir.

The Voices of Joy from First Church, Madison, opened the festival. Directed by Judy Hutchinson, the choir sang "Calypso Lullaby," by Jester Hairston, and "In the Name of the Lord," by Patty and Gaither, arranged by McDonald and McHugh. Their performance set a joyful tone for the service.

Donna Self, a member of the Voices of Joy, shared her thoughts on the festival. "We enjoy singing together. Our choir is not big in number, but we're a good group and we just enjoy preparing for the festival. We work on it off and on all year, but this last January we really worked hard on these two songs. Then we get to see people here. Jim Hayes (the Visionaires director) was my worship leader when I was 6 years old. It's great to see people we haven't seen in a year."

"In the past, the festival was a lot bigger, there were a lot more choirs, but COVID did a number on it, and we're just glad to have this many," Self said. "Kris did a great job, and the festival is a wonderful thing, so I hope it continues. It's something for us to look forward to and work toward. And look, when you get this age, you need that," she laughed. "Our choir has changed over the years, but thank the Lord, He keeps bringing new singers in. So you pray for that, too, that He will continue to bring new choir singers."

Smith encouraged Mississippi Baptists to pray for their choirs to come together in Spirit-filled worship. "I am filled with hope and anticipation for next year's festival on May 13, 2025, at First Baptist Church, Florence. My sincere wish is to see even more senior adult choirs joining in this tradition, enriching our worship, and strengthening our bonds of fellowship."

The Cooperative Program supports the Worship Ministries department as they continue to minister to choirs, worship leaders, and children. For more information on the Senior Adult Choir Festival or other events of MBCB's Worship Ministries, contact Cathy Taylor at 601-292-3267 or cwtaylor@mbcb.org, or [click here](#) for more details.