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By Rachel COleman • Leader & Times Dathan Moore finished work in Garden City Friday evening, picked up his wife and children and drove to Liberal to direct the first practice session of the Black History Community Choir at 7 p.m. Two hours later, in the sanctuary of Bibleway Church of God in Christ, the volunteer choir director was in high spirits.

“This is awesome,” he said as he dismissed the group of about 20 singers. “You sounded great.”

The choir, which will perform at the Black History Month program Feb. 27, represents what Martin Luther King Jr. meant when he spoke of a day when “the jangling discords of our nation would be transformed into a beautiful symphony.”

“It’s not about being black,” Moore said to the diverse group at Friday’s first practice. “It’s about worshipping God in this music and coming together to do it. I hope you all go home this week and get more people from your own churches and groups to join in and come next week. But even if it’s just these people,” he added with a smile, “it’s going to be great.”

The Black History Community Choir is open to all people in the community regardless of ethnicity or church affiliation, said Dathan Moore’s mother and member of the Black History Month Committee, Gwendolyn Moore. She also holds her own in the soprano section of the choir itself.

“We don’t want people to think that you have to be black to be in this choir,” she said. “We just want you to have a willingness to come in and participate. We had members come from Trinity Faith Church and First Baptist Church last year, and they blended right in and it was no problem.”

In fact, Gwendolyn Moore noted, the project kicked off a sort of musical exchange program. “Some of us ended up singing in the Living Christmas Tree production at First Baptist, and we had so much fun, we also got together to carol out at Good Samaritan Center.”

As Black History Month approaches, “we’ll bring back some of the old gospel that blacks used to sing years ago, and we’ll sing some of the more modern gospel, and just have fun,” said Gwendolyn Moore. “This concert will be a praise and worship type of thing.”

While most people readily listen to the rousing gospel music performed at black churches, it can seem a bit of a mystery to the uninitiated, Gwendolyn Moore acknowledged.

“The one thing about gospel music that is unfamiliar to a lot of people is that we don’t really have any printed music,” she said. “It’s more a matter of rehearsal; you’re not reading music. A lot of people who are used to that are kind of taken aback, but we have a way of teaching by ear.”

## Rehearsals going well for local Black History Choir

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That's just what Dathan Moore did Friday as he sang out tenor, alto and even soprano parts to the group, which then repeated the sections until a four-part harmony took hold. Compact disc recordings of the music also helped the group get a sense of how the piece would work.

"It's not hard to sing this way," Gwendolyn Moore said. "Gospel music is something you have to have a feeling for. It's music that's coming from the soul. It's not based on whether you know an 'a' from an 'e' or a 'b flat.' Yes, we would like you to sing on key, but you don't have to audition. If you have a desire to do this, then you come on out and you try it. It's just a fun thing to share with other people who love this music."

Group members appeared to concur with Gwendolyn Moore's description, as they joked, swapped recipes and traded anecdotes about the work week. George and Ginny McNitt greeted fellow choir members with hugs as Tommy Johnson checked microphones and amplifiers in the church sanctuary. When Christine Hammond showed up to practice, a spirited discussion about the Black History Month t-shirt selling contest broke out until Hammond pointed out that she wasn't going to conduct business of any kind in a church sanctuary. Laughter filled in the silence after an hour of singing.

"People should come on out and join us," Dathan Moore said as the group headed out for the night. "We'd love to have you."

Black History Community Choir rehearsals will be at 7 p.m. each Friday through January and February at Bibleway Church of God in Christ, 410 E. Eighth Street. For information about the group, contact Gwendolyn Moore after 5 p.m. at 626-7518.

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