

# Church brings sound of music to young people in small East Texas town\_22304

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Steve Richardson instructs Zachary Dillahunt with his trumpet (left) and Kim Sharp teaches Landon Parker on the piano at the community music school sponsored by Central Baptist Church in Livingston.

## Church brings sound of music to young people in small East Texas town

**By George Henson**

## *Staff Writer*

LIVINGSTON—Central Baptist Church of Livingston is bringing the gift of music—and the sweet melody of Christian love—to young people in a small East Texas town.

Music Minister Joel Salazar knows well the plight of students in the area who had to drive many miles for music lessons. His wife drove 90 minutes each direction so their daughter could attend violin lessons in The Woodlands.

"She had a wonderful instructor, but when you think of the time and expense of a drive like that each week for three years, there just had to be a better way," Salazar said.

He also knew his family wasn't the only one facing the problem. "Most people have to travel at least an hour to find instructors of certain instruments," he said. "I have been here for 13 years, and people always ask me: 'Do you know someone who teaches piano or guitar or some other instrument?'"

He came to see the problem as an opportunity for ministry.

In September 2002, Central Baptist Church launched its school of the arts. The school brings instructors to the church, allowing students to meet in a central location near their homes.

The first year, 61 students enrolled. Ten instructors offered guitar, electric guitar, banjo, electric bass, mandolin, harmonica, piano, organ, trumpet, percussion, violin, viola and cello lessons.

Some instruments have a waiting list for lessons. Classes also are offered now in flute, saxophone, oboe and clarinet.

This year, 91 students have registered. Of that number, 23 are adults, while

children ages 6 to 12 make up the bulk of the students with 38. Forty students are members of church, but 17 students have no church affiliation.

Salazar thinks so many students without church affiliation is a great asset of the program.

"This is a wonderful way to let them see who we are," he said. "We use every opportunity offered us to show charity and love to our students as well as our instructors."

Almost all of the instructors are praise and worship leaders from churches not only in Livingston, but also Lufkin, Jasper, Trinity, Liberty and Huntsville.

Students hail from Livingston, Coldspring, Leggett, Oakhurst, Goodrich, Onalaska, Cleveland, Shepherd, Dallardsville and Trinity.

Classes meet on Mondays from 4 p.m. to 10 p.m., with each student receiving a 30-minute private lesson. Each student pays \$50 per month for classes. For some instruments, the church supplements the teachers' pay so quality instruction can be maintained.

"The church has been very gracious and understands that the musical education of a child is important and takes a commitment," Salazar said. The church's subsidy of the lessons is \$525 per month this year. The money for the subsidy is collected through a banquet and special gifts from members.

In addition, a Sunday school class, Women on Mission, and an anonymous church member have given \$1,755, providing three full scholarship and one partial scholarship for students who cannot afford to pay.

The benefit to the church is obvious, Salazar said. All of the members of the praise band that plays for the church's Wednesday night youth meeting are

students of the school.

"Before our school was in existence, it was difficult to find youth who were instrumentalists, so our adults were helping play. With over 30 children and youth taking guitar, piano and percussion, we are seeing a resurgence of players being trained for God's service today and in the future," he said.

Students are learning so quickly that a second night with longer lessons for advanced students probably will be added soon, he said.

Salazar also is using the concept as an outreach tool at the Hispanic mission Central Baptist Church sponsors. He takes an hour out each Monday to go the mission, where he teaches piano, organ, guitar, bass and percussion. He also helped the youth prepare a drama for Christmas.

"It was the first time they had done anything like this, and it was a success in that we had one come to Christ as a result of the drama," he said.

"A young couple who had just started coming to church joined us in the drama. They had been living together and came to know Christ, got married, and the wife came down this past Sunday to be baptized due to their involvement in the play."

Youth involvement at the mission has increased dramatically as well.

"Both at the church and the mission we are seeing a lot of kids who maybe have never really been involved in sports or anything like that, and this gives them something besides Nintendo to excel in," he said.

"This has just been a wonderful ministry for not only the people in our church, but for the community as well.

"People ask me if I would do this in a different setting, and I say, 'Of course.' This allows us to touch people we ordinarily would not get to."

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