

— WHITESBURG —

STUDENT MUSIC

**2025 - 2026
HANDBOOK**

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Staff Contacts

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Volunteer Contact

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Whitesburg Student Choir Purpose

- We desire to *connect* with one another and God. We believe each singer has special gifts for the ministry of music. We acknowledge that these gifts and the joy of music come from God.
- We desire to *grow* musically and spiritually. We foster growth both musically and spiritually by embracing the challenge and reward of singing diverse musical styles. The choir is dedicated to high musical standards and consistent musical leadership which requires a high level of commitment from all members.
- We desire to *serve* our church, community, and the world through music missions. We serve one another for the mutual support and fulfillment of our members. As recipients of God's grace, we serve with a sense of gratitude for what God has given us. We serve knowing our primary purpose is worship leadership, which we fulfill by singing excellent music based on God's Word.

Lifestyle Expectations

The Bible says that as believers we should be salt and light in the world. We should stand out among non-Christians. As a representative of Jesus, Whitesburg Baptist Church, and Whitesburg Student Choir, each student is expected to:

- Grow daily with the Lord through prayer and Bible study.
- Live a Godly life, conducting oneself in a Christ-like manner.
- Show respect for sponsors and fellow students.
- Regularly attend Bible study classes and worship services in a Bible-based church.

Rehearsal Times and Location

- Unless otherwise stated in the calendar all Whitesburg Student Choir rehearsals will take place in the choir room at the main campus of Whitesburg Baptist Church from 5:15 p.m. to 6:45 p.m. on Sundays. During sectionals students may split and go other rooms near the music suite.
- During the fall semester both the middle school (6-8th graders) and high school (9-12th graders) choirs will rehearse together. During the spring semester, the two choirs will divide for part of the rehearsal time.
- Most rehearsals will include warm-ups, a spiritual teaching time, sectional practice, and full choir practice.
- Additional groups/options which require an audition include student ensemble (high school), drama (middle and high school), stomp (middle and high school), solos (middle and high school) and band (middle and high school).

Communication

Communication is vital to the operations of the Whitesburg Student Choir. Each student and his or her parents are encouraged to stay current with announcements and activities through at least one of the following mediums:

- Email (weekly updates are sent during the choir season to the student **and** parent email addresses provided in the online registration form).
- Text - *New for 2025*, we'll be utilizing "Text in Church" software that will relay important messages throughout the season and on choir mission trips.
- Facebook (weekly updates and other notes/documents are posted on the private group page: search for "WBC Student Music").
- Instagram (quick reminders and pictures from events will be posted at "whitesburgstudentmusic").
- Website - whitesburgbaptist.org (for generic information about the Whitesburg Student Choir and upcoming major events, or for registering for choir and mission trips).
- During mission trip events, GroupMe will be used for internal communication between the participants of the trip. Updates for parents will be shared via our Instagram and Facebook pages.

Attendance Expectations

Attendance Guidelines

- Attendance is **very** important in the ministry of the Whitesburg Student Choir. Students are part of a team dedicated to ministering the Gospel through music. Without all the members present we cannot prepare adequately to serve and minister effectively.
- A calendar of events for the Whitesburg Student Choir will be distributed in August each year and will include planning for both the fall and spring semesters. Occasionally, a date or time needs to be changed. If this occurs, there will be advanced notification for students and parents.
- If a student anticipates an absence or becomes ill before a scheduled practice/event, they are highly encouraged to contact Matt via email (matthew.sloma@whitesburgbaptist.org), Facebook message, or text (256-479-2020) message to indicate their absence. You may also message your family group leader. The choir is a family and I want to be able to pray for and encourage those that are absent. If a student has been absent for several practices without notice, their family group sponsor or Matt will contact them.
- Occasionally, a special situation applies to a student that necessitates absences that are unavoidable (i.e. divorce situations where students are in different cities every other week, extended illnesses such as pneumonia, mono, etc.). Please contact Matt to make special arrangements.
- A new student who desires to join the choir part-way through a semester may do so and will be eligible for participation in Hanging of the Green and/or the spring mission trip on a case-by-case basis.

Rehearsal Absences

- Students are allowed to miss 4 rehearsals in the fall semester and 4 in the spring semester. If you are not at the rehearsal for any reason, it is considered an absence. Exceptions will be made for an extended illness.
- All HOG Boot Camps, Mission Trip Boot Camps, and HOG rehearsal week rehearsals count against the 4 rehearsal limit.
- If a student exceeds the maximum number of allowed absences in the fall semester, he or she is subject to forgo participation in Hanging of the Green.
- If a student exceeds the maximum number of allowed absences in the spring semester, he or she is subject to forgo participation in the spring choir mission trip.

There will be instances when students will miss more rehearsals than are allowed due to various activities, illness, or issues out of their control. You may “clear” absences beyond the allowed number by attending the following events:

- Help in the music office after school (take off one absence per session).
- Help clean up and organize the choir room after rehearsal (take off one absence per session).

**** The above attendance policies are important because they ensure that each student is committed to preparing themselves for ministry with the choir.**

Family Groups

Family Groups

- Every student in the Whitesburg Student Music program will be part of a small group based upon your voice part. These small groups will be led by a sponsor who will be your connection point for any concerns during rehearsal (i.e. missing music, musical questions, etc.). They will be your encouragers if you need prayer or have been absent for an extended period of time. If you change voice parts during the year your leader will change as well.

General Choir Etiquette

Things to have during rehearsal

- Bottle of water (room temperature is best for optimal singing).
- iPad (personal or church) You will get your iPad before rehearsal begins each Sunday in the “gray room” across from the choir room. You’ll return it to the same place after each rehearsal. Remember to have your Planning Center/Music Stand login and password to connect each week!
- Learning and attentive spirit.

Refrain from the following during rehearsal

- Chewing gum
- Eating food
- Texting
- Phone conversations and unnecessary talking. Turn your phones off for rehearsal!
- Drinking liquids other than water.
- Wearing heavy perfume or cologne (these irritate nasal passages and bronchial tubes).

During the rehearsal...

- Sit in your assigned seat when applicable (a seating chart may be created by the director during the semester to optimize the sound and visual aesthetic of the choir).
- Give your full attention to the director and the rehearsal.
- Non-musical issues or concerns should be voiced privately, not publicly, with the choir director so that they may be addressed appropriately.

After the rehearsal...

- Clean up the area around your chair.
- If you used a church iPad, log out of Planning Center, and return it to the rolling charging rack in the “gray room.” Sponsors will sanitize each one before putting them away.
- Listen/download the mp3 rehearsal tracks and PDF music from Planning Center to review your parts at home.

Dress for Whitesburg Student Musicians

Rehearsals

- All students should dress modestly, avoiding clothes and accouterments that will be a distraction during the rehearsal.

Hanging of the Green

- All students in the Hanging of the Green program must follow the required student attire policy for the performance on Hanging of the Green Sunday. You also need to wear this attire for the dress rehearsal on the prior Wednesday. Failure to do so will result in not being allowed to sing in the program. We want to look uniform as a choir so that the Gospel message we are proclaiming in music is not distracted by our clothing choice. Remember, it is a formal evening program.
- Men:
 - Black dress pants with a black belt. Black button down dress shirt (must have collar and be ironed). Black dress shoes. Black socks. Black tie. No jewelry, watches, or earrings please.
- Ladies:
 - Dressy solid black – semi formal dress – length must at least come to the knee. Formal black shoes (open or closed-toe) – no flip flops, casual-looking shoes, or boots. Don't wear pantyhose. No sequins or rhinestones or any other material that will catch the stage lights. No low-cut dresses. No jewelry, watches, or earrings (except studs) please. Also, no bright or distracting finger nail polish colors. Girls, we ask that you bring in your HOG dress at a rehearsal in November for us to check.

Leading Worship

- See clothing details from emails leading up to worship leading, but in general the dress is dark-wash blue jeans with no holes or rips with a button-down shirt, polo shirt, or blouse (girls).

Mission Trips

- Dark-wash blue jeans with no holes or rips (no super skinny jeans).
- Depending on the location, shorts may be acceptable for concerts.
- Shoes must be closed-toe (no boots) unless stated otherwise.
- Further details about clothing and concert attire will be available in mission trip meetings.

Choir Mission Trips

Description

- **Why go?** As Christ-followers, we are called to minister to people who need to know Jesus. Students have a unique opportunity to minister to a variety of people in many different settings on the mission trips.
- **What do we do?** The choir engages in multiple concerts as well as hands-on ministry within a safe, Christ-exalting environment.
- **How long is the mission trip?** The high school choir mission trip is held over spring break each year (following the Huntsville City School calendar) and lasts eight days. The middle school choir mission trip is held on a weekend at the end of April and lasts one or two days.
- **Where do we go?** The high school choir will go to a specific location within the eastern half of the USA. *Past locations: St. Louis, Louisville, Chicago, Miami, Dallas, Washington D.C., New Orleans, Minneapolis, Atlanta, New York City, Savannah, and Orlando, Tampa, and Houston.* The middle school choir will go to a regional location in the southeast USA. *Past locations: Chattanooga, Atlanta, Memphis, Nashville, Knoxville, Gatlinburg, and Birmingham.* We always travel on coach buses and stay in hotel rooms (no adults mixed with students in rooms) during the duration of the mission trip.

Cost

- The cost of trips will vary from year to year. Each year many expenses are taken into account, including rooming, transportation, food, tour shirts, ministry supplies, music, and other items.
- The trip costs for the middle and high school choir mission trips must be completely collected at least 7 days before the departure date. High school students are required to make a mandatory deposit towards the trip and then encouraged to make payments in installments from then onward. Middle school students are required to make a deposit followed by the remaining amount.
- We encourage everyone to make trip payments electronically. If that is not possible, a check/cash can be filled out and given directly to Matt or Desiree Sloma ***only***. Please write "Student Choir Mission Trip" on the memo line and make the check out to "Whitesburg Baptist Church."
- If you are unable to make the payments on time, you must inform Matt to work out a plan.

- Students are encouraged to send support letters to family and friends. A sample letter will be shared and the process discussed at student/parent meetings.

Refunds

- The final opportunity to receive a partial refund of any money's paid toward a mission trip is 45 days before the start of the high school choir mission trip and 20 days before the start of the middle school mission trip. Exceptions include a death in the family, long-term sickness, or moving away from the area. Other exceptions to this will be handled on a case-by-case basis, through a discussion with the director.

Scholarships

- We don't want anyone to be excluded from the mission trips due to financial constraints. If you are in need of financial assistance, please contact Matthew Sloma at 256-479-2020 or matthew.sloma@whitesburgbaptist.org.
- A limited number of partial mission trip scholarships are given each year - students may only receive one scholarship per year. Priority will be given to those students who are members of Whitesburg Baptist Church, demonstrate positive attitudes in choir, have a good attendance record, and demonstrate an active walk with God. Members may receive up to half off while non-members may receive twenty-five percent off.

Trip Sponsors

- Any adult desiring to be a trip sponsor on either the middle or high school choir mission trip must contact Matthew Sloma to begin the process. Priority will include the following: directors, student ministry staff, band personnel, technical crew, sponsors helping throughout the season, and parents of students in the choir (must be members of WBC).
- Those selected to go must fill out a trip application and have completed the Child Protection training at WBC.

Forms

- All students and sponsors attending a mission trip must fill out the appropriate trip application (including necessary medical information). It must accompany the first payment (deposit) for the mission trip.

Student Ensemble (Auditioned)

Prerequisites/Requirements

- Must be in grades 9-12.
- High School Choir participation is mandatory.
- Participation in Hanging of the Green and the Spring High School Choir Mission Trip is mandatory.

Rehearsal Information

- Sunday's from 4:00 - 5:15 p.m. in the choir room; following the choir calendar throughout the fall and spring.
- Performance opportunities may include: Sing a call to worship in the 9:30 Sunday morning blended service once in the fall and once in the spring. Sing in Hanging of the Green and on the High School Choir Mission Trip. Participate in the ensemble caroling party in December, record music in March, and any other events that the group agrees upon.

Expectation of Singers

We are a small group where every voice matters and every singer's contribution, both musical and non-musical, makes a difference to the success of the group. Participation in the group assumes that you agree to honor the following:

1. Attend rehearsals, abiding by the same attendance policy as choir.
2. Participation in this ensemble is an opportunity to challenge yourself musically and to become a better musician. To accomplish this, we ask for your full energy and focus during our preparation. Our goal is to sing at the highest musical level with our eyes on the director and to connect and communicate with our audience, for the glory of God.
3. All singers invited to join the ensemble are expected to be at ALL performances unless excused prior to the performance.
4. Rehearsal schedules are sent out well in advance (at the beginning of the year) and take many factors into consideration. We ask singers to attend each rehearsal and we ask for that commitment up front. If you have a conflict with a rehearsal date please indicate that to Matt at the beginning of the year.

5. The most important difference between this and the main choir is that we don't want to spend a lot of time learning notes at rehearsals. Singers are expected to learn their music and to come to the rehearsals knowing their notes. This means that a singer is able to sing their voice part securely with the other parts. To ensure this level of preparation, you will have access to learning parts and music on Planning Center Online. You cannot rely on your sight-reading abilities to get you through rehearsals. Singers need to be able to commit the time, and to have the skills and methods needed to accomplish this. If we want to present an excellent performance, we need to know the music extremely well.
6. In such a small group, it affects everyone when one person isn't prepared and it pulls down the level of the group's work. We really don't want to lose good singers, so please spend the time necessary to be prepared. Singers who are not sufficiently prepared at rehearsals, may be asked to step down from a piece, the concert, or the roster.
7. At rehearsals, we expect singers to take responsibility for marking mistakes. We also expect singers to work on difficult passages between rehearsals and to fix mistakes between one rehearsal and the next. To reach our goals, we have to make significant progress between rehearsals.
8. Questions are an important part of the learning process. Please ask the music director (and not your neighbor) any questions you have regarding musical intent. It will no doubt help clarify a point for other people as well.
9. As a courtesy to others, please don't talk during rehearsal or practice your own line out loud. It's distracting to others.
10. We start promptly. Since we have a limited time to rehearse, we want to take advantage of it by warming up at the scheduled time. Please come as early as needed to organize your music or do whatever else you need to in order to be ready to warm up at the scheduled start time.

Auditions

The audition will consist of the following 3 sections:

1. Vocal Placement Exercises (Scales and aural exercises)
2. Read your voice part on a sight-reading song (a hymn) - I will play all the piano parts while you sing. It will not be a cappella.
3. Brief personal/spiritual interview

The entire audition will be about 5-8 minutes long. The audition will be evaluated by a panel of evaluators. Matt will have input into the final decision.

Some Tips for the Audition:

What voice qualities are the evaluators looking for?

1. Blend-ability
2. Breath support
3. Vocal power
4. Stage presence

What personal qualities are the evaluators looking for?

1. Evidence of a love for Christ and love for others
2. Honesty
3. Humble Attitude

Some Reminders for the Audition:

1. Don't say you have to warm up first. If you ask to warm up in the audition room, that tells the director right away that you are either not prepared or you think you have the mojo to dictate how things are gonna go, which is not your place. You need to be warmed up and ready to go the moment you enter the room.
2. Don't ask if you made the ensemble right then and there. Don't beg for an immediate decision. The director has to consult with the judges. Let the process take its course.
3. Don't flatter yourself to death. The panel doesn't want to hear your whole resume while you're standing there. If they ask you questions about your singing, answer honestly. Don't be a diva. Be aware that a director or the judges may reject your audition based on your attitude alone.
4. Don't flog yourself to death. This takes many forms:
 - "Sorry I didn't (warm up, hit that note, sing those words correctly, etc.)."
 - "I'm no good at sight reading."
 - "I've had a rough day."
 - "I haven't done this in a LONG time."

Just go in there and do your best! You don't have to explain anything unless the director asks. A good director will know if you have certain skills or not just by listening to you sing; that's why auditions exist in the first place. Auditions are not viewed as torture-chambers by directors; they're more like fact-finding missions. If you approach your audition with this attitude and allow the director to hear you as you are, as prepared as you can be, in that moment, you'll have no reason to apologize for anything.

A list of those invited to join the Student Ensemble season will be emailed and announced via social media on the week following auditions.

Stomp (Auditioned)

What is Stomp? Students use various objects, such as buckets, trash cans, brooms, and other items to create exciting rhythmic music. Typically there are several different rhythm parts being played simultaneously by a group of students. Stomp is a great way to draw a crowd on a mission trip to hear the Good News of the Gospel.

Prerequisites/Requirements

- Student Choir participation is mandatory.
- Participation in the spring high school or middle school choir mission trip is mandatory.

Rehearsal Information

- Meets in the spring semester.
- High School meets Sunday's from 3:00 - 4:00 p.m. & middle school meets Sunday's from 4:15 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.
- Performance opportunities include: Playing on the choir mission trip and at the homecoming concert.

Expectation

- Be present at rehearsals.
- Learn your part outside of stomp rehearsal with the aid of learning tracks.

Auditions

- Auditions will occur in December and early January.
- Students interested will sign up for an audition time, play a short stomp piece, and have a quick interview.

Mission Trip Band (Auditioned)

Prerequisites/Requirements

- For grades 6-12.
- Participation in either the middle or high school spring mission trip.

Rehearsal Information

- Meets in the spring semester.
- Day and time to be determined based on student availability.
- Performance opportunities include: Playing on either the middle or high school spring mission trip and at the middle or high school homecoming concert.

Expectation

- Practice music outside of band with the aid of learning tracks.
- Have a positive attitude when the band leader gives musical instruction.

Auditions

- Auditions will occur throughout the year upon request.
- Students interested will contact Matt and set up an audition time. Auditions will include playing a song or two, a quick interview, and analysis of basic music aptitude.
- Students auditioning should be engaged in some private instruction on their instrument and be able to read music.

Drama (Auditioned)

Prerequisites/Requirements

- For grades 6-12.
- Whitesburg Student Choir participation is mandatory.

Rehearsal Information

- Auditioned separately in both the fall and spring semesters.
- Day and time TBD based on student availability.
- Performance opportunities include: Involvement in the drama at Hanging of the Green and participating in drama during the middle or high school spring mission trip and at the middle or high school homecoming concert.

Expectation

- Memorize lines outside of practices.
- Listen to and respond to drama leaders stage instruction and make the necessary adjustments.

Auditions

- The fall semester is auditioned in September for participation in Hanging of the Green.
- The spring semester is auditioned in January for participation in the spring choir mission trips.
- Students interested will sign up for an audition time and be prepared to read a short script.
- Students auditioning should be ready to engage in a short interview.

Sponsors

Sponsor Spiritual Expectations

- I expect Whitesburg Music sponsors to have a solid faith in Jesus Christ and be in the Word of God daily. The way you live your life outside of choir rehearsal needs to demonstrate a living and active faith.

Sponsor Practical Expectations

- I expect Whitesburg Student Music sponsors to be on time to practices and events, be engaged in the rehearsal activities unless another task is needed (i.e. - singing with the students, warm-ups with them, etc.), and give advanced notice of absences for any Whitesburg Student Music rehearsal and performance. If emergencies come up, send a text, email, or Facebook message to Matt or Desiree so they can make other plans.

Sponsor Application Process

- Sponsors must go through three-step process that includes filling out an online application, having an interview with Matt, and completing the Ministry Safe online process (background check and Awareness Training). Sponsors must be at least 19 years old.

Sponsor Roles

- High School & Middle School Singing Sponsors - These sponsors will sit with the students during the rehearsals and sing the songs. They will only sing during rehearsals, not the performances...sorry :-)
- Sponsor Support Ministry (i.e. drama writing, devotions, etc.) - These sponsors will take on special roles of providing our scripts for HOG and choir tours as well as helping prepare the teaching times during rehearsals.
- Special Event Sponsors - These sponsors will be recruited specifically for extra help during productions. They may have a special skill (such as make-up artist or stage director) for productions or be able to help with tasks such as hospitality.
- Mission Trip Sponsors (A mix of adults from the above four categories) - These sponsors will be asked if they are willing to go on either the middle or high school choir mission trip in the spring. These sponsors need to serve a specific role on the trip. Being a sponsor is not a golden ticket to going on either trip.

Conclusion

Students and Parents,

It is the desire of the Whitesburg Student Music ministry that students *connect* with one another and God, *grow* musically and spiritually, and *serve* our church, community, and the world through music missions. The policies stated in this manual serve as a guideline to help us fairly and Biblically manage the music program with which they are involved with at Whitesburg Baptist Church. Thank you for your involvement and investment in the lives of students.

Please know that I am here for each student and parent. If you ever have any questions, concerns or needs that I may assist with, please contact me. My office number is 256-881-0952 ex.236. My email address is matthew.sloma@whitesburgbaptist.org. I am extremely honored and blessed to work with such fine students. Let's get ready for a great year of ministry!

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Matthew Sloma", written in a cursive style.

Dr. Matthew Sloma
Associate Worship Pastor
Whitesburg Baptist Church