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The Vision...

**Proposal to the Session of Central Presbyterian Church
Submitted by Rhonda Mitchell,
Coordinator of Christian Education
September 20, 1995**

Statement of vision: I propose for your consideration the concept of Central Hawthorne Conservatory (tentative name for identification in this proposal) to be founded to the glory of God and in the name of Jesus Christ. This conservatory would be a non-profit Christian outreach in the form of gratis music education serving young people in the community who are financially or environmentally disadvantaged.

Purpose of the Conservatory: Central Hawthorne Conservatory would provide to young people who may not have the parental support or the financial means to do so otherwise the opportunity to pursue the avenue of music education in a Christian environment. Through superior musical instruction young people would be challenged to develop talents in voice, brass, woodwind, strings, or piano in all veins of music that could perhaps provide a means of a university education through music scholarships. Beyond the music, however, would be the development of powerfully positive personal relationships with instructors, and mentors from Central Presbyterian Church (from youth to PrimeTimers), development of self-esteem as well as self-discipline, and spiritual nurturing through exposure to role models exhibiting Christ-like behavior.

*The house is perfectly suited to use for this purpose
...a grand place that, when opened and welcoming,
would make the smallest, poorest, meekest young
person to enter its doors feel worthy and important.*

Operating Criteria for the Conservatory: The Conservatory would be committed to offering superior musical instruction by professional musicians in the community, providing all necessary equipment (i.e. instruments when needed, reeds, music, music stands, and instrument maintenance and repair), while, foremost, offering moral and Christian support in the form of youth or adult mentors free to qualified students.

Funding for the Conservatory: The propelling asset for the establishment of the conservatory through Central Presbyterian Church is most obviously Central's Hawthorne Trust. The concept of the conservatory meets immediately with three of the four necessary requirements for the use of the funds, namely youth, music and outreach. Also, Huntsville is a community eager to contribute to worthy causes which are potentially life-changing for the beneficiaries. Typically we are eager to offer a chance for genuine self sufficiency rather than respond to another plea for a quick fix. Community donations to this effect through the Conservatory would include financial donations, and donations of time, professional music skills, instruments, instrument repair services, and all necessary equipment. In addition, this conservatory would qualify for national grants, and, to dream big, Christian celebrity musicians would potentially provide benefit concerts.

Location of the Central Hawthorne Conservatory: The vision of the conservatory is complete in having it established in the renovated Freeman House. The house is perfectly suited to use for this purpose and would be a grand place that, when opened and welcoming, would make the smallest, poorest, meekest young person to enter its doors feel worthy and important. Community involvement in this restoration to the benefit the community would significantly reduce the cost and time of this endeavor. Skilled laborers would donate time just as we see them donating to homes being built by Habitat.

September 20, 1995

Dear Members of the Session of Central Presbyterian Church,

On the preceding page you will find all the technical information I can provide at this preliminary presentation of my vision of the Central Hawthorne Conservatory...just the facts that I know are foremost in considering a venture such as this. At your leisure, after prayerfully considering the facts, I would like to ask that you allow me the chance in this letter to provide you with a more impassioned plea for your support.

In October of 1994 while director of Faith Presbyterian Preschool, I began to have thoughts that moved me to pray to God that I would have my eyes opened to needs of people in the world and that He would use my true talents and abilities to make a positive difference in providing for these needs. This feeling became overwhelming for me as I tried to sort out what my future might hold in His service. In my small way of trying to find this mission for myself, I thought back to my youth and to the time that a school-owned bassoon was given to me to play in the school band. The moment I took the bassoon my future became secure, although that wasn't evident till years later. My ability to play bassoon provided me with the opportunity to go to college. The full music scholarships I received allowed me the choice of universities in my area to attend (the University of Tennessee and Tennessee Tech), and it was not until later that I realized that college truly might not have been an option for me without those scholarships.

I thought back to my best friend in elementary school who started in the band with me, but whose father unintentionally denied her the moral support and nurture she needed to maintain the commitment it takes to pursue music - or life. Her parents' lack of involvement, and her own feelings of causing problems for them through her needs compelled her to drop out of band two years later, to drop out of a loyal circle of Christian friends in high school, and finally, three years ago drop out of life with a self-inflicted gunshot to her head. She left a three year old son and grieving parents.

I know in my heart that if she had had one adult who cared and showed her the worth of her life in the sight of God that her life could have been different.

I thought back to my Uncle Ross who had, along with my own parents, offered that sort of support to me, giving me the opportunity to challenge myself and delight in celebrating each day of life. Ross gave back to me the moral support and nurture of my potential that he had received from Harry Roberts, a high school teacher in rural Greene County, Tennessee. Financially, Ross's home environment (and that of my father) would appear to many to be bleak despite their love as a family...their father (my grandfather), completed 3rd grade and raised tobacco to support a wife and family of 5 children. Needless to say, a college education was not assured or expected for anyone in the family. But Mr. Roberts knew Ross had the hungry spirit for learning and for doing and excelling, and he found a way for Ross. Ross did the work, he did the studying, but Mr. Roberts provided the incentive for something life changing. Due to the effect of one life on another, Ross, the little skinny kid in overalls walking to school (yes, at least five miles one way!) began university studies at Warren Wilson and is now Dr. Ross Hinkle employed at NASA at Cape Kennedy working in environmental science and studying the effects of the shuttle launches on the environment.

In thinking back on these people, myself included, two who had support and one who didn't, and seeing the course their lives took, and knowing that I had been a beneficiary of God's love in Christian parents and family, I knew I had to be involved in giving back and offering as much chance for self-worth and self-sufficiency to children not so fortunate as to have been born into Christian homes with financial security. The world's greatest tragedies are children lost before they can know the glory of God's love for them and their worth in His love.

But, how now to begin, I wondered. Shortly after my prayer to be given a chance to try to give back some of my good fortune, I realized that if I could identify a talented young person in the

community who was financially or environmentally disadvantaged, but who was talented and eager, I could sponsor that child by providing private bassoon instruction, making sure that necessary equipment was provided, thus possibly providing that child an opportunity to go to college on a scholarship when college might not otherwise be an option. But, I didn't do it. Then a friend and I found we shared a common dream of providing musical instruction and mentorship for disadvantaged children, but how would that ever be coordinated or funded, we wondered. And, again, I didn't do it.

In the meantime, I knew God was preparing me to move on from my position at Faith. I felt like I was on the verge of something very big that I could be a part of that would be potentially life-changing for people I could reach. Despite the fact that I was happy in my job, had no other employment prospects and without doubt needed to remain employed, I felt unexplainably led by God to turn in my resignation at Faith in February to be effective in May, the end of the preschool year. I felt as though God wanted me to free myself up to be prepared to do His work that I had asked Him to allow me to do. Many people at Faith had to hear the same story you are being told now, and I remember commenting to several of them (Rev. Henry Pope and Rev. Frank Broyles included) that I felt as if I was on the verge of something very exciting that could touch many people. It was as though a big white ship was following behind me that I should be able to turn around and see. But, of course, I couldn't see it over my shoulder. What was I being led to?

In late May, the position of Coordinator of Christian Education became available to me. My prayers assured me without doubt that this was where God wanted me to be and I am very excited to be in a position of Christian ministry to young children and their families. Imagine my excitement, the unbelievable joy, the trembling that I felt when, a couple of months into my employment with Central, God puts all the facts together in my head and brings the possibility of founding the Central Hawthorne Conservatory with the assets and people wanting a mission that I see at Central! I feel

this idea is divinely inspired, coming from God, far beyond anything any one person could imagine without His vision. And, I must add that the big white ship in my thoughts surely must have been a big white house!

My background as a musician (8 years as bassoonist with the Huntsville Symphony, a position I currently hold) gives me the contacts with every professional musician in Huntsville. I have given private lessons in many of the schools, my husband is band director at Challenger Middle School and together we know most every band director in North Alabama (and many in Tennessee). I know the music store owners and instrument repair shop owners. I know parents who have forgotten instruments in their closets waiting to be donated to our Conservatory. In the area of benevolent outreach, I currently work at Faith on a volunteer basis taking calls from the community for needs, and will be attending two seminars in the next two weeks dealing with people helping people. Frank Broyles knows most of the benevolent organizations in town which could play a role in identifying potential students or just offering help in general, and I see Rev. Broyles and communicate with him regularly in my volunteer work at Faith. All these qualities combine with my degree and work in education to provide me with many assets that can be instrumental in developing the Conservatory. All this said, I now ask that you pray for what this could mean to you, to Central Presbyterian Church, to our community, and to the children it could touch. Please feel free to speak with me further. Ideally, some of you will feel led to form a committee to examine all aspects of this proposal and to pursue additional questions in hopes of seeing this vision realized.

This would be a precedent-setting venture for our area that could gain national attention. Nothing exists like this in our area. Nashville has a school founded on similar ideals, a community school, but that school is funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts and must follow strict government guidelines and therefore, of course, cannot operate as a Christian ministry. Everyone with whom I have shared this idea is anxious to see it happen, and is hoping to be involved in service with it. The idea brings a smile of hope and

excitement to people who hear it. Hopefully, you will feel the excitement and share the vision.

Your friend in Christ and partner in His work,

Rhonda Mitchell

Rhonda Mitchell



Hawthorne Conservatory

A Christian Ministry of Central Presbyterian Church

MISSION STATEMENT

“Hawthorne Conservatory—A Christian Ministry of Central Presbyterian Church is established to the Glory of God in the name of Jesus Christ to share the Gospel of Christ with students that they will not be of this world, yet, through also providing music education to develop skills for self-sufficiency, they will be prepared to live in this world.” The scriptural basis is Romans 12:2. *“And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”* (KJV)





The purpose of the Conservatory is to provide music instruction in a Christian atmosphere to students who demonstrate a keen desire, interest and aptitude in learning music. The Conservatory will be housed primarily in the upstairs portion of the Freeman House, which has six instruction rooms, a restroom, and storage compartments for music and equipment.



Youth Ministry

In keeping with the wishes and intent of the will, the youth ministry program at Central Presbyterian has become an outreach oriented program to the students of Huntsville. It has been my dream and vision to be connected with a church that encourages it's youth minister to reach out



*Cullen Davis, Youth Director
Central Presbyterian Church*

to the teenagers in the community. There are far too many churches that work under the philosophy of 'taking care of our kids.' But, Central is different. This church has caught the vision that students need to hear the message of hope, grace, and forgiveness and we welcome all to be apart of our fellowship.

Central's Youth Ministry is unique in that it has a partnership with Young Life, a high-school based ministry which has been involved in sharing God's love with teenagers in Huntsville for more than 50 years. Alabama's first Young Life Church Partner, I was hired with the mission of beginning a middle school Young Life Program, called Wyldlife, at Huntsville Middle School. Wyldlife began its outreach to the kids of Huntsville Middle in 1996 and currently touches the lives of nearly 100 kids each week through weekly meetings, contact work, and relationship-building.

Another exciting outreach went from dream stage to reality last year as Acoustic Cafe, a coffeehouse for youth, moved into the Freeman House. Coffeehouses were very popular in the 1960s and 1970s, and their forum for ministry has reached a popularity with today's young people. I have a vision of sharing this unique ministry with other churches in the downtown area so that it becomes a community of youth leaders and Christian students reaching out to bring their friends to Christ.



We have an opportunity to combine music, a very popular influence in youth culture, with relationships that last a lifetime and point students to an eternal relationship with their Father in heaven. Acoustic Cafe, Wyldlife, and leaders who are willing to go where kids are bring reality to Mrs. Hawthorne's dream.





A Surprise Gift

God's extra touch of whimsy and good humor, like a pat on the back for a job well-done, came from under the Freeman House into the hands of church custodian Nathan Dean, who had the good sense to turn it over to Carol Ann Samples, who had the good sense to turn it over to Harvie Jones, who had the good sense to recommend a Nashville Conservator who did a beautiful job that will be treated in a subsequent *Quarterly*.

The whole serendipitous story is delightfully told by Bill Easterling in his inimitable way. We conclude this issue by permission of the *Huntsville Times* with a reprint of his December 14, 1996 article. Thank you, Bill. Photographs from a *Times* article, August 3, 1994, "Passing the Torch from Sallie to Alyce to Lorin" by Food Editor Mickey Ellis, have been interspersed.