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## Taizé services gaining favor

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By Jonathan Barnes



Bill Wade/Post-Gazette

Richard Kobertz play guitar every week as part of the live musicians of Taizé Prayer at East Liberty Presbyterian Church.

Entering the large chapel in East Liberty Presbyterian Church on a recent Wednesday night, worshippers listened to guitarist Richard A. Kobertz playing and singing a tune he had penned:

"You are Holy, you are Holy ... God."

His tenor voice rang through the high-ceilinged room, giving a welcoming and reflective tone to the Wednesday Taizé Prayer service. Mr. Kobertz, of Allison Park, usually plays and sings with a small chamber orchestra sitting in the pews, but this night the volunteer orchestra was smaller than usual -- just two musicians playing recorders, two violinists, a pianist and Mr. Kobertz.

There were several icons at the altar -- a 4-foot-tall Russian Orthodox icon of Jesus hanging on the cross, with a statue of a saint on each side and a likeness of the Holy Spirit above. Arranged on the altar steps were candles and smaller icons. During the service, worshippers were invited to go up front, light a candle, sit on the floor and reflect.

This form of worship at the church started two decades ago and is thriving in a number of suburban churches of various denominations. St. Anne Church in Castle Shannon held a December Advent Taizé service. An ecumenical Taizé prayer service also was held in December at Bellevue Christian Church, in conjunction with Assumption Catholic Church. Hope Lutheran Church in Forest Hills has a Taizé service at 7 p.m. on the first Friday of every month. Forest Grove Community Church, a Presbyterian church in Robinson, has Taizé services at different times throughout the year.

The hourlong service at East Liberty includes sung prayers, simple music, a time of silence, spoken and silent prayers, and opportunity for individual prayer and anointing.

The Rev. Christiane Dutton is the minister of Taizé at East Liberty Presbyterian and said the service is based on a style of worship developed in the monastic Taizé community in Burgundy, France, founded in the 1940's. Originally providing a refuge during World War II, Taizé has developed into an ecumenical prayer community in France, and a form of prayer for Christians around the world. The Rev. Dutton said Taizé services can be held in churches that have an interested congregation and a minister interested in conducting such services. And, she said, many consider the meditative mood of the service, the perfect way to move into Lent, which starts Wednesday.

While preparing for an intercontinental meeting in Dayton in 1992, members of the East Liberty church began to have Taizé services on Wednesday nights. The services were so meaningful to worshippers, that they have been held every Wednesday since.

Taizé services at East Liberty -- and elsewhere -- follow simplified versions of monastic prayers. Sometimes, the Rev. Dutton will deliver a brief message. The worship usually includes a short Bible passage read in several languages. The services are almost entirely comprised of worshippers singing simple chants and melodies, led by the orchestra and vocalists

in the pews.

There is no offering during the service, which includes moments for prayer and meditation. It also includes a time for worshippers to come to the front of the room and be anointed with oil and have hands laid upon them by the Rev. Dutton.

Taizé services at this Presbyterian church are unique partly because Presbyterians don't routinely sing canons, some of which are in Latin, or display any icons or statues of saints.

The East Liberty Taizé services always end with one or two gospel songs, and this recent service is no exception, as worshippers sang the tune, "Friend."

"Some call you Holy Spirit, And some say Holy Ghost, But I long to call you Friend" the lyrics say.

There is no benediction, just a brief moment of quiet before Mr. Kobertz begins to play and sings "Healer of my soul."

"Jesus is calling, calling for sinners to come home" say part of the lyrics.

Wilkinsburg resident Marva Evans has been a church member for 15 years and began regularly attending the Taizé services a decade ago.

"It's so peaceful. I love the candles and I love singing... You leave with a serene feeling," Ms. Evans said.

Others are similarly affected.

Jeff McLaren of Freedom often comes to the Taizé because of the style of worship.

"You can focus more on praying ... you're more in touch with the Lord, because of the repetition of the songs," Mr. McLaren said. "A lot of people would be intimidated by a regular service, but this is more laid back. You can just feel the Holy Spirit in the service."

The Rev. Dutton and many from the church plan to attend a Taizé Memorial Day meeting in Chicago. For more information on the trip, call 412-441-3800 or visit [cathedralofhope.org](http://cathedralofhope.org).

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