

A Sense of God's Presence, in Silence, Song and Unity

A simple, yet contemplative and profound experience, Taizé prayer is a time to rest in God. Short chants, short scripture readings and silence are the key ingredients of these ecumenical gatherings, where Christians of many traditions can meet to praise God together. (1)

On a cold January evening, Joshua Falk, pastor at the Church of the Nazarene, sat intently at his pew in the 17 Wing Community Chapel, deep in prayer. "This was my first Taizé prayer service. That said, I'm open to many Christian traditions. I have a lot of Taizé music on my iPhone. I've even received contemplative prayer training from Benedictine monks. I really



gravitate towards the silence, and the meditative prayer experience. Tonight, I was deeply pulled in. This won't be a one-time thing for me."

Barbara Thuen, a parishioner at St. Jean Brebeuf Roman Catholic Parish, was equally moved. "This was my second Taizé prayer service. I attended one at a Catholic Women's League convention. But that was many years ago. I wanted to experience that sense of contemplation, prayer and community. Because sometimes, life can be very hectic. And when I pray, it's hard to quiet the mind. I struggle with that sometimes. But tonight, I was able to open myself up to God's presence. When the moment came, I felt a peacefulness. And a sense of God being right there, beside me."

Posted at 17 Wing since 2015, Major Hope Winfield is Senior chaplain, since 2016. The RCAF officer explains why she opened Taizé prayer services to the general public. "Taizé prayer is part of our program to help people develop spiritual resiliency. This quiet form of prayer has allowed many servicemen and servicewomen to find spiritual healing.

“We can all benefit from Taizé prayer. Our staff was looking for a way to open our Community Chapel to the greater community. This was a natural choice. Especially since no other Taizé prayer services are being conducted regularly in Winnipeg.”

A deacon at St. Andrew Bobola Parish in the Archdiocese of Saint-Boniface, Stepan Bilynsky was invited to conduct the Taizé prayer services at 17 Wing. “I am a physician neurologist, with a Masters’ degree in theology. I have always been concerned with spiritual health. I’ve organized retreats at 17 Wing on grief, emotional support and forgiveness. There are many wounded people that need healing. That need to become whole. Taizé prayer can be very beneficial.

“Of course, Taizé prayer is not just for healing. It’s a way of bringing people together. The Taizé community was founded in France in 1940, during World War Two, by Brother Roger Schütz, a Reformed Protestant. His aim was to bring Christians together, both Protestants and Catholics, so that they might have a communal experience. The Taizé spirit is all about encouraging us to be together. Over the years, people of other faiths and beliefs have also united in Taizé. We can work together and pray together as a people of God.”



Rosella East-Bédard attends Catholic mass at the 17 Wing Chapel, since her husband was in the military. “Opening up the Taizé prayer service to the greater community was a great decision. It’s good to see new faces. This was my second Taizé prayer service. It was thoroughly relaxing. When there’s silence, you really have time to enter in prayer. We are also blessed to have Yanna Courtney, a wonderful singer and flautist, as well as Richard

Konrad, an impressive pianist, to accompany us. That really strengthened our singing, and our sense of community.”

Barbara Thuen agrees. “I always knew Taizé prayer was interdenominational, but I hadn’t given it a lot of thought. It’s really nice to come together in prayer. As Christians, we have many things that unite us. We’re more alike than unlike.”

(1) Multilingual Taizé prayer services will take place from 7:00 to 8:00 PM on February 15, March 15, April 12, May 17 and June 21 at the 17 Wing Community Chapel, 2235 Silver Ave, Winnipeg. General Information: 204-833-2500, ext. 6800. For information poster, [click here](#).