

BELIEFS Values

Oakland church to host special Taizé service

BY RENA FULKA
SPECIAL WRITER

When the Rev. Dr. Ronald Byars and his wife, Susan, were invited by a friend to vacation at an old mill in France, they seized the opportunity.

And as they searched for a place nearby to worship, the couple stumbled upon an ecumenical community of brothers in the tiny village of Taizé.

Founded in 1940 by a Christian Reformed minister known as Brother Roger, the monastic, prayer-centered community initially opened its doors of hospitality to refugees of World War II.

Today, the Taizé community draws international visitors who join the brothers on pilgrimages of prayer, worship and reflection.

"The sense of reverence is astonishing. There's just this tremendous sense of awe," recalled Rev. Byars, of his first visit to Taizé a decade ago. "I got hooked on it."

Byars has shared a sense of the Taizé experience with his congregations ever since. He brought his experiences to Oakland County shortly after being installed as pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Birmingham three years ago.



Taste of France: The Rev. Ronald Byars (left) and music director Mark Wickens will bring a sense of ecumenism to worshippers through a special commissioned service.

ham three years ago.

At the 8:30 a.m. communion service on Sunday, May 12, the First Presbyterian Church will celebrate a specially commissioned Taizé service composed by Stephen Rush, director of the digital music ensemble and music director for the dance department at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

The commissioned work includes the poetry of Madeleine

L'Engle in a musical commentary on the biblical characters, Rachel, David, Mary and Moses. The singing will be accompanied by organ, piano, cello, saxophones, hand bells and a battery of percussion instruments. The Taizé service is expected to draw more than 100 individuals.

"It's just another option people have when they choose to worship," said Mark Wickens, the church's director of music for the

past two years. "It offers people the ability to choose different forms of worship that have integrity."

Carol Petty, a Troy singer, musician and teacher, was initially exposed to Taizé music at the First Presbyterian Church, where she has been a soprano soloist for 11 years.

"It has bits and pieces of chant in it, a repetition of short, melodic phrases," explained Petty. "It's a very easy thing to pick up."

Unlike the Taizé worship experience in France — which is chanted in a variety of languages — the Birmingham service will be in English. The ecumenical flair will be expressed through gospel sounds, music with a Native American influence and sounds of the 20th century.

"It's the Western answer to Eastern chant," said Wickens, a Birmingham resident. "It involves the whole idea of meditation and getting yourself into a still state."

"There's an enormous transition going on in terms of music today," added Byars. "As the generations change, people's expectation of music in church is changing as well."

The First Presbyterian

Church, 1669 W. Maple, meets the need for musical variety by offering three different Sunday morning worship services each week. The early service includes bits of Taizé music, the 9:45 service bears an Irish/Scottish influence with a liturgy from the Scottish island of Iona, and the 11:00 service offers traditional hymns based on the Presbyterian Book of Common Worship.

"We're helping to develop and expand a new vocabulary of worship," explained Byars, who heads a congregation of 1,850 members. "It needs to be accessible, singable, yet strong enough to support the sacred text."

Prior to the Taizé service on May 12, Byars will lead a group of 20 church members and four friends on a 12-day European trip to visit the sights of the Reformation and the origin of the Presbyterian Church in Geneva, Switzerland. But the focus of the trip will be in Taizé, France, where the group will spend most of its time.

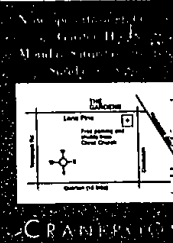
"I want to have people experience something of that community in its own setting," added Byars. "It's capturing the imagination of people around the world. It sparkles."

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WOMEN'S CELEBRATION

The Birmingham Area Church Women United will observe May Fellowship Day on Friday, May 8, at St. James Episcopal

Church, 355 W. Maple in Birmingham. Breakfast at the barrier-free church will begin at 8:30 a.m., followed by a 10:30 program entitled, "Loving Our Neighbor in a Broken World."

Those attending are asked to park in the Chester Street Parking Structure west of the church. Child care is available by calling the church at (810) 644-0820. May Fellowship Day, one of three national Church Women United celebrations, is held annually on the first Friday of May. Offerings support the work

of the local and statewide organization.

UP WITH SONG

The Kirk in the Hills Choir will present a public concert at 2 p.m. Sunday, May 6, featuring Brahms' Liebeslieder Walzes. The program includes works by Lauridsen, Rachmaninoff, Clausen and Gershwin. Admission is free but a free-will offering will be accepted. Kirk in the Hills is part of the Detroit Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church. It's at 1340 W. Long Lake, Bloomfield Hills.

BISHOP CONSECRATED

The Rev. Frederick G. Fick, rector of the Church of the Holy Redeemer in Troy, will be consecrated as the first bishop of the newly formed Great Lakes Diocese of the Charismatic Episcopal Church at 7 p.m. on Friday, May 10, at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Utica. The new diocese is comprised of churches in Michigan, Ohio and Indiana. As a diocesan bishop, Fick will continue to head the

first C.E.C. church in Michigan as a parish priest.

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