



Prayerful Fellowship Flourishes in Monthly Taizé-Style Gathering

Grand Rapids, Michigan

The Prayer of Peace in Grand Rapids, Michigan, is a monthly prayer event in the spirit of Taizé. It was started in 2006 in the inner-city parish of St. Mary's out of a desire to touch the peace of Christ within the human heart, to foster that peace and to share it with others. The organizers quickly recognized that prayer in the spirit of Taizé is a marvelous way of experiencing and cultivating peace through contemplative, communal, ecumenical prayer. They chose to follow close to the pattern of prayer described on the Taizé web site (taize.fr/en) and the book *Prayer for Each Day* (GIA).

The Prayer of Peace organizers tap into the experience and resources of musicians from the diocesan NPM chapter. An ensemble of volunteer musicians come together to lead the music for an assembly of more than 50 people each month. Most of those in attendance are regulars who come several times a year. Many are people who rarely miss a month.

Perhaps this prayer is “successful” because it meets a need. Brother Roger of Taizé wrote, “Caught up in the anonymous rhythms of schedules and timetables, men and women of today are implicitly thirsting for the one essential reality: an inner life, signs of the invisible.”

In addition to the songs, prayer in the spirit of Taizé is also known for its visual simplicity and beauty. The visual environment for the Prayer of Peace each month is created with a particular principle in mind: it's difficult to have too many candles. Even on a bright summer night, the constellations of candle flames in the church are a comforting sight.

Getting any regular prayer event rolling requires a few dedicated people willing to take responsibility for it. A chairperson is needed to assure that the preparations happen in a timely manner, delegate responsibilities where possible, and guide those who assist.

What are some of the best practices that the Prayer of Peace has learned?

- Communicate in advance of each event with the participants through the NPM chapter, email, church bulletins, and social media.
- The quality of the musical leadership is an important factor in providing a prayer experience that's meaningful. Since so much of the prayer is sung, the skill and sensitivity of the musicians at leading—without calling undue attention to themselves—and accompanying the singing is vital.
- Keep the prayer accessible. Even though the music is simple, repeat pieces from event to event so that the participants soon have a base of familiarity. Add repertoire intentionally, carefully and slowly.
- Silence is rich. Allow for silence between elements of the prayer. If people are uncomfortable with extended silence, increase the length of the great silence before the intercessions patiently over time.
- Respect the ecumenical nature of the Taizé community. The style of prayer they developed is accessible to Christians across denominational lines. In that spirit, reach out to non-Catholics.
- Preparing prayer begins, continues, and ends in prayer.

For more information, visit prayerofpeacegr.org.

– Larry Barton, chapter member