



3. Evening Services - why do we have so many different kinds of evening services?

For many years, the evening service at St Mary's was always Evening Prayer according to the Book of Common Prayer. Patterns of social life and worship changed; there was competition from 'Songs of Praise' and 'The Antiques Road Show' on the television, and the focus of Sunday worship switched to the Parish Eucharist. Most people were prepared to come to church only once on Sundays. As a result, numbers attending on Sunday evenings dwindled. This was sad, but it gave us a challenge and an opportunity.

After some heart-searching, we decided to use the worship on Sunday evenings as an opportunity to try out a number of different ideas. Some of these have worked, and been retained; others have not, and have been dropped, or used less frequently.

At present, we are working according to a more or less regular pattern. Usually, we start the month with a full Choral Evensong, after the style of a Cathedral service (a Bishop of Bedford, formerly Vicar here, called our church a 'mini-cathedral'). Some wish we did this every week; but the monthly service gives our choir and organists a chance to rehearse special anthems, and to give a polished performance.

As well as good church music, there are prayers and a sermon, and the whole is over within the hour. Given the amount of effort all put in, and the quality of the result, it is a pity attendance is not larger.

Second Sunday evening worship is normally a Methodist Evening Service, with hymns, prayers and a sermon. Ours is a shared church, in which for many years we have been seeking to know and understand each other's traditions and ways of worship better. Methodists are participating in Anglican morning worship regularly; this service is an opportunity for Anglicans to dip a toe into another part of the pool of Methodist worship.

On the third Sunday, our usual pattern is to have Taizé Worship; a quiet and meditative service with Taizé chants, readings and prayers, by candlelight during the dark months. We are still experimenting with a variety of formats for these. If you haven't sampled a Taizé service, this is a chance to try it; well done (and we do it quite well at St Mary's) it is a profound and moving experience. There is no sermon.

The fourth Sunday is normally either a Service for Christian Healing or a Young People's Service. At St Mary's, over

recent years, we have been fortunate in establishing a tradition of healing worship which focuses on the power of healing in its broadest sense - that is, healing of body, mind, emotions, feelings and spirit, all of which are interconnected and interrelated. We do, of course, also have a ministry of healing at the 9.30 a.m. Parish Eucharist, which offers the laying-on of hands.

Our young people periodically devise services of worship in which they participate actively, both by leading prayer, by taking part in drama, and through music. These are very lively events well worth our adults - even those who are not the parents of participants - taking the trouble to attend and learn how our younger members are learning, worshipping, and praying.

The pattern I have outlined is not always followed rigidly, and there will be variations over the next few months for special events. We sometimes have full Choral Eucharist with a visiting choir - always worth attending; and on major festivals the day is sometimes closed with a quiet and reflective Night Office, sometimes called Compline. There is something for everyone, so please come and try what we are offering you.

What is this Taizé, anyway?

Taizé is a tiny hamlet in Burgundy, in the hills on the west bank of the Rhone. Here Roger Schulz, a Swiss Protestant Pastor, established an ecumenical community of reconciliation in the years after the Second World War. It proved successful beyond his wildest dreams, becoming indeed a place of pilgrimage. The community eventually decided to hold a summer youth camp. This, too, attracted a big response.

Among other problems, it raised the question of how was worship to be conducted in a gathering of many languages. The solution was to use simple repetitive chants, easily learned, in a fresh and beautiful musical setting. The verse or prayer is sung by a cantor; the refrain is sung to the chant, with an instrumental accompaniment.

We have an accomplished vocal and instrumental team leading our Taizé worship. Come and try for yourself. A word of reassurance: despite the French-sounding name, this is not a plot by the Europeans to take over the Church of England.

This article originally appeared in 'Link', the Parish Magazine of St Mary's, Rickmansworth. It was part of a series of articles entitled 'Enquire Within' which were written by our Reader, Michael Baker over a number of years.