



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

## Worship Formation & Liturgical Resources: Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is Taizé worship and How can it be used? (How might its characteristics contribute to “regular” worship?)**

*The worship staff receives a number of similar inquiries on worship-related topics from across the church.*

*These responses should not be considered the final word on the topic, but useful guides that are to be considered in respect to local context with pastoral sensitivity.*

*The response herein may be reproduced for congregational use as long as the web address is cited on each copy.*

In the south of Burgundy, France lays a small village called Taizé. This village founded over seventy years ago by Brother Roger is home to a monastic community devoted to prayer and reconciliation. The community is made up of brothers from all the continents and major denominations who gather together three times a day, seven days a week, throughout the year to pray (whether there are 7000 young people present or only twenty). For more information on the Community, its history and on-going work, see their website.

#### **Gifts from Taize**

While many people make pilgrimages to Taizé to experience the community and prayer life, most experience Taizé through the ways that community comes to us, namely by the characteristics it has contributed to Christian worship practices. While Taizé worship as practiced in the monastic community cannot be simply imitated, it can and has been adapted by many Christian communities in the United States.

#### *Repetitive Sung Prayer*

The characteristic of Taizé worship that is most prevalent in our worship has been the use of a kind of repetitive prayer set to simple musical lines. Repetition is not a new phenomenon nor unique to Taizé. The use of repetitive prayers is a long attested reality in the history of Christian spirituality and liturgy (for example, in the Jesus Prayer and the Rosary). What is unique to the prayer of Taizé is the adaptation of the repetitive form to simple musical lines and core biblical texts that can be sung by a whole assembly of various nationalities, languages, and denominations. The duration of repetitive songs (whether in canon form or *ostinato*) during prayer is not to be timed nor the number of repetitions calculated beforehand. The assembly is to immerse itself in the simple but profound harmonies and let itself be carried by this sung prayer. Examples of music from the Taizé community can be found in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (#175, #236, #262, #348, #388, #406, #472, #528, #616, #642 and #751). For guidance on incorporating the music of Taizé, see Resources below.

## *Silence*

Another characteristic of Taizé worship that has been a welcome gift to Lutheran worship is its generous use of silence. Those simply incorporating Taizé music may not experience this fully, but when planning an entire worship service in the style of Taizé, silence will be a very important dimension of worship. The use of silence in Taizé raises an important question: how can we incorporate a more ample time of silence in worship rather than filling every moment with words or music? (See also, [“What is the role of silence in worship?”](#))

## **Meditative Worship**

In addition to the Taizé community, other communities have contributed to what one might call “meditative worship”: worship that intentionally includes the elements of silence, repetition and sung prayer among other aspects.

What would it look like to include more meditative qualities of worship? For some assemblies, this may mean adding a worship service, perhaps a regular evening prayer during the week or a service of healing. For assemblies that do not hold regular morning or evening prayer during the week, characteristics of Taizé or other meditative worship could be the basis of such daily prayer. You may also consider how qualities of meditative worship would enrich the Sunday pattern of Gathering, Word, Meal and Sending. There may be yet more possibilities.

*What resources can inform this dimension of worship?*

[The Iona Community](#) has published many volumes of worship resources that would be useful in meditative worship.

*Holden Prayer around the Cross* is an “evening service that includes scripture readings, prayers, silence and an opportunity to kneel or sit near a large cross, light a candle, and pray” (from Introduction to *Singing Our Prayer: A Companion To Holden Prayer Around the Cross*).

Some may desire musical refrains for intercessory prayer during Holy Communion. See, for example, *Hear Our Prayer: Sung Responses for Chorus and Assembly*.

Many of the musical refrains from the Taizé tradition are easily memorized and can be sung by heart. Congregations are rediscovering the profound yet simple way of singing without the aid of books/screens or printed materials. For more on what one community is doing to further this practice, see [Music That Makes Community](#) and their resource *Music by Heart: Paperless Songs for Worship*.

## RESOURCES

### Frequently Asked Questions:

- 🔗 What is the role of silence in worship?

### Resources Available from Augsburg Fortress:

- 📖 Briehl, Susan and Tom Witt. *Holden Prayer around the Cross: A Handbook to the Liturgy*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009.
- 📖 Witt, Tom. *Singing Our Prayer: A Companion To Holden Prayer Around the Cross*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2010. An assembly edition and a full score edition are available separately.
- 📖 *Hear Our Prayer: Sung Responses for Chorus and Assembly*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2007. A collection of sung prayer responses to be used between the petitions of the prayers of the church, as a call to prayer, or a closing to prayer

### Other Resources

- 📖 *Taizé: Songs for Prayer*: All worship resources in English and Spanish may be found at [GIA Publications, Inc](#): This most recent collection of songs uses inclusive language and includes updated versions of the songs first published in the early 1980s.
- 📖 *Prayer for Each Day: Taizé*. Chicago: GIA Publications, 1998. For a pattern and suggestions for daily prayer.
- 📖 Olivier Clément. *Taizé: A Meaning to Life*. Chicago: GIA Publications, 1997. For a good introduction to the Community:
- 📖 [Music by Heart: Paperless Songs for Worship](#), Church Publishing Inc., July 2008.
- 🌐 The Iona Community: <http://www.iona.org.uk/>
- 🌐 On the Community of Taizé: <http://ww.taize.fr/>  
This is an incredibly useful and easy to navigate website operated by the Brothers of Taizé. It contains information not only on the Community but also on preparing a prayer. It also explains how one can participate in the meetings at Taizé and how to get there.

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