



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

## **What is Taizé worship and how can it be used?**

**What is "Taizé worship?"** When the question is asked, there is often another question lurking behind it. Why do so many people (up to 7000 a week – primarily young people) go to Taizé to pray? Why is the Taizé prayer so attractive? There is certainly a multitude of answers but perhaps a key response lies in the fact that, at the heart of the prayer, there is a monastic community. Taizé is little village in the south of Burgundy, France. In this village, over 60 years ago, Brother Roger founded a community devoted to prayer and living a parable of reconciliation within the church and the human family. 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 the [Taizé Web site](#).

The Taizé prayer is not simply a prayer form or model that can be adapted or inserted into any context with the same results. There are, however, characteristics of the Taizé prayer that can be useful in understanding its dynamics. The distinguishing marks include repetition and silence and the insertion of these into the liturgy. 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.

Silence is perhaps the second most important aspect of this particular prayer practice. In the middle of the prayer is a long period of silence (rather than a sermon or meditation). Maintaining silence is not a technique or method enabling some special communication with God. It is simply holding oneself in a presence and letting Christ, through the Holy Spirit, pray in us. There are not many short silences in a Taizé prayer rather the prayer moves along according to a certain rhythm through song, psalm and reading leading up to a longer silence (around 10 minutes) which then culminates in intercessory prayer and more song.

There are many attempts to create prayer groups based on the format developed by the Community of Taizé. However, the approach of the Community, its use of song and silence, can also be inserted into more traditional forms of prayer. In North America, the songs of Taizé are often used during communion but they also have many other uses. For example, in a Eucharistic celebration certain songs can be used for the Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei. The Community of Taizé has also published a complete Eucharistic setting. The psalm and Gospel acclamation can be sung with alleluias or other appropriate responses according to the liturgical season; intercessory prayer can be intensified through many of the sung responses Taizé offers. There are also instrumental accompaniments for all the music published by Taizé. Finally, the use of silence in the prayer of Taizé raises an important question: how can we incorporate a more ample time of silence within our liturgical celebrations rather than filling every moment with words or music?

**The prayer of Taizé as practiced by the Community cannot simple be imitated; it can, however, be adapted with surprisingly beautiful results to any prayer form whether it be the Eucharist or a service of the Word, whether it be morning or evening prayer. The simple, repetitive songs and an ample silence are means for the gathered assembly, "with a common voice... to proclaim and respond to the Word of God." (*The Use of the Means of Grace*, page 16).**