



Contemplative weekend draws young people to Austin

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By Daniel Wallace / Special to the Baptist Standard

AUSTIN—An ecumenical monastic community in France sponsored an event at a Texas Baptist church that drew more than 200 young people from throughout the United States.

The Brothers of Taize, who represent various Christian denominations and 25 countries, sponsored a “Pilgrimage of Trust” at First Baptist Church in Austin.



In preparation for the Austin Pilgrimage of Trust, leaders (left to right) Brother Emile, Brother John, and Brother Emmanuel of the Taizé Community in Burgundy, France, visit First Baptist Church of Austin. Taizé, a village in Burgundy, France, about 250 miles south of Paris, annually welcomes around 100,000 young people from all over the world to spend a week at a [monastic community](#).

In the United States, Taizé is best-known for its contemplative style of prayer that combines meditative songs and extended times of silence.

The gathering in Austin marked the third consecutive annual Taizé function in the United States. The first American gathering was held at DePaul University in 2012, and the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota was host to a gathering last year.

In each Pilgrimage of Trust, young people spend two to three days deepening their trust in God and their ability to become bearers of reconciliation through participating in Taizé prayer services, Bible studies and workshops. The pilgrimages are designed for participants to experience

a compact version of life in Taize, said Brother Emile, who lives in the French community.

Participants at the Austin event experienced four Taize prayer services, which were open to the public.



Campers stack their equipment before a Taize weekend. Upon entering the sanctuary at First Baptist Church, they were directed to remain completely silent until the service started to prepare their hearts to commune with God.

Once the service began, participants joined in singing the “Songs of Taize” as a form of contemplative prayer.

“The whole idea of praying these short phrases and repetitive chants was with that aim of having people not being spectators of the prayer but being participants, because they pick up the melody, and the text is easy to learn,” Brother Emile said.

Following the contemplative prayer through song, participants spent 10 to 20 minutes in complete silence while the Brothers of Taize encouraged them to pray and give God space to move in their hearts.

The pilgrimages often become an “inner pilgrimage” for participants when they take extended time to encounter God through silence, Brother Emile noted.

Joe Bumbulis, minister to students at First Baptist Austin, participated in the Pilgrimage of Trust last year in South Dakota and was instrumental in bringing the Brothers of Taize to Austin this year.



Participants join in a Pilgrimage of Trust gathering. “The worship itself is very powerful,” he said. “In general, I like contemplative practices. I find that they draw me closer to God and what God is doing. There is just something heavy, or weighty and there is something about that silence that is just profoundly different from silence when you practice it by yourself. I think it is the weight of doing it together and listening together.”

Bumbulis suggested contemplative prayer finds a receptive audience in Austin because of the city’s thriving entertainment industry. Because he lives in Austin, Bumbulis can hear the best bands play live music frequently, he said. When it comes to worship, however, he seeks a deeper worship encounter, and believes Taize offers the platform to experience worship in a rich, powerful way.

Bumbulis noted he was looking for something connected to Christianity through the ages—“something that is centered in our tradition that feels ancient but doesn’t feel necessarily like a packaged consumer product.”

The simplicity of Taize invites participation, he noted.

“It is easy worship to allow yourself to enter into and to be swept up in,” he said.

Participants at the gathering also participated in workshops that stimulated thinking about the challenges of the world or provided insight on spiritual themes consistent with the Taize tradition.

Brother Emmanuel from Taize spoke to a handful of students about the importance of integrating silence into their lives and offered advice on how to do so. Consistent silence in daily life allows people to be reconciled to themselves and to understand themselves better, he noted.

Often, people are afraid to enter into silence, because they have a negative view of themselves and do not see themselves the way God sees them, he said. Entering into a time of silence gives God the opportunity to heal the deep wounds inside a person’s life, Brother Emmanuel insisted.

“He knows what is happening within us,” he said. “He knows that we are not bad, but that we are deeply wounded. Then the time of silence can become much more positive, because then instead of judging ourselves harshly and thinking God will judge us harshly for the things we don’t like about ourselves, we can discover ... God does not want to reject us or punish us, but God wants to heal the secret wounds of our hearts.”



Christians can encounter God silently throughout the day, in multiple times and in smaller increments, instead of through one long session of silence, he added. On a practical level, he suggested participants regularly take 60 seconds a day to express love toward God and receive his love through silent prayer.

“This one minute can be enough to renew that reciprocity of love with God. That exchange of love becomes life. My day is full; I have no room for silence, sometimes. But thanks to this one minute, I renourish and renew my relationship” with God.

Christian families from varied churches in Austin opened their homes for overnight lodging and provided transportation for pilgrimage participants.

“We noticed the experience of hospitality helps young people experience what the church is,” Brother Emile said. “It’s not a building. It’s real people who form a community of love, hope, joy and faith. Of course they meet on Sundays, but it is so much more. “

