

Ascension church's Celtic services attracting 'a lot of different people'

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Shopper News

While the architecture of the Episcopal Church of the Ascension on Northshore Drive has a British abbey-like feel and ambience with its tower and breezeway, it now also has Irish sounds emanating from it.

Once a month for several months, the church has offered a Sunday evening

Celtic service that features contemplative prayer time, a homily, lighted candles, Holy Eucharist, and, yes, soft Celtic-style Christian music.

And so far, it has drawn attendees beyond just the Ascension parishioners or even area-wide Episcopalians or those with a church home. The sounds of music and ancient words interspersed with the sounds of silence seem to be quite appealing to a large segment of the pop-

ulation.

"What we are finding is that a lot of different people are attending," said the Rev. Caroline Vogel, the church's associate rector for spiritual direction. "They are curious, and it seems to be meeting a higher need in the community for something obviously spiritual more than overtly religious.

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Celtic

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"These are deeply spiritual services that are resonating with people."

She said the idea was originated several months before the pandemic by the church's current interim rector, the Rev. Patrick Wingo, and his wife, Sue-Scott Wingo. With a sensed yearning for more contemplative services in an increasingly hectic world, and the growing popularity of Celtic music in the United States in recent decades due to everything from "Riverdance" to National Public Radio, the concept has caught on around the country.

"More and more Episcopal churches are offering these services with liturgies based on the early Celtic Christians from Ireland and the Isle of Iona off Scotland," she said, adding that St. John's Cathedral in downtown Knoxville has also offered them.

She said the Ascension Celtic service, which will next be held on May 2, usually begins at 5 for those who want to come a little early and sit and meditate and pray in silence or with very soft music. Vogel calls it a time for people to settle themselves and come to a place of stillness in a beautiful sanctuary.

Candles are also lit, and around 5:30, the service begins with liturgy reading, a short homily reflection done by someone on staff or an invited Episcopal priest from the area, and Holy Eucharist, or the serving of communion.

Celtic-style music is also interspersed throughout the service, which usually ends around 6:15 or 6:30. Vogel said director of music ministries Jim Garvey tries to encourage a variety of Celtic music.

"He had different musicians come in and play, and it is always incredibly lovely," she said.

She also enjoys the experience when she gets to lead the service.

"It is such a gift to be able to do it in such a gorgeous sanctuary," she said.

Although they had around 200-300 before the pandemic, and then continued the services online, they are limiting attendance to about 100 for the time being since the in-person Celtic service began again in April. Safe health



The Revs. Sara-Scott Wingo, left, and Pat Wingo are shown at one of the Celtic services they helped start at Episcopal Church of the Ascension before the pandemic began. COURTESY OF EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION

practices are also undertaken, and attendees are asked to sign up beforehand online.

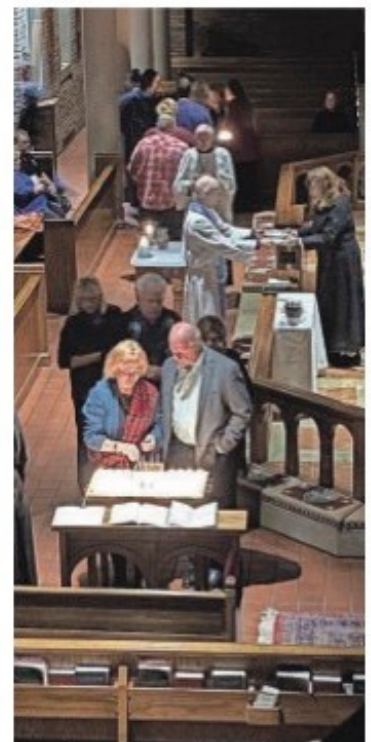
Besides a spiritual yearning Vogel believes all people have, even if they don't consider themselves religious, she said the services have also drawn on a desire

to come together as a result of the lockdown and lack of as much social interaction.

"There's a need for a sense of community, the feeling of being in it with other people," she said.



The sign for Episcopal Church of the Ascension, which fronts Northshore Drive. JOHN SHEARER/SHOPPER NEWS



Attendees light candles in this Celtic service at Episcopal Church of the Ascension shortly before the pandemic began. COURTESY OF EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION