

Artist in Residence

This Sunday at church, we are doing a new thing. We will enjoy the music of "The Spirit of Unity," an area gospel group. This isn't a one-off, but it's not a regular thing either.

This is a holy experiment.

What we've done is create a relationship with the group, offering the rehearsal and concert space in return for occasionally joining us for worship and sharing their gift of music. It's not a wild or crazy notion - institutions have had artists in residence for years. It's just new for us.

In fact, the whole gospel music scene is new for us. We are a fairly standard, European based music venue with all the old classics like *A Mighty Fortress*, or *Amazing Grace*. We sing in a pretty straight forward manner, if we sing at all. There are quite a few in the pews who think they can't sing, and others who just don't want to. But Spirit of Unity has a way of getting even the unwilling to tap their toes, the un-singing to loosen up their vocal chords.

I repeat that this is an experiment, and we don't know how it will fly - maybe parishioners unused to Gospel will balk. Maybe the group will find that worship with us just isn't working. You never know - but taking that leap of faith is part of the fun.

What made St. James' decide to try an Artist in Residence program? Serendipity more than anything. Spirit of Unity had performed as part of last Fall's concert series at our chapel, and people truly loved them. Through an off-handed comment about how much he loved the space, leader Ray Watkins set concert organizer Dyan Wapnick's wheels turning. She mentioned it to me, and we began scheming.

I suspect this will be a long and beautiful relationship, and who knows? Maybe it will lead to a whole series of artists in residence. Mind you, they can't actually live here - we have no place for them to reside - but we can have these strong relationships.

As the program progresses, I'll let you know how it's going. In the meantime, if you would like to experience the Spirit of Unity (I love that name!) you can join us this Sunday at our 10:00 AM service.