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ARTS

THEATER WEAVES SACRED THREADS IN COMMUNITY

Tapestry Players an outlet for members' talent and tool of St. Luke's UMC outreach

By Lindsay Peyton CORRESPONDENT



Photos by Yi-Chin Lee / Staff photographer

Members of the Tapestry Players —Jim Caldwell, from left, Hayden Messamore, Lesley Sisk, Grant Sovereign and Bob Colburn — St. Luke's United Methodist Church's theatrical company, rehearse for their upcoming operetta production of "H.M.S. Pinafore."



Sid Davis is director of Music and Fine Arts at St. Luke's United Methodist Church.



Yi-Chin Lee / Staff photographer

Director Randy Murrow watches as members of St. Luke's United Methodist Church's theatrical company, Tapestry Players, rehearse for "H.M.S. Pinafore."

Tina Throckmorton thought her theater days were over until she moved to Houston and found a venue in a place she never expected — her church.

While preparing to audition for theater at St. Luke's United Methodist Church, Throckmorton was anxious about dipping her toes back in the water.

“Fast-forward a couple of years, we’re organized and putting together our eighth season,” she said.

Throckmorton has become an active member in the church’s Tapestry Players, acting, directing and choreographing shows.

The theatrical production company was founded in 2012, a few years after Throckmorton joined. She auditioned for the first show, and now Tapestry Players has 33 plays and musicals under its belt.

Rehearsals have already started for “Goldilocks and the Three Bears,” which will run in October. The season continues in December with “Miracle on 34th Street” and in January with “The Mystery of Edwin Drood.”

In June, the actors performed “The Man Who Came to Dinner,” followed by “South Pacific” in July.

This year also marks the 40th anniversary of the church’s Rotunda Theatre. In the past, the venue was used by A.D. Players.

Sid Davis, director of music and fine arts for the church, joined the staff in 1996 to build a youth choir. When the need for a theater program arose, he got to work.

“St. Luke’s has always been really serious about the arts,” Davis said.

The theater stood on campus like an opportunity waiting to happen, he explained.

“A church doesn’t put in a pipe organ and not hire an organist,” he said. “You don’t build a theater and not have a theater program.”

Davis is a firm believer in a theater program’s ability to take a role in the church’s mission.

By producing plays, St. Luke’s builds community, and by acting, Davis added, church members can experience God through the performing arts.

“We’re created in God’s image,” he said. “If God is a creator, then we’re creators besides him. Jesus taught with stories. The power of storytelling is almost unparalleled. That’s what we do — we tell stories.”

He said the plays do not have to be religious to allow for ministry with Tapestry Players.

“God is everywhere,” Davis said. “The story doesn’t have to be overtly sacred to have sacredness in (it). Everything does. You don’t have to look hard to find those threads.”

The choir first drew the Throckmorton family to St. Luke’s.

“The rest is history,” she said. “I really feel like the hand of God was on us, that we landed at St. Luke’s.”

As a child, she grew up dancing and got involved in musical theater. Her passion turned professional as she grew up, but the rat race of the theater world in New York became less interesting as she dove into becoming a mom and building her family.

“Before my kids were born, I was always in a show,” Throckmorton said. “Music and theater were important to me. It was a part I thought I’d lost. I didn’t think I’d be able to do it for a long time.”

When the theater program became available at the church, Throckmorton realized there was another route — one that felt safe and welcoming and where her family could take part.

At first, she recalled, performers and staff would outnumber the people in the audience. Now the seats are packed. Shows often sell out.

One of Throckmorton’s favorite parts is seeing other church members step into acting roles and fall in love with the theater.

“I came in as a performer, and now I’m in leadership roles where I’ve been able to inspire people,” she said. “For me, that’s the Holy Spirit on the move.”

The theater brings people back to church who don’t attend regularly, Throckmorton added.

At the same time, she said, the plays bring a different audience to church grounds. The shows aren’t designed to proselytize but rather offer creatives at St. Luke’s a chance to shine.

“We’re here to tell a story and entertain you,” she said. “We love to have new people come in and perform with us. There are all kinds of ways to volunteer, and we hope to continue to fill our seats with new faces.”

Throckmorton said the stage and the seats in the audience are open to all in the community. The theater also offers an affordable alternative to downtown as well as a family-friendly setting.

“Come see a show — or take part in one,” she said.

Davis said that audiences and performers come from all over the city.

“We have people coming in our doors who would never come into a church,” he said. “Some people become members. Even if they never do, it doesn’t matter. What matters is that we are involved in our community.”

In addition, Davis said, Tapestry Players helps members discover their own hidden talents.

In fact, he's learned a lot about himself. "If someone would have told me that I would have been doing this 10 years ago, I would have laughed," he said. "I feel so fortunate, and I'm so excited about our season. We can stand back and say this is huge."

Jennifer Boubel, chief of staff at St. Luke's, has been with the church for a year. "It was fun to discover how vibrant the fine arts are here," she said. "I knew about the programs, but I didn't know how robust they were."

Before accepting the post, Boubel was not aware of the Rotunda Theatre. "It's unexpected," she said. "It's a theater in the round, a really cool and unique venue. You walk in, and it feels like it belongs. It serves the church members, and all the people in the community."

Lindsay Peyton is a writer in Houston.

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