

## Project: First Fridays Downtown Racine at St. Luke's Church (Spring 2015-Fall 2016)

2016 is the second year of grant-funded programming connected with the First Fridays Downtown Racine initiative. The church, located at the periphery of the "official" downtown area, hoped to piggy-back on this effort, since First Fridays attract large crowds into the downtown area for entertainment, shopping, and dining. The diocesan grants have allowed us to plan an organized schedule of free cultural programs, set in the context of the historic space of St. Luke's Church (funding was also used to print a quantity of color "tour brochures" with church history, and purchase exterior signage). Each month during the spring-to-fall season, we opened the church at 5:00 p.m., with parishioner-docents leading tours for visitors and the priest-in-charge giving *blessings-on-the-go*. The programs began at 6:00--either in the Sanctuary, Simpson Hall, or outdoors on the church grounds. Evening Prayer was offered at 7:00 to conclude the event. The cultural programs drew on the gifts and talents of the local community: showcasing a folk dance group, bell choir, drum circle, folk musicians, operatic vocalists, guitarists, organists, a Celtic ensemble, and indie rock band. The series definitely brought visibility to St. Luke's! 30-40 people would typically walk through the church for visits and tours, with 20-60 people enjoying the programs.

A sense of camaraderie and teamwork developed in the course of the series. The leadership committee, along with the priest-in-charge, met for monthly Saturday breakfast at a downtown restaurant to plan events and reflect on what worked and what didn't. Additional parishioners would be on hand during the events to serve as greeters and docents. Although the high-caliber programs have provided tangible cultural enrichment for the community, perhaps the most valuable end-product of this two-year effort will prove to be simply the reality that St. Luke's is (still) here, is part of the downtown scene, and is full of caring and welcoming people.

What would be needed to continue? The Vestry is discerning whether the project has run its course; and if it is even sustainable, given the hazards and limitations of a small parish with 50 people. It was surprising that the cultural events did not attract our own parishioners, and appeared to be perceived as a "separate" activity directed at outsiders. A fresh infusion of parishioner involvement (and needed funding) will be needed if another season is to occur. If this does not happen, we are still left with what we learned and experienced as a team--we had fun together and developed trust--and we can be proud of a successful experiment for St. Luke's.



Parishioner Darice Griffith of the Racine International Folk Dancers teaches a dance in Simpson Hall (April 2016)