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Community Holiday Favorite Returns to IWU

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--After a four-year absence the community-adored Christmas Candlelight Carol Service returns to Illinois Wesleyan University on Dec. 14 and 15 at 7:30 p.m. in Evelyn Chapel, 1301 N. Park St. The traditional pre-service organ music begins at 7 p.m.

The event is free and open to the public, but due to the popularity of the event, all wishing to attend must reserve seats by calling 309/556-3061.

The Community Christmas Candlelight Carol Service began in 1983 under the coordination of David Gehrenbeck, IWU professor emeritus of organ and sacred music, and continued until his retirement in May of 1996. Due to the strong community interest, IWU Associate Professor of Music Linda Farquharson chose to bring back the service this year.

"Our society rarely has the opportunity to just sit and meditate. I ask my students to imagine a society where they can say to someone, 'I'm sorry. I can't do that for you. That is my thinking time,'" said Farquharson.

"At this time of the year people have a tendency to get caught up in the hustle and bustle and race from event to event even more than usual. I think this service is a tremendous gift to the community in that it will allow them to sit and think and contemplate their faith."

A choir composed of 26 community singers and several area organists from different churches have spent the last two months preparing for the event.

The service includes members from across the community and represents various religions and organizations including: David A. Robins, senior minister of the Unitarian Church; Julian Bucher, State Farm; Roosevelt Newson, dean of fine arts at Illinois State University; Rev. Cyndy McBride, associate minister at the First Christian Church of Bloomington; James Warren, senior minister at the First Christian Church of Bloomington; Rev. Robert Anderson of Second Presbyterian Church; Diane Costantino, director of music at Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Church; Kathy Smalley, counselor at Normal West High School and Chuck Smalley, former assistant fire chief, Normal.

This year's service includes many representatives from IWU, including: Dean of Students and Professor of French, Jim Matthews, Professor of Music Tom Streeter, Assistant Professor of Musicology Joy Calico and her husband Christopher and Professor Emeritus of English Jim McGowan and his wife Anne.

"Including the rehearsals and planning, I would say everyone involved gave over 300 hours to the service thus far," said Farquharson.

The service includes nine scripture readings and several hymns and carols and ends with the traditional carol, "Silent Night! Holy Night!" sung in complete darkness. The congregation is invited to sing and is encouraged to refrain from talking until exiting the chapel.

"The uniqueness of Evelyn Chapel, the quietness of the service and the music that fits so well with the scripture adds to the enjoyment and nature of it," said Farquharson.