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The combined children's choirs sing "I See you, God" at the 2014 Interfaith Thanksgiving at St. Mary Catholic Church in Buffalo Grove.

*Joe Lewnard/Daily Herald, 2014*

By Eileen O. Daday  
Daily Herald correspondent

The annual Northwest suburban interfaith Thanksgiving service, which grew out of a desire to overcome racism and bigotry in the suburbs, may reflect a more international tone this Sunday as a result of the terror attacks on Friday in Paris.

The 25th annual Thanksgiving Community Service begins at 7 p.m. Sunday in the performing arts center at Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire. The ecumenical service has grown so big over the years that one church or synagogue no longer can hold it.

"In 25 years we have grown from 400 in attendance to more than 1,000," says Richard Rosen of Buffalo Grove, one of the lay members of the Northwest Suburban Interfaith Council, which organizes the service.

While the format will retain its community basics — with readings, adult and children's choirs, a bell choir and an interfaith band — organizers suspect the two inspirational speakers may reflect on the terrorist attacks that remain on everyone's minds.

"The interfaith aspect of this service is so important right now because it's a very clear and concrete way for people of different beliefs to come together in peace and with joy to do something constructive," said the Rev. Eric Schlichting, pastor of the Lutheran Church of Good Shepherd in Prospect Heights and chairman of the Northwest Suburban Interfaith Council clergy.

"We see so much about people of different faiths coming together in conflict and to destroy," Schlichting added. "This evening is a time to celebrate with our neighbors, hear voices from different faith communities and hear some fantastic music."

Organizers will also collect canned goods for local food pantries. Typically, the event takes in more than 1,000 donations.

Any leftover food from the reception afterward will be donated to the USO, to feed members of the military traveling through O'Hare International Airport over Thanksgiving.

The interfaith council now includes 10 suburban faith communities. They are St. Mary Parish, Hope Lutheran, Kingswood Methodist, Congregation Beth Am and B'nai Shalom in Buffalo Grove; Shir Hadash Synagogue in Wheeling; Congregation Beth Judea and Temple Chai in Long Grove; St. Alphonsus Church and the Lutheran Church of Good Shepherd in Prospect Heights; and St. Viator High School in Arlington Heights.

Local faith leaders came together nearly 30 years ago after anti-Semitic graffiti was discovered at a Jewish temple and at the Jewish Community Center, both in Buffalo Grove.

Their shared desire to promote tolerance and understanding in the community led to the first interfaith Thanksgiving service and, in recent years, it has led to an increasing number of joint service projects.

The faith communities work together to address hunger in the area, and have organized a 5K family event in June, called "iWalk," where contributions help sustain food pantries at a time when collections are seasonally low.

Recently, the interfaith council added travel to their agenda. Last year, they traveled by bus to Washington, Illinois, and this year to downstate Brockport, Illinois, on the Ohio River. Both communities were hit hard by tornadoes, and interfaith council volunteers helped in the restoration efforts.