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## Church offers special services

By Brendan Purves, For The Reporter

Emmanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church in Souderton, with the lay leadership of Jay Grimes of Franconia, has started a service that allows developmentally delayed members of the community to worship in a ministry that is tailored just for them.

"We're all part of the same community is what it comes down to," Grimes said. Grimes is the ministry coordinator for the Rejoicing Spirits service at Emmanuel Lutheran Church.

This monthly service has been providing a Christian outlet for developmentally delayed individuals, their families and their care givers for the last 2½ years.

"People come all the time," Grimes said. "They love the fellowship, they love the worship and they love their friends."

Rejoicing Spirits volunteer Debbie Seeley said she believes the service works so well because it is at the right level and everyone is involved.

"It's toned down and simplified," Seeley said. "And everyone is asked to participate."

Seeley also believes that, unlike regular church, the fact no one is ever told to be quiet makes the service as inviting as possible to people with developmental delays.

"There is a no-hush policy," Seeley said.

Grimes first got involved in the Rejoicing Spirits ministry because he wanted to help create an environment that would be inclusive to all members of the church community, but also because he wanted to help his son, Quinn Grimes, 12, to have a positive worship experience.

"I've always looked for ways to expand his worship," Jay Grimes said.

Quinn is a fifth-grader at Oak Ridge Elementary School, and has Down syndrome.

Before Jay Grimes brought Rejoicing Spirits to Emmanuel, he and Quinn went to a Rejoicing Spirits service at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Exton, the church where the program was started.

Jay and Quinn were so moved by what they saw at St. Paul's that Jay started planning to bring it back to Souderton.

"I took Quinn down, and it was inspiring," Jay said. "He could participate, which is really important."

Susan Crawford founded the Rejoicing Spirits Ministry in Exton five years ago, and has since created a guidebook to help other churches build the ministry in their own communities.

"We are always looking for other churches to follow our model," Crawford said.

Since its creation, the Rejoicing Spirits model has spread as far as Massachusetts, Tennessee and Michigan, and is now being used in 11 different churches, including Emmanuel Lutheran in Souderton.

"I can attribute it to the Holy Spirit," Crawford said. "The Lord had a plan to spread it to other churches. We feel blessed that other churches feel moved to reach out to their communities."

After 2½ years of growth, Emmanuel Lutheran is able to bring between 20 and 35 people together for the monthly services, but Grimes wants to expand the program so that the developmentally delayed churchgoers could attend a Rejoicing Spirits service at a different local church every week.

"We always look for new ways to get more fellowship, and we'd like to expand it to new churches," Grimes said.

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