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Stockade church sets 'Christingle' service

SCHENECTADY — Christingle services may not be big in the United States yet, but Paul Blanche and the people at St. George's Episcopal Church in the Stockade say it's only a matter of time.

A Christingle, which means "Christ's Light," is an orange decorated with a candle, a red ribbon and various fruits and sweets. It is symbolic of the Christian faith, with the orange representing the world, the red ribbon the blood of Christ, the fruit depicting God's creation and the four seasons, and the candle is Jesus, the Light of the World.

St. George's will hold a special Christingle service Sunday at 3 p.m. at the church situated at 30 N. Ferry St. in the Stockade section of Schenectady. A collection plate will be passed with all proceeds going to the Northeast Parent and Child Society.

"I can't find anybody else in this area that has done something like this, but it's very popular in England and used all the time to raise money for children's charities," said Blanche, who became St. George's senior pastor last year after a long career in Great Britain. "We kind of pinched it from the Moravians, and it includes a long procession that kind of snakes around the church in semi-darkness. It's quite an atmospheric experience, and a great

way to remind us about Joseph and Mary and their baby."

Christingle services can be dated back to 1747 in Germany when a Moravian bishop by the name of Johannes de Watteville decided to come up with a symbol to help children understand the message of Christmas. Through the Moravians' missionary work, Christingle services began being held in other parts of the world, although the practice didn't become popular in Great Britain until 1968 when John Pensom of The Children's Society introduced Christingle services to the Anglican Church.

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"We will sing a few carols, have a very short service, very simple and moving, and then we light the candles and form our procession," said Blanche, who added that the event is for the general public, not just St. George's congregation. "It's a great family thing, and it's one way we can do something for children by helping the Northeast Parent and Child Society. A lot of people are showing interest in this event, and hopefully we'll have enough oranges for everybody who shows up."

For more information, contact St. George's at 374-3163 or visit www.stgeorgesschenectady.org.