



VOLUME 13, NUMBER 2
AUGUST 2002

GOD'S FRIENDS

JOINING AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN WORSHIP
AND LIFE EXPERIENCE

THE SINGER, THE SINGING, AND THE SONG

by Marilyn Haskel

LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING

by Sanford Dole

SINGING ON

by Joan King

COME SING AND DANCE TO JESUS' LEAD

by Scott King

*The experience of singing at
St. Gregory's taught me
prayer. I remember, early on,
how when I couldn't
understand anything about
how to pray, I knew enough
to walk and sing. I'd set off
walking, from my home in
the Mission up over Bernal
Hill, and sing over and over
what I'd heard at the Table
the Sunday before: "Holy,
holy, holy; Lord God of power
and might; heaven and
earth are full of your
glory"...I'd be out of breath as
I made my way up the hill,
trying to look everyone
I saw in the face, and the
singing would pace itself to
my legs and my lungs
and my tiny self with
the huge sky above me.
Full of your glory.*

—Sara Miles

COVER:

Gary Blum, "Nativity," 1998.
Acrylic on canvas, 26 x 28 inches.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

I will start this note by stating the obvious: music, and singing in particular, draws people into churches like little else can. Most of us probably know several people who go to church primarily to sing or to listen to singers. Church singing can also evoke unpleasant feelings—anxiety, embarrassment, confusion, inadequacy. At one time or another, we've all been part of a mumbling, sheepish crowd dragging out the meter of hymns whose melodies dampen our spirits and whose words bore or vex us.

There are so many ways to think about and talk about and critique and just plain **do** church singing. And at St. Gregory's, the birthplace of this journal, congregational singing is central to our worship: most of our liturgy is sung without accompaniment. Thus, after a decent interval, we decided to dedicate another issue of *God's Friends* to singing—there's just so much more to say. (To read articles from our November 1997 music issue, go to our website, www.godsfriends.org.)

We are delighted to welcome two new voices to these pages. Singing with her fellow congregants anchors Joan Kenerson King in her centuries-old Mennonite community in ways she limns beautifully here. Marilyn Haskel uses her experience as an editor of the hymn book *Wonder, Love, and Praise* to illuminate her sense of what works for congregational singing, and why. Two of the voices that shape St. Gregory's sung liturgy are here, too. Anyone who's ever seen music director Sanford Dole in liturgical action knows how good he is at getting a whole congregation to sing with gusto; here he tells how he does it. And Scott King, composer, cantor, and baritone, shares his process of writing a hymn people will (and do) actually sing.

Finally, the art in this issue, by Gary Blum and Chris Graefensteiner, evokes the best of our experiences of singing together. These pieces are lyrical and exquisitely layered, both ethereal and deeply grounded. The duotones reproduced in the printed edition of this journal give a hint of their loveliness, but if you can, check them out in color online at www.godsfriends.org.

—Clancy Drake, Editor

ABOUT THE FEATURED ARTISTS

Gary Edward Blum, a California artist, holds an M.F.A. from the University of California at Berkeley. Successful solo and group exhibitions of his works have been mounted in galleries in San Francisco and Berkeley since 1997. Gary holds the J. Ruth Kelsey Traveling Merit Award for 2002.

German-born and trained artist Chris Graefensteiner has exhibited her paintings in Berlin, Vienna, Zurich, Dusseldorf, Sydney, and Bayreuth. She currently resides in Northern California.



Gary Blum, "Untitled," 2001. Acrylic on canvas, 55 x 54 inches.

THE SINGER, THE SINGING, AND THE SONG

by Marilyn Haskel

AS WE BECAME CONVINCED THAT WE WERE SAFE, HARMONY BEGAN TO EMERGE, AND THEN COUNTERMELODIES

Editor's note: Marilyn Haskel is vice president of Church Publishing, Inc., the publishing arm of the Episcopal Church in the United States, and a former parish organist. In the 1990s, she headed the team charged with creating a new Episcopal songbook to stand beside the familiar Hymnal 1982—a collection that would reflect the musical and cultural diversity of today's church. More than 90,000 copies of Wonder, Love, and Praise are currently in print and in use in some 1,500 parishes nationwide. (St. Gregory's own Music for Liturgy contains a few favorites borrowed from WLP.) In this article she describes some of her experience of helping to create Wonder, Love, and Praise.

Based in New York, Haskel conducts music workshops in parishes around the country. She continues to find that singing in Episcopal congregations today ranges from almost nonexistent to richly participatory, and covers an astonishing range of musical styles. God's Friends asked her to write about what makes music work for congregational singing.

Five years ago, I was about to lead worship for a small gathering of liturgists, an august body I'd heard about all my adult life—and I was very nervous. I'd been inducted into this legendary group a year before, and I guess this was my initiation. As we began the familiar words, I relaxed. I intoned the psalm, a simple tune. The group seemed to falter but kept going. When we got to the hymn, the group again struggled—with no piano for support—to stay with the melody. I was stunned. It seemed even this group of church professionals could not sing together—at least not without accompaniment.

Several years later, the same gathering stood around a blazing fire pit, singing a psalm in rich harmony alternating with a cantor's single voice. What had changed?

Several factors contributed to the evolution of this group's ability to sing together, I believe. After that first difficult event, we kept singing. We didn't give up, and by the end of the weeklong meeting we were much better. We focused on music that was reasonably simple and tuneful—music that could succeed on melody alone and did not depend on harmony for its appeal, since we hadn't the confidence for harmony. Over time, we began to laugh at ourselves making mistakes (we really didn't know it all!) and began learning in a new atmosphere of acceptance. We experimented. We focused on praying, not on reading words and notes. We went through a difficult time of transition, but we kept singing, often without accompaniment.

Successful congregational singing is the sum of many parts. One is choosing the right music—but determining what music works for liturgy, and why, is not easy, for the same reasons that one can rarely predict what book will be a bestseller, which movie will have wide appeal, or what song will sell millions of copies. One can analyze the components of music that has worked, trying to establish criteria for all church music, yet still not be able to predict with certainty that a given piece of music will succeed. There is music that breaks all the rules and still works. I'm thankful for that. Just when I think I have “the answer,” I find I don't. As I grow older there seems to be less and less that I know for sure, and I am greatly freed by that knowledge. Living with this kind of uncertainty is a challenge for those who would be faithful.

Music for the church is more than a product to be refined and finally perfected. Many texts that serve people for a time ultimately cease to do so. Musical styles and tastes change. Creativity takes new forms. Some ancient texts we sing have proved to be timeless, but many hymns that once marked us as Anglicans are no longer significant spiritually, culturally, or theologically.

So why compile collections of music for people to sing? The short answer might be because the body of texts and music that make up “the Song” of the church must be constantly reshaped for us as we seek to pray.



Gary Blum, “Untitled” (Invocation Series), 2001. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 20 x 23 inches.

Chris Graefensteiner,
"One Afternoon," 2002. Oil,
acrylic, and photo image on
canvas, 30 x 42 inches.

*The moments when we
sing and dance together
are often when I feel
closest to God. I hope
that God will grant me
the gift of remembering
those moments when
I am close to death.*

—Ellen Schell



THE SINGER, THE SINGING, AND THE SONG

continued from page 3

A MUSICAL TRINITY

My advisor in seminary, Miriam Therese Winter, has articulated a view of church music in the late twentieth century that steps away from the mechanics of style, taste, and even perfection to focus on its holistic nature. According to Dr. Winter, the evolution of church music parallels the renewal of the ecumenical liturgical world as embodied by the Second Vatican Council (1962–65). Prior to the Council, she writes, the Song was considered the “perfect offering. . . . It is for God, not for people. Sacred chant perfectly rendered, the Divine Office, sung precisely as prescribed by those duly appointed, is the Church’s perfect prayer of praise.” In the Anglican tradition, the Song was primarily the choral service, wherein the congregation listened to a trained group of musicians but was not vocally involved. This is still a cherished experience in the Episcopal Church, though less common now than in the past.

As liturgical renewal prompted by Vatican II encouraged full participation of the assembly, however, the act of Singing grew in importance. The communal celebration of singing helped create community. “Singing is a pastoral experience because it reaches out to people, connects them with each other,” Winter writes. The effect on Roman Catholic church music was to create singing congregations from those that had been silent for years—par-

ticularly in the American church. This development paralleled the folk-singing movement of the 1960s.

As liturgical practice continued to mature, the emphasis of music in the church kept changing as well. Winter discerns a third phrase, of which she observes: “Song is important, not for itself, but for what it can accomplish. It is a tool of transformation, capable of effecting a conversion of the heart. Song is for the singer. The singer praises God.”

The Song. The Singing. The Singer. These changing perspectives on vocal music in the church are not mutually exclusive. All three help determine how music in liturgy works and why it works. The perfection of the song, the creation of community in singing, and the conversion of the singer all contribute to the great prayer that is congregational singing.

BROADENING MUSIC PRACTICE IN THE CHURCH

The Episcopal Church, I believe, has tended to embrace the perfection of the song to the neglect of the other two perspectives. There is nothing wrong with exalting the Song, except that it can intimidate the average singer in the pew. Supposedly, the song of the trained has more value before God than that of the untrained. It’s said that if you sit in one of the first ten pews in a certain well-known parish, you don’t sing, because you have sat there to hear the choir. If a stranger violates this code, an unobtrusive glare from surrounding parishioners communicates the faux pas. I truly hope this is a myth.

Individual priests and musicians throughout the church have attempted to bring the Singer and the Singing more into the central focus of Episcopal church music. In the triennium 1994–97, the effort was broadened when the General Convention requested that the Standing Commission on Church Music compile a new collection of music to support the church's diversity. The membership of the commission charged with doing the work was itself ethnically, geographically, and demographically diverse. The fruit of that work was *Wonder, Love, and Praise*, a supplement to *The Hymnal 1982*.

Initially we struggled with what the collection should be. Although not all of us were convinced of the need for major change, all were more than a little daunted by the chal-

lenges. We had discovered that the Episcopal Church in the United States, if it was singing at all, was singing everything from popular religious songs (Christian radio) to white gospel music from the early part of the century. The range included standard denominational hymns, prayer and praise choruses, and cross-denominational standards from the African-American, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, and other communities. In many places, singing was lackluster and uninspired. A particular challenge was the many small parishes (under 50 members) that had no musical leadership and reportedly none to develop.

In any case, we plunged ahead, and a working method began to emerge. We decided that the music must be strong melodically and musically accessible, especially to small congregations. A major question was "How do we get the church singing again where it isn't?" We sang through several thousand pieces of music before finally selecting nearly 200 hymns, songs, and refrains, as well as service music, for the collection. We chose a number of brief choruses and rounds that could be used unaccompanied at potluck suppers or as the opening prayer at vestry meetings.

We looked for tunefulness, simple forms with classic (AABA) phrase structure, and rich harmonies that are predictable enough to

encourage singing in parts. And we looked for a variety of texts that express what we believe in different voices. We wanted the singing to become confident and selfless.

We had little need to find more choir and organ music, but when something came to us that was too extraordinary or useful to pass up we included it. Disagreements flared over certain pieces that some deemed the "work of the devil" or substandard at the very least. The work of several well-known composers was rejected—they were good pieces of music, but they didn't fit our goals. Some selections were made to appeal to particular lobbies because we were, after all, preparing material for the whole church. At one time or another, each of us had to put aside our personal preferences in service of the larger goal.

EPISCOPALIANS HAVE TAKEN RESPONSIBILITY TO ACHIEVE THE BEST OF THE SONG FOR AGES. WHAT WE HAVE NOT EMBRACED WITH AS MUCH ENTHUSIASM IS RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PASTORAL AND EVANGELISTIC NATURE OF THE SINGING, AND THE SIGN OF LOVE DEMONSTRATED BY THE SINGER CRYING OUT THE GOOD NEWS.

TESTING THE WATERS

Several of us on the commission hit the road to introduce the work in progress to parishes and dioceses. We found that people were often more concerned about doing what was "right" as Episcopalians than about what would work in their congregations. Many apologized for being small and having few resources, while some musicians would boast that their small congregation of 22 sang a new hymn every week! The range of responses was truly amazing.

In places where the Song ruled, people were uneasy with what they viewed as "dumbed-down" music. Some would rather not sing at all than sing something they didn't consider the "right" kind of music. In other places, fortunately, people were thankful that the collection contained non-Episcopal songs and hymns that they were already singing, and they readily embraced similar musical selections.

Toward the end of our time working on the book, the Music Commission met with the Standing Liturgical Commission at a diocesan conference center in Louisiana. Those of us on the Music Commission were very familiar with the new music; the rest had never heard most of it. Events during those

continued on page 7

The congregational singing was the first aspect that drew me into St. Gregory's and, with time, closer to God. I came to St. Gregory's on the recommendation of a friend after having shunned the church for 15 years. I was, to say the least, dubious about reentering a Christian house of worship. The a cappella singing was a surprise, but when the entire congregation broke into four-part harmony I knew I was in for a different experience.

—Rick Storrs

LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING

by Sanford Dole

EVERYONE, EVEN PEOPLE WHO CONSIDER THEMSELVES NONSINGERS, LOVES TO SING.

Congregational singing is central to the liturgy at St. Gregory's. All of our services include copious amounts of communal singing, joyfully rendered without accompaniment. The vested party at each of our four weekly services includes a cantor, who establishes pitch and tempo by singing the first phrase and who, if necessary, explains the manner in which the following musical selection will be sung. This may include singing the entire short piece at the Tuesday Taizé service, previewing the call-and-response at the 5 p.m. Saturday liturgy, or lining out the Psalm tone on Sunday morning at 8 a.m.

As cantor at the 10 a.m. service I have the delightful responsibility of starting the liturgy off with a ten-minute "rehearsal." This crucial invitation to our newcomers—and injection of energy, which will be felt throughout the morning—happens after the clergy and deacons have entered, and the Presider has commenced the service with a hearty "Christ is risen!" to which we respond, "He is risen indeed." This rehearsal is therefore not something that happens before the service begins but is part of the liturgy itself.

After the congregation has responded to the Presider, I take center stage and with much enthusiasm shout, "Let's sing," launching the assembly into a trisagion. Then, as I survey the room, looking directly into the eyes of as many newcomers as I can find, I say something like this:

"Good morning, and welcome to St. Gregory's. I would like to make a special welcome to those of you who are here for the first time. We are especially pleased that you are here because YOU will be helping us to create the liturgy. We sing throughout the service, and I encourage you, at every step of the way, to be brave and jump right in, joining everyone around you, who will be singing. In order to facilitate this, we'll look at some of the music right now, so that it is more familiar when we get there later in the service. Let's begin with today's hymns. . . ."

This speech has been honed over many years. We've made revisions to remove unnecessary or misleading wording as well as to heighten the invitation and welcome. The simple act of establishing a direct connection between the church's musical leader and the newcomers is radical, yet makes great

practical sense. If we want our congregations to participate, in particular to sing, then we must give them the means to do this. This includes providing the complete musical scores, the explicit invitation, and the chance to discover that unaccompanied congregational singing works well.

We have found that the absence of a keyboard or other instrumental "help" actually increases the ease and likelihood of participation. It is easier to get a starting pitch from another voice, as opposed to the organ, because the overtones are the same. And, if there are strong singers surrounding everyone, it makes it easier for the less experienced singers to follow along. Our little trick is to scatter members of the well-rehearsed choir among the congregation. What a difference this makes! Why segregate your best singers when they can be enlisted to help lead the congregational participation?

Everyone, even people who consider themselves nonsingers, loves to sing. Creating an environment that promotes every parishioner's participation can transform congregational life. I hope that our experiences and practices at St. Gregory's might help you accomplish this in your church.☉

Sanford Dole first sang in a church choir at age three and has done so ever since. He sang and played bells in youth choirs throughout his Presbyterian upbringing. After embarking on a career of professional service in churches, he has sung praises to God in a variety of denominations and faiths. Combined with his vast experience in more secular musical institutions, his varied background has proved invaluable to his leadership role in the rich, eclectic liturgy at St. Gregory's.



THE SINGER, THE SINGING, AND THE SONG

continued from page 5

few days helped shape the final pass of materials for the book.

Even then, we were still collecting music. At the Louisiana meeting we tracked down several table graces to include, and one commission member even wrote one on the spot. Its tune is titled “Bayou” in recognition of our location.

One evening we gathered in comfortable chairs and sofas around a towering natural stone fireplace that rose through the ceiling of the rustic lodge. The leader sat on the hearth, his tattered prayer book-cum-Bible in hand, and announced that we would celebrate evening prayer. When someone offered to get prayer books and hymnals, he promised we wouldn’t need them. The look of doubt on the volunteer’s face expressed the questions in our minds: Would we be able to remember the Apostles Creed? Would we know the hymn he picked? Earlier in the day, we had tried to sing a familiar hymn without the words in front of us, and became hopelessly derailed. But that night, after a time of silence, the leader skillfully set an atmosphere of acceptance that made us know we were there to pray—not to remember words. He chose simple music from the collection in progress, and repeated it throughout the worship. As we became convinced that we were safe, harmony began to emerge, and then countermelodies.

This experience was a test of what we had been working toward in theory. Did material exist to support a simple worship so that everyone, skilled or unskilled, could sing? Later that week, we celebrated the eucharist in the chapel using music from the collection, and again it successfully supported the variety of singers, including those unfamiliar with the music.

Why did it work? I could tell you that it was because we were intelligent musicians and had picked only the best music we could find. That might be true, but more informative is our consensus about goals.

WHAT SINGS?

In preparing a Leader’s Guide to *Wonder, Love, and Praise*, we included stories from people who had sent us their music. We wanted others to hear what we had heard from those who create music. These stories show that church music is often practical stuff—perhaps written for a specific event or as a spiritual disci-

pline—that sometimes achieves extraordinary things. We wanted to reach the heart of the singers.

My favorite story came from a mother who wrote the music for one of a group of texts we had sent out. She had chosen that text because it expressed her prayer of hope as she faced the pain of losing her daughter through estrangement. Her daughter had gone so far as to change her name, and the composer/mother gave that new name to the tune. It is a stunning combination of melody and text. The composer embraced the poet’s work as a means of her own salvation, and the result is an authentic vehicle for the Church’s song.

I have heard this hymn sung many times at conferences, workshops, and in worship services. The reactions vary from lukewarm to respectful acceptance to overwhelmed enthusiasm. Why the difference? I don’t know. Most church musicians will tell you this phenomenon is real but not readily explained.

There are some standard criteria for a good piece of church music: a text that reads well as poetry and that expresses belief; a stepwise melody the shape of which fits the shape of the text; an engaging harmonic structure that also supports the shape of the text; and a straightforward rhythm. However, I know hymns and songs that defy all these rules and still speak to people. Besides, these rules address only the Song. Episcopalians have taken responsibility to achieve the best of the Song for ages. What we have not embraced with as much enthusiasm is responsibility for the pastoral and evangelistic nature of the Singing, and the sign of love demonstrated by the Singer crying out the Good News.

In workshops I sometimes ask participants to recall times when they have been in worship and found the Singing overwhelming. Most have had that experience at least once. When I ask what moved them so deeply, they almost invariably reply that it was the sense of at-oneness, of expansive love, the strength of the witness of those around them. We know that this force of evangelical and pastoral strength exists, but we have not articulated it as a goal in choosing music.

I believe that there is no substitute for knowing the craft of making music. I believe that the quality of music composed for the church must be high. I believe that liturgy must be planned by people who understand the structure and intent of ritual. I also believe that the Holy Spirit blows where it will, using whatever means are at hand. We are mere practitioners who prepare the way as best we can.☺

*Through all the trials
of learning the liturgy,
coming to grips with
the absence of pews, red
carpets, and kneelers—
“order” as I had come to
understand it—the
music was my anchor.
The music grabbed my
gut, my mind, my
heart, and my spirit,
and it kept me coming
back despite all the
strange practices that I
didn’t yet comprehend.
The music—and the
music in this space—
I understood. And
I couldn’t resist.
I still can’t.*

—John Spangler

SINGING ON

by Joan King

SOMEHOW THE SONGS SUNG LONG BEFORE WE GATHERED HERE REACH OUT ACROSS THE GENERATIONS AND GRAB HOLD OF US.

SOME SUNDAYS
I ARRIVE AT
CHURCH HARRIED
AND FRAZZLED
FROM THE LIFE I
LEAD, SOMETIMES
NOT EVEN LIKING
MY DAUGHTERS
OR MY HUSBAND
MUCH. THEN THE
SINGING BEGINS.
*SPIRIT OF THE
LIVING GOD, FALL
AFRESH ON ME.*

I remember sitting in church between my grandparents when I was a little girl. I remember their singing. My grandfather was completely tone deaf, and my grandmother had a quavering, small soprano voice. But how they sang those songs of faith and how they loved to hear others sing!

Now I sing in a congregation that has stood in one place for over two hundred and fifty years. Usually I am surrounded by at least three hundred other singers. Unlike in my home church, we almost always sing without piano or organ, supported only by the strength of the community. The quality of the music is different here from the church of my childhood, where the organ often drowned out the singing. Still the songs are often the same, and my grandparents are never far from my memory or my heart.

I have sung in my current congregation long enough to hear the voices that are missing. I miss the young man whose tenor voice was silenced by cancer, yet some Sundays his eighty-year-old father's clear tenor sings on, affirming that "it is well with my soul" and making me stop my own singing to listen. I listen to the alto voice behind me, singing alone these five years after her dear husband died, after being committed all his life to singing in this space. When they sang together, their voices would meet, then part, as their harmonies drew close and diverged.

I have watched us come together in grief at the death of a child, faces drawn in pain. The song is faint at first; the words of comfort and assurance ring false at first. But somehow the songs sung long before we gathered here reach out across the generations and grab hold of us. You can hear it happening in the crescendo of the music, as the parts begin to clear, the bass line is heard, and slowly but surely, that affirmation of faith becomes just that—an affirmation.

Never was the power of the singing as clear to me as it was the Sunday following September 11. In our congregation we have different lay people lead worship throughout the year. That Sunday was one of my days as a worship leader. When I stood to lead worship that morning, I looked out over faces filled with images of the week—of pain, of shock, of confusion. As a peace church we brought a set of questions to that Sunday morning that were particularly painful. What does it mean to follow Jesus' way of peace in the face of a faceless enemy? How do we love the "other" when the other seems barely human?

As we stood to sing, I sensed the ocean of emotion among us that day. Then the song began: *Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, help me stand, I am tired, I am weak, I am worn; through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light. Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.* With each phrase more tears fell; with each phrase the song swelled, until finally it rang from the walls.

Did the singing change the world? Sometimes I wonder. What I know is that it brought those of us gathered there back to the place we needed to be, back to the place of struggle, back to stand before the face of God.

In her book *Traveling Mercies*, author Anne Lamott talks about visiting a church and of the "singing splitting her wide open." When I sit in this place hallowed by thousands of Sundays of singing, surrounded by people as different from me as night from day—yet hearing what music we make together—I marvel at the wonder and the breadth of God's grace.

Something magical happens in the middle of a song when you look down at the credit line and realize it was written in 1869, or in 1789, or even before, yet here you are in the middle of post-modern America finding God in the same words, the same harmonies in which God was present one hundred, two hundred, even three hundred or more years ago.

Some Sundays I arrive at church harried and frazzled from the life I lead, sometimes not even liking my daughters or my husband much, depending on what the morning at home has brought. Then the singing begins. *Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.* Somehow the conflict over the outfit for Sunday morning, or who will clean up the kitchen, slides into its proper perspective, shoulders relax, and the Spirit flows down the row of our family. I suspect many Sundays this experience is repeated bench after bench.

What is it about this simple act of singing that has such power?

Singing, I think, connects us in new ways; it is a powerful metaphor of community with the power to create new realities for us. We sing together even when we don't like each other, when we don't agree with each other, yet we find what is common and shared through the song.



Chris Graefensteiner,
"Remember That Day? IV,"
2001. Oil, acrylic, and photo
images on canvas, 10 x 13
inches.

*I believe our making
music together is the
major glue bonding our
community. Everyone has
a voice, and bringing those
individual voices together
in harmony shows the
power of our working
together to create
something greater than we
can achieve on our own.*

—Rick Storrs

Singing connects us again and again to the past and, when we sing with our children or others younger than we are, to the future. When I sing and hear, if only now in memory or through other elderly voices, the voices of my grandparents, all they were and gave to me comes near. When I extend that connection to others of faith who went before me, and realize they sang through times as frightening as whatever I might be facing, yet still sang on, I gain courage from that connection.

Mennonites talk all the time about community. We believe Scripture is interpreted in the context of the community, that authentic faith can only be lived in community, and that Jesus truly stands among us when we are gathered. We are at least as flawed and fraught with conflict as any other group of people. But our singing gives us hope. It is in the discord that the harmony is fully heard. It is only when we all sing the part written for us that the music is fully expressed. It is only when we are all paying attention to the song leader that subtle changes in dynamics can be expressed by hundreds of singers.

This crazy and sometimes wonderful culture we live in doesn't often express the priorities we find in the gospel story. During the week we don't hear much about the power of the powerless, the face of God reflected in the oppressed and downtrodden of our society, or the fact that God might be present in unexpected ways and circumstances. Then Sunday rolls around and we sing. In our singing the silence is broken, the denial crumbles, and the song that has been sung through the ages becomes our song, and sings on.🕊

Joan Kenerson King manages her own therapy and consulting business. She is an avid storyteller, the mother of three almost adult daughters, and the wife of her best friend, Michael. She attends Salford Mennonite Church in Harleysville, Pennsylvania. If you were to pass her on the road riding in her little green Toyota Echo, you would probably see her singing.

COME SING AND DANCE TO JESUS' LEAD

by Scott King

AFTER HAVING WORKED TO LEARN THE ART AND CRAFT OF WRITING HYMNS, I SEE THAT I START WITH THE EXPERIENCE I WANT SINGERS TO HAVE.

Gary Blum,
"Untitled," 2001. Acrylic on
canvas, 18 x 18 inches.



IF YOU CAN'T
TALK TO YOUR
ATTRACTIVE AND
FOXY FRIEND GOD,
TO WHOM CAN
YOU TALK?

I wrote my first hymn because I had to. An old friend had moved back to the Bay Area and wanted to rejoin St. Gregory's. She said, "Make a fuss over me . . . I want it to be a party!" At the time we merely announced that someone had joined the church, they stood and were introduced, and then the Presider read a beautiful prayer written by Rick Fabian. I wanted to add a musical element, like the Russian "As Many" we sing at baptisms. In a rush (we needed it the next Sunday!) I set out to write a brief hymn to celebrate joining St. Gregory's.

At the time I was studying American church music around the time of the Revolutionary War.

By far the most published tune was "Old Hundredth," familiar to us as Thomas Ken's hymn beginning "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." Connoisseurs consider the tune perfect. I thought we should find a use for it at St. Gregory's. It was a familiar tune good enough to stand up to monthly use. So for my members' welcome piece I had a tune with its associated "long meter" (four lines of eight beats per line, with the accent falling on each even-numbered syllable).

What text could I use? The baptismal hymn "As Many" is based on Corinthians, but St. Paul is silent on the theology of joining St. Gregory's. Then I realized that we already had in effect distilled a mission statement: *St. Gregory's Church invites people to see God's image in all humankind, to sing and dance to Jesus' lead, and to become God's friends.* I made it my purpose to turn this sentence into rhymed long meter to be sung to "Old Hundredth."

Now, after having worked to learn the art and craft of writing hymns, I see that I start with the experience I want singers to have. Even in this first hymn I declare our collective belief about membership, so "St. Gregory's Church invites people to" becomes "we." The mission statement suggests I start, "We see God's image in all humankind." Ugh. I need duh-DAH-duh-DAH-duh-DAH-duh-DAH, and I have duh-DAH-DAH-DAH-duh-duh-DAH-DAH-duh-DAH—too many syllables by two, and bad rhythm. The word "humankind" should only be found in unread anthropology texts; in a hymn it just draws attention to a decision to avoid "mankind."

And what does "image" really mean? From the parable of Caesar's coin we discover that the image of God stamped on us (as a coin is stamped) is a face, God's face, the face of Jesus. Taking all this into account, I write, "We see your likeness in each face." Seeing an attractive image (God is surely beautiful!) leads to desire: "Your friendship, God, is our desire." I like that because direct address to God reinforces the theme of friendship: if you can't talk to your attractive and foxy friend God, to whom can you talk?

With two good lines, I need the paired rhyming lines. After some experimentation I have: "We see your likeness in each face. / You freely give all holy grace. / Your friendship, God, is our desire: / In flame our hearts with holy fire." "You give grace" does not add much, but "all" emphasizes God's indiscriminate love, and "grace" is the best rhyme I can find. "In flame our hearts" is good, I think, because the sequence suggests passionate love growing from friendship with God, a spiritual path available to everyone. (Just try telling God you want to be his friend and wait to see how she responds.) I am not sure about using "holy" twice: reinforcing repetition or flagging inspiration? I opt for the former and move to the second verse.

St. Gregory's member Christopher St. John, a copywriter, once commented on the power of the image of being called to "sing and dance to Jesus' lead." Yes, and it's what we do every Sunday. For the phrase to be a line of long meter it lacks only an opening beat; this is how "invites" becomes "come." The final task is to turn the invitation to become God's friend into a hymn. "Our precious church invites you to become God's friend" seems mawkish. The invitation is not St. Gregory's, I realize, but God's! "My joy in you will have no end / because I call you each my friend" comes suddenly to mind, and I have a beautiful couplet in the voice of Jesus. So all I need to finish the second

verse is a rhyme with “lead,” and since lines 3 and 4 are in Jesus’ voice, why not the second line too? Jesus’ usual entrance line is “Don’t be afraid.” In the context of Gregory of Nyssa’s amazement at the endless generosity of God, the reassuring greeting becomes “The Lord provides for every need.”

I showed the result to Rick Fabian to get his reaction. “I like it, but I would reverse the two verses so you see Jesus’ likeness after he speaks.” And this is how my hymn for a returning member became “Come Sing and Dance to Jesus’ Lead,” which now welcomes all new members.

Come sing and dance to Jesus’ lead!
“The Lord provides for every need.
My joy in you will have no end
because I call you each my friend.”

We see your likeness in each face.
You freely give all holy grace.
Your friendship, God, is our desire:
Inflame our hearts with holy fire!

Scott King has written hymns and tunes to sing with them for 20 years. He is a medical entrepreneur, descendent of Sir Francis Drake, gardener, and editor of St. Gregory’s music book Music for Liturgy, 2nd edition.

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THIS IS TRUE
PERFECTION:
NOT TO AVOID A
WICKED LIFE
BECAUSE WE FEAR
PUNISHMENT,
LIKE SLAVES; NOT
TO DO GOOD
BECAUSE WE EXPECT
REPAYMENT, AS IF
CASHING IN ON THE
VIRTUOUS LIFE BY
ENFORCING SOME
BUSINESS DEAL.
ON THE CONTRARY,
DISREGARDING ALL
THOSE GOOD THINGS
WHICH WE DO HOPE
FOR AND WHICH
GOD HAS PROMISED
US, WE REGARD
FALLING FROM
GOD'S FRIENDSHIP
AS THE ONLY THING
DREADFUL, AND WE
CONSIDER BECOMING
GOD'S FRIEND THE
ONLY THING TRULY
WORTHWHILE.

—GREGORY OF NYSSA

I'd only experienced entirely a capella services in a monastery, an Orthodox church, at jail, or in a Taizé service. But never in a primary Episcopal church parish liturgy, much less at Easter. It was obvious that the singing was from the heart—a capella, and full of energy. And pretty damned good, too—and not just the choir, either. Everybody could—and did—sing.

—John Spangler



Gary Blum, "Untitled" (Invocation Series), 2001.
Oil and acrylic on canvas, 72 x 68 inches.

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500 DeHaro Street
San Francisco, CA 94107-2316

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
P A I D
San Francisco, CA
Permit No. 2123



*God's Friends is printed on recycled paper
by Golden Dragon Printing*