

SING A NEW SONG!

This spring, in celebration of our 125th Anniversary, we have commissioned poet Susan Palo Cherwien to write a new hymn text for our congregation. Susan is a Lutheran poet based in the Twin Cities area. An alumna of Wittenberg University, Susan went on to study voice in Berlin, Germany, and there met her husband David Cherwien (who now directs the National Lutheran Choir). After returning to the U.S. Susan completed a masters in Liberal Studies at Mundelein with a focus on spirituality, ritual, and the arts.

Augsburg Fortress has published two collections of her poetry, and the ELW hymnal contains eight of her texts.

Perhaps best known is her baptismal hymn,

“O blessed spring, where word and sign embrace us into Christ the Vine:
here Christ enjoins each one to be a branch of this life-giving tree.”

Another text I find particularly moving is her hymn on the theme of Christian community,

“Beloved, God’s chosen, put on as a garment compassion, forgiveness, and goodness of heart.
Above all, before all, let love be you raiment that binds into one every dissonant part.”

In the Lament section of the hymnal, she writes,

“In deepest night, in darkest days,
when harps are hung, no songs we raise,
when silence must suffice as praise,
yet sounding in us quietly there is the song of God.”

From Advent to Easter, from songs of sorrow, to celebrations of baptism and new life, Susan’s texts have helped to shape my faith experience, and invited me to think more deeply about the words that we sing together.

It is such an exciting prospect to be a part of a creative and generative process that not only contributes to the musical life of our community, but also helps to strengthen the centuries-old tradition of hymn singing by adding to the repertoire. To begin this venture, Susan asked for our church’s mission statement and any additional themes or information that would help her get to know our congregation a little better.

I sent her the statement from our visioning process:

“We are a faith rooted community with no walls -- always learning, always serving.”

The theme for our 125th Anniversary:

“Answering Christ’s Call”

And many other compilations of the wonderful outpouring of resources that our visioning process generated.

I was deeply moved by the creativity of Susan Palo Cherwien, and especially the way she directly and beautifully expressed the themes that we sent to her.

Once we received the completed text, I began work on a musical setting that compliments the ideas expressed and fits with the flow and pacing of the words. I am happy to introduce our newest hymn to you, and especially to singing it together as a congregation for the first time on Sunday, June 4, and hopefully for many years to come.

Blest Christ

Susan Palo Cherwien

April 6, 2017

6.6.8.6.D (Short Meter Double)

Commissioned by Christ Lutheran Church, Washington, D.C.
for the celebration of the 125th anniversary of the congregation,
"Answering Christ's Call"

Based on Colossians 1:15-20, Abraham Heschel ("...the prophet hears the silent sigh..."), and the Christ Lutheran Church vision statement: "We are a faith-rooted community with no walls - always learning, always serving."

Blest Christ, who builds no walls,
Who gathers all as kin,
Calls us to deep community,
That all may enter in;
In God all things have life,
In Christ all things cohere,
And God's blest Spirit hovers yet
To bring forth newness here.

God's living image Christ,
Who dwelt in mortal form,
Calls us to dwell in God's own heart
That all may be transformed:
Transfigured by God's love,
Transcending time and space,
Becoming love, becoming Christ,
A holy meeting place.

The wounded healer Christ,
Who turns away no plea,
Calls us to hear the silent sigh,
To see as Christ would see:
Wherever there is thirst,
To gladly fill the cup;
Wherever there are fainting hearts,
Our selves to offer up.

Rise, Christ, and rend the walls
That fear and wrath would raise;
Call us to Christ-like openness
To all within your gaze;
That loving, we may serve,
And serving, we may prove
A haven in this earthly sphere,
A refuge of your Love.