

Writing A Bicentennial Hymn Text

To Commemorate the 2017 Bicentennial of Christ Church, Georgetown, Washington, DC

by Gordon Silcox

The Bicentennial Celebration committee's Path to Our Vision: Goals was announced in August 2016. I knew then that I wanted to contribute in some way to this magnificent historic occasion.

When I mentioned to Bicentennial committee co-chair Page Smith then that I'd like to write a hymn, surely she must have thought, "Who is this guy and what makes him think he can do that?" She had no clue whatsoever, of course, what the result would be. Nevertheless, she liked the idea and has been immensely supportive from the start!

The backstory is that on that August morning I had a palpable certainty of purpose—a determination that I could, and in fact must contribute something worthy. As one facing ageing, illness, and mortality, the writing process inevitably involved expressing my own spiritual thinking as a "believer, seeker, unsure," which gave me many moments of reflection and comfort.

As I have written elsewhere:

*Calm in self-composed reverie,
Feeling divine light's soft caress
I create art not mine alone
Knowing now that this sweet stillness
Wakes the precious "I Am" in me.*

The Bicentennial Goals provided the framework for the text:

- **Express Gratitude:** *How blest are we for founders' gift,...that generations tended well*
- **Build Community:** *In Christ, one body all are joined*
- **Inspire Growth:** *Now 'tis our watch, our time to serve*

From the early stages of writing, Tom Smith, our skilled choirmaster and organist provided enthusiastic support and impressive expertise in the art of hymnody. In selecting an appropriate hymn tune, most existing hymns are identified by their "meter," the number of syllables for each line in each stanza, so that a new text may be sung to any tune having that same meter. Tom, in fact, suggested a particular tune entitled Land of Rest, an American folk tune with roots in the ballads of northern England and Scotland and known throughout the Appalachians. And so we shaped the text to the meter of *Land of Rest*.

And as the final text was completed, I felt the presence of another kind of guidance, an awareness I've never experienced before with such clarity that, indeed, God's Spirit has been with me in this effort.

My hope is that others today and in future years might find a word or phrase in "*How Blest Are We*" that might resonate—might satisfy their own "*yearning deep to feel within / God's touch, divinity stir.*"

My ten years as a member of the Christ Church, Georgetown community have been enriching beyond words, thanks to every one of my fellow parishioners, the youth, the clergy and staff, the programs and the place itself. I'm truly blest and grateful for this opportunity to participate in the joyous 200th celebration.





How Blest Are We For Founders' Gift

Common Meter (86.86.)—*Land of Rest*

by Gordon Silcox

How blest are we for founders' gift,
This house, God's dwelling place
That generations tended well
For us—beloved space!

Rich windows' hues cast radiant glow
O'er wood, fine stone, bright brass
As faith's faint embers blaze anew—
Our souls find solace at last.

Sweet sanctum where each glad heart sings,
“On holy ground I stand,
While Scriptures' timeless truths affirm:
Once dust, now ‘Here I am.’ ”

In Christ, one body all are joined
Believers, seekers, unsure
Or yearning deep to feel within
God's touch, divinity stir.

Now 'tis our watch, our time to serve
To honor founders' trust
To pass again this precious gift
To those who follow us.

Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.
Our strength in dark of night.
We feel God's love, will ever-more,
With each dawn's early light.

Gordon, a retired career counselor living in Fairfax, grew up in Alexandria, VA and joined Christ Church, Georgetown in 2007. He has taught early-teen Sunday School (5 years), is a Seminarian Committee member, a Bishop Walker School third graders' "Lunch Buddy," a Diocesan Convention Lay Delegate, and serves as a lector and usher.

In addition to his proudest accomplishment with their mother, Judie—their two daughters Andrea and Jessica—Gordon is pleased to be listed in the *Guinness Book of Records* as a member of the then largest trombone ensemble ever assembled—386 musicians—playing “76 Trombones” at Nationals Park in 2012.