

Music Blurbs for 8-12 -18

News and Notes:

This week the St. James' Ringers will make a joyful noise at the 10:30 service. Other music includes Bach's chorale setting of "Deck thyself, my soul with gladness" (Schmuecke dich). We will sing "I am the bread of life" and "Go forth for God."

Bulletin:

Sister Suzanne Toolan (Religious Sisters of Mercy) wrote "I am the bread of life" for an event for the Archdiocese of San Francisco in 1964. At the time, immediately after Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church was looking for music sung in the vernacular. Sister Toolan was teaching high school and decided to write a song during one of her free periods. After writing it she decided that she hated it, so she ripped it up and threw it away. The room she was working in was next to the school's infirmary. When she went out into the hall a student who was leaving the infirmary went up to her and asked her what she had been singing because she thought it was so beautiful. She went back into the classroom, retrieved the pieces from the wastebasket and taped them together. Since then, as Sister Toolan says, "It's taken on a life of its own."

The text is taken from John 6 and is used for services at which the appointed readings include John 6. It has also been widely used at funeral services and in 1966 was published in a San Francisco archdiocesan publication for use at Requiems. In her own words, Sister Toolan once remarked, "I could never figure out why the hymn became so popular....I think its popularity stems from its message of resurrection, which is so strong in these words of Jesus. We so need that message of hope. I am always touched when people tell me that at the funeral of a mother, father or friend, these sung words of Jesus gave them consolation. Then I know the hymn has done its work." In fact, she used the hymn at her own mother's funeral in 1994, at St. Patrick's Catholic Church right here in Rockville, MD.

The hymn has appeared in many languages and in many denominational hymnals and songbooks. It first appeared in the Episcopal denomination in the 1980 collection *Songs IV* before its placement in the *Hymnal 1982*. Sister Toolan recalls being introduced to a woman who was Episcopalian. When the woman heard Sister Toolan's name she responded, "Oh yes, number 335!"