



## Stewardship Hymn: "We The Lord's People"

"We the Lord's People" Hymnal 1982, H-51, is one of the most beautiful hymns written in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This hymn is adored by church musicians throughout the world. See two church musician's commentaries below.

### ***Commentary by Kirk Rich, Director of Music, All Saints Episcopal Church, Atlanta, Georgia***

The text was penned by Canon John E. Bowers (b. 1923) in 1972 and was included in two English hymnals. When the editors of our Hymnal 1982 approached Canon Bowers about including his hymn text in the new publication, they proposed a few changes that he only agreed to reluctantly. Richard Wayne Dirksen's tune (b. 1921) was written in 1983 specifically for this text. An organist, choir director and composer, Dirksen served first as choirmaster of the National Cathedral and later as its precentor taking on administrative oversight of all liturgical activity until his retirement in 1991. He was the first layman in the Anglican Communion to work in such a role. The tune takes its name Decatur Place from the Washington home of Paul Calloway, Dirksen's long-time friend and predecessor as organist-choirmaster of Washington Cathedral.

### ***Commentary by Dr. David Ouzts, Director of Music, Church of the Holy Communion, Memphis, Tennessee***

Episcopalians are, if nothing, a people of words. Words matter. Texts are important, as we are reminded by one of favorite Collects of the Day (Proper 28) in the Book of Common Prayer:

"Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life."

If *The Hymnal 1982* is still "the new hymnal" to many of us established Episcopalians, then this Sunday's first hymn at the Communion is still a new hymn. In this parish, we sing this hymn about once a year, but truth be told, it is an appropriate text for every Sunday. It is, indeed, a statement of purpose for why we gather each Sunday in worship.

*We the Lord's people, heart and voice uniting, praise him who called us out of sin and darkness into his own light, that he might anoint us a royal priesthood.*

Light is an Epiphany-thing. The Christ Child is our light to the world, and the Magi followed the star (more light), which led them to Bethlehem. Epiphany season is all about the manifestation of Jesus, who leads us out of the darkness into the light.

*This is the Lord's house, home of all his people, school for the faithful, refuge for the sinner, rest for the pilgrim, haven for the weary: All find a welcome.*

How wonderful is this image? I have also heard the church called “a hospital for sinners.” In this text, the church is a school, refuge, resting-place and haven. And all, not just some, are welcome. All are welcome. Period. (Count me in!)

*This is the Lord's day, day of God's own making, day of creation, day of resurrection, day of the Spirit, sign of heaven's banquet, day for rejoicing.*

No matter what your Hallmark calendar says, the first day of the Christian week is Sunday. Yes, in Genesis God rested on the seventh day, and we do not want to challenge our fellow Seventh-day Adventist Christians. However, the early Christians “remembered the Sabbath and kept it holy” by worshipping, partaking of the Lord’s Supper and commemorating the Resurrection. Every Sunday is “a little Easter,” and we celebrate the Holy Eucharist as heaven’s banquet here on earth.

*In the Lord's service, bread and wine are offered, that Christ may take them, bless them, break and give them to all his people, his own life imparting, food everlasting.*

With this stanza we are now down to the brass-tack words, words that include one of my top-10 favorite lines of text in the entire hymnal. This stanza contains the “Four Actions of the Eucharist.” Christ took bread, blessed the bread, broke the bread and gave the bread to his people. These four distinct actions hearken back to the earliest Eucharistic texts that we have (Hippolytus of Rome, 170-235 AD).

Originally titled “The Lord’s Own,” this rich, succinct text was written by Canon John Edward Bowers, sometime canon priest of Southwark Cathedral, London, and later of Leicester Cathedral. During the 1960s and 1970s, a phrase was often quoted in the Church of England as a teaching device: “The Lord’s People in the Lord’s House on the Lord’s Day for the Lord’s Service.”

With his brass-tacks, I believe Canon Bowers precisely hits the nail on the head with four stanzas of highly accurate words.