

# Notes from the Music Director (No. 4)

Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Rochester, Pennsylvania

## Henry Doktorski, III

August 9, 2015—11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost



Sister Suzanne Toolan, RSM

As in the previous two Sundays, today the theme of bread again appears in the scripture readings. First Kings tells us that when the prophet Elijah fled from his enemies into the wilderness, he was fed by an angel who provided him a “cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water.” The Psalmist recommends, “O taste and see that the Lord is good,” and the Evangelist John quotes Jesus who tells us, “I am the bread of life.”

Our Hymn of the Day, “I Am the Bread of Life,” with text and tune by Sister Suzanne Toolan, RSM, paraphrases Jesus’ words in John 6, “Unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink of his

blood, you shall not have life within you.”

Suzanne Toolan was born in Lansing, Michigan, in 1927. She moved to Hollywood, California, at the age of seventeen where she became a student of Richard Keys Biggs (1886-1962), a celebrated organist and choir master at Blessed Sacrament in Hollywood. She joined the Sisters of Mercy, and earned a masters degree in humanities. Although her duties were primarily teaching academic subjects, she also directed choirs at high schools, colleges, parish, and seminaries.

The story about her composing “I Am the Bread of Life” is interesting. Her publisher, GIA Publications, explains, “A while back, she constructed some sketches for a eucharistic piece to be used at an upcoming archdiocesan event. Disappointed with the results, she tore

up the manuscript and threw it into the waste can. Leaving the room, she encountered a freshman student who asked what she was playing. The student thought it was beautiful. Sister Suzanne rescued the shred and reworked it. The item was 'I Am the Bread of Life,' and it has certainly enjoyed a life of its own. It appears now in more hymnals and collections than any other title in the GIA catalog and has been translated into a least ten other languages."

You can hear the Cathedral Singers (conducted by Richard Proulx) sing Sister Suzanne Toolan's "I Am the Bread of Life," on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7y-NZoclwo&feature=youtu.be>.

## Sources

Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version (Zonderfan: 1989)

LBW: Lutheran Book of Worship (Augsburg Publishing House: 1978)

WOV: With One Voice (Augsburg Fortress: 1995)

W&P: Worship & Praise Songbook (Augsburg Fortress: 1999)

ELW: Evangelical Lutheran Worship (Augsburg Fortress: 2006)

Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org>

Hymnary.org: <http://www.hymnary.org>

GIA Publications: <http://www.giamusic.com>

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[http://henrydoktorski.com/Music\\_Director\\_Notes.html](http://henrydoktorski.com/Music_Director_Notes.html).