## A *Voices United* Intercultural Hymn Festival

*Hymn selections and reflections by Bruce Harding.*

### Gathering God’s People

“We sing of God the Creator, the Maker and Source of all that is.” **A Song of Faith**

**Words of Welcome**

Music can transform us—if we allow it to. Ask any guitar player who has permanent calluses on his or her fingertips or a vocalist who gradually increases her or his lung capacity. The same is true for a congregation: what we sing and how we sing can transform us, not only physically but spiritually—if we allow it to. A church that speaks many languages, dances to many rhythms, and sings from the heart the songs of others, prepares their congregants to become disciples of God’s church, which is intercultural by design. Taking time to learn, research, and invest in hymns from a variety of cultures will help transform us into the inclusive and welcoming Christians that God calls us to be.

**Opening Prayer**

Holy God,

you inspired great musicians

to write the hymns and music

we have today.

We gather here to be with you

and with all your people.

Inspire us, we pray.

May the examples of our siblings in the faith from around the world

stir our hearts and minds

that we in turn may help to inspire the

generations that follow us.

Amen.

(*Adapted from “Opening Prayer” in* Singing Faith Alive, *Betty Lynn Schwab* (*ed.*)(*The United Church of Canada*)*, p. 15.*)

**Hymn**

“Se-ka-i no To-mo to Te o Tsu-na-gi”/”Here, O God, your servants gather” (*Voices United* 362)

“Se-ka-i no” was the theme song for the 14th World Conference on Christian Education held in Tokyo in 1958. Tokuo Yamaguchi, a Methodist pastor who served in many areas of Japan, based his text on the conference theme “Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” The tune TOKYO is not in Western major or minor mode, but rather in the traditional Japanese *gagaku* mode, an ancient courtly mode for music, dance, and religious practice, with an accompaniment echoing the traditional *shō* (mouth organ) style of harmonizing in parallel fifths.

**Hymn**

“Qing-chen zao qi zan-mei Shen”/”God be praised at early morn” (*Voices United* 414)

Dawei Wang of China, the author of “Qing-chen zao qi zan-mei Shen,” was born into a Christian family, but was forced to abandon his Christianity during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). Later in life, with his father’s encouragement, Wang recovered his faith and became a church organist. Hearing the call in 1981 for new hymns for *Zanmeishi*, a new Chinese hymnal, Wang wrote three hymns: for morning, for evening, and to God’s glory. The editorial committee chose his morning hymn, suggesting that his third hymn to God’s glory, with condensing, would make a wonderful second verse for the morning hymn, and “God be praised” was born in its final form. Wang’s melody for his hymn is in a traditional Chinese style, and the more Western-style harmonization is by the noted Taiwanese hymnologist and song leader, I-to Loh.

### Praying and Listening Together

“We sing of the Spirit, who speaks our prayers of deepest longing and enfolds our concerns and confessions, transforming us and the world.” **A Song of Faith**

**Prayer for the Gifts of the Spirit**

Come, O Holy Spirit:

come as Holy Fire and burn in us,

come as Holy Wind and cleanse us within,

come as Holy Truth and dispel our ignorance,

come as Holy Power and enable our weakness,

come as Holy Life and dwell in us.

Convict us, convert us, consercrate us,

until we are set free from the service of ourselves,

to be your servants to the world.

Amen.

(*Adapted from Eric Milner-White 1884–1963,* Voices United *197.*)

**Hymn**

“Wa wa wa Emimimo”/”Come, O Holy Spirit, come” (*Voices United* 383)

Another song introduced to the world through the work of the World Council of Churches is “Wa wa wa Emimimo,” a traditional Christian song of the Yoruba people of Nigeria and the surrounding area in West Africa. This song is meant to be sung quickly and with spirit, and the playing of shakers and hand drums such as djembes sounds great and is very appropriate. The part in the bass staff in *Voices United* is actually a leader’s part for male or female voice depending on how the Spirit moves in your community, while the treble staff is the people’s part. Additional harmonies by ear would be welcome and expected in Yoruba singing. And while you sing, try calling the Holy Spirit down upon yourself with traditional hand gestures: hands stretched up then gesturing down toward yourself to coincide with the words “wa” and “wao,” both of which mean “come” in the Yoruba language.

**Scripture Reading**

Psalm 96, 100, or 137

**Hymn**

“O Great Spirit” (*Voices United* 239)

“O Great Spirit” is the only song in *Voices United* composed by a Canadian First Nations person: Doreen Clellamin, a Nuxalk Elder from Bella Coola, British Columbia. Clellamin had strong connections in the United Church in her home community, throughout British Columbia, and across Canada. Doreen’s song is rooted in the singing of her community—the Nuxalk community—as is typical of songs from many First Nations traditions. Pablo Sosa, the Argentinian song leader, composer, and hymnologist, heard Doreen’s song at a workshop on First Nations spirituality at the Vancouver School of Theology in the summer of 1993. He recognized the heartfelt spirituality of this song to the Great Spirit, transcribed it, and with Clellamin’s blessing began sharing it widely in his ministry around the world. Try singing this song *a cappella* in a very free time, or with a gentle, steady pulse on a frame drum or other hand drum.

**Hymn**

“O-so-so”/”Come now, O God of peace” (*Voices United* VU 34)

“O-so-so” or “Come now, O God of Peace” is one verse (adapted) from a four-verse hymn, words and music by Geonyong Lee of South Korea. Lee, a well-known composer and past president of Korean National University of Arts, originally wrote it as a prayer for peace, reconciliation, and the reunification of North and South Korea, but it has made its way around the world as a universal prayer for peace, particularly through the work of the World Council of Churches. The melody is in a five-tone scale similar to the Western minor mode, and in triple time, which is typical of Korean music. Try singing it gently, with reverence and longing.

**Prayers for Peace**

God of healing and wholeness…

(*See* Celebrate God’s Presence, *page 537.* *Intersperse moments for silent reflection after “our families,” “our communities,” “our hearts,” and “our relationship with you.”*)

### Offering Praise and Thanks

“We offer worship as an outpouring of gratitude and awe and a practice of opening ourselves to God’s still, small voice of comfort, to God’s rushing whirlwind of challenge. Through word, music, art and sacrament, in community and in solitude, God changes our lives, our relationships, and our world. We sing with trust.” **A Song of Faith**

**Hymn**

“Jaya ho” (*Voices United* 252)

“Jaya ho,” more properly pronounced “Jeye ho,” is the most common phrase for praising God throughout the Indian subcontinent, meaning victory or glory to God. This anonymous Hindi hymn from India, included in hymnals around the world, moves from praise and reverence to asking for forgiveness and protection. Two accompaniment elements are essential in traditional Hindi music: a sustained drone (for this song, a Bb in octaves, or with the fifth degree of F also included, can be played gently on organ or another instrument, such as cello, that can sustain notes) provides the canvas upon which the words and melody are painted, and if possible, accompaniment with percussion such as finger cymbals and tabla or other small hand drums will help to drive the rhythm. Enjoy the dialogue between the leader and people in the verses and, as you sing, try to observe the ornaments in the tune—intricate melodies, ornaments, and call and response singing are all part of the uniqueness and beauty of Indian tradition.

**Introduction to Offering**

Music and laughter,

Curiosity and compassion:

What an abundance of gifts we have!

All these gifts are symbolized in our offering.

Let us commit ourselves in service,

As we continue to worship God with our offering.

**Hymn**

“Santo, santo, santo”/”Holy, holy, holy” (*Voices United* 951)

“Santo, santo, santo” is a traditional song from Argentina, also introduced to the wider church by Pablo Sosa. Sosa, a Methodist pastor and musician, has devoted his career to lifting up the indigenous song of Latin America, encouraging people to write worship music that reflects their own cultural identity. In *Voices United*, “Santo, santo” was rearranged in triple time, which obscures its roots in Argentine folk music, so try singing it in a duple time such as 4/4, as it appears in the Presbyterian *Book of Praise* and many other hymn resources. Sing it slowly, with tenderness and reverence.

**Presentation of Offering**

**Hymn**

“Halle, halle, hallelujah” (*Voices United* 958)

The Caribbean Hallelujah is sung around the world, a lively reflection of Caribbean musical culture. In traditional Caribbean singing, the song as we have it in *Voices United* is only the chorus, interspersed with verses sung to the same tune such as “I am the rock of ages, cleft for me. I am the let me hide myself in thee.” George Mulrain, the connexional president of the Methodist Church for the Caribbean and the Americas and a musician and hymn writer with songs in *More Voices*, has expanded this idea to include other “I AM” statements such as “I am the bread of life, feed on me. I am the one true vine, grow in me.” Have fun with it any way you can, *a cappella*, with keyboard accompaniment, with percussion, with a full band!

**Prayer of Dedication**

Source of all harmony,

bless the gifts we present to you now.

And may our hymns of praise inspire us

to join with our siblings around the world

to continue your work,

Amen.

### Leaving with Joy!

“Grateful for God’s loving action, we cannot keep from singing. Creating and seeking relationship, in awe and trsut, we witness to Holy Mystery who is Wholly Love. Amen.”

**A Song of Faith**

**Hymn**

“Asithi: Amen”/”Sing amen” (*Voices United* 431)

“Asithi: Amen” is one of the most widely published worship songs from South Africa, written originally as a Great Amen for the close of the Eucharistic prayer. Stephen Molefe, a Catholic choir director of Sotho descent, composed it and presented it at the first composition workshop in South Africa organized by Dave Dargie, in 1977. Dargie is a white South African priest and anti-apartheid activist who has dedicated his life over the past 50 years to promoting the creation of indigenous South African music for worship, following the decisions of Vatican II to promote vernacular liturgy. Dargie transcribed Molefe's composition, arranging it in a style that echoes traditional Xhosa singing, but that also reflects Western harmonic practice. In print, “Asithi: Amen” is a good example of what happens when you put traditional music in a hymn book: it starts to look and sound like a hymn! Try it with the “Asithi” words sung by a song leader, with the people responding accordingly. Accompaniment on marimba or other mallet percussion would be very appropriate, and clapping a 3+3+2 rhythm is more appropriate than drum accompaniment in music from Xhosa tradition. Dancing is not only encouraged, but expected. Sing it many times around, not just once, and use the notes on the page as a guide only—don’t let the printed notes get in the way of a good harmony!

**Commissioning**

As we go forth from this place,

**let us resolve to live with your song in our hearts,**

to sing your mission faithfully and boldly,

**wherever we find ourselves in your world,**

so that with and by your grace we may become

your faithful people!

**Amen.**

**Benediction**

May the blessings of the great Composer, Creator of sound and silence,

and the Singer of God’s melody,

and the Mystery of the song,

echo always within us,

and resound through us to all.

Amen.