

1. The Spirit In Me. In the 1960s, we experienced the gift of chanting from the Hare Krishna tradition from India and the Taize Community from France. We sought to create meditative and prayerful short choruses for our multicultural congregation in downtown Los Angeles. "The Spirit in me greets the Spirit in you, Alleluia. God's in us and we're in God, Alleluia" was slowly and quietly sung around the communion table and during the "passing of the peace." Over time, the tempo and a joyful spirit of greeting has increased along with smiles, holy hugs, and strong clapping on the back beat.

2. I Am the Light of the World. A song for Christmas and the season Epiphany. In 1967 I read Howard Thurman's poem "The Work of Christmas." I used Dr. Thurman's words for the first verse and then responded to the central images of the poem to create the remaining lyrics and supportive music. The first printing of "Light" was in the songbook *New Wine, Songs for Celebration*, published by the (then) Southern California-Arizona Annual Conference of the Methodist Church in 1967. The credits read: "Words by Howard Thurman & Jim Strathdee" and "Music by Jim Strathdee." After the book went to press, Howard Thurman contacted me. It was his wish to change the credit line because it implied a collaboration which we did not have. His request was that we change it to "Words & Music by Jim Strathdee*" with "*In response to a Christmas Poem by Howard Thurman" at the bottom of the page.

Dr. Thurman has been a foundational part of my life of faith. His deep spirituality and activism has been a guidepost for my journey. I treasure the back-and-forth letters with him about the song and the few additional poems that he sent to me. Over the years we have shared royalties with the Thurman Educational Trust.

3. Help Us Accept Each Other. These words by Fred Kaan help us to affirm Jesus' accepting and restoring love through all encounters with the people in our lives. As we are accepted and loved, we are free to embrace God's dream of the beloved community. The words, "the table of forgiveness," suggest that this hymn may be useful as part of a communion service. Jim's tune expresses the emotion and beauty of the text.

4. Lovin' Neighbor. Jeanie wrote this song in response to the 1980 killing of 4 Catholic nuns in El Salvador. It is a call for each of us to lend a helping hand, to stop the fighting, and to advocate on behalf of all oppressed people as "we're walking to the Promised Land."

5. Wings of Grace. In 1977 Buenos Aires, Argentina, a military coup took place that ushered in a brutal dictator. Many people who resisted this takeover were “disappeared”. Elisabeth Käsemann, a German sociologist who was studying in Buenos Aires, was arrested for forging documents that could help people escape the country. Her friend, Diana Houston Page, was also arrested. They were tortured to give up names of their colleagues. Elisabeth was shot and eventually Diana was set free. I had the privilege of hearing Diana tell her story of torture and survival, and of God’s sufficient grace. This is her song.

6. The Spirit of the Lord (El Espíritu de Dios) Luke 4: 18-19.

Here is a setting of this text so very central to our Christian life. We are called to bring release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty the oppressed. In 1965 –1971 Jim had the privilege of serving as music director for a multicultural congregation in downtown Los Angeles. All of the songs were sung in both English in Spanish. We weave both languages together in this version.

7. Learn to Dance. This song was written by Canadian friends Walter Farquharson, text, and Ron Klusmeier, tune. The song invites us to put our theology into practice by learning to dance. Sometimes when we pray, or hear the words of scripture read, or sing our hymns, we may be called to do the work of justice and mercy. This hymn tells us “we have to face the conflict, we have to learn to dance.” I like this metaphor that doing God’s work is to “dance with the Spirit.” Partnering with the Spirit can be a joyous labor.

8. Homeless People. Text by Walter Farquharson. Tune by Ron Klusmeier. In this song Jesus speaks to homeless people saying that he was also a refugee, poor and hungry of his family, born in poverty, maimed and wounded. Also Jesus speaks to his followers reminding us that “Friends of his must learn to give. Life is ours to share with others, we are bound with all who live.”

9. Rivers of Change. This is one of my “life journey” songs as I reflect on the time as a young adult in the ‘60s protesting the Vietnam war. Eventually, we were successful in stopping the killing and bringing our troops home. Now, 60 years later, the wars never end and our commitment to caring for our veterans, and all of our citizens, is eroding as our democracy dissolves. It feels like a giant river of hatred, bitterness, and revenge is washing us all away. Every day Jeanie and I, in our 80s, ask ourselves what can we do this day for love and for justice. The words of this song still sing in my heart. “Take me and hold me, break me and mold me to change the river for You.”

10. We Are Simply Asked. These simple words by the Jesuit brother Peter Byrne are another answer to the question raised in our commentary about the previous song...

"We are simply asked to make gentle our bruised world.
To be compassionate of all, including oneself.
Then, in the time left over, to repeat the ancient tale
and go the way of God's foolish ones."

11. The Harvest Will Come. This song is in response to Jesus' parables about the farmer that plants his seeds, then lays down to rest, trusting that the seeds will eventually present a harvest, even though the farmer doesn't know how this happens. The disciples struggle to understand the meaning of these words. The second verse is about a minister who is overwhelmed with the work her congregation requires of her. She is discouraged and wonders how she can give anymore. The third verse tells the story of a married couple who are teachers at an alternative high school with students that need a great deal of care. They are discouraged by all the drugs and the alcohol the students use, and ask themselves "What's the use of working here?" Like the farmer, we do our best to sow our seeds and we do need our rest. We are not alone in this work. Like the seeds in the rich soil, God's Spirit is working with us and the tiny shoots will rise, and in time, the full harvest will appear.