



# The Vergers Voice

*The news blog of the Vergers Guild*

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Friday, January 16, 2015

## "Starting From Scratch" - New Adventures for a Long-Time Verger



Bill Gleason leads the entering procession as crucifer on Christmas Eve at St. John's Cathedral in Denver

By Ken Holloway, News Manager, VGEC, with Bill Gleason, St. John's Cathedral, Denver

When we retire from our major life's work, we expect to have a "starting attitude" in what we do next. Just how much of a starting attitude will be applied and to which endeavor often is made obvious to us by our surroundings.

Bill and Helen Gleason, long-time residents of Nashville, both planned to retire last year. Bill retired from UPS and from managing the [VGEC Guild Shop](#), and Helen retired from Vanderbilt University. They spent most of the summer in Denver to enjoy a long visit with their family. While there, they leased a condo and, among other activities, began attending [St. John's Cathedral](#), the see for the [Diocese of Colorado](#). They found a congregation so alive with its various ministries that they were instantly captured. Bill spent the summer actively observing the liturgical practices from various vantage points in the congregation. David Barr, the Dean's Verger, later said that he noticed Bill in full information-gathering mode during that time.

As the summer progressed, Bill and Helen began to seriously evaluate the prospect of living in Denver permanently. By September they had volunteered for several ministries and soon Helen was asked to join the Cathedral Choir. Bill began by serving as a torch bearer. He also participated as a crucifer and a gospel book bearer as well as a Eucharistic minister. One of his favorite assignments was to ring the bell in the Cathedral tower during the Great Thanksgiving - now that's a SANCTUS bell!

Their involvement grew, and by December, they decided to make the summer visit really long-term and to move to Denver. Bill, with many decades of service in parish churches and at the Cathedral in Nashville, literally started over as a student of how church is conducted at a major metropolitan Cathedral. He participated in training sessions and learned a great deal about St. John's liturgical customs. Since most of the acolyte duties there are performed by adults, he had

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plenty of opportunity to learn the various responsibilities of all of the non-ordained liturgical participants. He said that the very first time he served as a torch bearer he felt completely at home.

His comments about learning his new responsibilities are prudent and practical saying, "I just kept reminding myself that I was starting from scratch and did my very best to blend into the fabric of the church." He emphasized several times in our recent conversation that it was important to, "...continue being a student of the customs and processes of the new church versus telling them how I did it in the past."

On Christmas Eve and on Christmas Day, Bill served in all six liturgies. The photograph headlining this article shows Bill as the crucifer at the 5 pm Eucharist on Christmas Eve. If you visit St. John's you might see Bill volunteering. He says that, on a typical Sunday morning, about fifty people are involved in conducting the three services, excluding the Cathedral choir and the parish choir.

So Bill and Helen are settling in to their new home town and are fully acclimated to the sizable ministries of St. John's Cathedral. But he told me, more than once in our hour-long chat, he remains a student, even after 25+ years as a verger and his experience as a founding leader of the VGEC.

The *Kung Fu* television series of the early 1970's featured the young student named Caine and his mentor, Master Po who is blind. In the first episode they discuss awareness.

Master Po: [after easily defeating the boy in combat] Ha, ha, never assume because a man has no eyes he cannot see. Close your eyes. What do you hear?

Young Caine: I hear the water, I hear the birds.

Master Po: Do you hear your own heartbeat?

Young Caine: No.

Master Po: Do you hear the grasshopper that is at your feet?

Young Caine: [looking down and seeing the insect] Old man, how is it that you hear these things?

Master Po: Young man, how is it that you do not?

Here's to the student in all of us as we proceed forward in our service to the church. May we maintain our bearings and concentrate on continuing to learn more every day about what fuels our communal celebration of Christ.

In my observation, Bill Gleason's new ministry proves that we are never too old (or too young) to pay attention and hear the grasshopper at our feet.

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*Abstract: Retirement has its surprises, most of them pleasant. They can kick-start our changing gears and accelerating life's experiences with as much zeal as when we first were interested in the verger ministry. Learn how a broadly experienced, now-retired verger is starting from scratch in a different and much larger church as a student participant in our liturgy. He "sat-out" at first, to observe the customs, then volunteered for every liturgical assignment available in his new parish - the Cathedral of St. John in Denver.*

Posted by [Ken Holloway](#) at 9:46 AM



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