

Pastoral musicians convene to 'sing the Lord's music'

By Emily Morrison

More than 20 years ago, the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy defined the Church's liturgical celebrations as "the source and summit of Christian life." Two weeks ago in the Diocese of Rochester, a regional "summit meeting" of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians placed pastoral music at the pinnacle of its agenda, both in theory and practice.

The spoken word was accompanied by the sung liturgy and heavenly strains of organ cantatas during four days of seminars, talks, workshops and special interest sessions, banquets, Masses, musical performances, a hymn festival, an "Organ Crawl" that toured historic organs in area sanctuaries, and impromptu jam sessions. Held July 14-17 at the Genesee Plaza Holiday Inn, the convention included musical events that took place at St. Mary's Church, Eastman School of Music, and the Downtown United Presbyterian Church.

Although the schedule of events included a number of talks and seminars on such varied topics as "Preparing the Wedding Liturgy," "Establishing a Children's Music Program," "Choral Skills," and "Job Descriptions, Salary Negotiations and Standards," the convention's highlights were melodic rather than verbal. The difference between a pastoral music conference and those convened by practitioners of other professions is inherent in the nature of the musician's art, according to the Rev. Virgil C. Funk, a priest of the Diocese of Richmond, Virginia, and president of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians.

"Lawyers at a conference can't practice law. Doctors can't practice medicine," Father Funk pointed out after Wednesday morning's general session, attended by most of the convention's 1,000 registrants. "When musicians get together, they can make music. The art form gets practiced, and the results are evident in the hallways. Many of the participants have brought their own guitars, flutes, harps and even (double) basses."

Father Funk confirmed that those who transported larger instruments must have done so at considerable expense, since bassists who travel by commercial airliner are required to purchase an adjacent seat for their oversized yet delicate instruments — unless they're willing to risk almost certain damage to their basses in the plane's baggage compartment.

The Rochester convention was one of six regional NPM conferences held throughout the year of 1986. During odd-numbered years, a single national conference is held. Next year, in Minneapolis, Father Funk expects approximately 6,000 of the NPM's 8,500 members to turn out — a relatively high number, as convention attendance figures go. He attributes his estimate to perennial anticipation of music-making opportunities, among those who devote their lives to this specialized ministry.

"Hope and Beyond: The Developing Musician" was the theme of this year's Rochester convention, which hosted NPM members from New York, New England, the mid-Atlantic states, Ohio, and the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec. In the past, according to Father Funk, pastoral musicians often served their parishes on a volunteer basis, demonstrating what he termed an incredible degree of dedication to the Catholic Church.

"Developing musicians are looking for a clearer understanding of their job descriptions and role in the parish structure," he explained. This year, a new division of the association was inaugurated for full-time, salaried directors of music ministry (DMMs). The division's declared purposes are education, organization and mutual (moral) support, facilitation of national liaison with Church leadership and local dialogue with parish staff, clergy liaison, communication through NPM publications, and determination of salary and professional standards for DMMs.

Convention speakers noted that the liturgical reforms mandated by Vatican



Dr. John Ferguson, organist, directs participating choirs and congregation during the convention of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians.

Council II have entered a new phase, now that the first 20 years of renewal have been relegated to history. Responsibility for the development of liturgical standards is gradually being transferred into the hands of pastoral musicians, said Father Funk, although both clergy members and musicians belong to the association. "The major themes expressed at the conference were themes of hope for improving the quality of participation, a deeper emphasis on the scriptures and a call to justice within the Church in caring for the pastoral musician," he added.

The "beyond" in the conference's title encompassed "doing the day-to-day work in the parish, with all its limitations and strengths," Father Funk observed. Implementation of renewal during the first 20 years, he feels, was "chaotic," largely because of inadequate training of clergy members charged with the formidable task of liturgical reform.

The conference's focus on the shifting emphasis of the pastoral music ministry placed participants inescapably in the context of the larger culture of this baffling decade. "Come to Rochester and develop your understanding of what it means to be a pastoral musician in the 1980s," read a report published in the January issue of "Pastoral Music Notebook," a monthly newsletter disseminated by the NPM's publications division (which also makes available a wide selection of books on the subject). Fast-track secular buzzwords such as "burn-out" and "time management" cropped up frequently during conference lectures and discussions of the pastoral

musician's career path, yet the atmosphere remained overwhelmingly one of Christian fellowship and spiritual community.

A Thursday morning lecture entitled "The Care and Feeding of the Pastoral Musician" centered around generic '80s themes like time management, nurture, and growth. John Ferguson, professor of organ and church music and minister of music to the student congregation at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, spoke for an hour or so about the kinds of nurturance necessary to support the pastoral music ministry.

Ferguson's lighthearted delivery might have made him feel right at home during a recent broadcast of National Public Radio's "A Prairie Home Companion," when Midwestern humorist Garrison Keillor drew laughter with an apologetically irreverent anecdote about a foundering boatload of Lutheran ministers. Ferguson, who main-

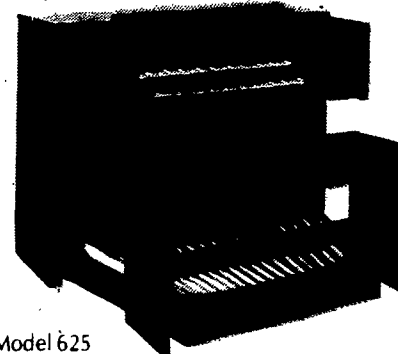
tains a teeming schedule of workshops and organ master classes back home, is widely known in pastoral music circles for his preparation of hymn festivals like the one he staged at the Downtown United Presbyterian Church the evening of Wednesday, July 16.

"The hymn festival is absolutely no joy for the organist if the congregation doesn't 'fest along,'" remarked Ferguson during his Thursday morning talk in the packed Holiday Inn ballroom. "Lutherans are a little less demonstrative," he added, after acknowledging the unaccustomed applause of appreciative audience members at the previous evening's hymn festival. Although the NPM is affiliated with the United States Catholic Conference and addresses primarily the concerns of the Roman Catholic liturgy, approximately 30 percent of its membership hails from other denominations, particularly

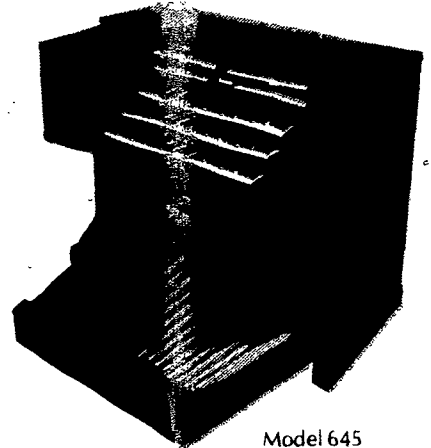
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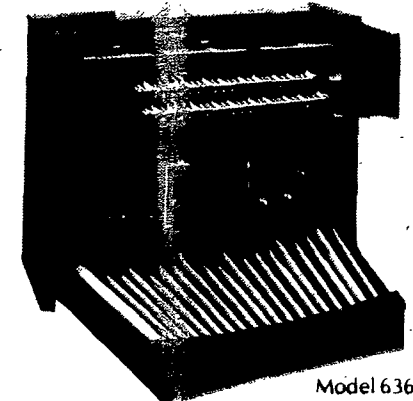
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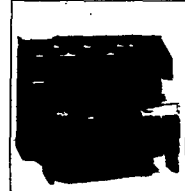
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