

Features

New hymnal celebrates black Catholic musical traditions

By Lee Strong

Jacquelyn Dobson has heard too many stereotypes regarding the nature of Black sacred music.

"A lot of people think that black people just get up and shout and move," said Dobson, director of the Office of Black Ministries. "So many people (also) think that Black music is just gospel."

Dispelling these misunderstandings is one of the purposes of *Lead Me, Guide Me: The African American Catholic Hymnal*. Intended as a complete hymnal and service book, the book was prepared by a committee composed of Black liturgists and musicians. Along with music, the hymnal includes a preface that explains the history of African-American sacred song and the role this music plays in black Catholic worship.

For Dobson, the book has additional importance.

"Many of the songs talk about not only the struggles of black life, but also the beauty of black life," Dobson explained. "It shows that we have a legacy—one worth holding on to."

In addition, the hymnal shows that black sacred music consists not only of gospel, but of spirituals, anthems and chants as well.

Father Robert Werth, pastor of St. Bridget's Church, praised the book as the "concrete enmeshment of black culture and Roman Catholicism in one book."

"This is a statement by the black community that there is a place in the Church for them," Father Werth noted. "They're saying, 'We're here and we have something to offer, and that Catholicism has something to offer the black community.'"

In addition to being an expression of black culture, the book is also a teaching tool, Dobson noted. The preface, she pointed out, gives a succinct and readable history of black sacred music—something that will help young blacks to rediscover their musical heritage and will enable anyone unfamiliar with that heritage to learn about it. Reading the songs themselves will help young blacks to understand the forces that underlie black culture, Dobson suggested.

John Kubeniec, associate director for liturgical music in the diocesan office of Liturgy, agreed that the hymnal will be an educational tool, noting that it is the first book to fully

"integrate black musical traditions with other parts of the American Catholic musical experience." He pointed out that the book is published by GIA, which also publishes the *Worship* series used in many parishes. Continuity between the hymnal and *Worship III*, the latest book in the series, will help to create a sense of continuity for black Catholics, he suggested.

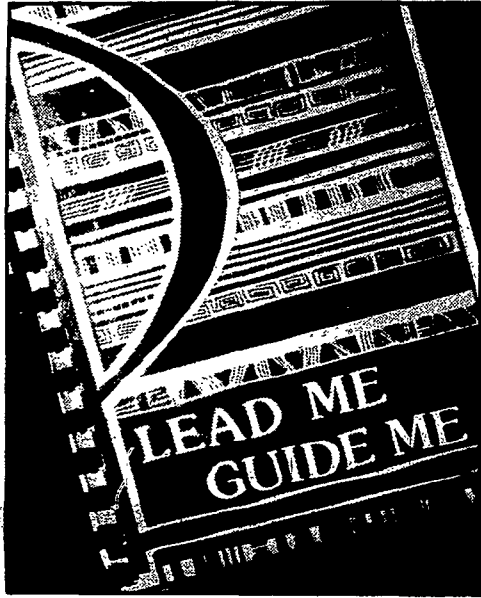
Nevertheless, Kubeniec doubted that the hymnal would become the primary musical text for many parishes "because it is so heavily in the Black idiom." He added, however, that "it could serve as a wonderful resource book for choirs and groups and for introducing that style of singing to congregations."

Currently, *Lead Me, Guide Me* is used in three Rochester parishes. It is the primary hymnal at St. Bridget's, and is used by gospel groups at Corpus Christi Parish and St. Vincent DePaul Parish in Churchville.

Nationally, however, the book has sold 35,000 copies and is in its third printing since its release in June. The success of the book has surprised the publishers.

"There's an excitement in the black commu-

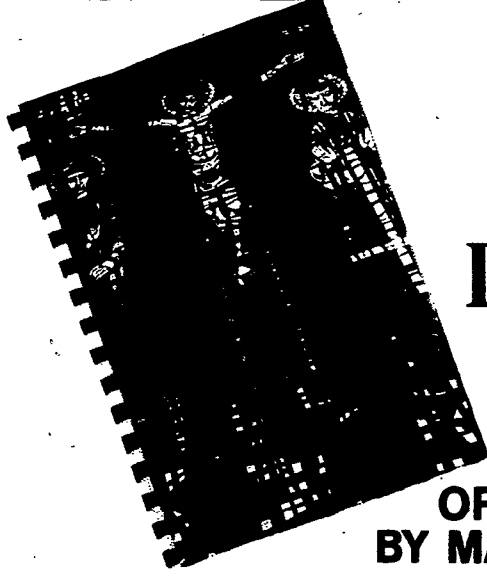
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The African American Catholic Hymnal.



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