

Composer tells parishes 'sing new song' for God

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

MENDON — What does a congregation that doesn't sing have in common with a dinosaur or an 18th-century tea kettle?

Ask the Rev. John Bell, a Scottish Presbyterian minister, and he'll tell you straight out.

"When the church sings, it declares it's an organic community. When it doesn't sing, it declares it's a fossil, an antique," he said.

Rev. Bell, music leader for the Iona Community, a Christian ecumenical community with main headquarters in Glasgow, made his remarks during an interview with the *Catholic Courier* at St. Catherine's Church convent Oct. 2.

Rev. Bell had just arrived from Scotland to present a series of workshops for a wide variety of parish workers in the Diocese of Rochester, including musicians, liturgists and social ministry workers. His visit was sponsored by the diocesan liturgy office, and the Sisters of St. Joseph Spirituality Center in Rochester. It was paid for in part by Thanks Giving Appeal funds.

He appeared at St. Patrick's Church, Victor, on Oct. 2-4; the SSJ center Oct. 5; and at St. Mary's Church, Bath, on Oct. 6.

Rev. Bell planned to address three topics through his workshops: congregational singing; social justice and the church's prayer life; and Celtic spirituality.

A composer who draws on different



styles of music, Rev. Bell noted he urges parish musicians in his workshops to move away from performing pieces for their congregations to showing their congregations how to sing together.

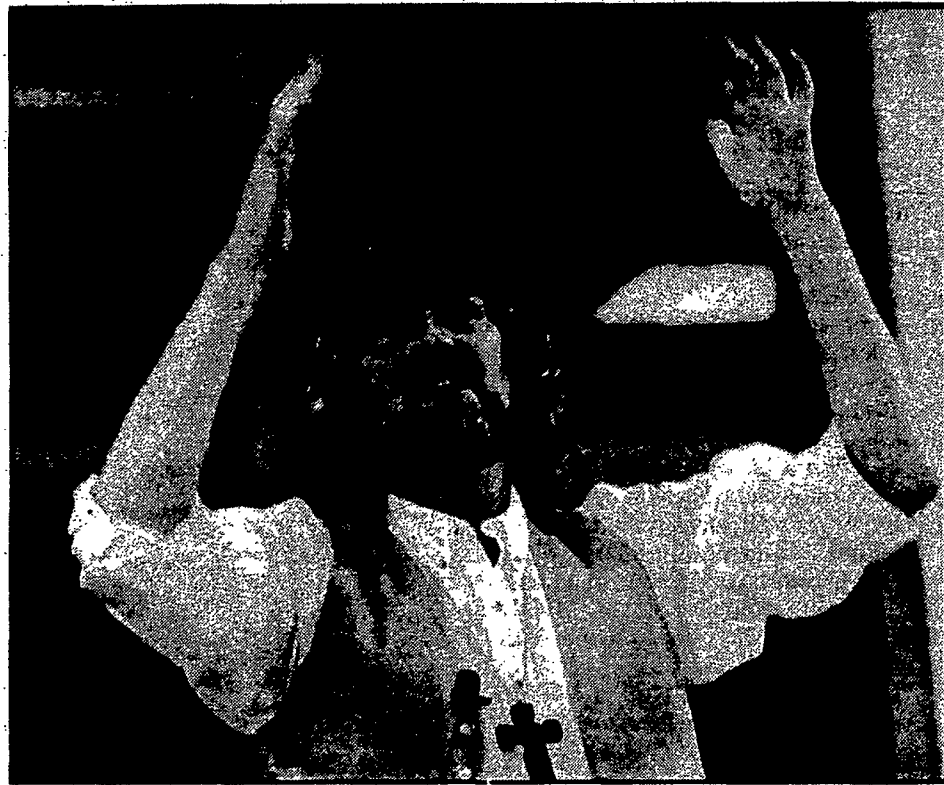
"How all the people of God are able to sing or lament should be one of the prime fascinations of church musicians," he said.

Many Christians think they can't sing, and leave church music to the professionals, he noted. But, with few exceptions, most people can sing quite well, Bell argued. He added that generally, people are discouraged from singing at an early age by their school music teachers.

"I think people have to make a theological choice who is bigger — your music teacher in high school who said you couldn't sing and use your voice, or God who says: 'Sing to me a new song,'" he said. "The body of Christ expresses itself as a body when it sings."

While Christian parishes need to learn to sing, Rev. Bell also stressed that they need to learn what their God has called them to: social justice.

He welcomes Pope John Paul II's call for the First World to forgive the Third World's debt as part of the jubilee celebration in the year 2000, and he urged all Christians, Protestant and Catholic, to similarly forgive debts, and focus on the plight



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Rev. John Bell, a music leader for the Iona Community, a Christian ecumenical community in Glasgow, Scotland, leads a workshop at St. Patrick's Church parish center, Victor, on Oct. 2.

of the world's poor.

Rev. Bell said both the Old and New Testaments put debt relief, hunger relief and human rights at the center of God's concern, and he said Christians need to realize that God is calling them to share this concern.

"The Gospel has a great deal to say about money and a great deal to say about food, and these are justice issues," he said. He added that Christians should ask themselves such questions as: "Can we fairly benefit from investments in companies that pay a pittance to their workers?"

Rev. Bell said he also wants the church to discover the value of Celtic spirituality. He noted that early Christians in Ireland and Scotland produced hundreds of prayers about ordinary activities like walking, rowing a boat or feeding an infant. The Celts also revered the earth as a place of human dominion, not human domination, he said.

The early church in Ireland, in particular, he said, emphasized the importance of the clergy living as one with lay people, and not above or apart from them. This

helped Irish missionaries evangelize Europe since they made a habit of learning the customs of the locals and blending in among them, he said.

Abbeys, he added, were places of hospitality, and the famous Irish monk, Columba — who ended his life on Iona, the isle from which Rev. Bell's community takes its name — was preeminent in this virtue. The Celtic monastic tradition stressed putting on feasts for strangers, he said, noting that this ran counter to the Roman tradition of monastic fasting.

"Fasting doesn't cost you anything," Rev. Bell said. "You save money when you fast. Feasting means you feed other people."

Bell noted that Christ also took on a different face in Celtic culture.

"In much of (Christian) spirituality, Jesus is enthroned and exalted," he said. "The Celtic tradition emphasizes the everydayness of Jesus as the one who befriends us where we are. We enter into conversation with God who is beside us. This increases the importance of hospitality as a Christian virtue."

Obituaries

Harriet Dunn, priest's mother; 97

Mrs. Harriet J. Dunn, mother of the late Father Gerald Dunn, died Aug. 10, 1998. She was 97.

Born Harriet Sanders in Rochester, Mrs. Dunn grew up attending St. Bridget's Parish. She married the late Edward R. Dunn July 23, 1919, at St. Bridget's. They had five sons.

Mr. Dunn died in 1939, leaving Mrs. Dunn a widow with her youngest child just 2 months old, according to her son, Ray Dunn. She went to work as a waitress with Valley Echo catering service. Because the service catered many church events, she became well-known among the priests of the diocese. "She took care of the priests," Ray Dunn noted. "She babied them."

He added that Mrs. Dunn continued to work into her early 80s.

Mrs. Dunn lived for 22 years at Dunn Towers, the senior complex that Father Gerald Dunn helped to create when he was pastor of St. Theodore's Parish, Gates. The parish donated the land on which the complex is built.

Even after she retired, she remained active, Ray Dunn said. She often accompanied Father Dunn to activities. In addition, he said, "She liked to go to parties."

When Father Dunn retired in 1992, he moved to Florida. A longtime friend, Deacon Charles Dispenza of St. Bridget's Parish, began visiting the priest there. He took Mrs. Dunn along several times.

"She was a very delightful woman," Deacon Dispenza recalled. "She was sharp as a tack and her sense of humor was good."

Deacon Dispenza noted that if one was upset, she had the ability to "calm you down. I have nothing but the highest praise for her."

Mrs. Dunn was predeceased also by her husband and son Robert E. Dunn. In addition to her son Ray and his wife Irene, she is survived by sons Thomas (Janet), and James (Joan); 15 grandchildren, 17 great grandchildren, one great-great grandson, several nieces and nephews; and friends Anne Meredith (the widow of son Robert), and Myrtle Gerew.

The funeral Mass for Mrs. Dunn was celebrated at St. Lawrence Church Aug. 12 by Father Frank Falletta, who served as assistant to Father Dunn at St. Theodore's.

The family requests that gifts in Mrs. Dunn's memory be sent to School of the Holy Childhood.

Aniello Contini, from Trumansburg

Aniello E. Contini, an active member of St. James the Apostle Roman Catholic Church in Trumansburg and in the ecumenical community, died Aug. 29, 1998, in Pawling, N.Y. He was 87.

Born in Elmsford, N.Y., he worked with father, Attilio J. Contini, as a plaster caster and mold maker in New York City. The family's projects included James Earl Frazer's "The End of the Trail" and Frederick Remington's "The Bronco Buster."

Mr. Contini served as an aerial photographer with the U.S. Army Air Force during World War II and in the Korean War. He stayed on active duty until November 1967, then moved to Trumansburg.

Mr. Contini was a caseworker and later

the first administrative services director for the Tompkins County Department of Social Services.

During the 1980s he served as president of the Trumansburg Council of Churches. He was an active supporter of food banks and participated in the Trumansburg Crop Walk well into his 80s.

He was predeceased by five brothers and a sister. Survivors include two sisters and three sisters-in-law. Friends and family were asked that memorials in his name be made to their local food banks.

A funeral Mass was celebrated Sept. 1 at St. Denis Church, Hopewell Junction, N.Y. Interment was in Arlington National Cemetery.

Recognizing

★ Jacob Perryman, Brian King, Chad Fame, Joseph Tubiolo, James Siena and Timothy Davlin were presented the Pope Pius XII medal, Boy Scouting's highest religious emblem, during a June 21 Mass at St. Rita's Church, Webster. The six members of St. Rita's received the medal for working together on service projects and for taking part in an ongoing discussion group to explore being Catholic Christians in today's world.

★ Father Francis Taney, MM, a Geneva native, celebrated 40 years as a Maryknoll priest June 28 at the Maryknoll headquarters in Ossining, N.Y. The 69-year-old, who attended St. Francis de Sales School, Geneva, joined Maryknoll in 1948 and was ordained a priest June 14, 1958.

★ Ada Laaken retired in July after 20 years as parish secretary for St. Michael Church, Newark.

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