

“NAME THAT TUNE—CHURCH STYLE”



With raised baton in hand, the director of the **University of Minnesota Summer Band** suddenly lowered it, at most one second before his downbeat. Why? At that precise moment, the bell tower began to ring. It was 7:00 p.m. and the timing was perfect! Everyone chuckled, and we patiently waited for the bell to cycle through the traditional *Westminster Chimes* at the top of the hour. That familiar melody dates to the late 18th century, when **Dr. Joseph Jowett** composed a simple chime for the University Church of the University of Cambridge that would repeat on every quarter hour. Nicknamed “Jowett’s Jig” by Cambridge students, it later simply became known as “The Cambridge Chimes.” Our bells here play part of that same melody each quarter hour, each successive chime building upon the previous. If you can’t place the tune, believe me, you’d recognize it. The full melody sounds right before the top of each hour, and so at precisely 7:00 p.m., the bells went through their full cycles (4 by 4 chimes) followed by the striking of seven tones at the hour. It provided the perfect backdrop for hosting the outdoor concert.

However, the impromptu “concert” also reminded me that I do not know that much about the history of Church bells. Turns out, it is quite fascinating. But I recall an insightful 1989 article in **Sacred Music** magazine, authored by **Msgr. Richard Schuler**, long time pastor at Saint Agnes and an accomplished Ph.D. Church musician in his own right. I was able to pull it up online. Bells have played a significant role in the life of the Church, though their provenance is not known with certitude. Schuler’s article maintained that Church bells were not widely known before the Carolingian period, which would be the time of Charlemagne (800 A.D.). Most scholars today surmise that Church bells originated in the early 5th century with **St. Paulinus of Nola** (who shares a feast with St. Thomas More on June 22), a renowned Latin poet. Hailing from a hamlet 20 miles from Naples in southwest Italy, Paulinus was a contemporary and a correspondent with Sts. Augustine, Ambrose and Jerome.

According to a 16th century work by an Italian Augustinian monk, the use of Church bells was formally sanctioned by **Pope Sabinian** in 604 A.D. Legislation provided for ringing the bells at specified canonical hours for the praying the Liturgy of the Hours, as well as before Mass. Both were a call to prayer. Poor Sabinian had the unenviable task of following the papacy of Pope St. Gregory the Great! Sadly, he is most known for his alleged parsimony in administering the papal granaries during a time of famine. He reigned only for two years, showing just how tough it is to follow a saint! Pope Benedict XVI might just agree! But now we must come to the crux of the matter— the reason for bells in the first place.

Bells were a call to prayer at a time when people worked in fields, long before people carried any kind of time pieces on their person. The bells were their sole reminder. How anyone kept time before the invention of clocks is amazing itself. There were well trained body clocks from years of experience (as I seem to be developing!), as well as water clocks and sun dials. Monks would dutifully ring the bells, or later, other individuals in parish churches. Somehow, it all managed to work. Later in the middle ages (ca. 1300 A.D.), most towns had at least one clock tower that kept time, typically prominently located in the town square.

One of my most harrowing experiences as a new pastor came in the summer of 2006, when in the middle of the night a thunderstorm rolled through Frogtown and the lightning triggered the Church bells. They suddenly went to “peel” without stop in the midst of a torrential downpour. This actually happened twice. The first time it took me a long time to wake up—someone had even called the police! The second time it occurred, I woke up, resolute in my determination to avoid another complaint. I scurried outside in a downpour and headed to the very top of the bell tower (I hope there are no pigeons up here!), struggling to find the right switch to stop the bells from ringing. But I could not find it, and finally as a last resort, yanked the plug out of the wall that attached to the control box. Finally, the bells stopped ringing. I was soaking wet, my ears rang for hours and could not get back to sleep, but the crisis was averted. “Who put the switch at the top of the bell tower?!” I also received complaints because the bells rang all night long— I had to agree with the neighbors on that one, and proceeded to shut them off after 10:00 p.m., starting again at 7:00 a.m.

Between 1915 and 1986, the Cathedral had just one bell, cast in Cincinnati in 1850, transplanted from the 2nd

and 3rd Cathedrals downtown. SAs recounted in our marvelous history of the Cathedral by Eric Hansen, thanks to Msgr. Ambrose Hayden, an initiative began in 1985 to produce five new bells, fashioned at the **Paccard Foundry** in Annecy France, not too far from where young John Ireland studied in the seminary, as well as Bishop Joseph Cretin's birthplace. Our largest bell weighs 6,600 pounds (pitched to "Bf2"), followed by 4,630 ("C3"), 2,750 ("D3"), 1,990 ("F3") and finally 1,545 pounds ("C3"). Each bell was cast of the finest bronze, consisting of 78% pure copper and 22% tin.

- Bishop Francis Xavier Yu Soo-il presided over the groundbreaking for a **Peace Chapel** being built in a village at the DMZ, the closest possible place to North Korea. The bishop believes the chapel will "also serve as a spiritual cradle for the soldiers guarding the truce village. A blessing on all those who visit here."
- I began at the Cathedral six years ago today. Thank you for your support during my first term of service, as I look forward to six more years. Much has occurred since 2012 that was unforeseen in this Archdiocese, and I am edified by your fervent faith.
- **Laura Ingalls Wilder's** name was removed from a major book award because of her "stereotypical attitudes" in *Little House on the Prairie*. I recall stories of strong and resourceful women, contributing a major role in settling this nation. Apparently, families in the later part of the 19th century were insensitive to inclusivity. How could they not have foreseen then how the cultural elite would view the world today? Shame on them.
- I conducted a Cathedral tour for **Bishop Athanasius Schneider**, an auxiliary Bishop from Kazakhstan, and what a story he has. His parents were ethnic Germans living in Odessa, whom Stalin sent to gulags in the Ural Mountains. His family lived in Kyrgyzstan and Estonia, attending clandestine Masses (often traveling 60 miles one way!) during the Soviet era. But they remained strong in faith. And yes, it was a little intimidating providing a tour to someone who could read the Cyrillic alphabet on the statue of St. Cyril!"
- We are hosting our annual Bloodmobile this coming **Thursday, July 5 from 11:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m.** The air-conditioned mobile clinic parked on Selby Ave. provides a comfortable space during your donation. You may pre-register online—see the link on our website.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector