News



Dan Schutte (Provided photo)



by James Dearie

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A concert by a renowned composer of Catholic hymns has been moved out of a local parish on orders of the bishop.

Dan Schutte, part of the 1970s and '80s musical group The St. Louis Jesuits responsible for some of the most widely used songs in the contemporary Catholic hymnal, was scheduled to give a concert sponsored by the Kansas City, Missouri, and Kansas City, Kansas, chapters of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians

April 28 at Visitation Parish.

Those plans were scuttled after Bishop James Johnston of Kansas City-St. Joseph, Missouri, did not receive "a letter of suitability" from Schutte's home diocese.

"Visitation Parish, its staff, and pastor were not a party to the decision to cancel," a statement posted to Visitation's website March 13 said.

Schutte is composer-in-residence at the University of San Francisco. Some of his best-known songs from his years with the St. Louis Jesuits are "Here I Am, Lord," "City of God" and "Sing a New Song," His more recent works include "These Alone are Enough" and a Mass setting titled "Mass of Christ the Savior."

"Whenever someone is given a public platform for ministry in our diocese," Johnston said in a letter to Kansas City clergy explaining the situation, "it is my practice to seek a letter of suitability from that person's local ordinary."

When asked for such a letter, Schutte, who lives in the San Francisco area, "supplied, instead, a letter from the Chancellor of the University of San Francisco," Kansas City-St. Joseph Diocese spokesperson Jack Smith told NCR in an email. "It is Bishop Johnston's practice only to accept letters of suitability from the person's diocesan bishop or his delegate."

In his letter to clergy, Johnston wrote, "A request for such a letter was made to Mr. Schutte's local ordinary and none was provided."

In an email to NCR March 13, Schutte said that he had always been issued letters of good standing by his bishops in the past.

"When Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone became Archbishop of San Francisco [in 2012], his office stated his policy for issuing these letters for laypersons should come from that person's pastor or the rector of the Catholic Institution he or she is affiliated [with] as it was difficult for him to know a large lay population," Schutte wrote. Because of his affiliation with the University of San Francisco, he wrote, "I have since had these letters issued from Fr. Steve Privett," chancellor of the University of San Francisco, which is a Jesuit institution.

Schutte also said that he "had participated in another benefit concert at Visitation to benefit the Roman Catholic Cristo Rey High School in [Kansas] without issue" 7 years ago.

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Schutte's appearance at Visitation became an issue in the Catholic blogosphere after a report appeared on the website Church Militant March 7 that claimed without naming sources that "Catholics" were "pushing back at news that" Schutte would be performing, and called the composer "a former Jesuit and active homosexual."

Schutte left the Jesuit order in 1986. He said he does not discuss details of his private life in public or with the press.

In a posting to his Facebook page March 12, he wrote, "I'm not going to comment about these two articles [from Church Militant] … because much of what is written is not accurate and taken from old internet postings and regurgitated sound bites."

"Friends, I want you to know that I'm fine," he wrote. "And most of all, this has nothing to do with the very good people at Visitation Parish in Kansas City. I feel their love and support."

Church Militant reported March 9 that the concert had "been moved off church grounds after pushback." When news of Schutte's upcoming concert broke, the article claimed, "locals wrote to the diocese expressing concern, and Catholics responded strongly."

Despite Church Militant's claims, Smith told NCR, "I believe the bishop's decision was conveyed to the pastor of Visitation on Monday, March 5." As to claims of pushback from the local Catholic community, Smith said the diocese "received a few [complaints], but not a barrage as was reported."

In his letter to clergy March 12, Johnston wrote that "speculation by Church Militant and by others on social media as to why the event was cancelled … has caused controversy among the faithful on social media and elsewhere."

Johnston also wrote that "the speculation about Mr. Schutte and about the diocese's reasons for cancelling this event has been uninformed and too often uncharitable both to Mr. Schutte and Visitation Parish."

A representative for the Kansas City, Missouri, chapter of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians told NCR that the concert is expected to go forward at a new

venue, which has yet to be determined.

Schutte has been a member of NCR's board of directors since June 2017. Privett has served on the board since October 2015.

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