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Instrument use strikes discord in area church

By Carla Hinton
Religion Editor

A local Church of Christ's decision to add musical instruments to its worship service has struck a wrong note with other church members.

"I do not believe that God is anti-instruments. The arguments that attempt to prove that He is are not persuasive to me," minister Mark Henderson said Wednesday.

Other ministers and members of Churches of Christ have denounced the recent addition of instrumental music to the worship service at Henderson's Quail Springs Church of Christ.

"There is no New Testament precedent for using instruments," Glover Shipp, author and retired Oklahoma Christian University professor, said Wednesday.

The Quail Springs' church's decision was detailed in a question-and-answer story in the Jan. 26 Religion section. In the cover story, Henderson outlined the congregation's reasons for starting a new morning service in which the church's praise and worship songs would be accompanied by musical instruments.

Henderson said the service, which began Jan. 27, represented a definite change from many Church of Christ congregations, which believe only a cappella music is permitted in worship services. Churches of Christ that allow instrumental music during worship service are in the minority. However, a large congregation in Texas, the Richland Hills Church of Christ, allows musical instruments during worship.

The Oklahoman requested reader feedback and received about 70 letters and e-mails from Church of Christ ministers and church members who said they were saddened and adamantly against Quail's decision.

On Wednesday, as another sign the issue had struck a chord, a full-page ad, purchased by a group calling itself "faithful members and area churches of Christ" appeared in *The Oklahoman* speaking out against Quail's decision.

The paid advertisement called Henderson a "false teacher for adding elements to the worship which God did not authorize."

At the heart of the matter is the belief that musical instruments should be prohibited from worship services.

And Shipp, one of the many who wrote to *The Oklahoman*, said Churches of Christ are not alone in their regard for musical instruments in worship. He said the Christian Orthodox, Mennonite and Primitive Baptist congregations also do not use musical instruments during worship.

Meanwhile, Henderson, 48, said he had received many e-mails and telephone calls Wednesday morning from people who read the newspaper advertisement and wanted to express support for Quail.

Henderson, a senior minister, said he did not have much to say about the ad.

"They're basically doing what their theology and their interpretation of Scriptures demands for them to do," he said. "We have some fundamental differences not about the authority of Scripture, but about how you interpret and approach Scripture."

Marching to different beat

Shipp, 80, of Edmond, taught history of Christianity, comparative religions and world religions for many years at the Church of Christ-affiliated Oklahoma Christian, Pepperdine University and Abilene Christian University in Abilene, Texas. A longtime member of Edmond Church of Christ, Shipp offered several New Testament Scriptures that support the use of a cappella worship.

He said Ephesians 5:19 says to speak to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs; to sing and make music in your heart to the Lord. He also offered Colossians 3:16, which tells believers to sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in their hearts toward God, and Hebrews 13:15, which says that believers are to offer the fruit of their lips as a sacrifice of praise.

Shipp said the early church sang unaccompanied because of such New Testament teaching.

Shipp said he thinks churches that adopt musical instrument worship want to be like other churches around them and draw more people to services.

Henderson said he is not against a cappella services. Quail Springs Church of Christ continues to offer a traditional a cappella service on Sundays.

"I believe it's beautiful. We think it's a great way to honor God, we just don't believe it's the only way to honor God."

But Henderson said by continuing to offer only an a cappella service, he and Quail church elders felt they were "maintaining a practice based on arguments that we do not believe in."

Others chime in

Correspondence voicing opposition to the new service at Quail came from across Oklahoma. Some letters chiding the ministry at 14401 N May also came from across the nation from places such as Cary, N.C., and Sun City, Ariz..

Many, such as prominent Edmond evangelist Mack Lyon of the In Search of the Lord's Way radio and television ministry, took exception to Henderson's comment that the new service at Quail was a break from Church of Christ tradition.

"You see, it is not a 'break from Church of Christ tradition' as Mark Henderson says. Rather it is a break from biblical tradition. Second Thessalonians 3:15 exhorts Christians to stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle," Lyon wrote.

Meanwhile about 20 people sent in letters and e-mails supporting Quail's decision to offer the new worship service.

Vicki Rennie said she grew up attending a "wonderful" Church of Christ in Stratford but now attends a Presbyterian church in Pauls Valley.

"I feel the Holy Spirit when I am singing, whether it is with or without music, and I feel God has placed me in this church for a purpose to minister to people with my singing. So I believe with or without musical instruments, God is pleased when we sing his praises from our hearts for His glory," she said.

And Robert A. Hefner IV had this to say: "It's unfortunate that God's people do not incorporate the whole council of God and often segment it for their own rationalization. ... When Christians divide over

such an issue, then they are forgetting that their position with God is all grace to begin with and not on anything inherently good in them.”

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