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WURSTMART & MEAT SHOOT***October 27, 2000***Bluegrass musicians spread pro-life message***By Jennifer Hartmann Review Staff Writer*

"We have not only something to play, but something to say," said Father Edward Richard.

The something to play? Bluegrass music.

The something to say? A message on being pro-life.

Those two themes, mixed in with good humor, a little teasing of one another and a great respect for their religious differences describe the relationship among Father Richard and his music-playing friends, Frank Ray, who belongs to the DeSoto Assembly of God Church, and Rich Orchard, who is a member of the Twin Cities Church of Christ in Festus.

The three are members of the Ozark Bluegrass Boys, a Missouri-based band whose name describes the music they play, which Orchard calls "folk music in high gear."

The three also are in high gear to spread a pro-life message through not only playing bluegrass music for others, including an appearance at the Pro-Life Convention in Downtown St. Louis earlier this month, and making an appearance on WRYT-AM 1080, but also simply through their friendship.

It all began...

Orchard and Ray have known each other for "40-something" years, according to Ray, who is Orchard's nephew.

"We've played music ever since the time" we met, Ray said of himself and his uncle. Recently, the two "were talking and ... he was telling me about this fellow he'd met that plays the banjo like Ralph Stanley, who happens to be a bluegrass icon," Ray said.

That banjo player was Father Richard, a Louisiana native who grew up

listening to bluegrass, country and cajun music. Father Richard moved to St. Louis in his late 20s to attend Kenrick-Glennon Seminary in Shrewsbury. He currently is associate academic dean and an assistant professor of moral theology at the seminary. In addition, he is on the editorial board of the Review.

The three got together toward the beginning of this year and started playing bluegrass music together. After spending time with each other, the three realized that, despite their religious differences, they do have much in common.

We three agree

"There's obviously ... moral issues as Christians we agree upon," Ray said of himself, Father Richard and Orchard. "It was very apparent that we just shared things that we love. ...We love the Lord first and our families and our church, and music is very close behind."

The three agree that they hope their friendship can spread a pro-life message on many different levels.

"I think the first thing is we want to demonstrate (a pro-life message) in our own lives," Father Richard said. "That people of different religious backgrounds can come together as an ecumenical witness for" others. "And that our respect for one another is a position for life."

Abortion, Orchard said, also is something upon which the three agree.

"The abortion issue, it's a murder issue as far as we're concerned," Orchard said. "Even though some doctrinal things we may not totally see eye to eye on, this is one that we do. And anything we can do to get that message across is what we're going to do."

Ray said the only way to get rid of the "obvious moral wrongs in America" is for Christian brothers and sisters of all denominations to unite.

"There apparently are not enough Assembly of God people in that denomination alone to change it, or not enough Catholics to change it alone, or Church of Christ or Baptists," Ray said. "But if we cross those lines, those barriers, and truly join hands and join efforts and unite, then we are the overwhelming majority."

In addition to speaking out against abortion, Ray, who is a deacon at his church, said he has had Father Richard out to speak to his congregation on two occasions.

"I saw an opportunity that Ed could bring some good teaching to the class that I teach, and that was one of my motivations," Ray said. "But I also

wanted to let him know as well as my people that this is the thing I think we need to be doing. He's been real well accepted."

"The first time I went out there, I taught everybody the Hail Mary," Father Richard joked.

Sharing in Father Richard's joke on their religious differences, Ray said, "Yeah, he handed out rosaries at the door."

With a more serious tone, and again reflecting on bringing Father Richard to his church for a visit, Ray said, "We're to be the light of the world, as the Bible says. And I'm just one little bulb on that tree."

Playing together, staying together

Another tie that the three share is work they did, along with the Ozark Bluegrass Boys, on "Do Whatever He Tells You," Father Richard's first CD of bluegrass gospel music that came out last August.

Orchard is featured on the CD playing the guitar and singing lead vocals, Ray on the mandolin and lead, tenor and high baritone vocals and Father Richard on banjo, lead guitar, and lead, baritone and tenor vocals. Five of the songs on "Do Whatever He Tells You" were written by Father Richard, and one was written by Ray.

The 13 tracks are a mixture of vocals and instrumentals, with such titles as "Life's Railway to Heaven," which describes Christ as the conductor on a mountain train to Heaven, "From the Manger to the Cross," a message about Christ and the sacrifice he made to forgive human beings of their sins, and instrumentals, including "Where the Soul Never Dies," "Pass Me Not," and "Hills of Rome."

"It really is true American music," Orchard said of bluegrass music. "They're ... songs about where you live, they're about home and Mom and Dad. Really the bluegrass movement came out of the Depression era."

The three said they hope to produce a CD together with the other members of the Ozark Bluegrass Boys. In addition, they noted that they are available to play at events, including parish picnics.

"Whether we're playing music or eating a piece of homemade apple turnovers or whatever that's what we're discussing, either music or God," Orchard said. "And that's fantastic. And that's going to rub off, I'm telling you. Because other people come around as well, and they're going to get a dose, and it will rub off."

"Do Whatever He Tells You" is available on CD and cassette. Copies can be ordered by calling (314) 792-6451.

For information on performances by Father Richard, Orchard and Ray, call Father Richard at (314) 605-2785 or e-mail him at e-richard@usa.net.

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