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Welcome to Mitford



Drama/Comedy by Robert Inman
Adapted from the Mitford novels by Jan Karon

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Welcome to Mitford

*Drama/Comedy. By Robert Inman.
Adapted from the Mitford novels by Jan Karon.*

Cast: 13m., 8w., 2 either gender. Father Tim Kavanagh is the much-loved bachelor rector of Lord's Chapel church in the close-knit mountain community of Mitford, surrounded by long-time friends and parishioners—church secretary Emma, housekeeper Puny, local mayor Esther, a covey of eccentric regulars at the Main Street Grill, elderly heiress Miss Sadie Baxter, and jokester Uncle Billy and his dotty wife, Miss Rose, who likes to direct traffic wearing a military trench coat and rubber boots. Father Tim's life is absorbed with the life of his town and the pastoring of his lively congregation. But things change radically when Father Tim takes in teenager Dooley Barlow, the unruly orphaned grandson of the church gardener, and again when he falls in love with and weds his new next-door neighbor, Cynthia Coppersmith, who writes and illustrates award-winning children's books. Father Tim and Cynthia struggle with the idea of his possibly retiring from his long career as a parish priest. He neglects his diet and exercise and is injured when he goes into a diabetic coma while driving and wrecks his car. During his recuperation, he battles depression as he agonizes over questions about his worth, his work and his future. Meanwhile, Dooley has grown into a fine young man, and as he heads off to a prestigious college (financed by Miss Sadie), he asks Father Tim and Cynthia to adopt him. Father Tim prays for direction and finds an answer through scripture. In a final sermon, he surrenders himself to God's will and is soon rewarded by his bishop with a new job as part-time minister of a struggling rural church. Hand in hand with Cynthia, he steps confidently into his future. *Area staging.*
Approximate running time: 1 hour, 45 minutes.
Code: WC4.



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WELCOME TO MITFORD

Adapted by
ROBERT INMAN

From the Mitford novels by Jan Karon



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“Originally produced at the Blowing Rock Stage Company,
Kenneth Kay, Producing Artistic Director.”

Jan Karon's Journey to Mitford (later *Welcome to Mitford*) received its world premiere at Blowing Rock Stage Company, Blowing Rock, N.C., on September 5, 2007. It was directed by Kenneth Kay,* original music was by William Harbinson, the set design was by Lyle Baskin, the lighting design was by Rebecca Dail, costumes design by Lisa Tireman, sound design was by Gary Smith, properties were by Jesseca Terhaar and the production stage manager was Lisa Lamont.* The cast was as follows:

Father Tim	Stephen Ware*
Cynthia	Angie Radosh*
Esther, Principal, Mayor	Viki Boyle*
Emma, Velma	Kim Cozort*
Stuart, Townsperson	John Felix*
Younger Dooley	Jonathan Faulks
Woman #2, Townsperson	Diane Haas
Russell, Townsperson	Paul Haas*
Puny	Millicent Hunnicutt
Woman #1, Townsperson	Melanie A. Miller
Sadie, Miss Rose	Harriet Oser*
Uncle Billy	Ed Pilkington*
Older Dooley	Brian Seagroves
Headmaster, Townsperson	Steve Sensenig
J.C., Walter	Gary Lee Smith*
Hoppy, Percy	Tom Wahl*
Mule, Larry	Mark Woodard
Teenagers	Cameron Greene, Jordan Rucker, Dylan Russell, Lyle Sterne

**Denotes membership in Actors' Equity Association.*

WELCOME TO MITFORD

CHARACTERS

FATHER TIM Kavanagh bachelor parish priest in a
small mountain town

CYNTHIA Coppersmith a new next-door neighbor

EMMA Garrett church secretary

DOOLEY Barlowe youngster from a troubled family

OLDER DOOLEY a college student

RUSSELL Jacks Dooley's grandfather,
church custodian

PUNY Bradshaw Father Tim's no-nonsense
housekeeper

ESTHER Cunningham Mitford's mayor

STUART Cullen Father Tim's bishop

WALTER Kavanagh Father Tim's brother

UNCLE BILLY Watson town philosopher
and joke-teller

MISS ROSE. Uncle Billy's eccentric wife

SADIE Baxter. elderly heiress and philanthropist

PERCY Mosley. proprietor of the Main Street Grill

VELMA Percy's wife

MULE Skinner. local realtor

J.C. Hogan newspaper editor

HOPPY Harper community physician

PRINCIPAL at Dooley's elementary school

HEADMASTER. at Dooley's boarding school

LARRY Johnson adult leader of a camping trip

LILA, LEE, ELVIN, LUKE teen campers

TOWNSPEOPLE and PARISHONERS of all ages

ACT ONE

Curtain up.

Music up. An evocation of the village of Mitford—Main Street, the Main Street Grill, church and rectory, Cynthia's house, Fernbank, the hospital. Light up on FATHER TIM as he enters, stops, sniffs the air and smiles.

Music out as FATHER TIM takes a key from his pocket. Suddenly, the sound of a large dog's great, booming voice from offstage.

BARNABAS (O.S.). Woof! Woof, woof, woof! (FATHER TIM recoils.) Woof! Woof!

FATHER TIM. Good grief! Get away! Be gone! (He finally resorts in desperation to scripture.) Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth but that which is good to the use of edifying... (The dog's barking fades into a meek whine.) Good heavens, a dog that responds to scripture. Well, now, I hope you've got that nonsense out of your system.

(The dog starts barking again as EMMA Garrett rushes in, brandishing a pocketbook.)

EMMA. Father Tim! Father Tim! *(She swats in the direction of the dog with her pocketbook and he retreats, yelping.)* And don't come back! *(She hands FATHER TIM a handkerchief, which he uses to wipe his face and glasses.)*

FATHER TIM. Thank you, Emma.

EMMA. That wasn't a dog, that was a Buick! *(She hands FATHER TIM a bundle of envelopes.)* Here's your mail. I'll have your coffee ready in a minute.

FATHER TIM. Blast! Make it a double! *(EMMA exits. FATHER TIM opens one of the letters. He scans it for a moment. To himself.)* Hmm...from Stuart Cullen... wonder what my old friend and bishop has to say.

(Light down on FATHER TIM, up on STUART Cullen, who holds an identical piece of paper, from which he reads:)

STUART. "Dearest Timothy: You ask if I have ever faced such a thing as you are currently facing. My friend, exhaustion and fatigue are the steady companions of a committed priest and there is no way around it. I'm concerned for what might follow if this goes unattended. Keep a journal. Let off some steam. Spend a bit of money on yourself. Pray. You are vitally important to your flock. Hang in there! I cannot exhort you to marry, Timothy, but I will say...

(Light down on STUART, up on FATHER TIM, who sighs, folds the letter and puts it back in the envelope.)

FATHER TIM (*musings*). "...exhort you to marry." Well, sometimes it seems sad to have never married and raised a family of my own. But...being a bachelor leaves far more time for my parish family. And goodness knows, I need it.

(A crowd of PARISHONERS rushes in, surrounding FATHER TIM, all talking at once, some of them shoving pieces of paper at him. He looks overwhelmed and bewildered. We hear snatches of dialogue...)

PARISHONERS. ...flowers for the sanctuary on Sunday... of course you're baking a ham for the wedding reception...must see you for a counseling session...the order of worship...a new joke for your sermon...Father Tim... Father Tim, Father Tim, Father Tim...

(The PARISHIONERS exit as EMMA rushes in.)

EMMA. Father Tim, that dog is back!

BARNABAS (*O.S.*). Woof!

FATHER TIM. I know. He seems to have adopted me.

EMMA. Does he have a name?

FATHER TIM. Not that I know of. I suppose I'll give him one. How about...Barnabas.

BARNABAS (*O.S.*). Woof!

EMMA. Well, keep him out of the church office. It's either him or me.

(EMMA exits as the crowd of PARISHIONERS enters, boiling around FATHER TIM, all talking at once...)

PARISHIONERS. ...Father Tim, Father Tim, Father Tim...

(The PARISHIONERS rush off as Mayor ESTHER Cunningham enters, holding a magazine.)

FATHER TIM. Good morning, Mayor.

ESTHER. Have you seen the article? *(Reading.)* “Mitford is a village delightfully out of step with contemporary America...and while Mitford’s charm and beauty attract visitors like bees to honeysuckle, the town makes a conscious effort to discourage tourism.”

FATHER TIM. I suppose that’s true...

ESTHER. So here we are, trying to discourage tourism, and...

(Light up on MISS ROSE Watson, dressed in a military trench coat decorated with medals, a man’s bashed-in felt hat, and rubber boots. Sound of traffic as MISS ROSE directs.)

ESTHER *(cont’d)*. Rose Watson is directing traffic over by the town monument.

FATHER TIM. Well, I don’t see...

ESTHER. Tourists! They’ll be flocking here from all over to see an old woman in a trench coat directing traffic. I’d like for you to speak to Uncle Billy about it. *(She exits.)*

FATHER TIM. But...why me?

(UNCLE BILLY enters.)

FATHER TIM (*cont'd*). Uncle Billy. Just the man I wanted to see.

UNCLE BILLY. Well, I'll be et fer a tater if it ain't the preacher. Got a new joke for you.

FATHER TIM (*indicating MISS ROSE*). Before you get into that...

UNCLE BILLY. This feller, he wanted to learn to skydive, don't you know. And so he takes all kind of training and one day he has to jump out of this airplane. And out he goes like a ton of bricks and commences to pull the cord and they don't nothin' happen, and starts pullin' on his emergency cord, and they still don't nothin' happen. First thing you know, here comes this other feller, a'shootin' up from the ground, and the feller goin' down says, "Hey, buddy, do you know anything about parachutes?" And the one a'comin' up says, "Nope, do you know anything about gas stoves?"

FATHER TIM. That's a good one, Uncle Billy. But what I wanted to talk to you about... (*He indicates MISS ROSE, still directing traffic.*)

UNCLE BILLY. Sometimes she's good as gold, and those are the times I live for. Other times, she's mean as a snake. But it's her illness.

FATHER TIM. Schizophrenia.

UNCLE BILLY. That's right. We been married forty-three years, and I knowed right off she was sick. But she's all I've got, and I'm thankful.

FATHER TIM. Is there anything we can do to help?

UNCLE BILLY. Well sir, I don't know what it would be. The Baptists tried, the Presbyterians tried, the Methodists did their part. But ain't nothin' worked. Now we're

coming over here to Lord's Chapel, and we like it, except for all the kneelin' and gettin' up and down.

FATHER TIM. You know, you don't have to kneel. You can stand or sit, just as well. Jesus prayed both ways. We Episcopalians can't heal Miss Rose any more than the Methodists or Baptists, but we'll do all we can.

UNCLE BILLY. I thank you, Preacher. *(Exits.)*

FATHER TIM *(gesturing toward MISS ROSE)*. But what about...

(Light down on MISS ROSE, up on the church office. FATHER TIM crosses to it as PUNY Bradshaw enters, pushing a roaring vacuum cleaner, followed closely by EMMA.)

FATHER TIM *(cont'd)*. Emma, what in the world...

EMMA. I've been telling you you need household help.

Well, the vestry has hired Puny Bradshaw.

FATHER TIM. Puny?

PUNY. When I was born I was all sickly and puny-like. I got over it by hard work.

(She exits, pushing the vacuum, followed by EMMA. RUSSELL Jacks enters, carrying a yard rake.)

RUSSELL. Beggin' your pardon, Father, but there's bats in your belfry.

FATHER TIM. Ah, well, Russell...it's been that way since an early age.

RUSSELL. Soon as we get them bats out of there, I'll scrape up the droppings and work 'em in the flowerbeds.

FATHER TIM. Do you have time for a visit before you tackle the bats?

RUSSELL. I've got my little granboy standing outside. He's been staying with me. His mama's poorly and cain't half watch after him. (*Confidentially.*) She lays drunk.

FATHER TIM. I'm sorry.

RUSSELL. She let all her young'uns go, all five. They were snatched up like a bunch of kittens in a box, one give here, another give yonder. The boy's the oldest, been taking care of them little'uns all his life, nearly. It's an awful bad thing for the boy. I told her I'd look after him awhile. Name's Dooley.

FATHER TIM. Dooley, come on in and let's get a look at you.

(DOOLEY Barlowe enters—a tousle-haired barefoot boy in dirty overalls. He stops just onstage and stands there, fidgeting.)

DOOLEY. Ain't this a church place?

FATHER TIM. It's a church office.

DOOLEY. I cain't come in, then. I ain't washed.

FATHER TIM. You don't have to wash to come in.

(DOOLEY crosses to FATHER TIM and RUSSELL, looking about.)

DOOLEY. You got any place in here where I can take a dump?

(FATHER TIM, taken aback, points offstage. DOOLEY exits hurriedly, followed by RUSSELL.)

PUNY enters, pushing the roaring vacuum cleaner. She holds a ragged pair of boxer shorts.)

PUNY. Father, your underwear looks like it's been in a catfight. How in the world do you preach a sermon in these things? *(FATHER TIM is speechless.)* Don't mind me. My granpaw was a preacher and I waited on him hand and foot for years. Next time I'm at Wal-Mart, I'll get you a dozen pairs, 'cause I'm going to use these for cleaning rags.

(As she exits, a crowd enters, chattering excitedly—EMMA, SADIE Baxter, ESTHER and UNCLE BILLY, who carries a large painting wrapped in brown paper.)

UNCLE BILLY. Look here, Preacher. Miss Sadie wants to give this piece of art to the church.

SADIE. I was up in the attic, looking for an old picture of Papa, the one with his handlebar moustache, when I came across this painting of the Blessed Virgin and the baby Jesus that Papa brought back from Europe. Everybody close your eyes. *(They all close their eyes while SADIE rips the paper off.)* Now!

ALL *(open their eyes)*. Whooooo!

FATHER TIM. This is quite beautiful!

(They all examine it closely.)

SADIE. You know, I've never thought about it before, but this looks mighty like a Vermeer to me.

ALL. Whooooo!

FATHER TIM (*thoughtfully*). I read somewhere that there's only thirty-five Vermeers in the world.

UNCLE BILLY. Well, I'll be et fer a tater.

FATHER TIM. We'll have to get an appraisal.

(Music up. SADIE, EMMA, ESTHER and UNCLE BILLY rush off with the painting, chattering excitedly.)

(Light up on the Grill. Newspaper editor J.C. Hogan and MULE Skinner sit at a table. PERCY Moseley hovers over the table with a coffeepot, filling mugs as FATHER TIM approaches and sits. Music out.)

PERCY. Boys, howdy, I got to do something...

FATHER TIM. About what, Percy?

PERCY. Business. It's fell way off.

MULE. Maybe you ought to mess around with the menu, and come up with a special you could run the same day every week.

PERCY. Like what?

MULE. Gizzards. I've told you for years that gizzards is the answer to lining your pockets.

J.C. He's right. You can sell gizzards in this town. This is a gizzard kind of town.

(VELMA Moseley enters, order pad in hand.)

VELMA. I see the Turkey Club has convened. Do you turkeys eat gizzards?

J.C. Not in this lifetime.

MULE. No way.

FATHER TIM. I pass. I ate a gizzard in first grade, and that was enough for me. I'll take two poached eggs and toast.

J.C. Two eggs over light, ham, double order of hash browns.

MULE. Let me think about it.

(VELMA gives MULE a look of disgust and stomps away.)

PERCY. Maybe I could do gizzards with some of Velma's special dipping sauce.

MULE *(skeptical)*. Maybe not.

J.C. You need to advertise.

PERCY. Maybe...a banner to hang over my awning.

FATHER TIM. What do you want the banner to say?

PERCY. Dern if I know. Some catchy phrase, I guess.

MULE. I got one. "This is the best place to eat in town."

J.C. This is the *only* place to eat in town.

MULE. Scratch that.

J.C. All right, let me think about it.

PERCY. I got to jump in here and start cooking. Mule, you're having what the Father is having.

MULE. I usually do.

(PERCY exits.)

J.C. *(to FATHER TIM)*. I guess you're celebrating, huh?

FATHER TIM. What do you mean, celebrating?

J.C. All that money you'll be getting down at the chapel.

FATHER TIM. What money is that?

MULE. Word's out you've got a painting over there worth two hundred thousand dollars.

FATHER TIM. Good grief!

MULE. A Vaneer.

J.C. (*taking pad and pencil from a pocket*). It's gonna be the lead story in the paper this week. I need a quote.

FATHER TIM. You can quote me as saying it's absolutely untrue. Someone donated a nice painting, but we haven't even had it appraised.

MULE. Oh, and the word's also out that you've got a new neighbor coming in next door.

FATHER TIM. Terrific. What does he do?

MULE. It's a she, and she's an artist and a writer. Blonde, blue eyes, real nice legs.

FATHER TIM. Aha.

(Stage dark. Music up. Light up on FATHER TIM, standing near a hedge, leash in hand. Music under as he calls offstage...)

FATHER TIM (*cont'd*). Barnabas, time to step outside, buddy.

BARNABAS (*O.S.*). Woof!

FATHER TIM. All right, without the leash this time, but stay in your own yard. The hedge and no farther.

BARNABAS (*O.S.*). Woof! Woof! Woof! Woof!

(Sound of VIOLET, a terrified cat.)

VIOLET (*O.S.*). Woooowwrrrrr!