

Sergeants Who Prayed Found Guilty by Court

By Martin Mawyer
Religion Today

Bossier City, La. — A military court has found two Air Force sergeants guilty of demonstrating unlawfully when they participated in prayer services outside an abortion clinic here.

The two staff sergeants, Phillip Byrd and David Burton, were extremely surprised at their convictions, having entered the four-day trial with high expectations of being acquitted.

During the last eight months, both men regularly participated in prayer services at a vacant public field outside the Bossier City Abortion Clinic. The Air Force contended that praying in uniform at the clinic is unlawful. An unusual court battle ensued, with the man bringing the charge picking his own judge and jury.

The sergeants belong to a local congregation, the Merrywoods Baptist Church. Its pastor, Bill Burrows, began holding prayer services when the clinic opened last spring.

Burrows explained, "We believe abortion is murder and God has ordered us to go to the very place where sin is being committed and denounce that sin."

The services were held

during the noon hour every day and Byrd and Burton used their lunch hours to pray with fellow church members.

Both are stationed at Barksdale Air Force Base, approximately a 10-minute drive away. The prayers would last about 20 minutes. Due to this tight schedule, the men felt it was impossible to change clothes, and went to the services while in uniform.

It is unlawful to demonstrate while in uniform, but neither man felt praying to be a "demonstration."

Under pressure from the abortion clinic, the sergeants' wing commander advised them to wear a shirt over their uniforms while praying. The sergeants obeyed, but the abortion clinic personnel, unhappy with this compromise, retaliated by having a female employee snap pictures of the men attempting to cover their uniforms.

Since it also is against military regulations to cover a uniform with civilian clothes, the base commander, Col. Guy Luke, ordered the men to stop praying unless they got out of uniform.

They repeated their argument to their immediate superiors that time spent

changing clothes would prevent them from having sufficient time to pray and return. Regardless of their rationale, the sergeants were commanded to cease.

The men refused to cease, however, claiming they must obey God rather than man. The military then brought special court martial charges against the sergeants, claiming their actions are a shame and disgrace to the Air Force.

The sergeants were represented by military counsel but relied very heavily upon civilian attorneys from the Christian Law Association (CLA) of Cleveland.

The CLA attorneys were prepared to argue that praying is not an act of demonstrating. The attorneys also were going to argue that the sergeants have inalienable rights to the free exercise of religion as guaranteed by the Constitution, and these rights suddenly did not become alienable when joining the service.

The lawyers also were prepared to argue before the court that since the men are allowed to pray in uniform against abortion clinics while in a church, they therefore also are able to pray while in uniform in a vacant public field.

But such preparations were unnecessary because the military court would not allow the arguments to be presented.

The manner in which this case was carried out shocked the CLA attorneys. To start, the base commander who initiated the prosecution of the sergeants also selected the judge and jury to hear the case. The judge subsequently told CLA attorneys they could not argue the sergeants' religious rights or, for that matter, any constitutional rights. And the judge forbade the CLA attorneys to introduce expert witnesses. The case will be appealed, also to a military court.

Parish Girl Scouts Awarded Medals

All six troops of Girl Scouts at St. Pius X participated in the Religious Recognition Programs designed for girls enrolled in Girl Scouts. On March 15, Father Gerald Conner, pastor of St. Pius X, awarded 94 girls the medals they have earned in their age groups.

Ave Maria Medals were given to: Jennifer Aman, Kristen Bieck, Nancy Chevalier, Danielle Dell'Anno, Christine Deutsch, Julie Goodman, Jill Josinski, Ann Kolozvary, Jody Ann Mastrodonato, Marcie Meagher, Kerry Monfalcone, Amy Reiter, Becky Steimer, Shanda Turmelle;

Janet Baly, Katie Byrne, Andre Carosa, Jenny Coffey, Leigh Donovan, Margaret Fallon, Stacey Hopkins, Teresa Iacovangelo, Katie Kluber, Janet Lafferty, Kelley Marron, Molly Meagher, Becky Meintel, Jill McCarthy, Cheryl Bartridge, Kelly O'Shea, Terry O'Shea, Laura Rizzo, Beth Sigmund, Michele Townsend, and Julie White.

I Live My Faith Medals were given to: Nancy Ariola, Michelle Barrett, Tiffany Bieck, Deborah Bolam, Amy Byrne, Jeane Englert, Teresa Lingeman, Melissa Mau, Kathy Mignano, Kathy Turmelle, Kathleen Urquhart, Doreen Youngblood;

Louise Arlotta, Bonnie Cassidy, Peggy Cummings, Theresa Daniel, Laura Daniels, Jennifer Deutsch, Linda Devaney, Christie Enright, Patti Enright, Natalie Fien, Joanne Graff, Kathleen Klim, Julie Kolb, Sheri Murtaugh, Coco O'Donnell, Debbie Townsend, and Kris Turmelle.

Marian Medals were given to: Mary Barrett, Molly

Byrne, Kate Claffie, Eileen Coffey, Carla Corcoran, Susan Devaney, Connie Duggan, Laura Englert, Michelle Erwin, Lyn Fien, Carol Gusherowski, Julie Irvine, Carolyn Pikuot, Colleen Quinn, Lori Stutch, Donna Suplizio, Mary Beth Urquhart, Theresa Voellinger; Mary K. Burke, Dianne Casey, Mary K. Drexel, Carrie Dunning, Ann Marie Fallon, Suzy Kykendall, Lori Lapp, Mary Lingeman, Marilyn Maher, Colleen McHugh, Clare Sheehan, and Marie Youngblood.

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Health Care Chaplains

"The American Hospital Association recognizes that chaplaincy programs are a necessary part of the hospital's provision for total patient care, and that qualified chaplains and adequate facilities, as well as the support of administration and medical staff are essential in carrying out an effective ministry for patients." (Statement on Hospital Chaplaincy, approved by the American Hospital Association, May 8-10, 1967.)

At present the diocese has full-time chaplains serving in 15 health care facilities of the diocese. There are approximately 25 priests and sisters ministering to the patients, families and staffs of these hospitals.

The hospital chaplain is a person approved by the proper ecclesiastical authority and appointed with the acceptance and approval of the governing

body of the hospital, to minister to the religious needs of persons in the setting in which he or she serves.

Although the primary concern of the chaplain is ministering to the patients, he/she also serves their families, the hospital staffs and the community.

The chaplain should possess a particular understanding of the relation between faith and illness, and be able to motivate and invite healthy, meaningful use of each individual's religious beliefs and attitudes in the management of the person's illness.

During the summer of 1980 a number of health care chaplains assisted the Permanent Diaconate Program of the diocese by supervising candidates and their wives in a 10-week program of hospital ministry. This program exposed them to the various

kinds of ministries in the health care field.

At present we have two full-time sisters serving as chaplains in two non-sectarian hospitals. The future, it is hoped, will bring more sisters into the ministry.

The Diocesan Association of Health Care Chaplains is made up of the priests and sisters presently serving in the health care facilities of the diocese.

The purpose of this association is to unify and strengthen the pastoral ministry of the Church on behalf of the staff, patients and families of health care institutions within the diocese of Rochester. It promotes the continued professional development of its members and has the primary responsibility on behalf of the bishop to examine the needs of health care institutions and foster appropriate response on the part of the Church.

In cooperation with appropriate personnel boards, it aids in the recruitment and training of persons for the ministry and, in cooperation with the boards and the institutions, brings candidates' names to the bishop for his appointment.

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