

Curran controversy continues; right of dissent questioned

from NC News and local reports
In the wake of a statement by Bishop Matthew H. Clark upholding Father Charles Curran's right to theological dissent, Father Curran continued to gather support from parishioners and pastoral ministers in his home diocese of Rochester this week.

Other Catholic voices in the diocese and across the U.S., however, praised the Vatican action and denied that a theologian has a right to dissent from church teachings.

A moral theologian and faculty member at Catholic University in Washington, Father Curran has been ordered by the Vatican's Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to either stop teaching Catholic doctrine or to retract his views on contraception and sterilization, abortion and euthanasia, masturbation, premarital intercourse and homosexual acts, and the indissolubility of sacramental and consummated marriage.

Father Curran argues that he does not disagree with any dogmas or defined truths of the Church and said his basic position is that it is "legitimate for a Roman Catholic to dissent in theory and in practice from non-infallible church teaching."

"My positions are neither rebellious nor radical," he said. "My theological positions represent the mainstream of Catholic theology."

During weekend Masses, several diocesan parishes offered parishioners copies of the statement Bishop Clark released last week, along with a draft of a letter of concern and a petition deploring action taken against Father Curran.

At Transfiguration Parish in Pittsford, close to 200 people signed the petition last weekend. More than 200 signatures were collected at Corpus Christi Church and St. Paul's churches respectively. About one-quarter of those attending Mass at St.

Mary's, downtown Rochester expressed similar support, according to Father James Lawlor, pastor.

"We had no negative feedback whatsoever," said Father Lawlor, a former student of Father Curran's. "I was very pleased at the level of maturity of people. They were able to be objective about it."

"I think people saw that this was not just a bunch of crazy people flying off the handle," he added. "We were talking about the importance of being aware of the issue."

Clergy, religious and lay persons in the diocese who support the right of theological dissent, have also organized the Friends of Father Curran to oppose the Vatican's ultimatum and campaign for a compromise.

"We've had a lot of enthusiastic responses coming in (by mail)," said Rebecca Gifford, a coordinator of the group. "I think it's the first time people in parishes have seen this as their issue, not just as an issue for the hierarchy."

One response which disappointed Father Curran's supporters came from Bishop James W. Malone of Youngstown, Ohio, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. Bishop Malone issued a statement Friday, March 14, endorsing the Vatican's efforts to discipline Father Curran.

Someone who "does not accept the teaching of the church's magisterium on crucial points cannot reasonably expect to occupy a position which requires that he teach what the church teaches," said Bishop Malone.

He added that the Vatican has "the right and duty" to "safeguard the authenticity of Catholic teaching throughout the world."

But Bishop Malone added that he hoped Father Curran's interests would be considered in any resolution of the controversy.

"He certainly didn't close the door completely," Gifford said. "He didn't say he



Speaking at a Washington press conference last week, Father Charles E. Curran, professor of moral theology at the Catholic University of America, rejected a Vatican order to retract his views. He may lose his right to teach Catholic doctrine as a result. Photo by NC News Service.

would not support a compromise."

One compromise — that Father Curran retain his tenured professorship at the university but agree not to teach any courses in sexual ethics — has already been rejected by the Vatican, according to Father Curran.

But the Vatican should be open to reconsidering that option, according to Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago, chairman of Catholic University's board of trustees.

While saying the compromise might represent "a glimmer of hope" for a satisfactory outcome, Father Curran said he nonetheless is prepared to file a civil suit to protect his teaching contract.

The Friends of Father Curran, meanwhile, plan to continue efforts to at least raise the issue in parishes around the diocese.

"Our basic aim is to respond to staff

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Demonstrators demand ban on U.S. nuclear testing

By Peter Iglinski

The Seneca Army Depot in Romulus was the focal point of a demonstration Saturday, March 15, but the message was intended for President Ronald Reagan.

The rally was an attempt to convince President Reagan to begin a nuclear test ban, according to organizer Jack Gilroy. Since last August, the United States has conducted seven nuclear tests, he said, while the Soviet Union has continued a test moratorium established on August 6.

Organizers chose the Seneca Army Depot because it is reputed to be the largest nuclear arsenal in the country. The government refuses to confirm or deny the presence of nuclear weapons at any site.

"We no longer have an option between non-violence and violence," said Father Richard McSorley, S.J., the rally's principal speaker. "The real option is non-violence or non-existence."

Never before have so many people around the world marched, been arrested and voluntarily imprisoned as witnesses to peace, he said.

Father McSorley, director of Peace Studies at Georgetown University, applied the lessons of three 20th century leaders —

Albert Einstein, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. — to the arms race.

Quoting Einstein, McSorley said: "We must never relax our efforts to arouse the people of the world, and especially their governments, to an awareness of the unprecedented disaster that they are absolutely certain to bring on themselves unless they change their attitudes towards each other. With the release of energy from the atom, everything has changed in our world except our way of thinking. And because our way of thinking has not changed, we drift towards unparalleled disaster."

Gandhi taught that seeking truth is the purpose of life, and that God is both truth and the author of life, McSorley said. Therefore, wherever we take life or prepare to take life, we also destroy some of the truth we are seeking.

He also drew upon the teachings of King, with whom he had marched. "We must organize peace with as much effort as we have organized civil rights, and as others organized for war."

About a hundred people participated in the rally, organized by the Broome County Nuclear Weapons Reduction Campaign and the Binghamton chapter of Pax Christi.

Demonstrators gathered at the depot's main gate during the morning. One Binghamton-area activist was detained by security when he attempted to walk through the gate. No charges were brought against him.

Demonstrators left the depot early in the afternoon for music and more speeches at nearby Sampson State Park. There they also released helium-filled balloons with notes attached to them.

Some participants were disappointed with the turnout. But J. Christopher Grannis, justice and peace director for the Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry, said the rally attracted many people who had never before been to the depot or an anti-nuclear rally.

The rally was organized at the last minute, Grannis said, and Finger Lakes-area groups were not notified beforehand. Given those considerations, he credited Gilroy with doing a "very good job" in almost single-handedly putting the rally together.

Diane Sampson of Irondequoit was also favorably impressed. A brand new activist, Sampson said she would have been happy if only two people showed up, so long as she had someone with whom to share her feelings.

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