

National/International Report



Ronald W. Thomas/NC News

CAPITOL CROSSES — Carrying wooden crosses with names of people killed in Central America, religious leaders stand on the steps of the U.S. Capitol during a Holy Week "Witness for Justice and Peace in Central America." About 500 people participated in the prayer service, the seventh in a series held each Wednesday during Lent on the steps. Following the vigil, 15 participants were arrested while praying and singing inside the Capitol.

Lenten protest draws 500 to capitol

Speakers liken Passion to suffering experienced by Central Americans

By Laurie Hansen

Washington (NC) — About 500 protesters who gathered on the steps of the U.S. Capitol April 15 were told that like Jesus, the poor of Central America are condemned to die as a result of the politics of the powerful.

Bishop Walter F. Sullivan of Richmond and Auxiliary Bishop P. Francis Murphy of Baltimore joined in the vigil, which was the seventh in a series of Lenten prayer services held at the Capitol each Wednesday since Ash Wednesday.

After the vigil, 15 participants demonstrated in the rotunda of the Capitol building and were arrested. As they were taken away by police, supporters sang the Lenten hymn "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?"

The protest was organized as the Lenten Witness for Justice and Peace in Central America by church leaders of different denominations.

During an opening prayer, Bishop Murphy compared Christ's suffering to the pain experienced by the Central American poor.

"In El Salvador and Guatemala, governing elites maintain control through military force and vicious death squads. In Nicaragua, rebels work to overthrow the government by force and terror," Bishop Murphy said, adding that the poor suffer because the United States supplies weapons, money and technical assistance — "here to governments, there to rebels."

"Like Jesus, the simple people are condemned to violent deaths for the political

purposes of the powerful and the power hungry," he said.

Holding white crosses bearing the names of Central American war victims, the protesters sang and prayed aloud while Washington tourists snapped photos. Government employees stepped around the crowd to go about their business.

Church leaders of various denominations read reflections on each of the 14 stations of the cross.

Each station was illustrated by a painting held high above the crowd. One depicting Jesus nailed to the cross showed a Christ figure whose face was hidden beneath a sombrero.

In an introduction at the vigil, Bishop Sullivan said the group had gathered to "accompany Jesus on the Way of the Cross" and to "acknowledge and grieve the sufferings Jesus now knows in his sisters and brothers in Central America.

"We will sorrowfully admit to the role our country plays in afflicting these sufferings," he said,

Noting that April 15, the day of the protest, is the deadline for mailing in federal income tax payments, Bishop Sullivan said Americans must "recall with sorrow that our tax money pays for much of the violence in Central America."

Also participating in the service were Thomas Quigley, Latin American affairs adviser at the U.S. Catholic Conference; Notre Dame Sister Patricia Gallahue, associate director of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious; Franciscan Father Roland Faley, executive director of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men; and Jesuit Father Walter Farrell, president of the Jesuit Conference.

Seattle chancellor slams story on 'retirement' for archbishop

Seattle (NC) — The chancellor of the Archdiocese of Seattle has denied a National Catholic Register story that the Vatican hopes to solve the ongoing controversy surrounding Archbishop Raymond G. Hunthausen of Seattle by eventually retiring the archbishop. The chancellor, Father Michael G. Ryan called the story "speculative" and "incorrect."

In an April 15 letter, Father Ryan told priests of the archdiocese to disregard the story. He said the information in the article "was apparently leaked ... by an uninformed and irresponsible party."

Francis X. Maier, editor of the Register, which published the article in its April 19 issue, said the story was "correct" and that the newspaper would not have published the article unless it was "absolutely certain" of the facts.

The story in the Los Angeles-based Register said that "according to highly placed sources" the Vatican hopes to "diffuse tensions" in the Seattle Archdiocese by promoting Auxiliary Bishop Donald Wuerl to his own diocese "and eventually retiring Hunthausen."

The Vatican last year instructed Archbishop Hunthausen to hand over authority in several key areas of archdiocesan life to Bishop Wuerl. As a result of widespread controversy provoked by the action, in February the Vatican appointed a commission of three leading U.S. archbishops "to assess the current situation" in the

Seattle Archdiocese.

The Register article said the "unusual, phased-in resolution to the continuing crisis" in the archdiocese "may bring a measure of peace" before Pope John Paul II visits the United States in September.

In his letter to priests Father Ryan said the "gist" of the article was that the Vatican has "formulated some sort of 'deal' in an attempt to force Archbishop Hunthausen into accepting early retirement."

He said it is "common knowledge" that Archbishop Hunthausen has had "very recent discussions" with the commission. "I can assure you that the archbishop has not been asked to retire or resign, nor are any 'deals' being made in that direction," Father Ryan said.

Archbishop Hunthausen, 65, would not normally retire until he reaches his 75th birthday in 1996. All bishops must submit their resignations at age 75, unless they have retired earlier for health or other reasons.

Mercy Sister Joy Clough, a spokeswoman for Chicago's Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, a member of the Vatican commission, said Cardinal Bernardin had no comment on the article.

She said that when the commission was appointed, members "agreed and announced publicly that they would not be making public comments on their own."

Other commission members are Cardinal John O'Connor of New York and Archbishop John Quinn of San Francisco.

Left gives Church unexpected aid in battle with Mexican government

By Mike Tangeman

Mexico City (NC) — The Mexican Catholic Church is receiving unexpected support in its decades-old battle with the government.

Traditionally, naller leftist parties lined up behind the governing Revolutionary Institutional Party in supporting constitutional measures that prohibit clergy from owning property, operating primary or secondary schools, voting or criticizing the government.

However, two of the country's leftist political parties have broken ranks with the governing party and are supporting the right of Catholic priests, nuns and bishops to vote in elections.

The new development is seen as part of a struggle by the left for greater democracy in Mexico, where the ruling party has been charged in recent years with widespread electoral fraud.

Leaders of the newly formed Mexican Socialist Party and the Revolutionary Workers Party have publicly favored allowing clergy to vote. They still maintain their positions against granting legal recognition to or allowing political activism by the Church as an institution.

The Mexican Socialist Party stance was outlined in a recently released document titled "Now, and Out in the Open: A New Relationship Between Church and State."

The document was written by party leader Gilberto Rincon Gallardo.

Rincon's views are significant because he is the most likely to win the top post in the party and because he consistently held the same position regarding the Church while a leader of the Mexican Unified Socialist Party and the earlier Mexican Communist Party.

When an ecumenical group asked Christians to vote for the Mexican Unified Socialist Party in 1982, the reaction of Cardinal Ernesto Corripio Ahumada of Mexico City was typical. "It is not possible to be a Christian and to be a Marxist," he said at the time.

The Mexican Church's overall reputation for conservatism goes back to the days of Spanish colonial domination, according to Martin de la Rosa, Church scholar and co-editor of the book "Religions and Politics in Mexico."

Because of the hierarchy's support of Spain during Mexico's War of Independence of 1810-1821, there was "constant church-state conflict throughout the 19th century," said de la Rosa.

Anti-clerical feelings again surfaced during the 1910-1917 revolution, because the Church held a privileged socio-economic position during the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz. The revolutionary leaders, said de la Rosa, took their reprisals by writing anti-church measures into the 1917 constitution.



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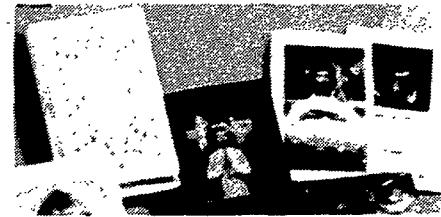
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