Local News

Activist bishop to offer forum linking peace, economics

Detroit Auxiliary Bishop Thomas J. Gumbleton, one of two bishops arrested in Nevada last spring during a protest against nuclear-weapons testing, will visit Elmira College next week as the featured speaker at a conference on economic justice.

Why should a peace activist address a group interested in economic issues?

Because the goal of the day-long conference on Saturday, Dec. 12, is to clarify the connection between peace and economic justice, according to Anthony Barbaro, an organizer of the event and executive director of the Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry. "In (Bishop Gumbleton's) address, he'll be linking the two pastorals, showing how the defense buildup affects jobs and how it has an impact on developing an economy that's more just for all," Barbaro said.

On May 5, 1987, Bishop Gumbleton, along with retired Bishop Charles Buswell of Pueblo, Colo., led nearly 100 demonstrators in an act of civil disobedience at the Nevada Test Site. The demonstrators were rounded up and cited for criminal trespass, but charges were later dropped.

Only one other U.S. Catholic bishop, New York Auxiliary Bishop Emerson Moore, has ever been arrested under similar circumstances. Bishop Moore's arrest occurred during a demonstration against South African apartheid.

Although Bishop Gumbleton's action lacked many precedents, it was not out of character. Since being appointed auxiliary in the Archdiocese of Detroit during the late 1960s, he has established an international reputation as a peace activist.

An outspoken critic of the Vietnam War, he traveled to that country in 1973 to investigate the treatment of political prisoners. Six years later, as a representative of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, he visited Americans held hostage in Iran.

The president of Pax Christi-USA, a national Catholic peace movement, Bishop Gumbleton was a member of the committee of bishops who in 1983 drafted the "Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response." He is also

Bishop Thomas J. Gumbleton

among the bishops currently writing an NCCB statement on deterrence.

Last December, Bishop Gumbleton traveled to Nicaragua, where he met with church representatives working with that country's poor. He also acts as spokesman for Quest for Peace and Witness for Peace, two organizations dedicated to bringing peace to Nicaragua.

A native of Detroit, Bishop Gumbleton was born in 1930 and educated at the city's Sacred Heart Seminary, from which he earned a bachelor's degree in 1952. Four years later, he graduated from St. John's Provincial Seminary in Plymouth, Mich., and was ordained to priesthood.

In 1964, he earned a doctorate in canon law from the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome. The following year he was appointed as vice chancellor of the Detroit archdiocese — a post he held until he was ordained a bishop three years later.

As auxiliary of the Archdiocese of Detroit, Bishop Gumbleton serves the parishes of the Centercity Region — an area that, like Elmira, has faced an army of economic woes in recent years.

Several years ago, while visiting nearby Johnson City, N.Y., Bishop Gumbleton was invited by officials from the Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry to stop in Elmira for an extra night. The bishop initially agreed, but then was unable to stay. After several attempts to schedule a subsequent visit, the bishop and local organizers fixed on December 12.

Bishop Gumbleton's visit to Elmira is part of a series of four workshops sponsored by the Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry to focus on the U.S. bishops' economics pastoral.

During the convocation's morning session, which begins at 10:30 a.m., Bishop Gumbleton will deliver a homily on the theme "To know God is to know where God is not." At 1 p.m., the bishop will present his main address entitled, "Whatever is done for the truth will make a difference." Following his talk, the convocation will offer six workshops on aspects of peace and economic justice, ranging from "Creative Arts and Peace Work" to "Star Wars."

The Southern-Tier series will continue in February with a workshop on spirituality and mysticism presented by Sister Judith Reger.

To register for next weekend's conference or to find out more about upcoming sessions, contact the Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry, (607) 734-5893. Monday, Dec. 7, is the deadline to register for the December 12 event.