

Local News

Protestors provide reminder: nuclear war will end in ashes

By Lee Strong

Under a cold, grey sky on Ash Wednesday, 18 shivering people huddled together before the Federal Building on State Street in Rochester. Several of them clutched signs protesting nuclear weapons and the arms race.

Passers-by and workers leaving the building for the day looked at them curiously, glanced at the signs, then hurried on. Most of them seemed to have seen protesters there before. On the other hand, several of the protesters — some of whom had never protested before — nervously returned the looks of the passers-by.

The protesters, 16 Nazareth College students and two of the school's professors, had gathered at the Federal Building for an unusual Ash Wednesday service that combined the distribution of ashes with a protest of the nuclear arms race.

"The theme for the service is repentance for the arms race," explained Harry Murray, assistant professor of sociology at the college and one of the protest's organizers. "Lent is a time for repentance, and the greatest sin we have to repent for is the arms race."

The service was part of Nuclear Awareness Week at Nazareth College. Sponsored by the Social Justice Committee of Campus Ministry, the week consisted of lectures, a slide show about the Nevada Test Site protests, and such movies as *War Games*, *Dr. Strangelove* and *Gods of Metal*.

According to Joe Polsinelli, the committee's student coordinator, the week was intended "to let people know there is a problem with nuclear war." The week was designed around the Campus Ministry theme for the year, "Awareness, Education and Action." The protest served as the action portion of the triad, he explained.

The service included songs, prayers, reflections and readings from the Bible; Dorothy Day's reflection on the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; and the section on penance from the U.S. Catholic bishops' 1983 pastoral letter *The Challenge of Peace*. The service culminated with the distribution of ashes.

The committee chose Ash Wednesday for the protest because of the theme of repentance symbolized by the ashes, Murray said. "Today, especially, ashes are a sign of repentance — not only for our own sins, but for all nations."

Prime among these sins is the possession of nuclear weapons, which Murray said "violate Jesus' command to love and the Church's teachings about just war." He called nuclear weapons a modern Tower of Babel, a human attempt to achieve the power of God. In addition, he said, nuclear weapons are sinful because they encourage the use of violence to resolve problems, divert money that could otherwise be given to the poor, have caused the deaths of thousands at Hiroshima and Nagasaki and — as a result of testing — "are a direct repudiation of God's command to trust in the power of God, not our weapons, for our defense."

Sister Marion Hocht, SSJ, a member of the college's English department, participated in the protest because she believes the nuclear issue "is important and needs to be kept in people's minds." She called nuclear war "the ultimate blasphemy," adding that "It's so easy to think of nuclear war as a game and to forget we're dealing with human beings."

Sister Hocht noted that the ashes used in the service had a double significance. "Literally, when you look at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, ashes are what was left of the peo-

ple," she pointed out. Secondly, "on Ash Wednesday, Christians look at the notion that we are dust, and when we die we will return to dust. There's a way that it's a part of the natural order, but there's a way — as in nuclear war — that it's criminal."

Several of the student participants acknowledged that they were inspired to protest because of the Nuclear Awareness Week. John Sullivan, a senior, said that not only was this the first protest in which he'd participated, but that he'd never thought about doing it before. "I was motivated to come by the movies and (talks) at Nazareth," he said.

The Ash Wednesday protest was also the first for senior Bill Mulherin. "I've been aware of the no-nukes movement for a while, but I've never done anything before," he said. He decided to protest because he feels the issue is an important one. "I wouldn't just stand in the cold for nothing," he added.

On the other hand, Steve Corryn, had participated in other protests. Yet he agreed that the Nuclear Awareness Week had helped to raise consciousness about the issue at Nazareth.

"The lectures and films made people aware of the dangers of nuclear arms," Corryn said. "I've seen people getting involved I didn't think would be aware."

Corryn's own reason for protesting was simple. "I don't want to have people reduced to ashes," he said.

Murray said he was surprised at the number of people who had turned out for the protest. He had expected only two or three, and was pleased by the number of people who had never been involved before. Even if only a few people had participated, however, Murray would have gone ahead with the protest. "The numbers don't matter, it's the spirit that counts," he explained. "The spirit (at the service and at Nazareth) is strong."

Murray credited the Nuclear Awareness Week — and the Social Justice Committee's efforts throughout the year — for helping to increase student interest in action on a variety of social issues. During the fall semester, for example, the committee focused on the homeless situation in Rochester, and one of the activities offered was serving a meal at one of the local soup kitchens. "I still have a backlog of people who are waiting for me to take them to serve," he said.

As for the nuclear issue, Murray noted that many students have expressed interest in participating in the Nevada Test Site protests. "There are a goodly number of students at Nazareth who are interested in getting involved and who are looking for ways to show (nuclear weapons) are not acceptable," he concluded.



Nazareth College student Steve Corryn (left) receives ashes from Professor Harry Murray at an Ash Wednesday observance and protest in front of the Federal Building.

Diocesan Appointments



Bishop Matthew H. Clark has announced the following appointments:

Father John B. Barrett, CPM, returning from temporary parochial vicar of St. Joseph's Church, Penfield, to the Fathers of Mercy, Cold Spring, N.Y., effective February 12.

Father Casimir Muszynski from temporary assistance at St. Francis DeSales Church, Geneva, to temporary parochial vicar at St. Charles Borromeo, Greece, effective February 16.

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