

World & Nation

Barricaded nuns challenged by superiors

Morristown, N.J. (NC) — Discalced Carmelite nuns who locked themselves in the infirmary of their monastery said they were protesting modernizing trends in the community, but Carmelite superiors and the local diocesan authorities said the issues were authentic Carmelite spirituality and religious obedience.

The dissident nuns asked Pope John Paul II to resolve the dispute. Church authorities said that the Vatican approved the moves taken by the local bishop, Bishop Frank J. Rodimer of Paterson, to end longstanding internal divisions in the monastery.

Four cloistered nuns — Sisters John of the Cross, Teresita, Maria and Bernadette — locked themselves in the infirmary of the Monastery of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel October 4.

Their protest made headlines after they told reporters they were afraid of being evicted from the monastery because they objected to their superior introducing newspapers, television, videotape movies, music, socializing and what they consider excessive sweets into the austere lifestyle of the 13-member community.

The four, who range in age from 28 to 45, also said that their superior for the past 14 months, Mother Theresa Hewitt, was brought in illegally by Bishop Rodimer, bypassing the Carmelites' procedures for electing a new superior.

The group was joined October 5 by Sister Philomena, a former superior of the monastery, who is in her 70s. Sister Philomena was ending a stay in a hospital when the protest action began.

Mother Hewitt said media portrayals of the protest as a liberal-conservative dispute were based on a misunderstanding.

"It is not a matter of conservative versus liberal; it is a matter of obedience versus disobedience," she told *The Beacon*, newspaper of the Paterson Diocese.

"And it's a misunderstanding of what the charism of St. Teresa (of Avila, foundress of the Carmelites) is all about and of Vatican II," the prioress added.

Mother Hewitt, who is 72, has been a Carmelite nun since 1948. She said she was brought in by Bishop Rodimer in August 1987 specifically to heal the division within the monastery. "My idea at the time was to blend the two groups," she said.

When that failed, according to Paterson diocesan spokesman Tim Manning, the four protesting nuns agreed informally last July to move to other monasteries. He said that since then the diocese had been helping them find places where they could live peacefully.

In September their agreement to move was formalized, and they were supposed to move by September 25, he said. He said they locked themselves in the infirmary when several representatives of the diocese went to the monastery to discuss their departure.

"The sisters are not being evicted," he stressed.

In a written statement issued October 6, Manning described the "unfortunate situation" in the monastery as "an internal problem caused by a difference of philosophy about contemplative religious life and personality differences."

In a telephone interview October 10 he said that the previous prioress, Mother Marie Terese, who last year completed a second



Sister Eliane of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary of Mt. Carmel monastery in Morristown, N.J., tells reporters why five nuns have barricaded themselves inside.

term of office and was not eligible to be elected again, had "a unique interpretation of some of the rules" of Carmelite life.

Carmelite spirituality involves a "blending" of community life and solitude, he said, but she had placed an undue emphasis "on the hermit aspect," restricting community life in the monastery.

He said Mother Hewitt had been part of a team of three experts in Carmelite life who visited the monastery in June 1987, at Bishop Rodimer's request and with Vatican approval, to study the situation and recommend a resolution.

He said the dissident nuns' complaints of "socializing" referred to a restoration of a balance between community and solitary life.

Mother Hewitt said television had been brought in so that the members of the monastery could see the pope's trip to the United States in 1987. Other TV and videocassette viewing is restricted to inspirational material and is optional for the community members, she said.

She described a morning coffee or tea break that she introduced as necessary because of the age and health needs of older nuns in the community.

Manning said similar changes "have been introduced in Carmelite monasteries all over the country without any of the turmoil that arose here."

The Rome generalate of the world's Discalced Carmelites issued a statement

October 10 which said, "The popular analysis of the conflict, as one between conservative and liberal elements, is but superficial caricature."

The Morristown monastery, the statement said, is directly subject to Bishop Rodimer.

"He, with the studied backing and formal authorization of the cardinal prefect of the (Vatican's) Congregation for Religious, has made legitimate changes in the government personnel of the convent. This is the crucial issue," said the Rome statement, which was released by Carmelite Father Anthony Morello, a member of the Carmelite governing board who handles the order's affairs in English-speaking countries.

In apparent criticism of the protesting nuns' appeal to the pope, the statement from the generalate said: "All men and women of religious orders are duty bound to collaborate with the Vatican's Congregation for Religious. In effect, and in line with the spirit of St. Teresa of Avila, who always dealt with the hierarchy, a solution will be forthcoming only through direct collaboration of the nuns themselves with the local bishop, without outside interference. All well-informed and right-intentioned Catholics know and believe that the bishop is, by office and divine design, the focus of local ecclesial communion and unity."

Bishop Rodimer was in Rome, making his official five-year visit to the Vatican, when the nuns began their protest.

Capsules

Candidates answer USCC

Washington (NC) — The U.S. Catholic Conference October 6 released answers from Vice President George Bush and Massachusetts Gov. Michael S. Dukakis to a first-ever USCC presidential candidates' questionnaire. Neither Bush nor Dukakis broke much new ground in his answers to the approximately 40 questions, which were based on 14 issues found in the USCC Administrative Board's statement, "Political Responsibility: Choices for the Future," issued last November. The USCC is the public policy arm of the U.S. bishops.

Abortion survey faulted

Washington (NC) — U.S. Catholic women undergo abortions at a significantly higher rate than do Protestant and Jewish women, according to a survey conducted by the Alan Guttmacher Institute, a private foundation that studies family planning issues. But the head of the U.S. bishops' Committee for Pro-Life Activities, Vincentian Father John Gouldrick, faulted the survey for not gauging "the degree of active involvement in the Catholic Church."

U.S. aid kept priest alive

Washington (NC) — Father Albert Reymann said he believes he is alive today because the Honduran secret police who took him in for questioning last September knew that killing an American priest "messes up U.S. aid" to their country. The veteran Maryknoll missionary was arrested September 14 while driving a truckload of about 5,000 calendars which bore names of "disappeared" and murdered Hondurans from the printers in the northern town of San Pedro Sula to a labor union hall for distribution. The calendars also had the names of those believed to be their killers — including police officers, army personnel and legislators — next to the names of their alleged victims.

Chileans call for unity

Santiago, Chile (NC) — Chile's bishops sounded a conciliatory note following the October 5 national plebiscite, which rejected 15 years of dictatorship, by calling on all elements of society — from government to leftist activists — to work together for the country. "We have to avoid in our language and our attitudes that which may be offensive to others," they said in a statement released October 6. "Political adversaries win or lose, but are not enemies."

Pope visits Europe

Strasbourg, France (NC) — Europeans must rediscover their Christian heritage in order to overcome their moral and material crises, Pope John Paul II said during his visit to Strasbourg, October 8-10. Europe's problems — including materialism, environmental pollution, the "disintegration" of the family and the decline in vocations — are ultimately problems of the spirit, the pope said during a weekend of speeches and meetings in the medieval city.

Poles to initiate new party

Warsaw, Poland (NC) — A member of the new Christian Democratic Club said the group would work to attract Polish Catholics and eventually form a new political party. Janusz Zablocki, a Catholic intellectual, said the club had 28 founding members but hopes to attract many of Poland's 35 million Catholics. He told reporters the club would help fill the gap left after Poland's communist government banned the Christian-oriented People's Party in 1950. "Conditions have not been ripe to form such a party," he said. "The Catholic community has been disintegrated, and it must be prepared for this initiative."

Salvadoran bishop blames army for village massacre

San Salvador, El Salvador (NC) — Auxiliary Bishop Gregorio Rosa Chavez of San Salvador accused the army of massacring 10 villagers south of the capital September 21.

But President Jose Napoleon Duarte challenged Church officials to produce evidence of the alleged massacre at the village of Cebadilla.

"Accusations should not be made without proof," he said.

The country's attorney general, Rodolfo Giron Flores, charged the San Salvador archdiocesan legal aid office, Tutela Legal, with hampering the government investigation by hiding witnesses.

Bishop Rosa Chavez told reporters September 26 that Tutela Legal had collected evidence showing that the 10 villagers were shot in cold blood by soldiers.

An army spokesman initially claimed all 10 were leftist guerrillas of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front, but later said only two of the dead were rebels and the rest were civilians. All had died in a skirmish between troops and the FMLN, the spokesman said.

Armed forces chief of staff Gen. Adolfo Blandon said there are "conflicting reports" on the killings.



Relatives and friends carry the remains of one of 10 peasants allegedly killed by Salvadoran soldiers.

Relatives of the victims have testified that soldiers of the Jiboa battalion of the 4th Infantry Brigade came to the village, pulled the campesinos from their homes and shot them in cold blood.

"There is ample evidence showing everything that will be of great help to the authorities, who have expressed publicly their desire to know the truth," Bishop Rosa Chavez said.

Calling the killings "macabre," he said Tutela Legal representatives accompanied the coroner and civilian judge to the scene of

the massacre where the bodies were first examined.

"Not only must the truth be clearly established" in the case, the bishop said, "but pertinent measures must be taken as well against those who are found guilty, even if they happen to wear military uniforms."

Duarte said he had asked the San Salvador Archdiocese for its reports on the killings.

"It is my duty to investigate to see if an error has been made," the president said. He said he has asked the army to make a thorough probe of the incident.