

## World &amp; Nation

## Dissident Carmelite nuns file, then withdraw civil lawsuit



UPI/NC News  
Nuns bring groceries during a visit to five Discalced Carmelite nuns barricaded in the infirmary of their Morristown, N.J., monastery.

By Maura Rossi

Morristown, N.J. (NC) — Only one day after filing a lawsuit, dissident nuns at the Discalced Carmelite monastery in Morristown withdrew the suit aimed at their prioress and bishop.

Meanwhile, as the widely publicized Carmelite dispute entered its fourth week, seven nuns loyal to the prioress broke the silence they had maintained through the controversy and expressed their views of the situation in an interview with the local diocesan newspaper.

The group described the dissident nuns as having separated themselves from the rest of the community long before the division became an internationally reported public controversy.

The civil suit was filed October 24 on behalf of three of five nuns who have barricaded themselves in the monastery infirmary since early October and on behalf of their former prioress, now living in France. The following evening the nuns' civil lawyer, William Marshall Jr., said the suit was being withdrawn at the request of the canon lawyer, Father Milan Mikulich, who is representing the nuns in their efforts to get a Vatican ruling favoring them.

The lawsuit had accused the prioress, Mother Theresa of the Trinity Hewitt, and Bishop Frank J. Rodimer of Paterson, N.J., in whose diocese the monastery is located, of engaging in "a conspiracy and a series of wrongful acts" to "subvert" the purpose of the monastery and to strip control from its members and divert its assets.

Marshall said the civil suit was withdrawn in the interests of pursuing the nuns' case through Church channels first. The Vatican was expected to make a decision on the nuns after reviewing a report by a Vatican-appointed investigator who visited the monastery October 13-17.

The seven contemplative nuns loyal to Mother Hewitt, in an interview with *The Beacon*, newspaper of the Paterson diocese, expressed strong support for Mother Hewitt and said they want her to continue indefinitely as their superior.

Speaking from behind the traditional grille which separates strictly cloistered nuns from visitors, they sharply disputed contentions by the dissenters that Mother Hewitt had made basic changes to liberalize the community.

Sister Emmanuel of the Mother of God, 77, a Carmelite for 60 years and a former prioress of the monastery, said separation of four younger nuns who started the protest — they range in age from 28 to 45, and two of them have not yet taken final vows — began several years ago with the attitude by two solemnly professed nuns that "nobody here was worth talking to except Mother Marie-Therese (of Jesus Crucified), the former prioress."

Sister Emmanuel said that when she herself was prioress, Mother Marie-Therese, then novice mistress, regularly challenged and even countermanded things she said to the novices.

Sister Teresa of the Holy Spirit and Mary Immaculate Voltmann, a former prioress and a Carmelite for 47 years, said that the

two in temporary vows and the two youngest nuns in final vows "totally separated themselves" from the others under Mother Marie-Therese, and their "separation" continued and expanded after Mother Hewitt was brought in from an Indiana monastery in August 1987 to try to restore unity within the Morristown community.

While the dissident nuns have complained that Mother Hewitt introduced changes violating the spirit and tradition of the Carmelite rule, the nuns at the interview insisted that it was the other way around.

The dissident nuns have gone elsewhere for Mass, they said, instead of joining in the Mass celebrated at the monastery by a Benedictine priest from nearby St. Mary Abbey.

Sister Voltmann sharply rejected the dissenters' complaint that Mother Hewitt had introduced television into the monastery when she bought a TV set last year. "People used to lend us their sets, and then we found that they had to borrow somebody else's when they wanted to watch something," she said.

"We are a conservative community," said Sister Juanita Jesus, Mary Chunga, rejecting the dissenters' claims that they refused to accept the changes because they opposed liberalization. "It was not what was done, but who did it. These four sisters were not going to accept anything that did not come from Mother Marie-Therese."

The dissident nuns refused to be interviewed by *The Beacon*.

## Pro-life

Continued from Page 1

abortion.

For the past two and a half years, those same sidewalks have been marched every Saturday by members of Project Life of Rochester, in an effort to dissuade women from having abortions at the hospital.

Several Project Life members showed up outside the hospital during the pro-choice march, but were told by Project Life officials to drive to Brighton. The pro-life demonstration outside Wortman's office was termed a "rescue mission," in which pro-life activists enter a doctor's office and refuse to leave.

When asked why the demonstrators had targeted Wortman's office twice in such a short

time, one pro-life demonstrator said "because he performs the most abortions on Saturdays."

Many Project Life members said they were answering the call of renowned pro-life activist Joan Elizabeth Andrews, who held a press conference at St. Bridget's Church in Rochester Friday, Oct. 28, prior to addressing about 300 people gathered at St. Augustine's Church for a rally that evening.

Andrews, who was arrested at an operation rescue in Toronto on October 29, was invited to Rochester by several groups, including vited to Rochester by several groups, including Blessed Sacrament Peacemaking Ministry, United Church Ministry, Inc., the Rochester chapter of Feminists for Life and Glory of Yahweh Franciscan Fraternity.

"We have to rescue these children. We are not true brothers and sisters to them if we

don't," said Andrews, who was released from prison October 18 after serving two and a half years of a five-year Florida prison sentence for trying to damage a suction machine at an abortion clinic. Gov. Bob Martinez of Florida commuted Andrews' sentence to the two-and-a-half years she had already served.

Florida authorities then extradited Andrews to Pittsburgh for sentencing on a 1985 protest-related trespass charge. She was sentenced to time already served in Florida and three years probation, and was released on her own recognition on the condition that she obey Pennsylvania laws and not trespass at abortion clinics.

Her time in jail has not deterred the Lewisburg, Tenn., native from further involvement with the pro-life movement. Andrews said she has been arrested 131 times since 1980 for her anti-abortion activity, and she has vowed to continue "rescuing" children.

"The babies have to be rescued. We have to save lives because these children are true human beings," asserted Andrews, who said she believes deeply in Martin Luther King Jr's



Doug Meszler  
Joan Andrews (right) and local activist Dee Dries discuss plans for the annual March for Life in Washington, D.C.

statement: "One has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws."

Andrews said she was "disappointed" in the lack of involvement among Catholic clergy and lay people nationwide, saying that "all Christians should be willing to pick up the cross for pre-born children."

"Other priests should be joining Father Tony," said Andrews, referring to Father Mugavero. "Human beings who are most in danger are pre-born children. I would beg every Catholic to get out there."

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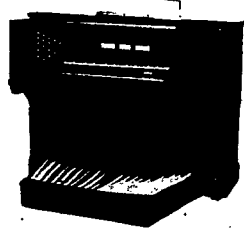
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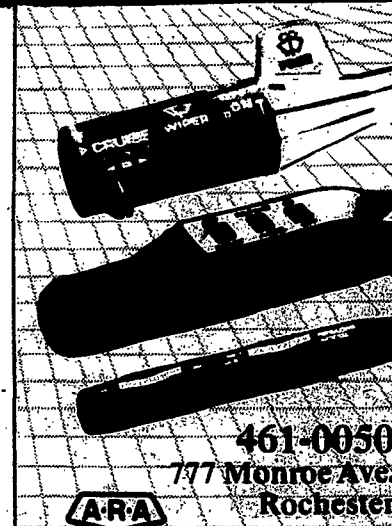
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