

Marking a milestone

A special Mass at Sacred Heart Cathedral marked the 10th anniversary of Bishop Matthew H. Clark's episcopal ordination. Page 5.



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Catholics remain divided over path to peace

'While the just-war teaching has clearly been in possession for the past 1,500 years of Catholic thought, the "new moment" in which we find ourselves sees the just-war teaching and non-violence as distinct but interdependent methods of evaluating warfare.'

The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response (1983)

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

For John Sdoia, commander of the Monroe County Catholic War Veterans, Memorial Day means one thing — respect.

"They lost their lives to protect their country," Sdoia said of the fallen soldiers honored this past weekend. "We should respect their constancy."

Father Robert Werth also respects the sacrifices made by those who fought to defend the United States. "I recognize and accept and praise all those who fought for freedom," he remarked.

But while the two men praise those who have died, they differ in their beliefs about military solutions today.

"I'm against war," Sdoia said. "You can't be a good Catholic and say you like war. But we have to defend ourselves. The country has to be protected."

"I want to give humanity credit that we have moved beyond having to kill people with weapons," Father Werth stated. The priest, one of 21 people detained for trespassing at the Seneca Army Depot during an anti-nuclear protest May 19, added, "I want to think humanity has advanced in ways of relating to each other."

Sdoia and Father Werth represent opposite ends of a continuum in the Catholic Church today. That range of opinion was outlined in the U.S. Catholic bishops' 1983 pastoral letter, "The Challenge of Peace:

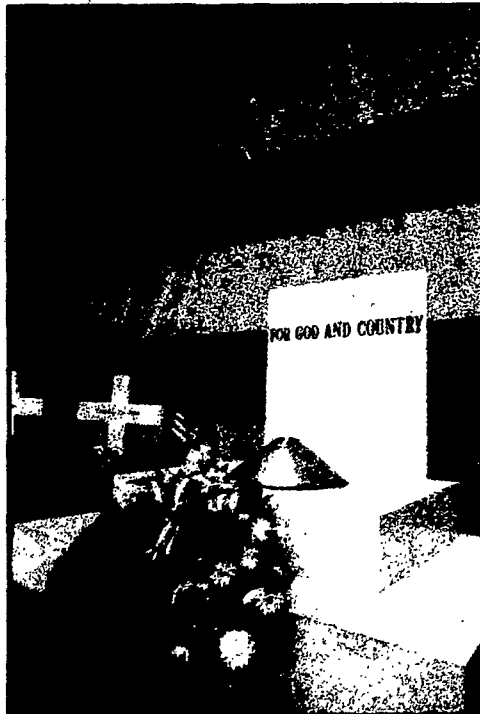


Linda Dow Hayes/Catholic Courier

Members of the Faith and Resistance Retreat group gathered Friday evening, May 19, for a Mass outside the fence of the Seneca Army Depot, where they believe nuclear weapons are stored. Concelebrants for the Mass were (left to right): Father James B. Callan; Jesuit Father Daniel J. Berrigan; Father Daniel O'Shea; and Father John Burke.

God's Promise and Our Response," which taught that the church has room both for those who advocate theories of just war and deterrence, and for those who seek non-violent solutions to conflicts.

Sometimes, however, peaceful coexistence between the two camps seems less a possibility than does peace among nations.



Judy Sanchez

As part of a service to mark Memorial Day, Catholic War Veterans placed flowers on simulated tombstones and this replica of the Eternal Flame.

Rochester's annual Memorial Day Parade, for example, has produced tensions for several years now. The parade, intended to honor those who died in war, includes military units and, for the past few years, a peace-and-justice contingent. The inclusion of the peace contingent has been a source of pain to veterans, according to Father Elmer Heindl, a decorated veteran of World War II.

"The vets are very much hurt by that," Father Heindl said. "It hurts because of what it says by insinuation: 'We're the

good guys; you're the bad guys. We're for peace; you're not for peace.' (But) we're both for peace."

The priest noted that protests at the Seneca Army Depot similarly cause pain to veterans. "It hurts the vets very much when people take the military and use it as a scapegoat," he said. "The military doesn't run the government. It's the politicians that run our country. (The protesters) should be down in Congress lobbying."

Robert Stratton, a Vietnam veteran who heads the Catholic War Veterans post at St. Jerome's in East Rochester, speculated that "people who are pro-peace are 90 percent anti-military." He added that he also is troubled by the peace groups' tactics, including protests and marching in the parade. "I sympathize with what they're saying, but it's not the way to do it," he said. "They're hurting themselves with their tactics. It can really turn people off."

But Mary Maher, a member of the board of Common Ground, a group dedicated to the consistent ethic of life, said that such protests as those at the Seneca Army Depot are not intended to show disrespect for those in the military.

"By protesting at the Seneca Army Depot, it's not against the people who work there," Maher explained. "It's a statement to our government."

Nor is participation in the Memorial Day Parade meant to slight the veterans, Maher said. The daughter of a retired Air Force colonel and Navy nurse who was completely disabled by injuries suffered during World War II, Maher asserted: "I have strong connection to the military by birth. Out of that background, I have seen even more so the need for peace."

Maher said she was convinced that
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Army troops march down East Avenue during Rochester's Memorial Day Parade Monday, May 29.