

Please don't tear up the seamless garment

Not long ago, a peace-and-justice advocate like Jan Bezila might not have shared the time of day, much less a demonstration, with Father Anthony Mugavero.

"Peaceniks" like Bezila were supposed to be hippies who opposed all institutions, especially the church; pro-lifers like Father Mugavero were oddballs who stood outside abortion clinics praying the rosary.

Yet under the auspices of "the seamless garment" approach to life issues and the U.S. bishops' peace pastoral, these pro-life and peace advocates have joined forces, increasing not only their numbers, but multiplying their credibility as well.

In this new unity, the peace movement gained prayerful grounding for actions that had been viewed primarily as radical. Pro-life people profited by the witness of those willing to endure not just discomfort, but the disruption of fines and jail terms for their convictions.

Perhaps as you read this, Bezila, Father Mugavero and other members of the Faith and Resistance Community will be gathering to pray and then challenge with civil disobedience what they regard as two equally immoral activities — abortion and militarism.

Because this is the third year lay people, religious and clergy have cooperated on the Faith and Resistance Retreat, we may overlook how extraordinary it is.

Day one, May 10, is spent at Rochester's Corpus

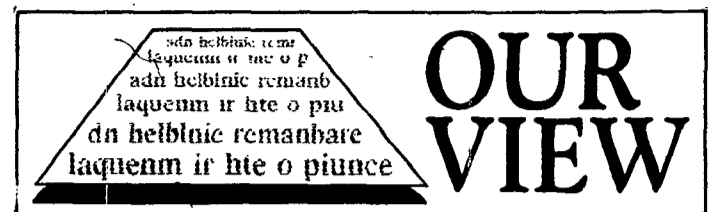
Christi Church, sharing supper, talk and prayer with peace and pro-life activists. Day two, May 11, offers more of the same at St. Stephen's Church, Geneva, in addition to "actions" at the Seneca Army Depot in Romulus and later, at a facility where abortions are performed.

The group began with women who had long regarded militarism and abortion as equally grave threats to life and faith, yet seldom heard them discussed in parishes. Realizing that Catholics look to priests for leadership, the women urged several clerics, including Father Mugavero, to join them in challenging local churches' silence.

We commend the community's actions. Grounded in prayer and personal reflection, its members remain nonviolent and endeavor to involve participants from all walks of life who are willing to accept the consequences of their actions — even though they have not always been sure beforehand what those consequences might be.

Yet the church as an institution appears to be backing away from the seamless-garment ethic that fostered such groups in favor of a narrower focus on abortion, as witnessed by censures against Catholic politicians whose votes aren't in line with church teaching, and by the U.S. bishops' million-dollar public relations campaign to promote their anti-abortion message.

The rise of a radical, evangelical anti-abortion



movement among non-Catholics has certainly challenged the church's concept of legitimate pro-life activity. Rescue missions have helped return the abortion debate to national prominence; yet the furor generated by such actions threatens to eclipse the prophetic witness of those who have for years prayed at locations where abortions are performed, who write letters and march on Washington and state capitols. Such efforts should not be dismissed as ineffectual simply because their proponents do not court arrest.

Meanwhile, ongoing debate over the effect of rescue missions on the violence surrounding abortion threatens to divide the pro-life and peace people at a critical juncture.

The institutional church ought to seize every opportunity to support this fragile alliance as well as the nonviolent pro-life movement. The diocesan-sponsored abortion dialogue is a good beginning. Away from the glare of television cameras and press reports — which tend to magnify sidewalk confrontation because it makes good copy — perhaps conversation, and later conversion can begin.



Amendment improves death-penalty bill

To the editor:

I am amazed that some opponents of the death penalty are surprised that I am taking the position I have long said I would take on this criminal legislation. While I did not support previous capital punishment legislation, I have said for years (and the newspapers have reported it) that I am not opposed to capital punishment. In fact I said I would support it if the critical issue of certainty of guilt was clearly addressed. Assemblyman Vincent Graber's amendment addresses my long standing concern.

Any reasonable person reading the amended death penalty legislation will observe that it is very well written and tightly drawn to protect the rights of the innocent. In my judgment the original

legislation was possibly subject to error in only an extremely few number of cases. But, it should be required to add further clarification to ensure that innocent people would not be subject to the death penalty. This goal was achieved when the bill's sponsor, Assemblyman Graber, announced that he was amending the legislation to strengthen the review power of the state Court of Appeals.

To illustrate my point please review the change.

The old section which is being removed states:

"Except as otherwise provided in this section, the authority of the court to review the validity of a sentence of death SHALL NOT be construed to give the court the discretion, in the interest of justice, to set aside, reduce or change a sentence of death as being unduly harsh or severe."

The new language which is to be added states:

"The authority of the court to review the validity of a sentence of death SHALL be construed to give the court the discretion, in the interest of justice, to set aside, reduce or change a sentence of death as being unjustified based on the quality of the evidence."

Anyone who says that is not a change, indeed an improvement, is not facing reality.

As to the basic question of the use of capital punishment, all the arguments boil down to one — justice. Throughout the course of my fourteen years of service with the New York State Legislature I have read, listened, discussed, deliberated and reflected on the circumstances in which the death penalty may be justified. My

conclusion, society has the right to protect itself and express intolerance for vicious, heinous acts, therefore capital punishment is justified.

Perhaps the one murder case that had the greatest impact on my decision was the Campbell/Ahalt murders of 1986 in various Rochester neighborhoods. Over the course of three days these two Caucasian males murdered five innocent people. On South Avenue two 75-year-old women and a 56-year-old blue-collar male were bludgeoned to death to the point that brain matter protruded from their skulls. On St. Paul Street a 29-year-old, seven-months-pregnant female was forced to eat broken glass before being murdered. She was stabbed 16 times with her tongue being cut off, her right breast removed and her throat being cut out, nearly severing her head. Lastly, on Evergreen Street, a 38-year-old mother suffered a head injury with diffuse cerebral hemorrhage, extensive skull fracture, lacerations of the scalp; cause of death severe head injury. Campbell/Ahalt were finally arrested at a Sherman Street residence.

Individuals may disagree with the judgment that criminals such as Campbell and Ahalt should be subject to the death penalty, while I respect their opinion, I most profoundly disagree with them. In certain cases, capital punishment is appropriate and in the interest of justice. With the legislation being strengthened to prevent the executions of innocent people, I can now support the capital punishment legislation.

Assemblyman Gary Proud
131st Assembly District
New York State Assembly

Bishop Sheen turned in his grave

To the editor:

I am sure Bishop Hickey would not mind my saying that Bishop Sheen must have done a number of rapid turns in his grave to be labeled "Progressive" in the context of the article front-paged in the *Catholic Courier* of April 12. To somehow associate Bishop Sheen with the, again, "Progressive" atmosphere of the diocese seems to me to be a travesty on a man who never deviated from his fidelity to the Church and its teachings. In reference to Ecumenism, Bishop Sheen never did, nor would he ever have endorsed the two main hallmarks of Ecumenism: 1. Intercommunion, and 2. Concelebration of Mass with non-Catholic ministers — both of which go on in the Rochester Diocese today, as the

bishop knows. I suspect, too, Bishop Sheen would have annulled the ecumenical marriage between the Catholic and Episcopal dioceses of Rochester on the basis of total incompatibility on the major moral question of the day; namely, abortion.

If, however, Bishop Hickey is looking for origins, he might look, among other places, to Cobo Hall in Detroit and the "Call to Action" so ardently embraced by this diocese in the '70s — an embrace no less ardent in the present diocesan planning to cope with the shortage of priests developing to crisis stage in the '90s.

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Thanks for the notice, but get the names right

To the editor:

I was pleased to read the article "Get-well greetings help church in Africa to prosper" in the *Catholic Courier* on Thursday, April 12, 1990, and mostly for letting us know about the donation to the Church in Africa. I have no objection to you wanting to let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, in spite of our Lord's warning 2,000 years ago, Matthew 6:3, but there are, however, corrections that need to be made concerning the information about the men from Kenya. My tribe's name is Maasai not Masai, and my name is Nataiia not Nataiia. Among the Maasai,

Nataiia is a beautiful ladies' name, and they are still holding to it.

I also want to mention that I am very proud of my host here in the States and that I am residing with the Basilian Fathers. The article reported that I am residing with St. John Fisher faculty in Rochester and that is not correct.

In the future, I will be willing to give correct names and information if I am interviewed.

Thank you for these corrections.

Father S. P. Ntaiia
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