

War activism stretches seamless garment

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

Robert Dorscheid has been active in the pro-life movement for many years.

He also has advocated the consistent ethic of life or "seamless garment," a philosophy promulgated in the early-1980s by Chicago's Cardinal Joseph Bernardin. The ethic connects opposition to abortion with opposition to all situations in which human life is unjustly taken — including euthanasia, capital punishment and war.

Yet on Jan. 31, 1991, the parishioner of St. Joseph's Church, Penfield, found himself marching across the street from the Rochester Federal Building in support of the war in the Persian Gulf.

On the sidewalk opposite Dorscheid and the other pro-war marchers stood activists who gather in front of the building each Thursday evening to demonstrate for peace. The weekly peace protests encompass many activists who likewise espouse the consistent ethic of life — including several who previously have marched alongside Dorscheid in pro-life demonstrations.

"My feeling on the war is that it is a just war," Dorscheid said of the gap that separated him from the other consistent-life advocates across the street. "I don't think it gets into a dispute with the consistent ethic of life. There's a lot of lives at stake here."

"The consistent ethic of life can be used for someone to say that they think in this particular case, that they agree with what is taking place," noted Father Anthony Mugavero, parochial vicar at St. Theodore's Parish and an advocate of the consistent ethic of life. "The consistent ethic of life could allow for the just war perspective."

Although Dorscheid and Father Mugavero both believe that the consistent ethic allows the possibility of supporting a war under certain circumstances, advocates of the seamless garment find themselves divided over the issue.

Some argue that current technology and war tactics eliminate the chance of any war's being just. Others acknowledge the possibility of a just war, but question whether this particular war fits the criteria.

And amid the just-war debate, yet others contend that the question of abortion is being neglected.

"It's popular and fashionable to protest the war," asserted Donna Kearney, seamless-garment advocate and the Right to Life Party's 1990 candidate for state comptroller. "Basically, I feel abortion is as much of a destructive, evil thing as war. A lot of the war protesters are afraid to protest the abortion issue because it is unfashionable."

Kearney and Father Mugavero are both members of the Faith and Resistance Community, a Catholic group advocating the consistent ethic of life.

During the past few years, the group has organized or participated in a number of pro-life and anti-war protests. Kearney said she and some other members of the group believe too much emphasis is being given to protesting the war, and not enough to abortion.

"They only protest the war, and they're not connecting the abortion issue," Kearney contended. "I'm afraid that they are missing the whole point of view that (the war and abortion) are both wrong."

"Some people are more drawn to one issue than another," acknowledged Jan Bezila, a member of the Faith and Resistance Community. Nevertheless, she continued, "We are consistent-ethic-of-life people."

"The Faith and Resistance Community has not in any way changed its basic mission statement," countered Father Robert Werth, pastor of St. Bridget's Church and a member of the community. "We are consistent-ethic-of-life based. We are faith based."

"The problem has come with the fact that some of our members feel that we shouldn't always need to make explicit that consistency," Father Werth continued. "Other members are saying always, at all costs, we should be consistent."

Yet the reality of the Persian Gulf conflict is focusing more attention on the war component, acknowledged Deacon Eugene Fuerst.

"I do think it has become a higher priority for the present time," he observed. "But I think it is still a life issue."

Even so, Deacon Fuerst observed, those who argue that too much attention is being given to the war have a valid point.

"There are 1.6 million abortions a year," Deacon Fuerst stated. "No where near that number (of deaths) is going to happen in the Persian Gulf war."

One concrete effect the war has had on the pro-life movement can be seen in the turnout for this year's March for Life in Washington, D.C., Jan. 22. Whereas the 1990 march drew approximately 75,000 marchers, this year only about 25,000

turned out, according to police estimates.

March organizers speculated that the war — which began only days before the march — and the threat of terrorism discouraged people from traveling to Washington. Still, the war has not led to any drop in support for pro-life activities, according to Don Peters, vice chairman of New York state's Right to Life Party.

Peters, a parishioner at St. Mary's Church in Waterloo, pointed out that the number of people participating in the Sat-

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Ex-Jesuit still dissents on homosexuality

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — According to former Jesuit priest John J. McNeil, the way the church treats homosexuals suggests that gay promiscuity can lead to heaven, whereas homosexual monogamy paves the road to hell.

McNeil made that allegation Saturday night, Feb. 16, to more than 70 people who attended the first of three talks he gave last weekend at Downtown United Presbyterian Church. His visit to Rochester was sponsored by the Presbyterian church's More Light for Lesbian and Gay Concerns Committee.

A co-founder of Dignity/USA — an organization of gay and lesbian Catholics — McNeil asserted that the church's teachings against homosexual practices are part of an overall societal repression that keeps gays "in the closet." In that closet, he said, many gays — including some of his former colleagues in the priesthood — lead self-destructive lives riddled with alcohol and drug abuse.

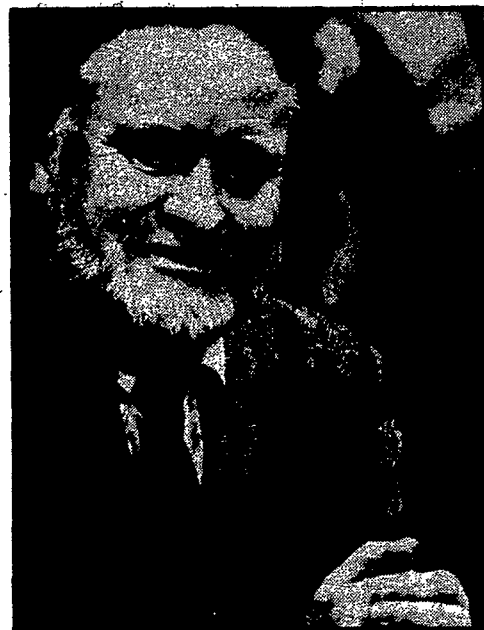
Recalling his Jesuit days, McNeil said he and other gays interpreted the church's message on homosexuality as: "if you got drunk and went out and got sex, well that's a weakness, but if you move in with someone, then we'll deny you absolution."

By fostering such an attitude, McNeil claimed, the church discourages gays from finding healthy, long-term relationships with same-sex lovers — relationships that might enable them to grow spiritually.

The former Jesuit criticized the church for teaching that it is acceptable for a person to have a homosexual orientation, but sinful for him or her to express that orientation in homosexual activity. He likened such a stance to a rhyme in which a mother permits her daughter to go swimming as long as she doesn't go near the water.

McNeil's controversial views earned him no favor with the Vatican, which in 1987 ordered the Society of Jesus to expel him. The expulsion culminated years of dissent by the former Jesuit — dissent that led him to publish *The Church and the Homosexual* in the mid-1970s. In part the book argued that Scriptural condemnations of homosexual behavior had been misinterpreted.

Prior to the first of his Feb. 16 talks, for example, McNeil told the *Catholic Courier* that Biblical condemnations of sodomy must be read in the context of the culture and times in which they were written. In the Middle Eastern world at the time the Scriptures were written, he said, captors routinely sodomized their captives to assert their dominance.



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer
Former Jesuit priest John J. McNeil spoke Feb. 16 and 17 at the Downtown Presbyterian Church.

And in *The Church and the Homosexual*, McNeil cited scholarly speculation that the Old Testament city of Sodom's sin — traditionally viewed as its homosexual practices — was actually that of inhospitality to the angels who visited Lot. To buttress his claim, McNeil noted that in the New Testament, Jesus told his disciples to shake the dust of inhospitable towns from their feet, adding "I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom on that day than for that town."

For nine years after the publication of *The Church and the Homosexual*, McNeil — acting under Vatican orders — refrained from any public dissent. But he violated those orders in 1986, publicly criticizing the Vatican and earning his expulsion from the Jesuit order.

The impetus for McNeil's renewed dissent was the 1986 pastoral letter *On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, written by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for

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