

Students found guilty of harassing minister

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — The dean of student affairs at St. John Fisher College has found three students guilty of harassing Jane Kirchner, the school's assistant director of campus ministry.

In April, Kirchner filed charges of sexual and civil rights harassment before the dean of student affairs against senior Jeffrey Leach as well as juniors Jon Karnisky and Ted Crosby.

In an interview with the *Catholic Courier* Kirchner noted that federal law prohibited her from discussing details of the charges.

Larry Roper, dean of student affairs, also told the *Courier* that he was legally obligated to refrain from discussing the charges against the students — as well as their subsequent punishment — since the convictions had become part of the students' school records. Federal law protects the confidentiality of all records colleges



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and universities maintain on their students, Roper said.

Roper stated, however, that the students "didn't challenge the charges."

Kirchner did comment on the circumstances surrounding the case, which, she said, stemmed from the students' discontent with her giving homilies at Masses.

"It was the fact that I was preaching, and that I'm a woman, and women shouldn't do homilies," Kirchner said of the students' attitude toward her. She added that the three students didn't like her use of gender-inclusive language in her homilies.

As examples of the students' attitudes toward her, Kirchner cited two issues of the *Fisher Free Press* — an independent, student-funded publication — which included sharp criticism of her ministry. Al-

though the articles cited by Kirchner had been written anonymously, the three students convicted of harassment also worked for the *Free Press*.

In particular, Kirchner pointed to Volume 4, No. 1, of the publication, in which she was referred to as a "feminazi," and in which her disagreement with the Catholic Church's prohibition of women's ordination was characterized as Freudian envy of men.

Volume 4, No. 2 of the *Free Press* also referred to Kirchner's views against the Persian Gulf War as creating "havoc, confusion, carnage and division" among Catholics at Fisher; stated that she tried to "build altars to her ego" by "trying to be a priest;" and asserted that the school's Commons "has special coated glass on Campus Ministry Office windows so one can finally look Jane Kirchner in the face without going blind."

When asked whether she was simply reacting to the students' exercise of free speech in criticizing her, Kirchner replied that the harassment she experienced "went way, way beyond the paper."

While declining to give specific instances, Kirchner asserted that the harassment by the three students affected both her personal life and her life on the campus. She

said the harassment began extending outside the context of the *Free Press* when she publicly stated her anti-war views during the Persian Gulf War.

"The war was when the harassment became more violent," she said, adding that the harassment started taking place "outside the paper."

When contacted for comment, both Leach and Crosby declined to talk to the *Catholic Courier*.

Karnisky, however, did agree to comment. Of the three students' actions, he observed: "We did have a lot of valid points, but we did go way over the line in proper etiquette."

Karnisky acknowledged that he, Leach and Crosby authored the *Fisher Free Press*, but he said the trio did not harass Kirchner outside of the context of the paper. He said the three students had told Roper that "other students" were responsible for the harassment that Kirchner experienced outside of the *Free Press*' pages, but that Roper "just sort of blew it off."

A front-page article in the May 2 issue of the *Pioneer*, Fisher's official student newspaper, quoted Crosby and Karnisky as saying that they would remain on probation for the remainder of their instruction at Fisher. In addition to writing personal letters of apology to Kirchner, the three students wrote a letter that was published in the May 2 issue of the *Pioneer*.

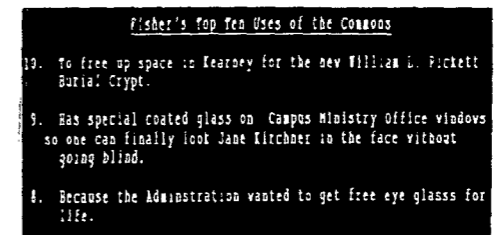
In their letter to the *Pioneer*, the three students wrote:

"Certainly, a publication which counted the defense of the Catholic faith as one of its reasons for existence should have been more conscious of Christ's precept of love of neighbor. The authors of the *Fisher Free Press* sincerely believed and still do hold fast to the views — apart from those pertaining to the person or opinions of Jane Kirchner — stated on matters liturgical, ecclesiastical and theological. This is no way lessens our contributions for whatever Jane Kirchner has suffered by the paper's publication."

Kirchner noted if the students had confined their criticism of her ministry to the *Fisher Free Press*, and if they had publicly disclosed their authorship of the articles, "I don't think I would've filed harassment charges ... When someone is anonymous, it doesn't allow for open discussion."

She added that she filed charges because the three students' actions "were bothering so many people," including faculty members and students.

"Everyone around knew who it was," she said of the students' identities.



To all those who are tired of Jane trying to be a priest at Christ's altar and of her trying to build altars to the community and to her own ego, then let your voice be heard! There shall be no peace in the Fisher Catholic community until Jane Kirchner is dismissed from her Campus Ministry position. Let us continue to pray and work for that day when Jane Kirchner's liberal reign of terror over the Fisher Catholic Community will be ended and when the Church's loyal children will do penance for Jane's pride no longer.

State awards Aquinas \$300,000 grant

ROCHESTER — The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation has awarded Aquinas Institute \$300,000 for exterior repairs to the building.

Announced during a May 14 press conference at the school, the grant will pay part of the cost to repair cracks in the masonry of the 67-year-old building.

Those repairs will be done in preparation for a \$3.5 million project to add a new building to the Aquinas complex, and to renovate portions of the interior of the current edifice.

Under the terms of the grant, Aquinas Institute — designated a New York State and Federal Historic Landmark in 1989 — must raise matching funds for the repair project and perform the work before submitting bills to the state for reimbursement of the \$300,000. School officials estimate that the exterior repairs will actually cost more than the \$600,000 from the grant and matching funds.

The grant was part of the last round of disbursements from the Environmental Quality Bond Act of 1986. Aquinas was

among 23 projects dividing the final \$4,074,000 of the bond act's funds. The state had received 121 applications for funding during this final phase.

In presenting the award, Julia Stokes, deputy commissioner of the state office, said Aquinas Institute was "perhaps our most persistent bond act applicant," having applied on five separate occasions before receiving an award. She praised school officials for working hard to make improvements to increase the high school's chances of receiving an award.

Robert Wegman, honorary chairman of the Campaign for Excellence — the effort to raise \$3.5 million for the new building and an additional \$3.5 million for faculty salaries and scholarships — accepted the award on behalf of the school. Wegman is chief executive officer of Wegman's Food Markets and a member of Aquinas' class of 1937.

The effort to raise matching funds for the grant will be conducted separately from the \$7 million campaign, noted William B. Ouweleen, development director at Aquinas.

"What our desire was was to go to alumni for campaign gifts, and to go to corporate neighbors for a matching contribution to restore a national landmark in our neighborhood," Ouweleen said. Thus, the contributors contacted for the grant would not be the same as those contacted for the campaign.

Meanwhile, Ouweleen reported that the Campaign for Excellence had already garnered \$4,071,000 in pledges toward the \$7 million goal. Wegman had contributed \$1 million and eight other Aquinas alumni pledged an additional \$1.5 million before the campaign officially began March 20, he said.

Ouweleen predicted that the campaign will reach its goal by September, after school officials had contacted all alumni.

Funds from the capital campaign will enable the school to build a new gym and to convert the old gym into a science and fine-arts facility. The renovation plan also calls for new faculty offices, library expansion, additional audio and visual facilities and more storage space.

In addition to improving faculty salaries, money raised from the capital campaign will create a \$1.5 million endowment fund for student scholarships.

— Lee Strong

Group protests firing at agency

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — The Faith and Resistance Community, an anti-war/pro-life group consisting of clergy and lay people, has issued a statement protesting the May 6 firing of Kenneth K. Maher from Catholic Family Center's Department of Justice and Peace.

The statement, released Monday, May 20, claimed that Maher was fired, in part, because of his "involvement in the 19th Ward Community Association, and his organizing opposition to Planned Parenthood's leasing space in that neighborhood's facility."

The statement went on to say that Maher had been dismissed because the agency believed his actions had "jeopardized funds" of the Catholic Family Center.

Maher, who had been a program specialist with the CFC, said he did not know the group was going to protest his dismissal, but that he had released his letter of dismissal to members of Faith and Resistance.

He said that the agency never directly instructed him to end his involvement in pro-life and other political activities, but that during his tenure with the center "it was clear that any act related to speaking out against abortion was an embarrassment."

On the other hand, the center's associate executive director, Jama Dodson, said the decision to fire Maher was not related to "the issues of funding and Ken's position on abortion."

"It is not possible for (members of Faith and Resistance) to have a full grasp of the events that led up to the decision," Dodson said of Maher's dismissal. She declined to discuss details of the case, based on the center's policies regarding the handling of personnel matters.

Maher's letter of dismissal said he was being fired because of a "continuing pattern of behavior in which you have not properly distinguished between your private matters and those of the agency."

The letter further said that Maher's

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