

Pax Christi targets armory for monthly Masses

Member to join Bosnian mission

By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

ROCHESTER — Roaring motorcycles and cars — some with radios blaring — passed by the July 25 Mass on the front lawn of the New York Army National Guard armory on Culver Road, sometimes drowning out the words and prayers.

But the message of the 23 people gathered for the Mass was clear.

"Neither shall they learn war anymore — Isaiah 2:4," proclaimed a banner rippling in the breeze as it hung between two trees.

"All sin is a form of violence," declared the liturgy's celebrant, Father Richard C. O'Connell, pastor of St. Joseph Church, 6105 Rush-Lima Road, Rush. "We are peacemakers when we are willing to be justice-makers, when we are willing to absorb the evil that is around us — as Jesus did."

The Mass was the monthly celebration of Pax Christi Rochester's "Parish at the Gates."

Rochester's chapter of the international Catholic peace movement began holding the Masses this past May to mark the 10th anniversary of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' 1983 pastoral letter on peace, titled *The Challenge of Peace*.

"What we are doing is committing ourselves once a month with saying this is our parish, because we feel the issue of violence needs to be brought to public attention," observed Jan Bezila, convener of Rochester's Pax Christi chapter. "What we're trying to



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer
Father Bob Werth (left) served as the celebrant at the first 'Parish at the Gates' Mass held at the New York Army National Guard armory on Rochester's Culver Road May 30. The Mass was the first in a series of monthly liturgies sponsored by Rochester's Pax Christi chapter.

do is make Christian non-violence an issue in our church."

The July 25 Mass had an added purpose as well.

Tom Malthaner, a member of both the national and local Pax Christi groups, was blessed — just as he was earlier in the day at his home parish, Corpus Christi Church, 864 E. Main St. — in preparation for his journey to Bosnia-Herzegovina July 30. The Ro-

chester man will be among approximately 60 U.S. citizens joining thousands of Europeans in a peace mission to the former Yugoslavia's war-torn regions.

The peace travelers intend to set up camps in Serbian, Croatian and Muslim areas, and to march through several cities.

Malthaner said he became interested in the upcoming excursion after reading an article in a Pax Christi publication this spring. The article told about a smaller trip made by some Italian peace groups in December 1992.

"They walked throughout Sarajevo

when Serbian forces had the city surrounded," Malthaner said of the Italian peace activists. "The Serbians let them through. People came out and hugged (the marchers) and wept.

"I thought to myself," he continued, "My God, that's the answer instead of violence. What if we had thousands of people marching?"

Malthaner will use his vacation time to take part in the march. He is scheduled to return to Rochester Aug. 15 — the same day as the next Mass at the armory.

Malthaner said he hopes that the leaders of the warring faction will look at the marchers' witness "and come up with a long-term solution in the country — and stop the fighting until they are able to do so."

But, he added, "That's all up to God."

The idea of promoting peaceful means to resolve conflicts lies at the heart of Pax Christi, Bezila explained.

One of the ways to promote that message to churches and to the community at large is through such events as the Masses, Bezila noted. But the liturgies serve more than just a way for public witness, she observed.

"We want to deepen our own conversion to following Christ's way of love and doing good to our enemies," Bezila said.

That conversion requires active resistance to evil, especially when people are being threatened with harm, Bezila added. Actions such as Malthaner's serve to show that peacemaking involves risk, she acknowledged.

Malthaner is aware of the dangers.

"I'm scared," he said. "But the truth that happened here (at the Mass), at Corpus Christi this morning, that's my support, that's my help and my faith."

EDITORS' NOTE: For information about Pax Christi Rochester, or the monthly "Parish at the Gates," contact Bezila at 716/244-7439.

Vigil

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Rescue Rochester.

Crawford added that this demonstration will also lend a spiritual boost to the pro-life activists themselves.

"This is as much for our benefit as it is for anything," he commented. "This is a renewed commitment, especially in the face of the many political things going on. We're not about to give up."

Crawford pointed to the current movement in Congress to create a law increasing the sentence for "rescue-

mission" participants who get arrested for trespassing. The punishment would increase from a misdemeanor with a one-year maximum jail term, to a felony carrying a 10-year maximum term as well as a \$250,000 fine.

Crawford said he has been arrested at Genesee Hospital "at least five times," during past rescue missions. However, he stressed that this week's vigil would not include tactics such as entering the hospital or physically blocking the entrance.

"The things we're looking at will be entirely within our legal rights," he said. — Mike Latona



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